In situ thermal measurements of sliding contacts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines frictional heating and the associated temperature rise for a sliding circular contact using an in situ thermal micro-tribometer. Observation of the contact temperature used a radiometric approach to measure local temperature at the sliding interface with an emphasis on full field imaging and thermal accuracy. Filled natural rubber samples were slid against optically smooth CaF2 counter-samples. Temperature rise was measured for externally applied normal forces ranging from ~100 to 1000 mN and sliding velocities ranging from ~250 to 1000 mm/s, producing temperature rises between ~3 and 26 °C. Measured temperature rise was compared to the analytical models of Jaeger, Archard, and Tian and Kennedy for the average temperature rise in sliding contacts.

1. Introduction

Frictional heating and the temperature rise in a sliding contact is a fascinating, and often passionately debated, area of study. The effects of temperature on friction and wear are of significant practical interest; for example, moving mechanical assemblies and the materials selected for durable operation must survive not only the ambient conditions but also the thermal conditions generated as a result of frictional sliding. Numerous studies have shown that the real area of contact between two rubbing bodies is typically small compared to the apparent area of contact [1–7]. In these intimate contacts, friction and high contact pressures frequently combine to generate substantial flash temperatures, and these asperity contacts can have profound effects on the tribological operation [8]. Characterization of the dependence of tribological properties on such temperatures and pressures is an ongoing effort which has spanned analytical, numerical, and empirical approaches [9]. Here we expand these methods through precise micro-scale experiments by (1) directly measuring the temperature profile of the apparent contact area for small contacts, (2) correlating the measured temperature data with traditional tribotesting (i.e. friction/wear) measurements, and (3) comparing these measurements to the established models for frictional heating. These measurements not only provide explicit temperature and pressure profiles within the contact, but can also provide data for estimates of wear.

Solutions to heat transfer problems involving moving sources of heat have been of great importance in the understanding of frictional heating. The early work of Jaeger [10] used an approach based upon the superposition of various classical heat transfer source types to solve for the average temperature rise in the contact due to moving sources of various shapes and uniform distributions; his work was largely based upon the fundamentals proposed by Carslaw [11]. Postulates put forth by Blok [8,12,13] and Holm [14] expanded on the thermodynamic and geometric intricacies of the problem. Archard [15] used simple physical considerations in deriving practical equations for surface temperature rise with functional forms similar to those of Blok and Jaeger. Tian and Kennedy later expanded upon these models for the entire range of Peclet numbers using a Green’s theorem approach [16]. More recently Bansal and Streator [17] used a numerical approach to evaluate the heat partitioning hypotheses used by Blok and Jaeger, in addition to determining the accuracy of Tian and Kennedy’s approximate formula for the maximum interfacial temperature rise for various source shapes and distributions. One challenge associated with the use of contact temperature models is deciding how heat is partitioned within the contact. It was originally postulated by Blok that no temperature discontinuity should exist between two materials in areas of real contact, and that a constant overall heat partition function could be estimated by equating the maximum surface temperatures of the two bodies within the contact [13]. Although this method provides a good estimate, the most accurate partitioning of heat matches the temperature at every point within the real area of contact and does not require the use of a partition function [9,17–19].

The progression of empirical analysis for this problem has evolved alongside theoretical solutions. These experiments have spanned a large range of methods starting with embedded thermocouples, which then progressed to the use of dynamic...
and thin-film thermocouples [20–22]. The radiometric approach, which is considered to be the most accurate because of its ability to sample at higher speeds and capture larger areas, has been used recently but often at high temperatures (400–500 °C) and large variability [23–29]. Major limitations associated with using a radiometric approach include an incomplete knowledge of emissivity and real contact area of the contacting bodies [24,29–31]. We have attempted to develop a small scale, high precision radiometric approach for full field, direct temperature measurement of the contact.

Here, we have designed and constructed a new instrument that combines microtribological probes and methods to perform sliding friction experiments while making high fidelity full field surface temperature measurements of the contact through infrared thermography. The instrument is capable of measuring normal and friction forces ranging from 10 mN to over 2 N. This design facilitates synchronized measurement of externally applied contact force, friction force, and \textit{in situ} thermal imaging of the contact with a spatial resolution limited by the diffraction limit (around 3 μm).

