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# Performance Tests of a Liquid Hydrogen Propellant Densification Ground System for the X33/RLV

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## **PERFORMANCE** TESTS **OF A LIQUID HYDROGEN PROPELLANT DENSIFICATION GROUND SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR THE X33/RLV**

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#### **Abstract**

A concept for improving the performance of propulsion systems in expendable and single-stage-to-orbit **(SSTO)** launch vehicles much like the X33/RLV has been identified. The approach is to utilize densified cryogenic liquid hydrogen (LH<sub>2</sub>) and liquid oxygen (LOX) propellants to fuel the propulsion stage. The primary benefit for using this relatively high specific impulse densified propellant mixture is the subsequent reduction of the launch vehicle gross liftoff weight.

Production of **densified** propellants however requires specialized equipment to **actively** subcool both the liquid oxygen and liquid hydrogen to temperatures below their normal boiling point. A propellant densification unit based on an external thermodynamic vent principle which operates at subatmospheric pressure and supercold temperatures provides a means for the LH<sub>2</sub> and LOX densification process to occur. To demonstrate the production concept for the densification of the liquid hydrogen propellant, a system comprised of a multistage gaseous hydrogen compressor, LH<sub>2</sub> recirculation pumps and a cryogenic  $LH_2$  heat exchanger was designed, built and tested at the NASA Lewis Research Center (LeRC). This paper presents the design configuration of the  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  propellant densification production hardware, **analytical** details and results of performance testing conducted with the hydrogen densifier Ground Support Equipment (GSE).

#### Nomenclature



#### V volume

VJ vacuum-jacketed

Greek

- Ψ head coefficient
- Ф flow coefficient
- $\eta$ efficiency
- **P** density

#### Subscripts

- L liquid
- R recirculating
- V vapor

#### Introduction

The desire to increase the payload **capabilities** and performance **of** SSTO reusable **launch** vehicles (RLV) is driven by constantly evolving mission requirements. Construction of the International Space Station Freedom, Mission to Planet Earth, a return to the Moon and planetary exploration of Mars and far beyond demonstrate the variety of potential future mission profiles. In support of these missions, the next generation RLV demands several technological improvements in order to achieve a lower cost and more reliable access to space. Advancements in higher performance engines, light weight composite structures, propellant tanks constructed of light-composite materials including graphite-epoxy and aluminum-lithium, durable thermal protection subsystems and electromagnetic actuators replacing hydraulics all constitute improvements to the RLV technology cache. One technology area that has not been as aggressively developed is densification of cryogenic liquid propellants, even though the performance gains in an RLV application exceed those improvements previously cited.

Propellant **densification** (PD) by itself is **not** a **new** technology approach considering **the** former development of slush hydrogen for the National Aerospace Plane<sup>1-3</sup> and other programs. The operational problems associated with the solid-liquid propellant mixture have however deterred wide-spread acceptance of the fuel. Production of densified propellant at conditions above the triple-point (TP) temperature is a much simpler process, and a less costly technique without the vehicle operational complexities of a slush mixture. A continuous process for subcooling LH<sub>2</sub> propellant above the TP, without the generators, mixers, two-phase pumps, etc., that are commonly associated with the large-scale slush hydrogen production facility, has significant operations and cost advantages in the RLV application. The continuous PD concept developed in this work is a ground support unit comprised of a pump, compressor, and heat exchanger for  $LH_2$  propellant subcooling, and an integrated recirculation system for the launch vehicle propellant tank.

Cryogenic propellants at temperatures below their NBP have a higher bulk density and reduced vapor pressure. The greater density fluid permits the use of smaller sized and consequently lighter launch vehicle propellant tanks. The lower vapor pressure propellant allows the vehicle tank design and operating pressure to be reduced, permitting the use of thinner walled vessels. The combination of these effects contributes to a significant improvement in the vehicle gross lift-off weight (GLOW). Study estimates<sup>4,5</sup> for RLV's using densified propellants indicate performance benefits ranging from 15 to 32 percent reduction in vehicle GLOW compared to the vehicle fueled with NBP LH<sub>2</sub>/LOX propellants. Because of this significant RLV performance and cost advantage by vehicle weight reduction with the use of subcooled cryogens, a propellant densification technology demonstration program<sup>6</sup> was conducted by the NASA LeRC and Rockwell Space Systems Division (RSSD). The PD work completed during this effort was funded by Marshall Space Flight Center (MSFC) under NASA Contract NCC8-79.

This paper describes the results of the Phase I liquid hydrogen PD experimental program conducted at the LeRC. A subscale LH<sub>2</sub> propellant densification system, sized for a 20 000 gal LH<sub>2</sub> tank, was designed, constructed, operationally checked-out with liquid nitrogen  $(LN_2)$  and functionally tested using liquid hydrogen propellant by LeRC. Performance tests were conducted at the K-Site Cryogenic Propellant Tank Facility located at the NASA LeRC Plum Brook Station. Liquid hydrogen densification test results to be reported include data for GSE unit mass flow rates, subcooled LH<sub>2</sub> temperatures for the heat exchanger system and compressor operating conditions. Also presented here is background information on the thermodynamic process for subcooling the LH<sub>2</sub> propellant, a description of the GSE hardware configuration and K-Site test facility, details of GSE **test** procedures, operational problems **encountered** with the GSE and analytical comparisons with densification system performance models.

