

The Effects of Charge Motion and Laminar Flame Speed on Late Robust Combustion in a Spark-Ignition Engine

2010-01-0350

Published
04/12/2010

Craig B. Wildman and Wai K. Cheng
Sloan Automotive Laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Copyright © 2010 SAE International

ABSTRACT

The effects of charge motion and laminar flame speeds on combustion and exhaust temperature have been studied by using an air jet in the intake flow to produce an adjustable swirl or tumble motion, and by replacing the nitrogen in the intake air by argon or CO₂, thereby increasing or decreasing the laminar flame speed. The objective is to examine the “Late Robust Combustion” concept: whether there are opportunities for producing a high exhaust temperature using retarded combustion to facilitate catalyst warm-up, while at the same time, keeping an acceptable cycle-to-cycle torque variation as measured by the coefficient of variation (COV) of the net indicated mean effective pressure (NIMEP). The operating condition of interest is at the fast idle period of a cold start with engine speed at 1400 RPM and NIMEP at 2.6 bar. A fast burn could be produced by appropriate charge motion. The combustion phasing is primarily a function of the spark timing. At each spark timing, however, there is an optimal charge motion that could minimize the COV of NIMEP while not substantially changing the end of combustion (measured by the 90% burn location: CA90). The exhaust temperature is only a function of CA90, irrespective of whether the CA90 is changed by spark timing, charge motion, or laminar flame speed. By using an appropriate amount of charge motion, the exhaust temperature could be raised by 100° C while keeping the same COV of NIMEP.

INTRODUCTION

To meet the emissions regulatory requirements, it is essential to after-treat the spark-ignition engine exhaust with a catalyst. The treatment, however, is not effective before the catalyst reaches a light-off temperature (~300°C). Consequently, a major portion of the total emissions produced in the Federal Test Procedure (FTP-75) occurs during the first tens of

seconds of engine operation before the catalyst reaches light-off temperature [1]. The hydrocarbon (HC) emissions during this period are especially severe because the cold environment is not favorable for the mixture preparation process. Enabling the catalyst to light off quickly will substantially reduce overall HC emissions.

One strategy to accomplish fast catalyst light-off is to increase the exhaust enthalpy flow by retarding the spark timing [2]. Then combustion occurs substantially late in the expansion stroke, and less work is extracted by the piston. Late combustion also results in a lower heat loss by the charge because the peak temperature is lower and the burned gas has less residence time in the cylinder. These factors contribute to a hotter exhaust. Furthermore, to provide the same torque output, a higher through put rate is required to compensate for the unfavorable combustion phasing, thereby increasing the exhaust sensible enthalpy flow. Retarding combustion also directly decreases HC emissions due to the hotter post-flame oxidation environment encountered by the unburned HC in the late expansion and exhaust processes [3, 4].

Retarding combustion phasing has the undesirable effect of substantially increasing the cycle-by-cycle variations (CCV) in torque. When combustion is substantially retarded from maximum brake torque (MBT) timing, the torque is much more sensitive to the heat release schedule and CCV goes up accordingly. Furthermore, since the local turbulence level plays a strong role in determining the burn rate, and since the origin of much of the charge motion and turbulence is in the intake process, when combustion is late, there is a much longer elapse time for the turbulence to develop before it affects the flame. Since turbulent flow is a chaotic process, a longer development time would lead to a higher level of cycle-to-cycle variation. Thus a fast burn/slow burn

combustion system usually has a higher/lower CCV in torque. The CCV is especially severe under idle condition. At the low idle speed, the elapse time between intake and combustion is longer so that there is a larger cycle-to-cycle variation in the local fluid motion. The low manifold pressure and low speed result in a low Reynolds number, thus the intake process is not effective at generating high turbulence. Also, the residual gas fraction is high. These factors contribute to a slow burn combustion system and thus a high CCV. The factors affecting CCV are: variations in charge motion; variations in the mixture inhomogeneity in temperature and concentration; variations in the amounts of the reactants; variations in the spark discharge. Charge motion effects appear to play the dominant role [5].

Increasing CCV in torque worsens the noise-vibrations-harshness (NVH) quality of the engine. Increasing combustion phasing CCV leads to driveability and emissions problem because some of the cycles may be so late that there are partial burn and misfired cycles. Thus two confounding effects have to be balanced in managing the cold start process: the combustion should be sufficiently retarded to provide a high exhaust enthalpy flow for catalyst fast light-off, but should be not so retarded to avoid high CCV in torque. Therefore, an engine design with a "Late Robust Combustion" is most desirable.