Preliminary tribological tests with \textit{in situ} frictional heating measurements were performed between half spheres of filled natural rubber and a flat calcium fluoride disk to directly obtain the temperature distribution and average temperature rise within the contact and compare these to the models previously set forth.

2. Trubometer description

The \textit{in situ} thermal micro-tribometer is capable of performing pin-on-disk and reciprocation sliding experiments with \textit{in situ} thermal imaging (Fig. 1). The hemispherical sample (pin) is mounted directly to an instrumented cantilever that measures normal and frictional forces. Three micrometer stages control the positioning and loading of the sample. Opposing the sample is a rotary stage which holds a flat calcium fluoride counter-sample (disk). An infrared camera focuses through the infrared transparent counter-sample onto the interface created by the pin and the disk via a 3X objective.

![Fig. 1. Profile of tribometer (stage and counter-sample holder cross-sectioned). Radiation from sample/counter-sample sliding contact is focused onto the detector by the 3X camera lens.](image)

2.1. Imaging methodology and temperature analysis

When the sample and counter-sample are in sliding contact, nearly all the work done to overcome friction causes temperature rises at or near the interface in areas of true contact [15]. Thermal radiation from the surface of the sample is transmitted through the IR transmissive counter-sample and is focused onto an infrared detector. Calcium fluoride was used as the counter-sample due to its hardness, thermal conductivity, and ability to transmit light over wavelengths measured by the thermal camera.

There are three main contributions to the radiant energy collected by the infrared detector: (1) radiation from the rubber sample (pin), (2) the calcium fluoride counter-sample, and (3) reflected ambient radiation. The contribution of the counter-sample was neglected due to its low emissivity, even at elevated temperatures (approximately zero at 373 K) [32]. Thermal images taken before the materials were in contact were averaged and subtracted from subsequent images taken during sliding; greatly reducing the effect of the reflected radiation component; secondary reflection effects were neglected all together. The measured radiation is then only a function of the sample temperature and emissivity. An in-depth discussion of infrared thermography is given by Volmer [33].

The emissivity of the pin was determined by two different techniques. The first method compared surface temperature measurements made by the camera to measurements made by a thermal couple. In the second method a body of known emissivity and sample material were simultaneously imaged using the infrared camera. The emissivity of the sample material was adjusted in the camera software until the surface temperatures of both bodies were equal. Calibrations were done over the temperature range measured in this study (∼20–70 °C) and through a calcium fluoride window to account for thermal and absorption effects. The emissivity of the nascent surface was determined to be close to 1 (∼0.97) with no discernible dependence on temperature over the range considered. There was no perceptible difference between the emissivity of the sample before and after sliding.
Thermal images of the sliding contact were acquired by a FLIR SC7650 with an InSb detector as quickly as 100 Hz with a field of view of 3.2 mm × 2.4 mm and a 5 μm/px resolution. To approximate the nominal area of contact and the temperature distribution a post processing technique was performed. Plateau equalization, a general class of histogram-based mappings, was applied to gray scale temperature images to provide contrast enhancement [34] of the distinct thermal gradients that exist at the edges of contact. Edge detection was then used to estimate an outline of the nominal contact area. Each pixel encompassed by the resulting contact outline was then mapped to the corresponding value from the measured temperature field. These values were considered representative of the nominal contact area as it was not likely that all of the material within this region was actually in intimate contact with the counter-sample. An average of all temperature values over the nominal contact area was considered the nominal contact temperature at that point in time. Likewise, the nominal contact pressure for each frame was calculated by dividing the measured force by the nominal contact area. This process was repeated for each time synced image of the contact.

The nominal contact temperature rise was calculated by subtracting the background temperature, the average contact temperature before sliding, from contact temperature values averaged over a specified amount of time corresponding to thermal steady state.