#### **Background**

The ideal rocket engine propellant is characterized as one with a high specific impulse (Isp<sub>v</sub>), high density and low vapor pressure. LH<sub>2</sub>/LOX is one of the highest performance propellants with a nominal Isp<sub>v</sub> of 450 sec. The problem with LH<sub>2</sub> stored at the NBP at standard conditions is its relatively low density and high vapor pressure. Liquid hydrogen has a density of 4.4 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> at its NBP. Subcooling LH<sub>2</sub> to a temperature of 28 °R increases the density to 4.7 lb/ft<sup>3</sup> corresponding to a **7** percent density gain. The vapor pressure ofLH 2 at **these** conditions is **reduced** from **14.7 to** 2.6 psia representing an 82 percent change. Figure 1 shows the LH<sub>2</sub> density and vapor pressure improvement as the temperature is **reduced.** The higher density propellant requires less **tank** volume, **reducing tank size** and mass. Due to **the reduced** vapor pressure, the subcooled propellant needs a lower tank operating pressure while **still** maintaining **the** net-positive **suction** head requirements for the pump fed engine **system.**

The densification of liquid hydrogen is based on the well characterized **thermodynamic** vent principle. The basic densification GSE unit itself, integrated with an RLV propellant tank (Fig. 2), consists of a LH<sub>2</sub> recirculation pump, LH<sub>2</sub> heat exchanger and gaseous hydrogen (gH<sub>2</sub>) compressor. The production of supercold LH<sub>2</sub> temperatures is accomplished by withdrawing saturated liquid hydrogen off the top of the thermally stratified RLV tank through a collector manifold, circulating it through the heat exchanger of the ground cooling unit, and returning the subcooled propellant from the GSE to the bottom of the RLV tank. Subatmospheric pressure boiling at 1.2 psia provides the 25.4 °R thermal heat sink required to condition the propellant in the  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  heat exchanger.

In order **to** maintain the propellant tank at **thermally** stratified conditions, a very important aspect in the overall performance of the densification process in terms of the time required to accomplish the desired densification, warm saturated liquid is withdrawn off the top using a collector manifold and the subcooled propellant from the GSE is returned to the bottom. The tubes of the GSE heat exchanger are submerged in a low temperature  $LH_2$  boiling bath maintained at subatmospheric pressure. To generate subcooled  $LH_2$  at 27 °R, the heat exchanger bath operating filled with  $LH_2$  is reduced to a pressure of 1.2 psia causing the liquid to boil at 25.4 °R. This low temperature boiling provides the thermal heat sink required to condition the propellant. The inlet  $LH_2$  stream is gradually subcooled through the tubes of the heat exchanger and exits at the desired 27 °R outlet temperature. The  $gH<sub>2</sub>$  compressor maintains the heat exchanger ullage pressure constant at 1.2 psia and rejects the boiled-off  $gH<sub>2</sub>$  saturated vapor to the atmospheric pressure vent.

### Test Apparatus and Procedure

#### K-Site Test Facility

The experimental testing for the LH<sub>2</sub> densification program was performed at the K-Site Cryogenic Propellant Tank Facility located at the NASA LeRC Plum Brook Station. The K-Site facility (Fig. 3) contains the main test building housing a 25 ft vacuum chamber, a remotely located control room, cryogenic liquid and gas storage areas, and equipment for slush hydrogen production. The  $LH_2$  propellant densification GSE was installed outdoors (Fig. 4) on an existing concrete slab located near the vacuum pump building adjacent to a reinforced blast wall. The PD system components are assembled on a welded I-beam structure, 36 ft long and 8 ft 6 in. wide.

The facility liquid hydrogen equipment for the PD tests consist **of two** 13 000 gal roadable dewars, vacuum jacketed **transfer** lines and a dewar vent **system.** A plan schematic of the LH 2 GSE fluid handling **system** is **shown** in **Fig.** 5. The H24 rail station dewar supplies LH<sub>2</sub> to the GSE pumps and heat exchanger. Subcooled propellant from the GSE flows to the H25 receiver dewar for storage. Vent valves on both dewars are **routed to the** 6 in. south burn-off and flared with a natural gas pilot. The discharge line from the  $gH_2$  compressor ties into a second 6-in. vent line which also terminates at the south bum-off flare stack. **Foam** insulated lines connect the facility vacuum jacketed lines leading **to the** GSE **skid through** mating bayonets with short VJ extensions. One **remote** operated valve (V210) is installed in the skid supply

piping to allow the back-transfer of  $LH_2$  from the roadable H25 dewar to the rail station H24 dewar to bypass the densification test rig.

Gaseous helium (gHe) used for purging is supplied to the GSE at 45 psig from the K-Site **gHe** bottle **farm** and tuber systems. Gaseous nitrogen is provided to the skid at 90 psig for valve operator pressure. Liquid nitrogen used during cold shock and densification checkout tests was fed from a separate  $LN_2$  dewar temporarily placed adjacent to the skid. A portable 400 KVA 7200/480 V transformer provided 480 and 208V three phase electrical power to motors on the LH<sub>2</sub> recirc pumps, gH<sub>2</sub> compressor and its cooling system pump and fan.