In this study, we assess the effects of charge motion and laminar flame speed on combustion phasing and CCV in torque. A variable-flow air jet in the intake port is used to create various degree of in-cylinder charge motion. Then the nitrogen of the air supply is substituted with carbon dioxide or argon to decrease or increase the laminar flame speed respectively. Relationships between burn duration, combustion phasing, exhaust gas temperature, and coefficient of variation (COV) of net indicated mean effective pressure (NIMEP) are explored. The objective is to find the factors that would promote late robust combustion.

FLAME PROPAGATION AND CHARGE MOTION

The spark ignition engine flame propagation process is reviewed here in the context of the experiment. It has been well established [2] that the spark ignition process initiates a small flame kernel which propagates first in a laminar manner with a smooth flame front. After the kernel grows to be larger than the characteristic turbulent eddy length scale, the flame propagation process is controlled by the fluid turbulence through the wrinkling of the flame front. The latter process can be described by a simple entrainment-and-burn model suggested by Keck [6, 2]. The flame front, with nominal frontal area of A_f takes in unburned gas of density ρ_u with an entrainment velocity u_t which is equal to the local turbulent velocity fluctuation. This entrained gas is then

consumed in a time scale given by ℓ_t / S_L where ℓ_t is the turbulent length scale and S_L is the laminar flame speed.

$$\frac{d\mu}{dt} = \rho_u A_f u_t - \frac{\mu}{\ell_t / S_L} \quad (1)$$

In Eq.(1), μ is the mass of unburned gas which is entrained but not burned yet. Then the mass burn rate $\dot{m}_b$ is the sum of the laminar burning at the nominal front and that of the entrained unburned mixture.

$$\frac{dm_b}{dt} = \rho_u A_f S_L + \frac{\mu}{\ell_t / S_L} \quad (2)$$

From Eq. (1) and (2), the quasi-steady (i.e. when $\frac{d\mu}{dt} = 0$) burn rate is:

$$\frac{dm_b}{dt} = \rho_u A_f (S_L + u_t) \quad (3)$$

The quasi-steady burning velocity is, therefore, $S_L + u_t$. Thus the turbulent velocity augments the laminar flame speed after the flame front transforms from a smooth surface to a wrinkle one. Under conditions for which the laminar speed is too low, however, the burn-out time ℓ_t / S_L will be comparable or longer than the diffusion time ℓ_t^2 / D , (where D is the mass diffusivity), and the wrinkle laminar flame model will no longer be valid. Then the combustion progresses slowly in a distributed manner.

The relationship between charge motion and the local turbulence that enhances flame propagation is not straight forward [7]. Only the small eddies are effective in wrinkling the flame front. It has been established that the small scale turbulence generated in the intake process are mostly dissipated in the compression process. The turbulence that matters is produced by the breakup of organized charge motion such as the swirl and tumble motion generated by the induction process. Thus the break up details substantially affects the burn rate.

EXPERIMENTAL SET UP

A 1.8L I-4 DOHC spark-ignition engine was modified for single cylinder operation on a motoring dynamometer. See Table 1 for the engine specifications. The engine features a centrally located spark plug, a shallow bowl-in-piston, and it is representative of modern spark-ignition engines. The intake

and exhaust systems were modified to separate the flow through one cylinder from the other three.

Table 1. Engine Specifications

Displacement	442.3cm ³
Compression Ratio	9.5
Bore	80mm
Stroke	88mm
Clearance Volume	52cm ³
Connecting Rod Length	140.5mm

A Kistler 6051A piezoelectric pressure transducer coupled to a Kistler 5010 charge amplifier was used for in-cylinder pressure measurements. In-cylinder pressure was pegged to the Manifold Absolute Pressure (MAP) at BDC of the intake stroke. Air flow was measured directly with a 505-9A-02 Kurz flow meter. Fuel flow was calculated based on the equivalence ratio, as measured in the exhaust by an Etas Lambda Meter. Intake air temperature, coolant temperature, and exhaust temperature were recorded. The latter value was measured by a bare thermocouple (type K) approximately 20 cm from the exhaust valve. No radiation correction was applied.