3. Materials

Carbon black filled natural rubber hemispheres of 2 mm radius were used in this study. The rubber had an elastic modulus of approximately 6.5 MPa, a thermal conductivity of 0.24 W/mK, and a thermal diffusivity of 0.143 × 10⁻⁶ m²/s. The average surface roughness and RMS roughness of the molded rubber were determined to be ~ 800 nm and ~1 μm, respectively, by scanning white light interferometer (Veeco Wyko NT100).

Calcium fluoride was used as the infrared transparent counter-sample with 92–95% transmission of electromagnetic wavelengths in the range of 0.2–6.5 μm. The wavelengths of light measured in these experiments were in the range of 3–5 μm; this value was set by the infrared detector and associated filtering. The combination of transmission, hardness, and thermal conductivity of calcium fluoride made it a better choice for these experiments when compared to other IR transmitters such as zinc selenide, sodium chloride, silicon, and germanium. The optical windows were 50 mm in diameter and 3 mm thick with an RMS roughness of ~6.5 nm.

4. Description of loading and sliding experiments

Long time duration (900 s) testing was conducted to observe the effects of load and sliding velocity on the average nominal contact temperature rise. Due to the finite nature of the moving body (disk) it was expected that residual heat reentering contact would lead to higher temperatures than predicted by thermal models derived for an infinite half space. Short duration (~25 s) and forced convection tests were performed to evaluate this effect by minimizing this redundant heating.

Prior to sliding, the sample was loaded against a clean calcium fluoride disk to a prescribed force at a track radius of 18 mm; radial position was the same for each experiment. A record of the surface temperature at ambient was taken before sliding. Experiments were then performed at prescribed speeds and loads for either short durations (25 s) or long durations (900 s). Images were acquired before, during, and after sliding at a rate of 80 Hz for short tests and 0.5 Hz for long duration tests. Experiments were performed at targeted loads of 100, 250, 500, 750, and 1000 mN with varying sliding velocities of 250, 500, 750, and 1000 mm/s. Forced convection testing was performed under these same conditions for a target normal load of 500 mN and a sliding velocity of 750 mm/s. During sliding a steady flow of laboratory air (~20 °C) was directed onto the disk surface just outside of contact via a fan and nozzle configuration. The flow of air was not measured but it was sufficient enough to cool exiting disk material down to ambient temperature before it reentered the contact. This was verified by a small drop of black paint placed on the disk surface just outside of the contact path.

Acquired images were post processed using MATLAB® to determine the average temperature over the nominal area of contact, estimated contact area, and nominal contact pressure (applied load over measured nominal contact area). Although normal force was measured throughout the experiments it was not adjusted during sliding to minimize disturbances to the system.

5. Results

An overview of the measured contact temperature as a function of applied load and sliding velocity is shown in Fig. 2. Nominal contact temperature rises ranged from ~3 °C, at the lowest load and sliding velocity, to ~26 °C, coinciding with the
the greatest product of friction coefficient, contact pressure, and sliding velocity. The maximum single point temperature was measured to be ~51°C. Short duration and forced convection tests resulted in a reduced contact temperature and time required to reach steady state (Fig. 3). Friction coefficient contact pressure, and sliding velocity did not significantly change over the duration of the convection experiment (σ=0.06, 0.02 MPa, and 0.5 mm/s respectively); providing a good estimate of the effect of heated material reentering the contact on the measured contact temperature. Average measured values for each pin-on-disk experiment are given in Table 1.

During these experiments the observed shape of contact was distorted from an elliptical shape at low loads and sliding velocities, into a bifurcated contact with a distinct leading edge at the highest loads and velocities. This distortion of the contact was confirmed by separate images taken of moving contacts, of the same material, with an optical interferometer [35]. At lower loads and velocities the degree to which this happened was less, resulting in the appearance of more material being in contact. At higher loads and velocities material just behind this leading ridge was at a sufficient distance from the counter-sample that it no longer appeared to be in contact. These contact shapes were most likely due to the accommodation of strain by the material as a result of low modulus and large interfacial shear stresses. Schallamach observed a similar behavior between butyl rubber sliding on Perspex [36].

Over the duration of testing no visible wear debris was generated. Scanning white light interferometer scans confirmed the surface roughness of the rubber pin did not change significantly from the beginning to the end of the experiments (RMS ~ 900–1100 nm).