#### Propellant Densification GSE Hardware

The propellant densification GSE is designed to subcool 2.0 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec of saturated LH<sub>2</sub> propellant. The heat exchanger duty rating is 60 Btu/sec with flowing LH<sub>2</sub> at maximum inlet conditions of 40 psia and 43 °R. The subcooled product design outlet **temperature** from **the** densifler unit **exchanger** is 27 °R. Table I lists the design parameters for the test bed GSE. The major hardware for producing the densified propellant (Fig. 6) consists of two LH<sub>2</sub> recirculation pumps mounted inside a dewar, a cryogenic LH<sub>2</sub> heat exchanger and a gH<sub>2</sub> centrifugal compressor. A GSE system flow schematic (Fig. 7) configured for the K-Site  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  densification tests shows the rig to be set-up for once-through flow testing where  $LH_2$  flows from dewar H24 to H25. The primary test objective in this series was to demonstrate heat exchanger-compressor performance and the production of 27 °R subcooled propellant.

#### Recirculation Pumps

For K-Site densification test operations, LH<sub>2</sub> from the H24 rail station dewar, operating self-pressurized at 40 psia, supplies warm liquid to the GSE system. With valve V210 closed,  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  flows through valve PV-1 to the recirculation pump inlets. The recirculation pumps (Fig. 8) are arranged in parallel and capable of flowing 200 gpm through the 3 in. Sch l0 vacuum jacketed (VJ) piping system. They develop a 5 psid differential pressure rise at a design point speed of 7400 rpm. The submersible pumps operate in a cold-guard dewar (Fig. 9) filled with NBP LH<sub>2</sub> to control environmental heat leak and provide motor cooling. The dewar bath level is controlled by sensing liquid level with silicon diodes and adding make-up  $LH_2$  through valve PV-2.

Located just upstream of the recirculation pumps is a 1 in. LH<sub>2</sub> VJ supply line. This makeup flow stream would maintain the X33 propellant tank level constant as fluid bulk density is reduced during a 2 hr densification process. The makeup flow rate, nominally ranging from 13 to 24 gpm, would be monitored by a venturi flow meter and controlled by valve PCV- 1. The control valve would sense tank level by an input signal from a liquid-level capacitance probe mounted near the top of the X33 vehicles' propellant tank. Due to the single pass operation of the GSE for the demonstration testing at K-Site, this part of the system was not operated.

#### Heat Exchanger

The pump discharge stream **flows** through **valve PV-4** and enters **the LH** 2 heat exchanger. Inlet **conditions** are 40 psia and 36 to **44 °R** depending on the H24 supply dewar outlet liquid **temperature.** The inlet flow rate **to** the heat **exchanger** is measured with a venturi flow meter. Liquid hydrogen flows **through** the heat exchanger **tube** bundle where the fluid is progressively cooled **to** the 27 °R product outlet **temperature.** Six **silicone** diodes mounted on the axis of a single heat **exchanger tube** provide wall **temperature** gradient data. The **subcooled** fluid **exits the** heat **exchanger,** flows **through** valve PCV-4 and is directed to the H25 roadable dewar for storage. The heat exchanger bath level is maintained constant by **sensing** bath **liquid** level with **silicon** diodes mounted on a probe. Level control valve PCV-3 opens when the input **signal** from a low-level control diode detects the level has dropped below its fixed position.

The  $LH_2$  heat exchanger assembly (Fig. 10) is a single-pass shell and tube design constructed of a manifolded aluminum tube bundle, a 304SS inner vessel and a carbon **steel** outer vessel which forms a vacuum jacket for **the** inner assembly. There are 150 **extruded** aluminum tubes with machined fins providing nearly 600 ft 2 of **effective** surface area. This particular design permits the **extremely** close **exit-end** approach **temperatures** necessary for **subcooling the** propellant **to** within **1** °R of the boiling LH 2 bath. Heat **rejection** from the **exchanger** produces a design boil-off **rate** of 0.4 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec of saturated gH<sub>2</sub> vapor. Shellside ullage conditions are maintained at 1.2 psia and 26 °R.

#### **Hydrogen** Compressor

The supercold vent gas from the heat exchanger **flows** through isolation **valve** BV-1 **to the** inlet **of** the hydrogen compressor system. The four-stage centrifugal compressor (Fig. 11) is designed to compress the cold inlet gas from 26 °R and 1.2 psia to a discharge pressure of 15.6 psia. To maintain the heat exchanger bath pressure constant at 1.2 psia, compressor speed is either manually or automatically adjusted by a single 200 hp variable frequency drive controller (VFD). Compressor speed compensation with the VFD provides a method to control the heat exchanger bath pressure constant at off-design vent gas flow rates resulting from changes in heat exchanger inlet LH<sub>2</sub> temperature and mass flow rate.

Each compressor stage **operates** at the same rotational **design point** speed of 22 000 rpm with the common VFD. **The** compressor stages are driven by individual high-speed AC induction motors each rated at 460 V, 3 phase, 60 Hz and 40 hp. The drive motors housings are cooled with a recirculating propylene-glycol coolant loop. The fourth compressor stage discharges 1180 ACFM of gH<sub>2</sub> at 15.6 psia and 128 °R into a 4 in. vent line. From stage four, the gH<sub>2</sub> vent flows through shut-off valve BV-3 and discharges into the facility vent system where the gas is flared and vented to atmosphere. The total compressor exhaust flow rate is measured by a turbine flow meter for monitoring low-flow conditions necessary to control compressor surge instability. Gas-bypass valve *BV-2* opens manually or automatically at the onset of surge detection. Surge is controlled by injecting recirculation gas into the heat exchanger  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  bath where the gas cools, vaporizes additional liquid, dissipates heat of compression and recycles to the inlet of the first stage.

