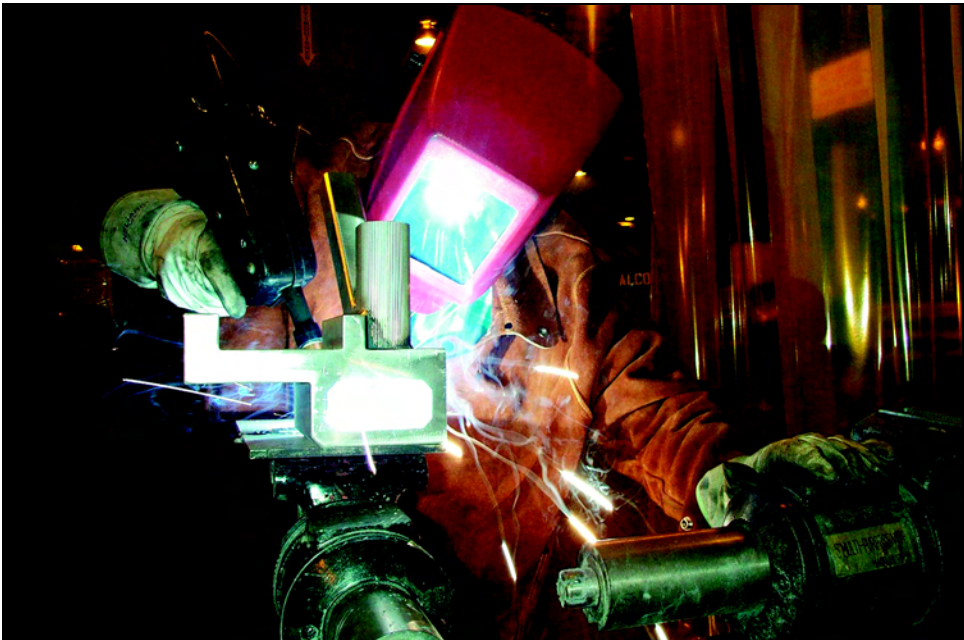


Welding Aluminum— Questions and Answers

**A Practical Guide for Troubleshooting
Aluminum Welding-Related Problems**

by

Tony Anderson, CEng, CWEng



American Welding Society

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Reviewed by the

AWS Product Development Committee

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American Welding Society

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Preface

This book is largely comprised of individual Aluminum Questions and Answers that were originally published over a number of years in the American Welding Society (AWS) *Welding Journal*. The majority of the questions addressed herein originate from inquiries to me, primarily from individuals within the welding fabrication industry. Also included in this collection of material are some feature articles that I have had published previously in the *Welding Journal*. The welding processes section contains some information and parameters graciously provided by The Aluminum Association and reproduced from their outstanding publication “Welding Aluminum Theory and Practice.” Many of the graphics and charts within this book have been reproduced with permission from ESAB Welding and Cutting Products and were taken from material that is used by AlcoTec Wire Corporation and ESAB Welding and Cutting Products for their aluminum welding technology training programs.

This book is not constructed in the format that is typically associated with text books pertaining to similar subjects. That is to say, because of the nature of the material source used for this book, the Aluminum Q&A columns, the individual chapters within this book have been compiled to best highlight and explain that material in a manner that reflects the original question and answer theme. For this reason the book deviates from the more traditional layout of a textbook, where typically you would see all the information on specific topics grouped together more specifically.

The idea for compiling this book originated through inquiries from individuals who followed the Aluminum Q&A column in the *Welding Journal* enthusiastically. They wondered if anyone had ever thought of collecting all the information within the Aluminum Q&A columns together into a practical guide for troubleshooting aluminum welding-related problems. I have tried to present this material in a logical format and have included a fairly comprehensive table of contents in an attempt to direct the reader to their appropriate areas of interest. If the information contained in this publication helps individuals to better understand aluminum welding and possibly assists in improving welding quality, then I will be pleased with the overall outcome.

Tony Anderson, CEng, CWEng

About the Author

Tony Anderson has 40 years of experience in the welding industry. He began his career in 1968 when he joined Vickers Shipbuilding in Barrow-in-Furness, England as an apprentice welder. While working for Vickers Shipbuilding, predominantly employed on the welding of nuclear submarines, he attended technical college for four years and received the highest qualification at that time awarded by the City and Guilds of London Institute in Welding Engineering. In his late twenties, he relocated to Southern Africa where he spent 15 years employed as a Welding Inspector, Welding Engineer, NDT Manager, Quality Assurance Manager, and Welding Engineering Consultant.

Anderson has also spent 15 years in the U.S. During this time he has been actively involved with aluminum welding technology. He was employed by AlcoTec Wire Corporation where he held the position as Technical Director before being transferred to ESAB Welding and Cutting Products as Corporate Technical Training Manager—ESAB North America.

