Analysis of wear modes in open porosity titanium matrix composites with TiC addition processed by spark plasma sintering

Abstract

Titanium Matrix Composites (TMCs) are related to their low specific weight, high elastic modulus and tensile strength. In wear resistance, the benefits of particle reinforcing and the wear mechanisms occurring during sliding events are still under investigation. This work focused on the influence of TiC reinforcing particles on the tribological properties of TMCs with open porosity, processed by Spark Plasma Sintering (SPS). Materials composed of an equimolar mixture of Ti and TiH₂ with 0, 3, 10 and 30 vol% of TiC were sintered at 850°C. Wear tests were carried out using a tribometer in a ball-on-flat configuration. Characterization included density measurements, phase identification, hardness, and wear track analysis. Results showed a microhardness increment from 281 to 554 HV with increasing TiC content. The Coefficient of Friction (CoF) showed a minimum of 0.2 for 10%TiC grade. 3D-profilometry showed the wear volume to decrease 13 times for the 10%TiC reinforced material in comparison to the TiC-free material. For the 3%TiC composite, adhesive wear with severe plastic deformation was identified. The 10%TiC material showed a Mechanical Mixed Layer (MML). The 30% TiC composite showed abrasion as the main wear mechanism. In conclusion, the wear mechanisms, CoFs and wear volume varied with TiC content.

Iván Farias^a, Luís Olmos^b, Omar Jiménez^a, Martín Flores^a, Annabel Braem^c, Jozef Vleugels^c

^aDepartamento de Ingeniería de Proyectos, Universidad de Guadalajara, 45100, Zapopan, Jalisco, México.

^bInstituto de Investigaciones en Ciencias de la Tierra - INICIT, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, 58060, Morelia, Michoacán, México.

^cKU Leuven Department of Materials Engineering, Kasteelpark Arenberg 44, B-3001 Heverlee, Belgium

Keywords: Porous titanium, spark plasma sintering, wear, Titanium matrix composites

1. Introduction

Titanium and its alloys combine interesting chemical, physical and mechanical properties such as a high corrosion resistance, low density (4.5 g/cm³) and relatively low Young's modulus (110 GPa) which make them suitable for chemical, aerospace, marine, sports and biomedical applications [1]. On the other hand, Metal Matrix Composites (MMCs) and Titanium Matrix Composites (TMCs) with reinforcing particles embedded in a matrix have been investigated with the purpose to enhance their performance in service. TMCs offer attractive mechanical properties, high specific strength, thermal stability, erosion, corrosion wear and creep resistance [2-4]. These composites have been proposed for advanced applications where monolithic materials are insufficient, such as for aerospace, gears, turbine blades, rotors, missile housing, tubing, and engine parts, in conjunction with commercial applications such as medical implants, high-performance sporting and automotive components [5-7].

Spark Plasma Sintering (SPS) is a relatively novel sintering technique used for materials consolidation. SPS involves volumetric Joule heating by a pulsed DC current passing through a graphite die/punch set-up that contains the starting powder. The process permits simultaneously a high pulsed DC current (10000 A) flow at low voltages (10 V), in combination with a uniaxial pressure, resulting in high density materials in a short period of time. Grain growth can also be minimized [8-10], in comparison to conventional sintering methods such as hot isostatic pressing, hot pressing, microwave sintering or high temperature extrusion [11]. Different factors contribute to fast sintering during SPS such as a high heating rate, volumetric Joule heating, and the pulsed on/off current flow through the powder compact [12-13].

Mixtures of Ti and TiH₂ were used to specifically obtain porous materials, with an optimal composition of Ti-40 wt% TiH₂, and a maximum open porosity of 23% [14]. In addition, fine titanium compounds such as TiH₂ also offer the advantage of a good distribution within the compact enhancing sintering and reducing the cost of raw materials [15]. During sintering, the hydrogen is completely or partly removed by dehydrogenation in the lower temperature range (~600°C), resulting in a high purity and reactive fine Ti powder that enhances densification [16-18]. Even if TiH₂ is not completely removed during processing, TiH₂ is easily removed by annealing in vacuum due to its high diffusivity, permitting temporally usage as an alloy element [19, 20].

Knowing the poor tribological properties of titanium and its alloys [21-23], TMCs and MMCs have been particle-reinforced with refractory materials for enhancing the wear resistance. Varying the amount of reinforcing particles and the sliding velocity in wear tests allows to delay the transition to a severe wear regime, and thus the wear resistance can be improved [24, 25]. Although many studies reported a better wear resistance upon adding secondary phase particles, Ram Prabh et al. [26] pointed out that ceramic particles could act as an abrasive agent when the bonding between matrix and reinforcing particles is weak. The wear resistance of composite materials is influenced by several factors such as the size, volume and geometry of the secondary phase particles, counterpart material, load, microstructure, atmosphere, humidity, etc.