6. Discussion

A significant obstacle facing full field frictional heating measurements is the real-time measurement of the true area of contact. Classical contact mechanics may be used to estimate the area of contact but for highly deformable or rough surfaces, where the true area of contact may be significantly increased or reduced, it is not easily determined [4,7,35,37]. The present experimental configuration allows for the direct measurement of contact temperature in addition to providing an estimate of the shape and area of contact. This creates a unique situation where all of the variables required for thermal modeling are either known a priori or measured in situ.

In this experimental configuration the disk is heated by a moving source and conduction from the pin. The pin is heated by a stationary source and cooled by oncoming cooler portions of the disk. Because the disk material is cool when it enters contact it must be quickly brought up to the temperature of the stationary surface. This results in the interfacial temperature rise being dominated by the removal of heat away from contact by the moving counter-sample.

Although most of the heat generated in the contact is conducted into the moving body, a fraction of the total heat flux goes into each body in contact. Blok hypothesized that the maximum surface temperatures of the two contacting bodies must be equal, and that an overall heat partitioning factor can be estimated [13]. Jaeger used a similar idea by equating the average temperature of contact of the two bodies to derive an overall heat partitioning factor [10]. Both postulates assume a fraction, a, of the heat flux generated (per unit time over the area of contact) passes into body 1, and the remaining fraction, (1−a), passes into body 2. The fraction alpha can be obtained by equating the interfacial contact temperature due to a moving heat source, with heat flux qα going into body 1, to the contact temperature due to a stationary heat source, with q(1−α) going into body 2. Here the disk is taken as body 1 and the pin as body 2. Laraqi et al. [38] showed when the Peclet number was ≥ 30 that for any increase in velocity, and therefore Peclet number, the partitioning coefficient remains approximately constant.
Frictional heating models developed by Jaeger, Archard, and Tian and Kennedy, used to predict the nominal contact temperature rise for various source shapes and distributions are plotted in normalized form with measured data in Fig. 4 (Appendix B). Values used in these calculations are listed in Table 1. The measured temperature rises from the short duration (~25 s) sliding experiments were very close to those predicted by modeling; however, long duration (~900 s) sliding experiments were observed to have higher temperature rises than model predictions. Differences between the experimental setup and model geometries involved in the derivation of these equations may account for this discrepancy. These models neglect convection of heat away from the interface, do not account for the residual heat in the disk that passes back through the contact with each revolution (infinite half space assumption), and are for model contact geometries (circular, square, etc.). Other models have been proposed that account for the finite nature of both bodies as the contact and the contact temperature from residual heat can be quite significant [9,39,40]. Laraqi et al. developed an analytical solution for the temperature distribution in a pin-on-disk configuration and found that for Pe ≥ 20 there is a distinct heat drag that develops in the disk. At sufficiently high speeds the temperature tends to its average value which corresponds to a thermal balance between the heat flux entering over the area of contact and the heat flux removed by convection [38]. The effect of convection on the average temperature of contact and the time required to reach equilibrium is shown in Fig. 3. It is shown that residual heat in the disk effectively re-heats the contact resulting in a higher than predicted equilibrium contact temperature. The use of forced convection allows disk material exiting the contact to cool back down to ambient temperatures before reentering; mimicking the effect of sliding on an infinite half space. In a like manner, short duration experiments are sufficiently long enough for the contact to reach a quasi-steady state value and short enough as to minimize the effects of residual heat in the disk.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Velocity [mm/s]</th>
<th>Fn [mN]</th>
<th>σ(Fn) [mN]</th>
<th>μ</th>
<th>σ(μ)</th>
<th>a [μm]</th>
<th>Nominal contact pressure [Mpa]</th>
<th>u(P) [Mpa]</th>
<th>Pe</th>
<th>u(Pe)</th>
<th>Nominal contact temperature rise ΔT [°C]</th>
<th>σ(T) [°C]</th>
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<td>(a) Long duration sliding (~900 s)</td>
<td>250 &amp; 112 &amp; 2 &amp; 4.1 &amp; 0.20 &amp; 360 &amp; 0.57 &amp; 0.01 &amp; 18 &amp; 2 &amp; 3 &amp; 0.1</td>
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<td>(b) Short duration sliding (~25 s)</td>
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</table>