Mr. Anderson is the Chairman of the Aluminum Association Technical Advisory Committee for Welding and Joining and is associated with the following AWS Committees:

AWS D10.7, *Arc Welding of Aluminum Alloy Pipe* (Chair)

AWS A5.10, *Bare Aluminum and Aluminum-Alloy Welding Electrodes and Rods* (Chair)

AWS A5.3, *Aluminum and Aluminum Alloy Electrodes for Shielded Metal Arc Welding* (Chair)

AWS D3.7, *Guide for Aluminum Hull Welding* (Past Chair)

AWS D8.14, *Automotive and Light Truck Weld Quality—Aluminum* (Past Chair)

AWS D1.2, *Structural Welding Code—Aluminum* (Vice Chair)

AWS Conference Committee (Vice Chair)

Anderson has a Master of Science degree in Industrial Engineering Management and Quality Assurance and a Bachelor of Science degree in Welding Engineering. He is a Professional Member of The British Welding Institute (TWI) and a Registered Chartered Engineer (CEng) with the British Engineering Council (EC-UK). He is an American Welding Society Certified Welding Inspector (CWI), Certified Welding Educator (CWE), and Certified Welding Engineer (CWEng). He has had numerous technical articles relating to welding engineering published in many journals and magazines over the years and has presented technical papers internationally at many conferences and seminars. In 2004 Anderson was awarded the American Welding Society's "Individual Achievement Award" in recognition of excellent service to the advancement of the image of welding.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Preface.....	iii
About the Author.....	v
List of Questions.....	xv
List of Tables	xvii
List of Figures.....	xviii
Basic Safety Precautions.....	xxi
Chapter 1—The Advancement of Aluminum within the Welding Fabrication Industry and its Many Product Design Applications.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Automotive Industry	1
1.3 Shipbuilding.....	3
1.4 Recreation and Sporting Equipment.....	4
1.5 Transportation and Containers	6
1.6 Defense and Aerospace.....	8
1.7 Conclusion	9
Chapter 2—What is the History of Aluminum and Aluminum Welding?.....	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 The Story Behind the Metal.....	12
2.3 Developments in Welding Aluminum.....	13
2.4 The History of Heliarc Welding (Gas Tungsten Arc Welding)	16
2.5 Gas Welding (Oxyacetylene Welding).....	17
2.6 Stick Electrode Welding (Shielded Metal Arc Welding).....	18
2.7 Conclusion	18
Chapter 3—Aluminum Alloys and Metallurgy	19
3.1 Introduction	19
3.1.1 The Aluminum Alloy Temper and Designation System	19
3.1.2 Wrought Alloy Designation System.....	19
3.1.3 Cast Alloy Designation	20
3.1.4 The Aluminum Temper Designation System.....	20
3.1.5 Aluminum Alloys and Their Characteristics	23
3.1.6 1xxx Series Alloys	23
3.1.7 2xxx Series Alloys	23
3.1.8 3xxx Series Alloys	24
3.1.9 4xxx Series Alloys	24
3.1.10 5xxx Series Alloys	24
3.1.11 6XXX Series Alloys	25

Section	Page
3.1.12 7XXX Series Alloys.....	25
3.1.13 Conclusion	25
3.2 What is the Affect of Arc Welding on the Heat-Affected Zone (HAZ) of Aluminum Alloys?.....	26
3.2.1 Introduction.....	26
3.2.2 The Various Types of Aluminum Alloys	26
3.2.3 The Principal Effects of Alloying Elements in Aluminum.....	26
3.2.4 Pure Aluminum 1xxx.....	26
3.2.5 Copper (Cu) 2xxx.....	26
3.2.6 Manganese (Mn) 3xxx.....	27
3.2.7 Silicon (Si) 4xxx.....	27
3.2.8 Magnesium (Mg) 5xxx.....	27
3.2.9 Magnesium and Silicon (Mg ₂ Si) 6xxx	27
3.2.10 Zinc (Zn) 7xxx.....	27
3.2.11 How Aluminum Alloys Obtain Their Strength	28
3.2.12 Strain Hardening	28
3.2.13 Heat Treatment.....	28
3.2.14 The Affect of Arc Welding on the Heat-Affected Zone	28
3.2.15 Nonheat-Treatable Alloys.....	30
3.2.16 Heat-Treatable Alloys.....	30
3.2.17 Conclusion	30
3.3 Is There a Filler Alloy that Can be Used to Weld All Aluminum Base Alloys, and How Do I Weld Aluminum Alloys 7075 and 2024?.....	31
3.3.1 A Filler Alloy for All Aluminum Base Alloys.....	31
3.3.2 Welding 2024 and 7075.....	32
3.3.3 Conclusion	33
3.4 What are the Differences Between the Heat-Treatable and Nonheat-Treatable Aluminum Alloys?.....	33
3.4.1 Understanding the Basic Differences Between Heat-Treatable and Nonheat-Treatable Aluminum Alloys.....	33
3.4.2 Nonheat-Treatable Aluminum Alloys.....	33
3.4.3 Heat-Treatable Aluminum Alloys	34
3.4.4 How Does the Type of Material, Heat-Treated or Nonheat-Treated, Affect the Completed Strength of the Weld?	34
3.4.5 Conclusion	35
3.5 What are the Alloying Elements in Aluminum Alloys?.....	35
3.5.1 The Addition of Alloying Elements to Aluminum	35
3.5.2 The Principal Effects of Alloying Elements in Aluminum.....	36
3.5.2.1 Copper (Cu) 2xxx.....	36
3.5.2.2 Manganese (Mn) 3xxx.....	36
3.5.2.3 Silicon (Si) 4xxx.....	37
3.5.2.4 Magnesium (Mg) 5xxx	37
3.5.2.5 Magnesium and Silicon (Mg ₂ Si) 6xxx	37
3.5.2.6 Zinc (Zn) 7xxx.....	37
3.5.2.7 Iron (Fe).....	38
3.5.2.8 Chromium (Cr).....	38
3.5.2.9 Nickel (Ni)	38
3.5.2.10 Titanium (Ti).....	38
3.5.2.11 Zirconium (Zr)	38