While most of the investigations agree on the beneficial use of composite materials for wear applications, it is not entirely clear how the wear modes change as a function of the TiC reinforcement content. The aim of this work is to analyze the wear mechanisms of TiC particle-reinforced Ti composites processed by means of SPS at a low temperature of 850°C from a mixture of commercially pure (C.P.) Ti and TiH₂ with TiC particles addition. A possible correlation between the evolution of the total wear volume and the hardness due to TiC addition was investigated.

2. Materials and methods

2.1 Materials and sample preparation

An equimolar powder mixture of C.P. Ti (Grade 2, *Raymor AP&C*) with a particle size < 45 µm and a mean size of 17.7 µm and TiH₂ (grade VM, Chemetall) with a D₅₀ of 10.6 µm, was used as the matrix, without and with addition of 3, 10 or 30 vol% of TiC (99.9%, Atlantic Equipment Engineers) with a mean size of 4.21 µm as reinforcement phase. Fig. 1 shows the morphology of the starting powders, as obtained from SEM images.

Fig. 1. SEM images of the starting powders: (a) C.P. Ti spheres, (b) TiH_2 irregular particles and (c) TiC powder.

The powders were weighed and manipulated in a glove box under a protective Ar atmosphere and the polyethylene containers with the powder mixture were sealed to avoid oxidation. The mixture was dry mixed on a multidirectional turbula mixer (WAB, Switzerland) at 75 rpm during 5 h. 10 g of the prepared powder mixture was poured into a graphite cylindrical die with an inner and an outer diameter of 32 mm and 66 mm, respectively. Sintering was performed using SPS (HP D25/1, FCT Systeme, Frankenblick, Germany) in a vacuum of 400 Pa with a pulse/pause duration of 10/5 ms. The SPS sintering parameters are shown in Fig. 2 (a).

2.2 Sample preparation and microstructural characterization

The SPS materials are referred to as TiC-Free (TiC-F), TiC3, TiC10, and TiC30 in accordance to their TiC content. SPS samples were ground and polished using conventional metallographic preparation in order to obtain mirror finished surfaces with an average roughness of 50 nm. Once polished, the samples were etched with Kroll's reagent for microstructural analysis. The identification of the crystalline structure was done through X-Ray Diffraction (PANalytical, Empyrean diffractometer) with $\text{Cu K}\alpha$ radiation ($\lambda = 1.54 \text{ \AA}$) at 40 kV and 30 mA in a Bragg-Brentano configuration in the $30\text{--}75^\circ$ in 2θ range, with a step size of $0.02^\circ/\text{s}$, quantitative phase analysis was development using Rietveld refinement with MAUD software. The microstructure of the TMCs was characterized by Field Emission Scanning Electron Microscopy (FE-SEM, TESCAN, Mira 3 LMU Microscope) coupled to an Energy Dispersive X-Ray Spectrometer (Bruker, XFlash 6|30) for elemental and mapping analysis. The density of the SPS materials was measured according to the Archimedes principle in distilled water at 20°C on a Sartorius analytical balance with a precision of 0.1 mg. The theoretical density was calculated assuming the rule of the mixtures based on the XRD phase composition analysis, using a theoretical density of 4.5, 3.76 and 4.93 g/cm^3 for Ti, TiH_2 and TiC respectively. In addition, the samples were encapsulated into a lacquer of known density in order to avoid water absorption during immersion according to the following expressions:

$$\rho_{SL} = \frac{\rho_{H_2O} \times w_{SL}}{w_{SL} - w_{SL}(H_2O)} \quad (1)$$

Where: ρ_{SL} is the density of the sample and lacquer, ρ_{H_2O} , the water density, w_{SL} , the weight of sample and lacquer and $w_{SL}(H_2O)$, the weight of sample and lacquer in water. Finally, in order to obtain the theoretical density of the porous sample ρ_s , the following equation was used:

$$\rho_s = \frac{\rho_{SL} \times \rho_L}{\rho_L \left(\frac{w_{SL}}{w_s} \right) - \rho_{SL} \left(\frac{w_L}{w_s} \right)} \quad (2)$$

Where: w_L and w_s is the weight of the lacquer and non-encapsulated sample, and ρ_L is the known density of the lacquer.

2.3 Hardness evaluation

The Vickers hardness of the open porosity SPS material was measured, while nanoindentation tests were carried out to punctually measure the bulk material without the influence of porosity. The Vickers hardness was measured under a constant load of 300 g and a dwell time of 15 s by means of a FutureTech FM-800 microdurometer, whereas the nanohardness was measured on a Nanovea nanoindenter at a maximum force of 80 mN in a programmed square matrix of 4X4 and 60 μm between indentations. The reduced elastic modulus, E_r , and hardness, H , were calculated from the unloading curve according to the Oliver and Pharr method [27]:

$$E_r = \frac{1}{2\beta} \left(\frac{\sqrt{\pi}}{\sqrt{A}} \right) \frac{dP}{dh} \quad (3)$$

and

$$H = \frac{P_{max}}{A} \quad (4)$$

where $\frac{dP}{dh}$ is the slope at the start of the unloading curve and A is the projected area of the Berkovich indenter on the sample, β is a geometric factor correction for the Berkovich indenter ($\beta = 1.034$), while P_{max} is the maximum load used. The reduced elastic modulus is the elastic property combination of the indenter tip and sample as follows:

$$\frac{1}{E_r} = \frac{1 - \nu^2}{E} + \frac{1 - \nu_t^2}{E_t} \quad (5)$$

where ν and E is the Poisson's ratio and elastic modulus of the bulk material, respectively. ν_t and E_t is de Poisson's ratio and elastic modulus of the indenter.

