Inert gas welding of aluminum alloys

Process engineering and selection of shielding gases
The right inert gas for the right process

A variety of processes are available for aluminum treatment. The range of shielding gases is correspondingly wide.

**TIG welding**
For better removal of the oxide coating, TIG welding is carried out using alternating current. In addition to classic argon and the argon-helium mixes, the more advanced dual and triple gas mixes Aluline N and Aluline He N are available as shielding gases. The nitrogen content of Aluline N stabilizes and concentrates the arc and improves the penetration properties. The TIG DC mode with a negative electrode is relatively seldom used. Here, helium or a high helium content shielding gas is employed.

**MIG welding**
In most cases, pulse technology is to be recommended. This means that thinner sheets can be welded while, at the same time, increasing the protection against pore formation. Spatters are also reduced. The range of gases is similar to that for TIG welding. The admixture of nitrogen in the Aluline N series has proven beneficial. With increasing sheet thickness, the helium content should be raised accordingly.

**Special techniques**
Plasma welding with a positive electrode is a variety of TIG welding, usually applied in automated systems. The Plasma-MIG process, that combines plasma process with MIG welding, is also normally used with fully automation. Thick sheets can be welded in one position with very high quality in this mode. In the dual wire MIG technique, two wire electrodes, usually with two separate power sources, are mounted together in one torch. This is used, by preference, for the welding of long seams on level components or on circumferential welds.

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**Shielding gases for TIG and MIG welding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group acc.</th>
<th>ISO 14175</th>
<th>Composition as a percentage by volume</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Welding Argon</td>
<td>I1</td>
<td>100 / - / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helium 4.6</td>
<td>I2</td>
<td>- / 100 / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He15</td>
<td>I3</td>
<td>85 / 15 / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He30</td>
<td>I3</td>
<td>70 / 30 / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He50</td>
<td>I3</td>
<td>50 / 50 / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He70</td>
<td>I3</td>
<td>30 / 70 / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He90</td>
<td>I3</td>
<td>10 / 90 / -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline N</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Balance / - / 0,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He15 N</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Balance / 15 / 0,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He30 N</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Balance / 30 / 0,015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aluline He50 N</td>
<td>Z</td>
<td>Balance / 50 / 0,015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main applications
Aluminum offers a lot of advantages as a construction material. It is light, very strong, resistant to corrosion and easily to reshape. Rail vehicle construction is a classic area of application and this has now been joined by automobile production. There are also many other fields of application, such as the bicycle industry, ventilator fans, machines, containers and shipbuilding. Aluminum alloys are also used in building construction.

What is special about aluminum?
The high melting point of aluminum’s oxide coating makes positive-polarity welding (MIG) or AC welding (TIG) necessary. The flow characteristics are very different from those of steel. Because of the high thermal conductivity, attention must be paid to safe edge penetration. Aluminum is sensitive to hydrogen porosity, so care must be taken with the storage of welding-Filler metals, the cleanliness of the weld edge and the reliability of the shielding gas feed.

TIG or MIG welding?
TIG stands out primarily for its high process reliability, MIG for high performance. The TIG process can be optimized by variation of the alternating current parameters. MIG welding is also increasingly used for tasks with high quality requirements. Here, the pulse technology is an essential precondition. High demands on the wire feed system are met by four-roller drives, push-pull systems and a Teflon core.

Base materials
The alloying elements and the manufacturing process determine the characteristics of materials. A distinction is made between non-hardenable and hardenable alloys (DIN EN 573). For use as non-hardenable materials, AlMg alloys with high natural hardness are preferred. In vehicle construction, hardenable alloys of classes AlZnMg or AlMgSi are mainly used. Some cast alloys are only partial suitable for welding because of their tendency to pore formation.

Filler materials
Aluminum is predominantly welded to itself or to similar materials. In order to avoid cracking, AlMg or AlMgMn Filler materials are also used for the hardenable materials. AlSi Filler materials exhibit lower hardness, but have very favorable welding properties. Important criteria are also the corrosion resistance and subsequent surface treatment. Wire electrodes of 1.2 mm and 1.6 mm diameter are mainly used.

Edge preparation and preheating
Absolute cleanliness is necessary for aluminum welding. For work on the weld edges, milling is to be preferred to grinding. Particularly in the case of TIG welding, the lower edges of the seam should be slightly chamfered. In general, from a sheet thickness of approx. 8 mm, preheating (80 °C to 150 °C) is recommended.
Technical centres – sources for innovation
For the development of new technologies in the field of welding and cutting, Messer operates technical centres in Germany, Switzerland, Hungary and China. These facilities provide ideal conditions for innovative projects as well as customer presentations and training courses.

Portfolio of gases – comprehensive and clear
Messer offers a spectrum of gases that extends well beyond the standard fare: it ranges from just the right gas for each application, and clear, application-oriented product designations to the continuous introduction of new gas mixtures designed to address current trends.

Specialised on-site consulting – right where you need it
Specifically in the context of your particular application, we can show you how to optimise the efficiency and quality of your processes. Along with process development, we support you with troubleshooting and process development.

Cost analyses – fast and efficient
We will be glad to analyze your existing processes, develop optimisation proposals, support process modifications and compare the results with the original conditions – because your success is also our success.

Training courses – always up to date
For the optimal handling of our gases, we can train you on processes and how to use them. Our training courses illustrate the use of various shielding gases for welding and explain how to handle them safely. This also includes the storage of the gases and the safe transport of small quantities. Information and training materials for your plant are also part of the service, of course.

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