Section	Page
3.5.2.12 Lithium (Li).....	38
3.5.2.13 Lead (Pb) and Bismuth (Bi)	38
3.5.3 Conclusion	38
3.6 What are Weldable and Unweldable Aluminum Alloys?	39
3.6.1 The Definition of the Tern “Unweldable”	39
3.6.2 Difficult-to-Weld Alloys	40
3.6.3 Coherence Range	40
3.6.4 The 2xxx-Series Alloys (Al-Cu)	40
3.6.5 The 7xxx-Series Alloys (Al-Zn).....	41
3.6.6 Conclusion	41
3.7 How do I Establish the Strengths of Aluminum Alloys, Base Material, Welds and Filler Alloys?.....	42
3.7.1 Aluminum Base Alloy Strength	42
3.7.2 Aluminum Filler Metal Strength and As-Welded Aluminum Joint Strength	42
3.7.3 The AWS Filler Metal Classification System for Aluminum	43
3.7.4 Conclusion	44
3.8 What is the Affect of Natural Aging on 6061 Aluminum Base Alloy?.....	45
3.8.1 The Heat-Treated Condition of the Base Alloy	45
3.8.2 The Affect of Natural Aging After Solution Heat Treatment.....	45
3.8.3 The Affect of Aging on the HAZ	45
3.8.4 Heat-Treatable Filler Alloy	48
3.8.5 Conclusion	48
3.9 What is the Affect of Elevated Service Temperature on 6xxx Series Aluminum Alloys?.....	48
3.9.1 What is the Reason for this Drop in Hardness and Will the Hardness Drop Further?	49
3.9.2 What is the Phenomenon Behind the Hardness Drop After Heating?	49
3.9.3 Will the Hardness Drop Affect Surface Roughness (Pitting, etc.)?.....	50
3.9.4 Conclusion	50
3.10 What is Anodized Aluminum?.....	51
3.10.1 What is Anodizing?	51
3.10.2 How is it Performed?	51
3.10.3 Different Types of Anodizing.....	52
3.10.3.1 Type I—Chromic Acid Anodizing.....	52
3.10.3.2 Type II—Sulfuric Acid Anodizing	53
3.10.3.3 Type III—Hardcoat Anodizing.....	53
3.10.4 Sealing.....	53
3.10.5 Welding on Anodized Aluminum	53
3.10.6 Anodizing Material After Welding.....	54
3.10.7 Conclusion	54
3.11 Can Stress Corrosion Cracking (SCC) Affect the 5xxx Series Aluminum Alloys?	54
3.11.1 What is Stress Corrosion Cracking (SCC)?	54
3.11.2 The Susceptibility of the 5xxx Series Aluminum-Magnesium Alloys to SCC	55
3.11.3 Is SCC a Problem when Using the 5xxx Series Aluminum Alloys?.....	56
3.11.4 Conclusion	56

Section	Page
3.12 Where Can I Find Technical Information and Training on Aluminum Welding?	57
3.12.1 Useful Textbooks.....	57
3.12.2 Training Programs for Aluminum Welding.....	58
3.12.3 Conclusion	59
Chapter 4—Aluminum Filler Alloys.....	61
4.1 Filler Alloy Selection for Aluminum Welding	61
4.1.1 Introduction.....	61
4.1.2 Ease of Welding.....	61
4.1.3 Critical Chemistry Ranges	61
4.1.3.1 Aluminum/Silicon Alloys—4xxx Series	62
4.1.3.2 Aluminum/Copper Alloys—2xxx Series.....	62
4.1.3.3 Aluminum/Magnesium Alloys—5xxx Series	62
4.1.3.4 Aluminum/Magnesium/Silicon Alloys—6xxx Series	62
4.1.4 Crack Sensitivity.....	62
4.1.4.1 Coherence Range.....	63
4.1.4.2 The 2xxx Series Alloys (Al-Cu).....	64
4.1.4.3 The 7xxx Series Alloys (Al-Zn)	64
4.1.5 Groove Weld Tensile Strength	65
4.1.6 Ductility.....	66
4.1.7 Corrosion Resistance.....	66
4.1.8 Service Temperature.....	66
4.1.9 Postweld Heat Treatment.....	66
4.1.10 Conclusion	67
4.2 What Filler Alloy Should be Used to Weld 6061?	68
4.2.1 How to Choose the Best Filler Alloy	68
4.2.2 Making the Choice	69
4.2.3 Conclusion	70
4.3 What are the Advantages of 4047 Filler Alloy over 4043?.....	70
4.3.1 The Difference Between 4043 and 4047 Filler Alloys	70
4.3.2 Conclusion	71
4.4 What is the Correct Filler Alloy for Welding 5083 Base Alloy, and is the Filler Alloy I am Using the Reason Why I am Failing the Guided-Bend Tests?	71
4.4.1 What is the Most Appropriate Filler Alloy?.....	71
4.4.2 Why Did the Welded Samples Fail the Guided-Bend Test?	72
4.4.3 Reasons Why a Welded Sample May Fail the Guided-Bend Test.....	72
4.4.3.1 Discontinuities in the Welded Joint.....	72
4.4.3.2 Using an Incorrect Testing Fixture	73
4.4.3.3 Improper Sample Preparation	73
4.4.4 Conclusion	73
4.5 Should I Use 4043 or 5356 Filler Alloy?	73
4.5.1 Choosing Between 4043 and 5356.....	73
4.5.2 Conclusion	74
4.6 Are the 4xxx Series Aluminum Alloys Heat-Treatable Alloys or Nonheat-Treatable Alloys?	75
4.6.1 Postweld Heat Treatment.....	75
4.6.2 Conclusion	76