2.4 Wear testing

Reciprocating sliding wear tests were performed on a CETR UMT-2 microtribometer with a ball-on-flat configuration at a constant load of 2 N, a stroke length of 10 mm, a frequency of 1 Hz for 1800 s and a 10 mm alumina ball counterpart (Redhill precision 99.5% Al_2O_3) with an initial calculated Hertzian contact stress of 374 MPa. A metallographic microscope (Nikon eclipse MA100) was used to observe the worn surface of the Al_2O_3 ball after reciprocating testing. SPS samples were ground and polished using conventional metallographic techniques to obtain a mirror-like surface finish using a 0.05 μm Al_2O_3 suspension. The samples were ultrasonically cleaned and dried in a muffle at 95°C during 3 h prior to wear testing. The roughness and volumetric wear loss were measured through 3D optical profilometry by means of a FILMETRICS 3DProfilim equipment.

3. Results and discussion

3.1 Sintering behavior

Fig. 2 shows the sintering evolution during the SPS process in which three different regions can be distinguished. The first region is influenced only by the temperature ramp, where dilatation of the powders occurred in all cases, leading to an expansion of the powder compact. The densification curves of the TiC-F, TiC3 and TiC10 composites are comparable, whereas that of the TC30 is substantially different. In Fig. 2 (b), the thermal expansion and final shrinkage of TiC30 is less pronounced. This discrete expansion is explained by the higher TiC content and its lower thermal expansion compared to TiC-F. The lower final shrinkage is due to the percolated network of TiC particles that inhibit plastic deformation of the powder compact, resulting also in higher residual porosity. A second region starts after 410 s, showing an increment of the force accompanied by a rapid piston displacement, i.e., densification, leading to a final shrinkage. Since the SPS TiC-F, TiC3 and TiC10 grades had a substantial amount of residual TiH_2 (see below) whereas TiC30 was partially dehydrogenated, it is assumed that there was not enough time to complete the dehydrogenation, moreover since the H_2 gas might be trapped in the closed porosity of the plastically deformed Ti matrix. The TiC30 presented a substantially higher amount of open porosity allowing a better evacuation of H_2 . Dehydrogenation of TiH_2 occurs in the 450-570°C temperature range in pressureless sintering conditions [28]. The third region begins with a rapid cooling rate and a progressive release of the piston pressure.

Fig. 2. (a) SPS processing parameters and (b) densification behavior during the SPS process.

Table 1. Summarizes the densification and recovery rate, along with the measured density. The reinforcing content accelerates the densification and recovery rate of the powder compact during sintering of TiC-F, TiC3 and TiC10. A lower TiC content results in a higher densification as a result of combined die compression and temperature. TiC30 has the lowest compressibility and densification. D. Bouvard [29] described that the densification process is driven by the soft particles when they reach their yield stress, while hard particles stop the densification process in mixtures of soft and hard particles under isotropic or quasi-isotropic pressure. Hard particles may create a percolation network, as in TiC30, due to rearrangement during the compression process. If hard particles do not present plastic deformation or fragmentation, an increment in densification is not possible.

Table 1. Punch compression/recovery rates during SPS and the measured and relative density of the SPS materials.

Sample ID	Hardness, H (GPa)	Reduced elastic modulus, E_r (GPa)	Yield strain H/E_r	Resistance to plastic indentation H^3/E_r^2 (GPa)	Elastic recovery %
TiC-F	4.7 ± 0.9	114 ± 9	0.042	0.008	60.00
TiC3	5.9 ± 1.5	109 ± 19	0.054	0.017	61.43
TiC10	7.8 ± 2.9	174 ± 38	0.045	0.015	70.71
TiC30	14.1 ± 10.0	164 ± 56	0.086	0.100	81.86

3.2 Phase identification of the composite compacts

Fig. 3 shows the XRD patterns of the SPS materials with different TiC content. Due to the rapid densification, Ti and TiH₂ phases are present in all grades except TiC30, which contains only Ti and TiC. The peaks corresponding to the TiC phase clearly become more intense with increasing TiC content in the starting powder mixture. Rietveld refinement of SPS processed composites did not show any shift of the TiC peak position. A direct comparison between PDF card for TiC (PDF#32-1383, 4.3274 Å) and the lattice parameter of TiC in the composites (4.32578 ± 0.00021 Å) showed no C dissolution in the Ti/TiH₂ matrix. On the other hand, TiH₂ was identified as fcc δ TiH₂ phase with a lattice parameter of 4.399912 ± 0.00044 Å. The measured a/c lattice parameters of the α -Ti phase were $2.957588 \pm 0.00035/4.7037706 \pm 0.00076$ Å, which matched well with the lattice parameters of the Ti reference card PDF#44-1294, confirming no change in the α -Ti phase.