#### **Instrumentation**

Temperature sensors used on the GSE system were predominantly silicone diode (SiD) type probes with an accuracy of  $\pm 0.5$  °R. A total of 43 installed SiDs provided temperature data for the LH<sub>2</sub> recirculation, heat exchanger and gH<sub>2</sub> compressor systems. Fifteen capacitive type pressure transducers installed on the GSE indicated  $LH_2$  and  $gH_2$  system pressures ranging from less than 2 to 50 psia. Differential pressure transducers sensing AP for each of the four venturi flow meters provided information for calculating GSE mass flow rates. The  $gH<sub>2</sub>$  compressor discharge flow rate was measured with a 2 percent accurate 6 in. turbine flow meter.

#### Data Acquisition

The data acquisition system (DAQ) used during PD testing at K-Site was the ESCORT D program. ESCORT D was set up to provide real-time monitoring of 70 GSE and facility data channels. Data was recorded at a nominal rate of 1 scan/sec/channel, simultaneous. The DAQ system included a variety of signal conditioners and analog filters to accommodate the different sensor types. A dedicated microVAX computer located in the K-Site control building was linked to the NASA LeRC VAX mainframe computer system. The microVAX was used for temporary data storage prior to data transmission to LeRC for post-run analysis. No averaging or smoothing of the raw data was performed with the PD data-sets reported.

#### Test Procedures

Hydrogen densification GSE test procedures involved several operations. Pretest activities included establishing K-Site facility systems, GSE vacuum purging, gHe inerting, system chill down of LH<sub>2</sub> transfer lines, and LH<sub>2</sub> fill of the heat exchanger bath and pump dewar. Test and post-test activities involved verification of valve settings, actual GSE unit startup of the pumps and gH<sub>2</sub> compressor, data recording, GSE shutdown and facility safeing and post-run cleanup. Remote operation of the test rig was conducted by personnel stationed inside the K-Site facility Control room using a control panel (Fig. 12) and a programmable logic controller (PLC) interface designed for the GSE. Remote video displays provided a visual observation of the GSE during testing.

Following completion of the pretest operations, a typical  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  densification test run procedure was to pressurize the H24 rail station supply dewar to 40 psia. The H25 roadable dewar would be set vented to slightly above atmospheric pressure. The heat exchanger bath (PCV-3) and pump dewar (PV-2) level control valves were placed in their automatic control modes. The desired mass flow rate through the densifier was established by opening and then adjusting the PCV-4 control valve and monitoring the heat exchanger inlet mass flow with a venturi flow meter. With the flow rate through the heat exchanger stabile, the compressor glycol coolant system pump and heat exchanger fan were started. The

compressor acceleration rate was preprogrammed for a 2 200 rpm/min ramp. The desired compressor set-point speed was initially programmed into the PLC, typically 8 000 rpm for the  $LN_2$  tests and 22 000 rpm for the  $LH_2$  testing. The compressor system was started in VFD manual speed control by the power-on button. The DAQ system was started and key variables including  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  flow rate, compressor speed, and heat exchanger bath pressure would be closely monitored. The densification system was operated until a steady-state condition was reached, the rig was manually shut-down by the operator, or until the PLC detected an abort condition and triggered a fault-shutdown of the GSE.

#### Results and Discussion

A series **of LN** 2 system cold-shock, **proof-pressure** tests, gHe mass-spec leak checks and component functional checkouts were initially run on the GSE. Following the subsystem checkouts, three  $LN<sub>2</sub>$  densification tests were conducted. Liquid hydrogen densification testing began at K-Site in mid-December 1996 with a total of four LH<sub>2</sub> densification tests performed. Table II provides a run summary of the experimental conditions for the seven densification tests completed during this phase of the program. A more detailed review of the densification test results including mass balances, and system temperatures and pressures is presented in the sections below.

#### Liquid Nitrogen Densification Results

The objectives of the  $LN_2$  densification tests were to evaluate the performance of the GSE as a system and gain operating experience with the equipment before proceeding with the hydrogen testing. Although the densifier was designed to process LH<sub>2</sub>, analysis of the equipment performance specifications resulted in the following target run conditions for the LN<sub>2</sub> densification trials: 9.0 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec recirc mass flow rate, 3.0 psia heat exchanger bath pressure, and 8 000 rpm compressor operating speed. The first two attempted  $LN<sub>2</sub>$  densification runs were affected by high frequency electrical noise problems generated by the compressor AC drive motors. The other problems encountered were maintaining a high enough  $LN_2$  recirc flow rate through the rig due to mechanical difficulties with the LH<sub>2</sub> recirc pumps and an excessive back pressure caused by the K-Site facility VJ piping downstream of the GSE. Liquid nitrogen mass flow rates for these initial two tests were only 1.5 to 1.8 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec. Each of these preliminary LN<sub>2</sub> runs did however yield some valuable data. The compressor was operated at 8 000 to 8 500 rpm, resulting in a **final** heat exchanger bath pressure of 3.0 to 3.6 psia and production of subcooled  $LN_2$  at 120 to 121 °R (see Table II). The flow rate and noise problems noted earlier were corrected prior to proceeding with the next  $LN<sub>2</sub>$  test. The mechanical start-up problem with the recirc pumps could not be resolved given the schedule constraints and inclement weather conditions, therefore the flow rate through the GSE was by pressurized transfer with the pump motors deenergized and the pumps free-spinning.