Section	Page
4.7 Which Aluminum Filler Alloys are Suitable for Sustained High-Temperature Service?.....	76
4.7.1 Introduction	77
4.7.2 Evaluation of Most Appropriate Filler Alloy.....	77
4.7.2.1 Filler Alloy ER4643	77
4.7.2.2 Filler Alloy ER4043	77
4.7.2.3 Filler Alloy ER4047	77
4.7.2.4 Filler Alloy ER5554	77
4.7.3 Conclusion	78
4.8 Filler Alloy Selection Chart.....	79
Chapter 5—Welding Discontinuities and Weld Testing.....	83
5.1 How to Avoid Cracking in Aluminum Alloys	83
5.1.1 Introduction	83
5.1.2 The Primary Cracking Mechanism in Aluminum Welds	83
5.1.2.1 The 5xxx Series Alloys (Al-Mg).....	84
5.1.2.2 The 6xxx Series Alloys (Al-Mg-Si)	85
5.1.3 Further Considerations	87
5.1.3.1 Coherence Range	89
5.1.3.2 The 2xxx Series Alloys (Al-Cu)	89
5.1.3.3 The 7xxx Series Alloys (Al-Zn).....	89
5.1.3.4 Al-Zn-Mg Alloys	89
5.1.3.5 Al-Zn-Mg-Cu Alloys	90
5.1.4 Be Aware	90
5.1.5 Conclusion	90
5.2 Why am I Experiencing Cracking Problems in 6061 Welds when Using Both the GMAW and GTAW Processes?	91
5.2.1 Crack Sensitivity	91
5.2.2 Cracking in GTAW Welds and Why the Welds May be Cracking	91
5.2.3 Cracking in GMAW Welds and Why the Welds May be Cracking	92
5.2.4 Conclusion	93
5.3 Why is the Tensile Strength Too Low in my 6061 Welds?	93
5.3.1 Why the 6xxx Series Base Alloys Loss Strength After Welding and How this Condition Can be Minimized.....	93
5.3.2 Conclusion	95
5.4 How Do I Avoid Porosity Problems in Aluminum Welds?.....	95
5.4.1 How Does Porosity Occur	95
5.4.2 Shielding During the Welding Operation.....	96
5.4.3 Hydrocarbons	97
5.4.4 Moisture	97
5.4.5 Material Preparation Concerns	98
5.4.6 Cleaning Prior to Welding.....	98
5.4.7 Conclusion	98
5.5 Why am I Having Problems Passing Guided-Bend Tests with 6061 Base Alloy and 4043 Filler Alloy?	99
5.5.1 What is a Guided-Bend Test and When is it Used?.....	99
5.5.2 Bend Testing Aluminum is Different than Bend Testing Steel	99

Section	Page
5.5.3 Special Bending Conditions for Aluminum Alloys	101
5.5.4 Conclusion	102
Chapter 6—Equipment, Welding Processes, and Welding Procedures	103
6.1 The Repair of Aluminum Structures	103
6.1.1 Introduction.....	103
6.1.2 Identification of Alloy Type	103
6.1.3 The Repair of Some High-Performance Aluminum Alloys	104
6.1.4 Base Material Strength Reduction After Repair Welding	105
6.1.5 Cleaning and Material Preparation Prior to Welding	106
6.1.6 Conclusion	106
6.2 Why am I Having Feedability Problems when Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW) Aluminum?	107
6.2.1 The Importance of Feedability in GMAW Welding of Aluminum	107
6.2.2 How the System Affects Feedability	107
6.2.3 Feeding Systems	108
6.2.4 Conclusion	109
6.3 What Shielding Gas should be Used when Arc Welding Aluminum?.....	109
6.3.1 The Two Commonly Used Shielding Gases for Arc Welding Aluminum.....	109
6.3.2 Shielding Gas for Gas Metal Arc Welding.....	110
6.3.3 Shielding Gas for Gas Tungsten Arc Welding.....	111
6.3.4 Conclusion	111
6.4 What Should I Know About the Storage and Preparation of Aluminum Base Alloys and Filler Alloys?.....	112
6.4.1 Correct Storage and Preparation is Important	112
6.4.2 Aluminum Oxide	112
6.4.3 Hydrocarbons	113
6.4.4 Storage of Filler Wire.....	113
6.4.5 Metalworking Methods and Considerations when Plasma Arc Cutting	114
6.4.6 Conclusion	115
6.5 How Can I Minimize Distortion when Welding Aluminum?.....	115
6.5.1 Considering the Principal Reasons for Distortion.....	115
6.5.2 What Methods can we Employ to Reduce Distortion?	116
6.5.2.1 Correct Sizes of Welds	116
6.5.2.2 Joint Design	116
6.5.2.3 Intermittent Welds	117
6.5.2.4 Balance Stresses	117
6.5.2.5 Fewer Weld Beads	117
6.5.2.6 Process Selection.....	117
6.5.2.7 Equal Distribution of Welding Stresses	117
6.5.2.8 Other Welding Sequences.....	117
6.5.2.9 Use the Shrinkage to your Advantage.....	117
6.5.2.10 Jigs and Fixtures	118
6.5.2.11 Use Extrusions to Reduce the Amount of Welding	118
6.5.3 Conclusion	118
6.6 What is the Friction Stir Welding Process and is it Used for Welding Aluminum?	120