Fig. 3. X-ray diffraction patterns of the SPS Ti matrix composites.

Table 2. shows the numerical results of the Rietveld refinement compositional analysis. The TiH₂ content clearly decreased with increasing TiC content, since the de-hydrogen process requires an open porous network for H₂ evacuation during SPS processing [30]. Residual TiH₂ has also been previously reported for pressureless sintered cold isostatically pressed materials [14]. Table 2 indicates that almost no TiH₂ dehydrogenation occurred during SPS of the TiC-F and TiC3 materials, whereas 10 and 30 vol% TiC addition allowed partial dehydrogenation in the applied SPS cycle.

Table 2. Constituent phases (wt%) in the SPS TiC-F, TiC3, TiC10 and TiC30 materials, as determined by XRD Rietveld analysis.

Phase	TiC-F	TiC3	TiC10	TiC30
α Ti	49.5 ± 0.6	44.1 ± 0.7	49.3 ± 1.5	46.5 ± 1.0
δ TiH ₂	50.5 ± 1.0	51.9 ± 1.0	35.9 ± 2	29.1 ± 1.0
TiC		4.0 ± 0.2	14.8 ± 0.7	24.4 ± 0.6

3.3 Microstructural analysis

Fig. 4 (a-d) shows backscattered electron (BSE) SEM images of the microstructure of the four TMCs materials. The matrix phase corresponds to gray-colored rounded C.P. Ti particles and randomly dispersed smaller grained TiH₂ particles with the same contrast characteristics. The darker contrast reinforcing phase are the TiC ceramic particles. Additionally, residual porosity is present as a black contrast phase, concentrated and surrounding the C.P. Ti particles. Fig. 4 (a) shows a distribution of fine pores within the matrix, which could be formed by two routes; the released hydrogen from TiH₂ and the remaining porosity after sintering. Fig. 4 (b-d) show coarser pores in comparison to those in Fig. 4 (a). Here, pore formation is mainly due to the TiC addition and its low compressibility during SPS processing. The TiC particles and residual porosity are evenly distributed at the periphery of C.P. Ti particles. These figures also show the presence of a fine acicular α -phase in the C.P. Ti particles, most probably as a result of the rapid cooling during the fabrication process. The low sintering temperature below the α - β transus temperature and the high cooling rate resulted in a microstructure that resembles that of the C.P. Ti starting particles.

Fig. 4. BSE SEM micrographs of the TMC composites (a) Ti-F, (b) TiC3, (c) TiC10 and (d) TiC30.

3.4 Hardness test

Fig. 5 shows the micro- and nanohardness data, along with the relative density of the investigated materials. The standard deviation on the hardness increased with increasing TiC content. This is explained by the increasing inhomogeneity of the composites as a result of the increasing quantity of the reinforcing particles and porosity, as shown in Fig. 4. On the other hand, the density is reduced with increasing TiC content in the composites. Although the microhardness is expected to increase with the reinforcing content, the average microhardness of TiC-F is higher than that of TiC3 and TiC10, which can only be attributed to the higher porosity as shown in [29, 31]. Although TiC30 has the lowest density, it showed the highest microhardness, clearly revealing that the higher TiC content counteracts the lower density. The nanoindentation results showed an almost linear increment in hardness as a function of the TiC volume fraction. The difference between the Vickers microindentation and nanoindentations hardness results is that nanoindentation is more punctual and uses lower loads, recording the composite as a bulk material. For the wear testing, the TiC content should therefore be considered to be more important than the residual porosity.

Fig. 5. Nanoindentation, microhardness, and density as a function of the TiC content in particle-reinforced Ti matrix composites after SPS.

The microhardness of TiC-F, TiC3 and TiC10 are comparable to the microhardness $HV_{0.2}$ value of 2.5 GPa reported for nanostructured (125 nm grain size) C.P. Ti [31]. TiC particles are not the only component that contributes to the hardness enhancement. Previous reports indicated that the hardness of TiH_2 was also superior to that of C.P. Ti, i.e. 3.70 GPa vs 2.74 GPa [32]. Thus, the residual TiH_2 content also contributed to an increased hardness of the TMCs after SPS.

Fig. 6 presents the nanoindentation load-displacement curves with a maximum applied load of 80 mN. The curves present a continuous and smooth profile during penetration of the tip which indicates the absence of cracks on the surface of the sample during testing. As expected, the penetration depth decreased with increasing reinforcement content. Table 2 summarises the numerical data obtained from sixteen nanoindentations over the surface of each sample. D. Setoyama [33] pointed out that materials with an H/E_r ratio around 0.05, such as ceramics, have an elastic behavior, whereas metals with a ratio below 0.006 deform plastically [34, 35]. Furthermore, H^3/E_r^2 is reflecting the resistance against plastic indentation [36]. Basically, high H^3/E_r^2 can be related to the wear resistance capacity of a material and consequently the wear process is most of the time a result of plastic deformation. The values shown in Table 2 will be discussed in the following section.