It is not likely that the shape of contact and the pressure distribution is immaterial but to a good approximation the contact may be assumed as a uniform circular (or band shaped) source with a radius (half width), a, estimated from the measured nominal contact area, A, by approximating the entire contact as a circle (a = \(\sqrt{A/\pi}\)). It appeared that these assumptions had less of an influence on predicted temperature rise than other assumptions made above.
7. Concluding remarks

An in situ thermal micro-tribometer has been developed to accurately measure the full field temperature distribution between two contacting bodies due to frictional heating. Experiments were performed with filled natural rubber half spheres on smooth calcium fluoride to observe the effects of normal load, sliding velocity and friction coefficient on the average temperature rise of the interface.

A nominal contact temperature rise as high as 26 °C was observed with a maximum single point temperature of ~51 °C occurring at a point close to the leading edge of contact. The measured average contact temperature rise was compared to predicted values from Archard, Jaeger, and Tian and Kennedys’ fundamental frictional heating models. In situ radiometric images taken of the sliding interface showed that models proposed by Jaeger and Archard for a uniform source moving over an infinite half plane provided the closest approximation of the nominal contact temperature rise for short duration sliding. Due to continuous reheating of the contact, long duration sliding experiments resulted in a higher than predicted nominal contact temperature rise.

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Appendix A. Nomenclature

\(a\) radius of contact or heat source (m)
\(A = \pi a^2\) area of contact or heat source (m²)
\(V\) velocity of contact or heat source (m/s)
\(K\) thermal conductivity (W/mK)
\(\chi\) diffusivity (m²/s)
\(P_e = Va/\chi\) non-dimensional speed parameter (Peclet number)
\(q = Q/A\) heat rate per unit area (W/m²)
\(\Delta T\) nominal contact temperature rise (°C)
\(\overline{\Delta T}\) normalized nominal contact temperature rise
\(K^* = K_{disk}/K_{pin}\) non-dimensional thermal conductivity

Appendix B. Contact temperature derivations

The equations used in computing the normalized nominal contact temperature rise (Fig. 4) were derived using various solutions of Jaeger, Archard, and Tian and Kennedy. These heat transfer solutions were used in conjunction with Jaeger’s method of equating the nominal contact temperature of each body to estimate an overall heat partitioning coefficient \(\alpha\). A fraction of the heat generated in the contact, \(\alpha\), goes into the body experiencing the moving source and the remaining fraction, \((1-\alpha)\), goes into the body experiencing the stationary source. This constant heat partitioning coefficient was then used with moving source solutions to estimate the nominal contact temperature rise. Either the moving source or stationary source solution may be used in computing the temperature rise as the condition of matching the nominal temperatures of contact will guarantee that both solutions will be the same.

Measured temperature rise

The measured nominal contact temperature rise, Fig. 4, was normalized to the maximum temperature due to a stationary circular source of uniform distribution in the following way

\[
\overline{T}_{nom} = \frac{\Delta T_{measured}K_{pin}}{q a}.
\]  

Jaeger [10]

Jaeger’s approximate band source solution, Eq. (B2), and Tian and Kennedy’s stationary uniform circular source solution, Eq. (B3), were used to compute an overall heat partitioning coefficient \(\alpha\).

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{1.064qa}{K} Pe^{-1/2}
\]  

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{8qa}{3\pi K}
\]  

An estimate of the heat partitioning coefficient \(\alpha\) was determined by setting Eqs. (B2) and (B3) equal with a fraction of the heat, \(q\), going into the disk and the remaining fraction, \((1-\alpha)q\), going to the pin:

\[
\frac{1.064qa}{K_{disk}} Pe^{-1/2} = \frac{8(1-\alpha)q}{3\pi K_{pin}}
\]  

solving for \(\alpha\)

\[
\alpha = \frac{0.849K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe}}{0.849K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe}+1.064K_{pin}}
\]

using the coefficient from Eq. (B5) in the moving source solution, Eq. (B2), the estimated nominal contact temperature rise can be written as