Section	Page
6.6.1 All About the Process.....	120
6.6.2 Some Applications	121
6.6.3 Conclusion	122
6.7 Can Aluminum be Welded to Steel with the GMAW or GTAW Processes?	122
6.7.1 Methods Used to Facilitate the Welding of Aluminum to Steel.....	122
6.7.2 Bimetallic Transition Inserts.....	122
6.7.3 Coating the Dissimilar Material Prior to Welding	123
6.7.4 Conclusion	123
6.8 What are Bimetallic Inserts and How are they Made by Explosion Welding?.....	123
6.8.1 Joining Aluminum to Other Metals.....	124
6.8.2 Bimetallic Transition Inserts.....	124
6.8.3 Explosion Welding of Aluminum to Other Materials	124
6.8.4 Welding of Bimetallic Transition Inserts	126
6.8.5 Principal Applications for Bimetallic Transition Inserts	126
6.8.6 Conclusion	127
6.9 Are the Laser Beam and Electron Beam Welding Processes Used for the Welding of Aluminum Alloys?.....	127
6.9.1 Some Advantages of High Energy Density Beam Welding	127
6.9.2 Laser Beam Welding (LBW).....	128
6.9.3 Operation.....	128
6.9.4 Types of Lasers	129
6.9.4.1 CO ₂ Gas Lasers.....	129
6.9.4.2 Nd:YAG Solid-State Lasers.....	129
6.9.4.3 Direct Diode Lasers	131
6.9.4.4 Fiber Lasers	131
6.9.5 Electron Beam Welding (EBW).....	131
6.9.6 Conclusion	131
6.10 Can Resistance Spot Welding be Used Effectively on Aluminum Alloys?.....	132
6.10.1 About the Process	132
6.10.2 Advantages.....	133
6.10.3 Disadvantages.....	134
6.10.4 Differences Between Resistance Spot Welding Aluminum and Steel.....	134
6.10.4.1 Surface Oxide.....	134
6.10.4.2 Coefficient of Thermal Expansion	134
6.10.4.3 Thermal Conductivity	135
6.10.4.4 Electrical Conductivity.....	135
6.10.4.5 Electrode Wear	135
6.10.5 Conclusion	135
Chapter 7—The Common Welding Processes.....	137
7.1 Introduction to the GTAW and GMAW Processes	137
7.2 Gas Tungsten Arc Welding of Aluminum Alloys	137
7.2.1 Introduction	137
7.2.2 GTAW Welding with Alternating Current (AC)	139
7.2.3 GTAW Welding with Direct Current Electrode Negative (DCEN).....	140
7.2.4 GTAW Welding with Direct Current Electrode Positive (DCEP).....	140
7.2.5 GTAW Alternating Current (AC) Equipment.....	140

Section	Page
7.2.6 Power Sources	141
7.2.7 Shielding Gas for GTAW Welding.....	142
7.2.8 Welding Torches.....	142
7.2.9 Tungsten Electrodes	142
7.2.10 Filler Alloy	144
7.2.11 Pipe Welding	145
7.2.12 Welding Procedures	145
7.2.13 Conclusion	148
7.3 Gas Metal Arc Welding of Aluminum Alloys.....	148
7.3.1 Introduction.....	148
7.3.2 The GMAW Process	148
7.3.3 Equipment	150
7.3.4 Power Sources	150
7.3.5 Pulsed GMAW	151
7.3.6 Electrode Feeder and Gun.....	152
7.3.7 Shielding Gas	154
7.3.8 Electrode Wire.....	155
7.3.9 Welding Procedure Development.....	155
7.3.10 Conclusion	156
Chapter 8—Codes and Standards for Welding Aluminum	161
8.1 Codes and Standards for Welding Aluminum.....	161
8.1.1 Introduction.....	161
8.1.2 Sources.....	161
8.1.3 American Welding Society (AWS).....	162
8.1.4 American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME)	162
8.1.5 Conclusion	163
8.2 The Structural Welding Code for Aluminum	164
8.2.1 Introduction.....	164
8.2.2 About the D1.2 Code	164
8.2.3 Conclusion	165
8.3 What is the AWS A5.10, <i>Specification for Bare Aluminum and Aluminum-Alloy Welding Electrodes and Rods?</i>	166
8.3.1 The A5 Series Specifications	166
8.3.2 All About the Specification	166
8.3.2.1 Part A—General Requirements	166
8.3.2.2 Part B—Tests, Procedures, and Requirements.....	166
8.3.2.3 Part C—Manufacture, Identification, and Packaging	167
8.3.3 Conclusion	168
Annex A—References and Sources for Further Information	169