Fig. 6. Nanoindentation loading/unloading curves for TiC-F, TiC 3, TiC10 and TiC30

Table 3. Numerical results from nanoindentation testing of TiC-F, TiC3, TiC10 and TiC30.

Sample ID	Hardness, H (GPa)	Reduced elastic modulus, E_r (GPa)	Yield strain H/E_r	Resistance to plastic indentation H^3/E_r^2 (GPa)	Elastic recovery %
TiC-F	4.7 ± 0.9	114 ± 9	0.042	0.008	60.00
TiC3	5.9 ± 1.5	109 ± 19	0.054	0.017	61.43
TiC10	7.8 ± 2.9	174 ± 38	0.045	0.015	70.71
TiC30	14.1 ± 10.0	164 ± 56	0.086	0.100	81.86

3.5 The coefficient of friction and wear analysis

The Coefficient of Friction (CoF) during mechanical contact gives a numerical value of the resistance to movement in a tangential direction. Fig. 7 shows the evolution of the CoF of the investigated composites. The CoF of TiC-F is below 0.18 during the initial 500 seconds and increases to a constant value of 0.36 after that. The low roughness and the native oxide film on the surface of the composite material provoked a smooth contact. Beyond 500 seconds, there is an increment of the CoF with slight oscillations as a consequence of the breakdown of the oxide film, and the detachment of material which formed an oxide-based tribofilm.

The CoF of TiC3 rapidly increased during the first 60 s to a stationary value of 0.36, comparable to that of TiC-F. The early increment in the CoF might be attributed to the effect of the reinforcing particles. The CoF of TiC10 reached a maximum during the first 100 s. After that, the CoF shifted to a continuous and steady low value of 0.20. Finally, the TiC30 composite presented the highest CoF;

~0.54, among all investigated materials. As expected, the CoF evolved according to the reinforcing phase content and residual porosity.

Fig. 7. CoF evolution during reciprocating sliding of TiC-F, TiC3, TiC10, and TiC30 against an Al_2O_3 sphere.

The wear track on TiC-F (Fig. 8 (a-c)) shows abrasion and material adhesion as the main wear mechanisms with some oxidized material transfer located inside the grooves. In the absence of reinforcing ceramic particles, the wear test resulted in a partly-polished surface.

Upon adding reinforcing particles in TiC3, the presence of small-size debris is noticed in the wear track shown in Fig. 8 (d, e). Moreover, the grooves seem to be narrow, but deeper as confirmed in Fig. 8 (f). Additionally, a higher degree of abrasion is observed in comparison to TiC-F, due to the addition of 3 vol% TiC particles as these might act as abrasive debris pulling out material from the metal matrix during the reciprocating test, resulting in a higher wear rate of the composite [26, 37]. The major wear volume and dispersion of the debris across the wear scar explained the early action of a third body element, which affected the CoF evolution with a sudden increment from 0.18 to 0.45 after hundred seconds.

Fig. 8. Wear track images and removed volume for the TiC particle-reinforced Ti matrix composites after reciprocating sliding against an Al_2O_3 sphere for 1800 s.

Fig. 8 (g, h) shows the formation of either a tribofilm or a Mechanically Mixed Layer (MML) in the wear track of TiC-10. Biswas [38] identified that the formation of new structures and materials in the interface is possible. This film has a major influence on the CoF and wear resistance since this can be

protective or destructive depending on several factors. A tribofilm is chemically formed as a result of the interaction of the system with the environment and/or thermally activated by friction. Contrary, MMLs can be formed by a mechanical process with the addition of counterpart material, resulting in a new composite material layer formation.

Fig. 9 (a-d) shows the worn surface of the counterbody, the diameter (dashed line) and the damage on the Al_2O_3 sphere is directly related to the removed material volume from the TiC-F and TiC3 composites. The Al_2O_3 ball slid against TiC10 does not show a well-defined circular track and it presents the lowest damage. The Al_2O_3 sphere in contact with TiC30 shows a zone of concentrated damage with a low degree of penetration, which can be explained by the TiC particles in the composite load carrier.

Fig. 9. Micrograph of the Al_2O_3 ball surface, after reciprocating testing against: (a) TiC-F, (b) TiC3, (c) TiC10 and (d) TiC30 for 1800 s.

The partly delaminated oxide film shown in Fig. 8 (g) could be considered as a new MML formed during sliding. TiC reinforcing particles are important, providing good adhesion and mechanical interlocking in the film. Stachowiak [39] pointed out that the formation of TiO_2 is usually due to

changes at the interface in the range of nanoscale to microscale. On the nanoscale, the surface material is released and reacts chemically to form the oxide as confirmed in the EDS mapping shown in Fig. 8 (h). The protective layer was mechanically and chemically formed at the interface contributing to maintaining the so-called mild wear regime.