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{0.903qa}{0.849K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe}+1.064K_{pin}}
\]

Equation (B6) may be written by normalizing it to the maximum contact temperature rise due to a stationary circular source (\(q\) or \(K_{pin}\)) of uniform distribution

\[
\overline{T}_{nom} = \frac{\Delta T_{nom}K_{pin}}{q a} = \frac{0.903}{0.849K^*\sqrt{Pe}+1.064}.
\]

Archard [15]

Equating Archard’s solutions for the nominal contact temperature rise due to a stationary circular source of uniform strength, Eq. (B8), and the solution due to a fast moving circular source, Eq. (B9), it is possible to calculate an overall constant heat partitioning coefficient, \(\alpha\).

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{Q_{pin}}{4aK_{pin}}
\]  

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{0.31Q_{disk}a}{K_{disk}a} Pe^{-1/2}
\]  

equating the average nominal contact temperatures of Eqs. (B8) and (B9) and solving for \(\alpha\)

\[
Q_{disk}a/Pe^{-1/2} = \frac{Q_{pin}(1-\alpha)}{4aK_{pin}}
\]  

\[
\alpha = \frac{0.785K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe}}{0.785K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe}+0.974K_{pin}}
\]
From this result the average contact temperature rise due to a uniform circular source, with the partitioning of heat being accounted for, is given by Eq. (B12). Normalizing this result to the maximum contact temperature rise due to a stationary circular source of uniform distribution Eq. (B13) is obtained

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{0.765qa}{0.785K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.974K_{pin}} \quad \text{(B12)}
\]

\[
\eta_{nom} = \frac{\Delta T_{nom}K_{pin}}{qa} = \frac{0.765}{0.785K^\frac{1}{2}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.974} \quad \text{(B13)}
\]

**Tian and Kennedy** [16]

Tian and Kennedy derived equations for the nominal contact temperature rise over the entire range of Peclet numbers for circular heat sources of uniform (B14) and parabolic (B15) distributions [16]

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{1.22qa}{K\sqrt{\pi (0.6575 + Pe)}} \quad \text{(B14)}
\]

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{1.464qa}{K\sqrt{\pi (0.874 + Pe)}} \quad \text{(B15)}
\]

using Jaeger’s method of partitioning for the case of the uniform circular source:

\[
\frac{1.22qa}{K_{disk}\sqrt{\pi (0.6575 + Pe)}} = \frac{1.22(1-x)qa}{K_{pin}\sqrt{\pi (0.6575)}} \quad \text{for} \ x = \frac{0.849K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.6575}{0.849K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.6575 + 0.688K_{pin}} \quad \text{(B16)}
\]

an estimation of the nominal contact temperature rise due to a circular source with a uniform distribution, Eq. (B18), was obtained by substituting \( qa \) for \( q \) and \( K_{disk} \) for \( K \) in Eq. (B14)

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{0.584qa}{0.849K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.6575 + 0.688K_{pin}} \quad \text{(B18)}
\]

Normalizing the above equation in the same way as Eq. (B13) it may be expressed in non-dimensional form as

\[
\eta_{nom} = \frac{\Delta T_{nom}K_{pin}}{qa} = \frac{0.584}{0.849K^\frac{1}{2}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.6575 + 0.688} \quad \text{(B19)}
\]

Using the above procedures for calculating the heat partitioning coefficient and the nominal contact temperature rise, similar expressions may be written for the circular heat source with a parabolic distribution, Eq. (B20), with a non-dimensional form given by Eq. (B21)

\[
\Delta T_{nom} = \frac{0.730qa}{0.884K_{disk}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.874 + 0.826K_{pin}} \quad \text{(B20)}
\]

\[
\eta_{nom} = \frac{\Delta T_{nom}K_{pin}}{qa} = \frac{0.730}{0.884K^\frac{1}{2}\sqrt{Pe} + 0.874 + 0.826} \quad \text{(B21)}
\]

**References**


[37] Luft N, Aliat N, de Maria JMG, Bairi A. Temperature and division of heat in a pin-on-disc frictional device—exact analytical solution. Wear 2009;266:765–70.