List of Questions

Question	Page
What is the History Behind the Welding of Aluminum?	15
Is There a Filler Alloy that Can be Used to Weld All Aluminum Base Alloys, and How Do I Weld Aluminum Alloys 7075 and 2024?	31
What are the Differences Between the Heat-Treatable and Nonheat- Treatable Aluminum Alloys?	33
What are the Alloying Elements in Aluminum Alloys?	35
What are Weldable and Unweldable Aluminum Alloys?	39
How do I Establish the Strengths of Aluminum Alloys, Base Material, Welds and Filler Alloys?	42
What is the Affect of Natural Aging on 6061 Aluminum Base Alloy?.....	45
What is the Affect of Elevated Service Temperature on 6xxx Series Aluminum Alloys?	48
What is Anodized Aluminum?	51
Can Stress Corrosion Cracking (SCC) Affect the 5xxx Series Aluminum Alloys?	54
Where Can I Find Technical Information and Training on Aluminum Welding?.....	57
What Filler Alloy Should be Used to Weld 6061?.....	68
What are the Advantages of 4047 Filler Alloy over 4043?	70
What is the Correct Filler Alloy for Welding 5083 Base Alloy, and is the Filler Alloy I am Using the Reason Why I am Failing the Guided-Bend Tests?	71
Should I Use 4043 or 5356 Filler Alloy?.....	73
Are the 4xxx Series Aluminum Alloys Heat-Treatable Alloys or Nonheat- Treatable Alloys?	75
Which Aluminum Filler Alloys are Suitable for Sustained High-Temperature Service?	76
Why am I Experiencing Cracking Problems in 6061 Welds When Using Both the GMAW and GTAW Processes?	91
Why is the Tensile Strength Too Low in my 6061 Welds?.....	93
How Do I Avoid Porosity Problems in Aluminum Welds?.....	95

Question	Page
Why am I Having Problems Passing Guided-Bend Tests with 6061 Base Alloy and 4043 Filler Alloy?	99
Why am I Having Feedability Problems when Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW) Aluminum?	107
What Shielding Gas Should be Used when Arc Welding Aluminum?.....	109
What Should I Know About the Storage and Preparation of Aluminum Base Alloys and Filler Alloys?.....	112
How Can I Minimize Distortion when Welding Aluminum?.....	115
What is the Friction Stir Welding Process and is it Used for Welding Aluminum?.....	120
Can Aluminum be Welded to Steel with the GMAW or GTAW Processes?	122
What are Bimetallic Inserts and How are they Made by Explosion Welding?.....	123
Are the Laser Beam and Electron Beam Welding Processes Used for the Welding of Aluminum Alloys?.....	127
Can Resistance Spot Welding be Used Effectively on Aluminum Alloys?.....	132
What is the AWS A5.10 Specification for Bare Aluminum and Aluminum-Alloy Welding Electrodes and Rods?	166

List of Tables

Table	Page
3.1 Wrought Aluminum Alloy Designation System.....	20
3.2 Cast Aluminum Alloy Designation System.....	21
3.3 The Basic Temper Designations	22
3.4 Subdivisions of H Temper—Strain Hardened	22
3.5 Subdivisions of T Temper—Thermally Treated.....	23
3.6 Typical Tensile Strength Properties of Groove Welds—Nonheat-Treatable Alloys.....	30
3.7 Typical Tensile Strength Properties of Groove Welds—Heat-Treatable Alloys.....	31
7.2 Typical AC-GTAW Procedures for Fillet and Lap Welding Aluminum.....	147
7.3 Typical Semiautomatic GMAW Procedures for Fillet and Lap Welding Aluminum	158
7.4 Typical Semiautomatic GMAW Procedures for Groove Welding Aluminum	159