Recently, studies carried out on near- β titanium and $\alpha+\beta$ alloys [40] concluded that the transition between mild and severe wear is characterized by the crack growth in the oxide film as a result of the local stress concentration. In this case, the MMLs presented cracking, followed by crack propagation, and finally delamination. The chosen testing parameters of 2 N normal force and 1 Hz resulted in a mild wear regime since no transition to severe wear occurred. The initial CoF of TiC10 is 0.22, but was slightly reduced to 0.19 after the first 2 min with the formation of the protective MML. During the test, the Al_2O_3 ball was sliding on the MML film with a low tangential force leading to a smooth and relatively low CoF value which was continuously maintained at 0.19 during the whole reciprocating test. As a result, the TiC10 composite presented the lowest material loss, as shown in Fig. 8 (i) and in Fig. 10.

The morphology of the worn surface of the TiC30 composite, presented in Fig. 8 (j, k), shows that the probability of contact between removed TiC reinforcing particles and soft matrix alloy during the reciprocating test was highly recurrent. The hard particles, being the reinforcing phase, avoid the plastic deformation of the matrix due to their load-carrying capacity during rubbing, as is evidenced in Fig. 9 (d). The EDS mapping in Fig. 8 (k) shows the TiC particles, colored in green, embedded in the matrix. This figure also shows a dark blue color corresponding to oxygen, confirming the formation of titanium oxide on the matrix material. The TiC30 sample shows the second-best wear resistance among the investigated materials, as shown in Fig. 10 (a, b).

In order to estimate the regime of the occurred wear, the wear coefficient (K) was calculated from Archard's equation [41]:

$$Q = \frac{KWL}{H} \quad (6)$$

where Q , is the volume removed, L the sliding distance, H the hardness of the sample material, W is the normal load and K is a dimensionless constant. The calculated wear coefficient is reported in the table insert in Fig. 10 (b).

Stachowiak identified mild and severe wear regimes under dry sliding conditions based on the K value [39]. The mild wear regime has K values ranging from 10^{-6} to 10^{-4} , whereas K ranges from 10^{-4} to 10^{-2} correspond to the severe wear regime. Based on this, TiC30 has a major tendency to severe wear. Although, it should be noted that one wear regime could present different wear mechanisms. For TiC30, the predominant wear mechanism was abrasion, mainly generated by the TiC particles which are the cause of abrasive wear at the end of the wear track, as shown in Fig. 8 (i), and adhesion, due to the plastic deformation and oxidation of the matrix phase. During sliding, the abrasive wear mechanism is predominant due to a large number of reinforcing loose particles showing the abovementioned load carrying effect [42]. In addition to the enhanced wear resistance, matrix

strengthening occurred by the load transfer from the reinforcing particle to the matrix via thermally induced dislocation. This phenomenon occurs via thermal mismatch as a consequence of the difference in thermal expansion coefficient between matrix and TiC particles ($CTE_{TiC} < Ti$) during cooling, generating dislocation slip at the matrix/reinforcement interface, strengthening the matrix indirectly [43].

Fig. 10 (a) and (b) show the cross-sectional profile of the wear track and the wear rate of the different materials. The wear rate was obtained from Archard's equation [41]:

$$Q = k_i WL \quad (7)$$

where k_i is the wear rate in (mm^3/Nm). The wear rate was correlated with parameter combinations derived from nanoindentation measurements, such as the H/E_r and H^3/E_r^2 ratios summarized in Table 2. Higher H/E_r and H^3/E_r^2 ratio values were measured for TiC30, as a consequence of the higher hardness. However, TiC30 was only the second-best material regarding the measured wear rate, as presented in Fig. 10 (b). This implies that the highest hardness, as an indirect measure of wear resistance, not always results in the best wear resistance of composite materials, and ceramic inclusions not necessary enhance the wear resistance. TiC3 showed a higher volumetric wear loss due to detached TiC particles acting as an abrasive agent, whereas the higher TiC content in TiC10 resulted in the formation of a protective MML.

Fig. 10. (a) Depth profile of the wear track and (b) volumetric wear rate and wear coefficient for the TiC particle-reinforced Ti matrix composites reciprocative slid against and Al_2O_3 sphere counterpart.

