That Which Fits the Mold: A Braided Composite Wing

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Introduction

- Composites are used to improve and develop products under certain parameters (durability, weight, and shape) [1]
- Aramid, or Kevlar® strands are interlaced to form a braided tube, then manipulated to form a sheet
- Braided composite is coated in resin and then, depending on the type of resin, is cured under elevated temperatures or at room temperature (cold-cured), to harden and reinforce it (fig.1)
- The applicability and manufacturability of this process is tested through the construction of a model airplane wing

Fig 1: Braided composite tube segment

Objectives

- Design an aerodynamic model airplane wing using composite materials manufacturing methods, demonstrating realistic applications of braided composite materials
- Identify materials that can be used in alternative curing processes

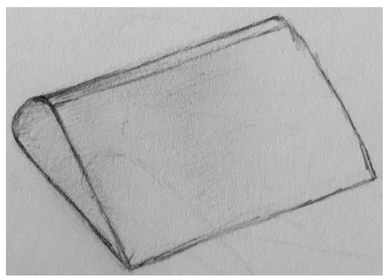

Fig 2: A concept design of plane wing. Air on top of the wing will move faster than air on the bottom of the wing, generating lift.

Methods

A draft of the wing mold was designed, while ensuring an aerodynamic shape (fig. 2). The steep top curve allows less resistance (drag) to be experienced.

Using SOLIDWORKS®, a 3D computer-aided design (CAD) software, model airplane wing mold was drafted (fig. 3).

The prepared 3D printed mold was used to lay the braided portion of Kevlar® down to then apply the resin (fig. 4). The wing begins to take shape.

The solid centres were pressed down to compress the layers and ensure an even spread of resin (fig. 5).

The two halves were cold cured for approximately two days and then joined to form a wing shape.

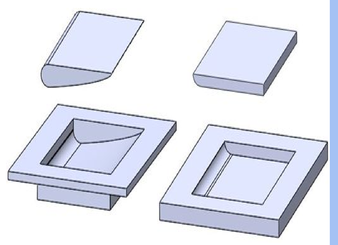

Fig 3: Compression mold of upper and lower wing halves

Fig 4: braided composite, sliced and laid flat

Fig 5: prepared for curing

Conclusions

- With SOLIDWORKS®, a model airplane wing mold was made
- The mold adequately sustained the process of material and resin application
- From a concave view, the fibre layout was misaligned slightly; although it resulted in a smooth, even exterior
- Future considerations of using a metal mold may encourage debonding in the event of opting for a heated cure [2]
- The nature of the plane wing may be better suited for a weaving machine rather than the tubular braiding machine
- The results demonstrate versatility in having produced aerospace parts

Literature Cited

[1] B. Räckers, “Introduction to resin transfer moulding,” *Resin Transfer Moulding for Aerospace Structures*, pp. 77, Dec. 1998.

[2] .H. Vangerko, “Composite tooling for composite components,” *Composites*, vol. 19, no. 6, pp. 483–484, Nov. 1988.

Acknowledgments

- I am sincerely thankful to my Principal Investigator, Dr. Jason “Bossman” Carey; my supervisors, Ahmed Samir Ead and Eric Lepp; and the other members of the Carey Lab for their stellar support and generosity
- I would like to thank the WISEST team and the department of Mechanical Engineering in my endeavors to pursue STEM