List of Figures

Figure	Page
1.1 Fabricated Wheel Often Manufactured from the 5xxx Series Aluminum Base Alloys	2
1.2 Drive Shaft Coupling Made from 6xxx Series Aluminum Alloys.....	2
1.3 Fabricated Aluminum Engine Cradle.....	3
1.4 Large Military Ship Almost Exclusively Manufactured of Aluminum Alloys	4
1.5 Coastguard Vessel Made from 5xxx and 6xxx Series Aluminum Alloys	5
1.6 High-Performance Bicycle Made from 7xxx Series Aluminum Alloy.....	5
1.7 Snowmobiles are Often Manufactured from Aluminum Alloys	5
1.8 Aluminum Baseball Bat	6
1.9 Dump Trailer Usually Built from 5xxx Series and 6xxx Series Aluminum Alloys	6
1.10 Livestock Trailers Make Use of Aluminum’s Light Weight and Excellent Corrosion Resistance	7
1.11 LNG Tankers Make Use of the Low-Temperature Strength of Aluminum Used for the Manufacturing of These Large Spherical Vessels	7
1.12 Aluminum’s Light Weight and Corrosion Resistance is Very Suitable for the Fabrication of Many Types of Tanker Trucks	7
1.13 The Light Weight Allows Aluminum Armored Vehicles Like This to Travel at High Speed.....	8
1.14 The Corrosion Resistance and Light Weight of Aluminum Allows this Military Amphibious Vehicle to Travel at High Speeds on Land and Over Water.....	8
1.15 High-Performance, High-Strength, Heat-Treatable Aluminum Alloys are Used on the Space Shuttle Projects.....	9
1.16 The Space Shuttle Fuel Tank is Fabricated from High-Strength Aluminum Alloys	9
2.1 Tea Pot Souvenir from the National Aluminium Week Held in the UK in October 1932	14
2.2 U.S. Military Water Bottle Stamped 1918 and Welded with the Oxyfuel Gas Welding Process.....	15
2.3 1944–1994 Advertisement Celebrating 50 Years of Heliarc	16
3.1 Shows the HAZ on Both the Heat-Treatable and Nonheat-Treatable Alloys	29
3.2 The Welding Heat Affect on a Heat-Treatable Alloy	29
3.3 Aluminum Alloys Used in Common Applications	39
3.4 The Natural Aging of 6061 Over Varying Periods of Time and at Varying Temperatures.....	46

Figure	Page
3.5 The Reduction in Tensile Strength (Hardness) of the HAZ of a 6061-T6 Alloy with Varying Heat Inputs in the As-Welded Condition.....	47
3.6 The Reduction in Tensile Strength (Hardness) of the HAZ of 6061-T6 and 6061-T4 Alloys in the As-Welded Condition and the Recovery of Strength of a 6061-T4 Alloy After Postweld Artificial Aging.....	47
3.7 Solution Heat Treatment Requires that the Material be Heated to Around 990°F [532°C], Followed by Quenching in Water.....	50
3.8 Anodized Aluminum Rings Being Removed from a Processing Tank.....	52
3.9 Shows the Conditions Required to Promote Stress Corrosion Cracking.....	55
3.10 Shows the Selective Grain Boundary Precipitation in Two 5% Mg Alloys.....	55
4.1 Gas Metal Arc Welding on an Aluminum Wheel Uses 5454 Base Material Welded with an ER5554 Filler Alloy that is Made Specifically to Match the Base Alloy Content.....	63
4.2 Automotive Components Welded with 4047 Filler Alloy Produces Welds that are Extremely Fluid and Easily Create Leak-Tight Joints.....	67
4.3 Weld Made Using 6061-T6 Base Metal and 4043 Filler Metal Would Not Produce a Good Color Match After Anodizing.....	69
4.4 Aluminum Filler Alloy Chart.....	80
5.1 The Effects of Four Different Alloy Additions on the Crack Sensitivity of Aluminum.....	84
5.2 Hot Cracking in 6xxx Series Alloys.....	85
5.3 Cracking in Fillet Weld Terminations.....	86
5.4 A Longitudinal Crack Can be Seen in the Inside of this Pipe on the Opposite Side of the Fillet Weld.....	87
5.5 Microcracking Can Develop on the Edge of a 6xxx Series Plate During Plasma Cutting.....	88
5.6 Dilution Effect on Weld Composition.....	92
5.7 Reduction of Strength in the 6xxx Series Alloys After Welding and its Association with Overall Heat Input During Welding.....	94
5.8 Porosity is Seen Here in a Cross Section of a Fillet Weld in Aluminum.....	96
5.9 Guided-Bend Test Samples.....	100
5.10 The Mechanism for the Wraparound Bend Test Fixture, the Preferred Method of Bend Testing Aluminum Weldments.....	100
5.11A Wraparound Testing Machine with an Aluminum Test Sample Loaded and Ready to be Tested.....	101
5.11B Basic Design of a Wraparound Testing Jig.....	101
6.1 GMAW Welding an Aluminum Extrusion Using a Spool Gun.....	104
6.2 Wire Feeding System for Gas Metal Arc Welding of Aluminum.....	108
6.3 Ionization Potential and the Thermal Conductivity of Helium Shielding Gas is Much Higher than that of Argon Producing Greater Heat when Welding with Additions of Helium in the Shielding Gas.....	110
6.4 Cross Section of Welds Made with Argon and Argon Helium.....	110
6.5 Micro Cracking at the Edge of an Aluminum Plate After Plasma Cutting.....	114
6.6 Distortion of Welded Aluminum Wheel.....	119
6.7 Predicted Distortion of an Aluminum Suspension Frame.....	119
6.8 The FSW Process.....	121