The compressor startup transient for the third  $LN_2$  densification trial given in Fig. 13 shows the compressor ramping at 2 200 rpm/min to its set point speed of 8 000 rpm. Following a slight overshoot of controller speed, a compressor surge condition occurred 100 sec following the acceleration ramp as shown by the abrupt decline in speed to 7 500 rpm. The surge instability was quickly corrected by manually opening the gas bypass valve BV-2 to re-establish the compressor mass flow rate (Fig. 14) above 1.0 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec gN<sub>2</sub>. At 1500 sec into the LN<sub>2</sub> densification run, a steady-state condition was achieved. Compressor discharge and heat exchanger ullage pressures (Fig. 15) were leveling off at 15.3 and 3.7 psia, respectively. Compressor interstage temperatures (Fig. 16) were constant as indicated by a flat 150 **°R** adiabatic temperature rise across all four stages of the system. The LN<sub>2</sub> recirc mass flow rate (Fig. 17) was averaging 8.6 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec through the GSE heat exchanger. The heat exchanger ther-mal performance(Fig. 18) shows that it produced 123 **°R** subcooled LN<sub>2</sub> at a nominal inlet temperature of 150  $\degree$ R. The exchanger bath temperature reached a low point of 121  $\degree$ R during the test, indicating a 2 **°R** exit end approach AT. The heat exchanger experimental AP across the tube bundle and manifolds ranged from 4.0 to 5.0 psid.

#### Liquid Hydrogen Densification Results

For the liquid hydrogen densification testing, the following target operating conditions were specified for the initial series of runs: 1.8 to 2.0 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec LH<sub>2</sub> recirc mass flow rate, 1.4 to 1.8 psia heat exchanger bath pressure, and 22 000 rpm compressor operating speed. The compressor speed profile (Fig. 19) for the first  $LH<sub>2</sub>$  densification test (Run H1) shows the unit ramping at a linear rate of 2 200 rpm. Between 400 and 550 sec of the startup, the mass flow rate (Fig. 20) through the compressor was averaging 1.1 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec of  $gH_2$ . At ~600 sec into GSE startup the compressor stopped accelerating as it approached 16 700 rpm. The compressor pressure-time data (Fig. 21) indicated a surge condition had developed 30 sec beforehand. Compressor interstage temperatures (Fig. 22) were running 30 to 40 °R below their design point predictions. Unlike the  $LN_2$  densification test, manual operation of the gas-bypass valve BV-2 did not recover

**the** compressor from the flow-reversal caused by the **surge.** The compressor shut itself down by a VFD over-current fault, interrupting operations at 630 sec. The heat exchanger bath pressure reached a low of 3.4 psia prior to the shut-down. With the LH<sub>2</sub> bath temperature at 29 °R, the heat exchanger outlet temperature attained 30°R (Fig. 23), indicating a 10 °R subcooling affect of the product stream near the end the startup transient. Liquid hydrogen mass flow rates (Fig. 24) varied from 2.0 to 2.3 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec throughout the test. Two repeat attempts (Run H2 and H3) to startup the GSE compressor using this constant linear ramp procedure resulted in similar abort shutdowns after various run lengths.

A modified startup procedure was employed for the final LH<sub>2</sub> densification Run H4. The compressor was ramped incrementally in 2 000 rpm **steps** (Fig. 25) starting with operational verification at **10** 000 **rpm.** The GSE was **then** allowed **to** reach pseudo-steady state conditions in order to stabilize the operation before **the** next step change increase in compressor speed was programmed. Partial success was **realized** using this startup approach as the overall densification run time increased to 1110 sec in duration. With the **exception** of a controlled **surge** incident at 500 **sec,** the 13 psi AP produced by **the** compressor (Fig. 26) **resulted** in a final **low** point heat **exchanger** bath pressure of 2.9 psia. Hydrogen mass flow rate through the heat exchanger was a constant 2.0 lb<sub>m</sub>/sec of liquid entering at 39 °R. The LH<sub>2</sub> temperature profile through the heat exchanger (Fig. 27) resulted in the production of a 29.3 °R LH<sub>2</sub> product stream at a bath temperature of 28.9 °R and minimum 0.4 °R **exit end exchanger** AT. At **1310 sec** into the **extended** densification **test,** the compressor operation abruptly terminated with a **similar** VFD fault **shutdown.** Subsequent compressor regtart attempts failed, resulting in an immediate stoppage. **Follow-on** inspection of the compressor system showed **that** the third stage **thrust** bearing had failed and **the** drive motor had shorted to ground, prematurely ending **the** testing phase of **the** program before completion of **the entire** planned densification matrix.