4. Conclusions

Open porosity TMCs were obtained by mixing equimolar amounts of Ti and TiH₂ along with 3, 10 or 30 vol% TiC followed by fast SPS densification at 850°C. The sintering behavior, microstructure, mechanical properties and wear resistance of the materials were characterized, allowing to draw the following conclusions:

1. The 0, 3 and 10 vol% TiC composites showed the same densification behavior, resulting in a residual porosity of 10-14 vol% and a substantial residual TiH₂ content. The 30 vol% TiC composite showed a lower densification rate and a concomitantly higher porosity of 17 vol% with the lowest residual TiH₂.
2. The nanoindentation hardness increased with increasing TiC content along with the material density, whereas the H_V microhardness did not clearly correlate with the TiC content nor residual porosity.
3. The predominant wear mechanism in the TiC-F material was adhesion, while a predominant abrasive mechanism was observed upon adding 3 vol% TiC. On the other hand, 10 vol% TiC addition showed adhesion wear with the formation of a protective MML film, resulting in the lowest volumetric wear rate and CoF. The 30 vol% TiC material showed a combination of adhesive and abrasive wear mechanisms, resulting in the second-best volumetric wear rate despite the highest CoF of 0.6.
4. The calculated wear coefficients of all materials fall in the mild wear regime range (10^{-6} to 10^{-4}) for dry sliding conditions. The 10 vol% TiC composite showed wear coefficient values close to those reported for lubricated conditions.

Acknowledgements

The authors thank The Mexican Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) for the support received under the scholarship (449474) and Mrs. Bensus Tunca Altintas (KU Leuven) for the XRD Rietveld analysis.

References

- [1] C. Leyens, M. Peters, Titanium and Titanium Alloys: Fundamentals and Applications [M]. 1st ed., John Wiley & Sons, 2006.
- [2] Ö. Doğan, J. Hawk, J. Tylczak, R. Wilson, R. Govier, Wear of titanium carbide reinforced metal matrix composites [J]. *Wear*, 1999, 225–229: 758–769.
- [3] S.Tjong, Z. Ma, Microstructural and mechanical characteristics of in situ metal matrix composites [J]. *Materials Science and Engineering: R: Reports*, 2000, 29: 49–113.
- [4] S.C.C. Tjong, Y.-W.W. Mai, Processing-structure-property aspects of particulate- and whisker-reinforced titanium matrix composites, *Composites Science and Technology*. [J]. 2008, 68: 583–601.
- [5] S. Ranganath, A Review on Particulate-Reinforced Titanium Matrix Composites, [J]. *Journal of Materials Science*, 1997, 32: 1–16.
- [6] S.M.S. Abkowitz, S.M.S. Abkowitz, H. Fisher, P.J. Schwartz, CermeTi® discontinuously reinforced Ti-matrix composites: Manufacturing, properties, and applications [J]. *JOM*, 2004, 56: 37–41.
- [7] S. Abkowitz, P.F. Weihrach, S.M. Abkowitz, H.L. Heussi, The commercial application of low-cost titanium composites [J]. *JOM*, 47, 1995, 40–41.
- [8] M. Suarez, A. Fernandez, J.L. Menendez, R. Torrecillas, H. U. J. Hennicke, R. Kirchner, T.