Figure	Page
6.9 Microetched Sample of the Characteristic Wavy Profile of an Explosion Welded Joint.....	125
6.10 Schematic of the Explosion Welding Process	125
6.11 Transition Joints are Offered in Various Thicknesses and are Available in Strip, Plate, and Tubular Sections	126
6.12 Welded Transition Coupling Between Aluminum and Stainless Steel on a Pipeline.....	127
6.13 High Energy Density Beam Welds Showing the Classic Deep and Narrow Penetration of these Processes	128
6.14 Stiffener Manufactured from AA2014 Alloy in the T4 Condition	130
6.15 Microstructure of Laser Weld Between Stringer and Skin Panel.....	130
6.16 Illustration of the Resistance Spot Welding Process	132
6.17 An Aerospace Quality Spot Weld in 0.035 in to 0.039 in [0.9 mm to 1.0 mm] Alclad 2024 Alloy.....	133
6.18 Commercial Quality Spot Weld in 0.08 in [2 mm] 6082 to 0.05 in [1.2 mm] 6016.....	133
7.1 Schematic Representation of GTAW Equipment Showing the Different Components.....	138
7.2 GTAW Welding Arc and Surrounding Component	138
7.3 Alternating Current GTAW and its Characteristics	139
7.4 Direct Current GTAW and its characteristics.....	140
7.5 GTAW Torch Components.....	143
7.6 Selection of GTAW Torches	143
7.7 Different Types of Tungsten Electrodes and Their Color Coding	145
7.8 The Extended-Land Bevel	146
7.9 Advantages of Welds Made with the Extended-Land Bevel	146
7.10 Schematic Representation of the GMAW Process.....	148
7.11 GMAW Spray Transfer	149
7.12 Typical Variation in Current for Pulsed Gas Metal Arc Welding	152
7.13 The Different Types of Feeding Systems for Aluminum Welding.....	153
7.14 The Characteristics of the Two Primary Shielding Gases Used for GMAW Aluminum Welding	154
7.15 Typical Joint Geometries for Arc Welding of Aluminum.....	157

Basic Safety Precautions

Burn Protection. Molten metal, sparks, slag, and hot work surfaces are produced by welding, cutting, and allied processes. These can cause burns if precautionary measures are not used. Workers should wear protective clothing made of fire-resistant material. Pant cuffs, open pockets, or other places on clothing that can catch and retain molten metal or sparks should not be worn. High-top shoes or leather leggings and fire resistant gloves should be worn. Pant legs should be worn over the outside of high-top shoes. Helmets or hand shields that provide protection for the face, neck, and ears, and a head covering to protect the head should be used. In addition, appropriate eye protection should be used.

Electrical Hazards. Electric shock can kill. However, it can be avoided. Live electrical parts should not be touched. The manufacturer's instructions and recommended safe practices should be read and understood. Faulty installation, improper grounding, and incorrect operation and maintenance of electrical equipment are all sources of danger. All electrical equipment and the workpiece should be grounded. The workpiece lead is not a ground lead. It is used only to complete the welding circuit. A separate connection is required to ground the workpiece. The workpiece should not be mistaken for a ground connection.

Fumes and Gases. Many welding, cutting, and allied processes produce fumes and gases which may be harmful to health. Avoid breathing the air in the fume plume directly above the arc. Do not weld in a confined area without a ventilation system. Use point-of-welding fume removal when welding galvanized steel, zinc, lead, cadmium, chromium, manganese, brass, or bronze. Do not weld on piping or containers that have held hazardous materials unless the containers have been inerted properly.

Compressed Gas Cylinders. Keep caps on cylinders when not in use. Make sure that gas cylinders are chained to a wall or other structural support. Do not weld on cylinders.

Radiation. Arc welding may produce ultraviolet, infrared, or light radiation. Always wear protective clothing and eye protection to protect the skin and eyes from radiation. Shield others from light radiation from your welding operation. The use of filtering masks or airline respirators will be required if it is determined that personnel are being exposed to excessive pollutants.

Additional information on welding safety may be obtained from the American Welding Society, 550 N.W. LeJeune Road, Miami, FL 33126. ANSI Z49.1, *Safety in Welding, Cutting, and Allied Processes*, and the *AWS Safety and Health Fact Sheets* are available online and free of charge on the AWS website: <http://www.aws.org/technical/facts/>.

Chapter 1

The Advancement of Aluminum within the Welding Fabrication Industry and its Many Product Design Applications

1.1 Introduction

When we consider the advancement of aluminum within the welding fabrication industry, it becomes clear that there is a definite need for a better understanding of how to weld this material.

As aluminum welding fabrication has advanced, there have been many questions to answer associated with the welding of this material.

This introduction is intended to point out just a few of the many applications where aluminum is used in the welding fabrication industry today.

The first commercial applications of aluminum were novelty items such as mirror frames and serving trays. Cooking utensils were also a major early marketed product. In time, aluminum grew in diversity of applications to the extent that virtually every aspect of modern life was directly or indirectly affected by its use.

Today, aluminum's unique characteristics of light weight, high strength, high toughness, extreme temperature capability, versatility of extruding, excellent corrosion resistance, and recycling capabilities make it the obvious choice of material by engineers and designers for a variety of welding fabrication applications.

1.2 Automotive Industry

Perhaps the most dynamic advancement of aluminum welding fabrication today is within the automotive industry. Promoted primarily through environmental issues such as increased fuel efficiency, corrosion resistance, and recycling, we are seeing more and more components manufactured in aluminum appearing within the average automobile.

Recent developments of major structural components fabricated entirely from aluminum such as engine cradles, front and rear suspension frames, drive shafts, and wheels are complementing the more traditional nonstructural components such as heat exchangers, radiators, and air conditioning units (see Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3). Many of these welded structural components are manufactured using 6xxx series base alloys, making use of this material's ability to produce complex extruded shapes and