#### Analysis of GSE Performance Data

The GSE mass and energy balance around **the** heat exchanger are calculated by Eqs. (1) and (2) from experimental mass flow rate, **temperature** and pressure data.

$$
\dot{m}_{L_{in}} + \dot{m}_{V_{in}} - \dot{m}_{V_{out}} = \frac{d(\rho_L \bullet V_L)_{bath}}{dt}
$$
 (1)

$$
\dot{m}_{L_{in}} h_{L_{in}} + \dot{m}_{V_{in}} h_{V_{in}} + \dot{m}_R \left( h_{R_{in}} - h_{R_{out}} \right) + Q_{env} - \dot{m}_{V_{out}} h_{V_{out}} = \frac{d(M_L \bullet V_L)_{bath}}{dt}
$$
(2)

Based on the heat **exchanger** bath level **fluctuating, results** of **integrated** densiflcation mass balance data **is** given in Fig. 28. Initial bath quantities for LH<sub>2</sub> and LN<sub>2</sub> were estimated to be 240 and 2750 lb<sub>m</sub>, respectively. The mass sum totals for the five tests shown are 2600 lb<sub>m</sub> of liquid in for heat exchanger level control plus bypass gas in, 3100 lb<sub>m</sub> of vapor boil-off out to the compressor inlet, and 200 lb<sub>m</sub> of bath density mass change (V • dp/dt). The vapor boil-off mass out is 500 lbm (i.e. **19** percent) greater **than** the liquid plus gas bypass mass in. The combined **experimental** mass balance on the bath indicates a 700 lb<sub>m</sub> (i.e. 23 percent) total reduction of initial bath mass. This result confirmed experimental **records** denoting slow **response to** bath **level** change. The heat **exchanger fill** and level control valve (PCV-3) **sometimes** had difficulty keeping up with and maintaining a constant bath liquid level. This was attributed to the common dewar feed line plumbing and **equivalent** H-24 dewar pressure supplying liquid **to the** GSE. During portions of **the** densiflcation tests, the heat **exchanger** bath level gradually dropped below **the** lower control point when **the** boil-off flow rate was high therefore requiring a greater bath level flow.

**Integration** of the energy Eq. (2) provides another use-ful insight into the test data. The energy balance test **results** for **the** GSE heat **exchanger** bath (Fig. 29) compare **the energy** added with **the** bypass gas flow, **the** heat transferred **to the** product liquid for subcooling, **the energy** rejected with the vent gas flow due **to** boil-off and other unaccounted for system **energy** changes. Energy **totals** for **the** five **tests** shown indicate 57 000 **Btu** in with bypass gas, 100 000 **Btu** of heat transferred for cryogen **subcooling, 181** 000 **Btu** of **energy rejected** with **the** vent gas and 24 000 **Btu** unaccounted. **Based** on **the** ratio of heat transferred **to** the fluid and **the energy rejected** with the vent gas, the **thermal** efficiency of the GSE **start-up** process was 55 percent. At design point steady-state operating conditions, **the** GSE **thermal efficiency should** increase **to -98** percent. The average and peak heat **exchanger** experimental subcooling duties calculated were 28 and **42** Btu/sec, **respectively.**

Heat exchanger inlet, outlet and axial wall temperature data (Fig. 30) is shown as a function of tube length for LH<sub>2</sub> run Hl. Recall that a single heat exchanger tube was outfitted with five SiD's to provide wall temperature profile information as liquid flows through a tube. Experimental log-mean  $\Delta T$ , heat transfer rate (Q) and overall heat transfer coefficient  $(U_0)$  values are indicated on the chart. Results of the transient wall temperature data show that the wall  $\Delta T = T_w - T_{\text{bath}}$  varied from 1.8 °R at the inlet to 0.3 °R at the heat exchanger outlet. A comparison of the experimental data with the GSE heat exchanger performance model was also made. The analytical model showed good agreement of **\_+0.5 °R** with the wall temperature data. Predicted heat exchanger outlet temperatures were acceptable to within 0.7 **°R** of the outlet  $LH_2$  temperature data point.

A detailed performance analysis of the gN<sub>2</sub> and gH<sub>2</sub> compressor data was conducted for the following reasons: to ascertain whether the compressor performance satisfied design point and manufacturer performance specifications during GSE testing; to verify the cause and solution to the surge problems that frequently occurred during operation; and to possibly identify the source of the stage no. 3 drive failure. Review of the  $gN<sub>2</sub>$  test data (Fig. 31) showed that the compressor operated satisfactorily and within its design margin at the re-rated conditions established for pumping dry nitrogen gas. The nominal run point conditions matched the estimated  $gN<sub>2</sub>$  performance of 8000 rpm, 3.0 psia bath pressure and 1.0 lb/sec  $gN_2$  flow. From Eqs. (3) to (5), the calculated gas horsepower (GHP) and head ( $\Psi$ ) versus flow coefficient ( $\phi$ ) data estimated for the LN<sub>2</sub> test indicated that the experimental performance compared very favorably to the manufacturers original shop air test data. The compressor power requirements for each stage running steady at 8000 rpm showed that all the drive motors were ~90 percent power loaded during the  $LN<sub>2</sub>$  test.