- Kessel, Challenges and Opportunities for Spark Plasma Sintering: A Key Technology for a New Generation of Materials [M]. London: Sintering Applications, InTech, 2013.
- [9] V.S. Balaji, S. Kumaran, Densification and microstructural studies of titanium–boron carbide (B₄C) powder mixture during spark plasma sintering [J]. Powder Technology, 264, 2014: 536–540.
 - [10] H. Kessel, J. Hennicke, R. Kirchner, T. Kessel, Rapid sintering of novel materials by FAST/SPS—Further development to the point of an industrial production process with high cost efficiency [J]. FCT Syst. GmbH, 2010, 96528.
 - [11] N. Saheb, Z. Iqbal, A. Khalil, A. Saeed Hakeem, N. Al Aqeeli, T. Laoui, A. Al-Qutub, R. Kirchner, Spark Plasma Sintering of Metals and Metal Matrix Nanocomposites: A Review [J]. Journal of Nanomaterials, 2012, 983470: 18
 - [12] V. Mamedov, Spark plasma sintering as advanced PM sintering method [J]. Powder Metallurgy, 2002, 45: 322–328.
 - [13] J. R. Groza, A. Zavaliangos, Sintering activation by external electrical field [J]. Materials Science and Engineering: A, 2000, 287: 171–177.
 - [14] Q. Peng, B. Yang, B. Friedrich, Porous Titanium Parts Fabricated by Sintering of TiH₂ and Ti Powder Mixtures [J]. Journal of Materials Engineering and Performance, 2018, 27: 228–242.
 - [15] J. D. Paramore, Z.Z. Fang, M. Dunstan, P. Sun, B.G. Butler, Hydrogen-enabled microstructure and fatigue strength engineering of titanium alloys [J]. Scientific reports, 2017, 7: 41444.
 - [16] I. M. Robertson, G.B. Schaffer, Comparison of sintering of titanium and titanium hydride powders [J]. Powder metallurgy. 2010, 53: 12–19.
 - [17] O. Ivasishin, V. Moxson, Low-cost titanium hydride powder metallurgy [J]. Titanium powder metallurgy, 2015: 117–148.
 - [18] Y. Zhang, C. Wang, Y. Zhang, Fabrication of low-cost Ti-1Al-8V-5Fe by powder metallurgy with TiH₂ and FeV80 alloy [J]. Materials and Manufacturing Processes, 2017, 32: 1869–1873.
 - [19] W. R. Kerr, The effect of hydrogen as a temporary alloying element on the microstructure and tensile properties of Ti-6Al-4V [J]. Metallurgical Transactions A, 1985, 16: 1077–1087.
 - [20] O. Senkov, Thermohydrogen processing of titanium alloys [J]. International Journal of Hydrogen Energy, 1999, 24: 565–576.
 - [21] I. S. Kaptyug, V.I. Syshchikov, Effect of alloy content on fractional properties of titanium [J]. Metal Science and Heat Treatment, 1959, 1: 27–32.
 - [22] S. L. Rice, S.F. Wayne, H. Nowotny, Material transport phenomena in the impact wear of titanium alloys [J]. Wear, 1980, 65: 215–226.
 - [23] K. G. Budinski, Tribological properties of titanium alloys [J]. Wear, 1991, 151: 203–217.
 - [24] A. Pramanik, Effects of reinforcement on wear resistance of aluminum matrix composites [J]. Transactions of Nonferrous Metals Society of China, 2016, 26: 348–358.
 - [25] T. Miyajima, Y. Iwai, Effects of reinforcements on sliding wear behavior of aluminum matrix composites [J]. Wear, 2003, 255: 606–616.
 - [26] T. Ram Prabhu, V.K. Varma, S. Vedantam, Tribological and mechanical behavior of multilayer Cu/SiC + Gr hybrid composites for brake friction material applications [J]. Wear, 2014, 317: 201–212.
 - [27] W. Oliver, G. M Pharr, An improved technique for determining hardness and elastic modulus using load and displacement sensing indentation experiments [J]. Journal of materials research, 1992, 7: 1564–1583.
 - [28] A. Braem, T. Matheys, B. Neirinck, J. Schrooten, O. Van der Biest, J. Vleugels, Porous Titanium Coatings Through Electrophoretic Deposition of TiH₂ Suspensions [J]. Advanced Engineering Materials, 2011, 13: 509–515.
 - [29] D. Bouvard, Densification behaviour of mixtures of hard and soft powders under pressure [J]. Powder Technology, 2000, 111: 231–239.
 - [30] Y. Zhao, M. Taya, Processing of porous NiTi by spark plasma sintering method [J]. In Smart

- Structures and Materials, 2006, 6170: 617013.
- [31] A. Sergueeva, V. Stolyarov, R. Valiev, A. Mukherjee, Advanced mechanical properties of pure titanium with ultrafine grained structure [J]. Scripta Materialia, 2001, 45: 747–752.
 - [32] Xu, J. J., H. Y. Cheung, and S. Q. Shi. Mechanical properties of titanium hydride. Journal of alloys and compounds [J], 2007, 436: 82-85.
 - [33] D. Setoyama, J. Matsunaga, H. Muta, M. Uno, S. Yamanaka, Mechanical properties of titanium hydride [J], Journal of alloys and Compounds, 2004, 381: 215–220.
 - [34] T. Mura, N. Yamashita, T. Mishima, Y. Hirose, A dislocation model for hardness indentation problems II [J]. International journal of engineering science, 1989, 27: 1–9.
 - [35] E. F. Finkin, Examination of Abrasion Resistance Criteria for Some Ductile Metals [J], Journal of Lubrication Technology, 1974, 96: 210.
 - [36] T. Tsui, G. Pharr, W. Oliver, C. S Bhatia, White, R. L. Anders, I. G Brown, Nanoindentation and nanoscratching of hard carbon coatings for magnetic disks [J]. MRS Online Proceedings Library Archive, 1995, 383.
 - [37] A. T. Alpas, J. Zhang, Effect of SiC particulate reinforcement on the dry sliding wear of aluminium-silicon alloys (A356) [J]. Wear, 1992, 155: 83–104.
 - [38] S. Biswas, Some mechanisms of tribofilm formation in metal/metal and ceramic/metal sliding interactions [J]. Wear, 2000, 245: 178–189.
 - [39] G.W. Stachowiak, Wear: materials, mechanisms and practice [M]. Wiley & Sons, 2005.
 - [40] K. Farokhzadeh, A. Edrissy, Transition between mild and severe wear in titanium alloys, Tribology International, 2016, 94: 98–111.
 - [41] J. F. Archard, Contact and Rubbing of Flat Surfaces [J]. Journal of applied physics. 1953, 24: 981–988.
 - [42] F. Toptan, A. Rego, A.C. Alves, A. Guedes, Corrosion and tribocorrosion behavior of Ti–B₄C composite intended for orthopaedic implants [J]. Journal of the mechanical behavior of biomedical materials, 2016, 61: 152–163.
 - [43] N. Chawla, Y.-L. Shen, Mechanical Behavior of Particle Reinforced Metal Matrix Composites [J]. Advanced engineering materials, 2001, 3: 357–370.