$$
GHP = \frac{H \cdot m_V}{550 \cdot \eta} \tag{3}
$$

$$
\Psi = \frac{32.2 \bullet H}{U_2^2} \tag{4}
$$

$$
\phi = \frac{C_{in2}}{U_2} \tag{5}
$$

For the LH<sub>2</sub> compressor test series, while assuming that only "dry"  $gH<sub>2</sub>$  entered the first compressor stage, the calculated head and flow coefficient data resulted in first and second stage  $\Psi$  and  $\Phi$  coefficients that were extremely high in comparison to the previous  $gN_2$  and manufacturers data (Fig. 32). The  $\Psi$  and  $\Phi$  data points were 40 to 60 percent to the far right of the curve and well off the known compressor performance map. Furthermore, upon review of the hydrogen inlet temperature and corresponding saturation temperature data, obtained from known inlet pressures for stages 1 to 3, showed that the gas was saturated entering these stages (Fig 33). Additional calculations suggested that the hydrogen gas contained entrained  $LH_2$  and was wet with a quality ranging from ~90 to 98 percent. The calculated power requirements for each stage during the hydrogen test H4 and prior to the failure indicated that the first stage motor was 88 percent loaded, the second stage 102 percent loaded, the third stage 111 percent loaded and the fourth stage was running at 107 percent of full load power. These experimental findings would imply that the third stage drive motor failure was probably induced by a sustained current overload of the stage no. 3 drive motor due **to** the wet saturated conditions and relatively higher density  $gH<sub>2</sub>$  vapor that was entering the compressor system during the run.

#### **Conclusions**

Propellant densification is a technology concept for increasing the performance of cryogenic LOX and LH<sub>2</sub> propulsion systems of the future. For an SSTO or RLV the use of supercooled, densified LOX/LH<sub>2</sub> propellants can significantly impact the vehicle design. Its been shown that densified propellants can benefit an RLV by reducing the gross lift-offweight by as much as 32 percent. For existing vehicles like the Space Shuttle, the use of densified fuels would result in a payload increase of 6 000 to 8,000 lb.

This paper described a test program conducted by the NASA LeRC to demonstrate the LH<sub>2</sub> propellant densification technology approach. The work was funded under NASA Contract NCC8-79 by the MSFC. A 2 Ib/sec capacity, prototype-subscale, LH<sub>2</sub> densification Ground Support Unit, was designed, built and tested. Densification performance tests,basedonacompressor-heat **exchanger** unit operating on <sup>a</sup> **thermodynamic** vent principle, were conducted using cryogenic LN<sub>2</sub> and LH<sub>2</sub>. The initial series of experiments with the GSE occurred in December 1996 at the NASA Plum Brook, K-Site test facility, located in Sandusky OH. Three LN<sub>2</sub> and four LH<sub>2</sub> densification tests were run. The fundamental densification **technology** was first satisfactorily demonstrated with **the safe** inert working fluid LN 2. Liquid nitrogen was **sub-cooled** and densified from **148 to 123** °R at a flow **rate** of 9 lb/sec **through the** heat **exchanger** operating at 3.7 psia. During liquid hydrogen **testing,** compressor start-up problems caused by **surge** initially plagued **the** experiments. A modification to the start-up procedure eventually resulted in an extended LH<sub>2</sub> densification test run. Two pounds per **second** ofNBP LH 2was subcooled and densified by a **10** °R AT prior **to** an **equipment** failure of **the** compressor stage no. 3 drive motor. The following conclusions, **technical** issues and lessons learned can be drawn from **these** preliminary **experimental** densification results.

**• The** fundamental densification technology and design concept for subcooling cryogenic fluids based on this GSE approach has been confirmed. This same system philosophy can be extended to processing other cryogens including liquid oxygen.

**•** The performance of the multistage centrifugal compressor during hydrogen **testing** was affected by wet saturated gH<sub>2</sub> vapor entering the inlet to the first stage. This condition contributed to the premature failure due to an overload of that drive.

• The thermal performance of the cryogenic LH<sub>2</sub> heat exchanger was better than expected based on the close exit end operating  $\Delta$ Ts of the unit processing LH<sub>2</sub>.

• Engineering solutions for each of the **technical** problems encountered with **the** GSE during **this** preliminary demonstration have been defined. For example, a piping change involving the relocation of the  $gH_2$  bypass line from the heat exchanger  $LH_2$  bath to the inlet of the first compressor stage is the hardware fix required to prevent the wet inlet gas condition. Corrective actions prior to further demonstration tests of the GSE densification rig are planned.

The interest in densified fuels for rocket engines has recently grown throughout the aerospace community. Because propellant densification potentially represents a major state-of-the-art advancement in cryogenic propulsion **technology,** it's **recommended** that this important work be continued. Ongoing **research** and **testing** will be necessary **to** bring **this** propellant **technology** to the next level **leading** to successful commercial development and application.

#### Acknowledgement

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#### Appendix A

#### Propellant Densification Test Data

The appendix contains **three** propellant densification **test** data sets. **The** results are given in a **tabular** format: data for LN<sub>2</sub> densification test number N3 is shown in Table A1; LH<sub>2</sub> densification test number H1 in Table A2; and LH<sub>2</sub> densification test number H4 in Table A3. Test data for LN<sub>2</sub> test numbers N1 and N2 were excluded due to problems with electrical noise on several data channels; LH<sub>2</sub> test numbers H2 and H3 are not reported because the data and trends are very **similar to the test** no. H1 data set provided in Table A2. Each **table** provides **twenty-two** different **recorded** measurements as a function of time on a five second scanned interval. The **temperature,** pressure and mass flow rate data obtained around the LH<sub>2</sub> heat exchanger and gH<sub>2</sub> compressor provides sufficient information for a complete performance assessment of **the** GSE unit densifier during startup, pseudo-steady **state** operation and shutdown.

Data Table Symbols :











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LH, IPTD tank		LH, Recirc pumps	
Tank diameter, ft Total volume, $ft3$ Ullage volume, percent Maximum tank pressure, psia Initial propellant mass, lb Densification time, hr	10 2706 2.0 35.0 11720 20	Recirc mass flowrate, lb/sec Recirc volume flowrate, gpm Maximum diff pressure, psid Head rise, ft	$1.8 - 2.0$ $180 - 200$ 5.0 $160 - 170$
$gH2$ Compressor		LH, Heat exchanger	
Type Driver Number of stages Design flowrate, lb/sec Design inlet temperature, R Design inlet pressure, psia Discharge pressure, psia Horse power, GHP Design pt. speed, rpm	Centrifugal <b>AC</b> Motor 0.40 26.0 1.2 15.6 40.0 22000	Inlet mass flowrate, lb/sec Max inlet temperature, R Inlet pressure, psia Outlet temperature, R Maximum pressure drop, psid Heat transfer rate, Btu/sec Bath pressure, psia Bath temperature, R	2.0 42.6 40.0 27.0 1.0 $34 - 63$ $1.4 \pm 0.2$ $25.9 \pm 0.5$

TABLE I.--LH **2** PROPELLANT DENSIFICATION GSE **DESIGN** BASIS

**TABLE** II.--PROPEI.LANT DENSIFICATION TEST **DATA** SUMMARY

Test number	Description	Recirc flow. lb/sec	Inlet temperature, ۰R	Bath pressure, psia	Outlet temperature, ۰R	Compressor speed, rpm	Run time. sec
N1	$LN2$ Densification	1.8	144	3.0	120	8020	1070
N2	LN, Densification	1.5	149	3.6	121	8530	630
N3	LN, Densification	9.0	148	3.8	123	8020	1420
H1	LH, Densification	2.0	40	3.4	30	16670	470
H2	LH, Densification	1.9	40	7.1	34	13350	380
H3	$LH2$ Densification	2.3	40	4.8	32	14760	210
H4	LH <sub>2</sub> Densification	2.0	39	3.0	29	15570	1110



Figure 1.-Liquid hydrogen density and vapor pressure curves.



Figure 2.-Integrated RLV propellant tank and LH<sub>2</sub> propellant densification unit based on thermodynamic vent principle.



Figure 3.-NASA Plum Brook K-Site facility.







Figure 5.-LH<sub>2</sub> propellant densification GSE configuration for testing at K-Site.



Figure 6.-Skid mounted LH<sub>2</sub> propellant densification assembly.



**Figure 7.--LH 2 propellant densification GSE system flow schematic.**



**Figure 8.mLH 2 recirculation pump assembly.**



**Figure 9.\_I\_H 2** recirculation **pumps mounted inside dewar.**







**Tube bundle assembly End view of tubes Figure 10.--LH 2 heat exchanger fabrication** and **assembly.**



Interstage assemblies

Four stage GH<sub>2</sub> compressor assembly



14-in. Compressor impeller

**Compressor housing** 

Figure 11.- Gaseous hydrogen compressor assembly.



Figure 12.—LH<sub>2</sub> propellant densification operator<br>control panel.











Figure 15.-Compressor stage discharge gN<sub>2</sub> pressures during nitrogen densification Test N3.



Figure 16.-Compressor stage discharge gN<sub>2</sub> temperatures during nitrogen densification Test N3.



Figure 17.-Liquid nitrogen mass flow rate through GSE heat exchanger tubes during LN2 densification Test N3.



Figure 18.-Heat exchanger LN<sub>2</sub> inlet and outlet temperatures during nitrogen densification Test N3.



Figure 19.-Compressor speed during LH<sub>2</sub> densification Test H1.



Figure 20.-Compressor discharge gH<sub>2</sub> mass flow rate during hydrogen densification Test H1.



Figure 23.-Heat exchanger LH<sub>2</sub> inlet and outlet temperatures during hydrogen densification Test H1.



Figure 21.-Compressor stage discharge gH<sub>2</sub> pressures during hydrogen densification Test H1.



Figure 22.-Compressor stage discharge gH<sub>2</sub> temperatures during hydrogen densification Test H1.



Figure 24.-Hydrogen mass flow rates entering GSE heat exchanger during LH<sub>2</sub> densification Test H1.



Figure 25.-Compressor speed during LH<sub>2</sub> densification Test H4.



Figure 26.-Compressor discharge and heat exchanger ullage pressure during LH<sub>2</sub> densification Test H4.







Figure 27.-Heat exchanger LH<sub>2</sub> inlet, axial wall, outlet and bath temperatures during hydrogen densification Test H4.















**Figure 32.\_Compressor stage 1 head versus flow coefficient for LH2 densification test H4 assuming** dry inlet gH<sub>2</sub>.



**Figure 33.--Compressor 1st stage inlet gH2 temperature compared to hydrogen saturation temperature during LH2Test H4.**



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