CHARGE MOTION PRODUCING JET

An air jet was installed in the intake port to produce charge motion. (The original charge motion control plate in the intake port was removed.) A nozzle, made out of a copper tube with an inside diameter of 4.8mm, was supplied by a pressurized bottle of air. The mass flow rate of the resulting jet was controlled by a pressure regulator and a choked flow orifice of known diameter that was changed for different ranges of flow rates. The fraction of total intake air that was supplied by the air jet in the charge motion tests was varied from 0 to 1 by changing the jet flow and by adjusting the intake air throttle valve. The nozzle was mounted through the fuel injector hole in the port so that the end of the tube was positioned just behind one of the intake valves. (See later section for fuel introduction.) It was directed in two orientations to generate swirl motion or tumble motion respectively as shown in [Fig 1](#).

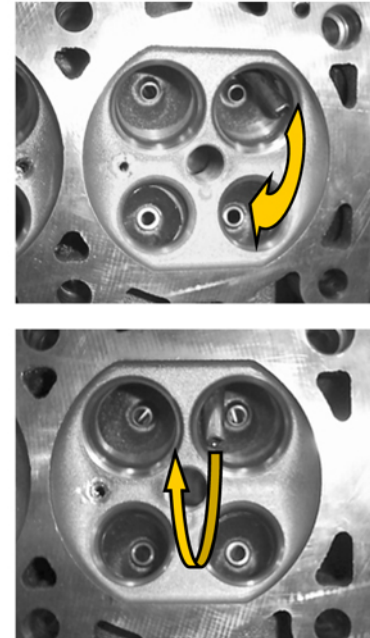


Fig. 1. Charge Motion Producing Jets. Each jet was installed immediately behind an intake valve to generate swirl (top photograph) or tumble (bottom photograph) respectively.

CHANGING THE LAMINAR FLAME SPEED

The composition of the non-reactive gas in the intake air was varied in two sets of tests to study the effects of laminar flame speed on burn duration and COV of IMEP. In the first set, the intake flow consisted of air augmented by a mixture of O₂ and argon so that effectively, the nitrogen in the air was substituted with argon in various amounts. Because of the higher specific heat ratio of argon, the laminar flame speed was enhanced. In a second set, CO₂ was used instead of argon to decrease laminar flame speed. The air augmentations were introduced far up-stream in the intake system so that the base engine charge motion was not affected.

OPERATING CONDITIONS AND ANALYSIS

Operating conditions were controlled to simulate a fast-idle state shortly after engine start. Speed was held constant at 1400 rpm, and the engine coolant temperature was kept at 20°C with an industrial chiller. All tests were conducted at $\lambda = 1$ and at 2.6 bar NIMEP. The spark timing was varied from 20° BTC to 20° ATC in 5° increments. Since the experiments were conducted at constant NIMEP, higher MAP was required to compensate for the loss of indicated efficiency with the retarded combustion.

Gaseous propane was used for fuel instead of gasoline to eliminate the possibility of CCV of fuel vaporization. Initially, the propane was introduced into the intake manifold by a nozzle. However, under the condition when most of the air was supplied by the charge motion producing jet, there was inadequate air/fuel mixing; then variations in λ significantly increased and manifest as substantial torque fluctuation. To address this issue, a fuel tube was installed to direct fuel into the port next to the air tube. Then the fuel was introduced into the high speed air jet and rapid fuel/air mixing was achieved.

Data were collected for 300 cycles for statistical analysis. Heat release for each cycle was calculated using the Rassweiler and Withrow method [8].

RESULTS

It is difficult to characterize the details of the charge motion produced by the air jets. Instead, the results are parameterized by the amount of air introduced by the jet as fraction of the total air. The corresponding tumble and swirl numbers are estimated from the jet flow rate and geometry of the jet; see [Appendix A](#).

CHARGE MOTION EFFECTS ON COMBUSTION

The effects of the tumble flow produced by the air jet on the 0-10% burn duration (early part of the flame development) and 10-90% burn duration (major heat release process) are shown in [Fig. 2](#) as a function of the normalized jet flow for the different spark timings. Both burn durations increased when the combustion phasing was retarded. As the jet flow increased, both burn durations were shortened. The faster burn may be attributed to the increase in local turbulence level due to the air jet.

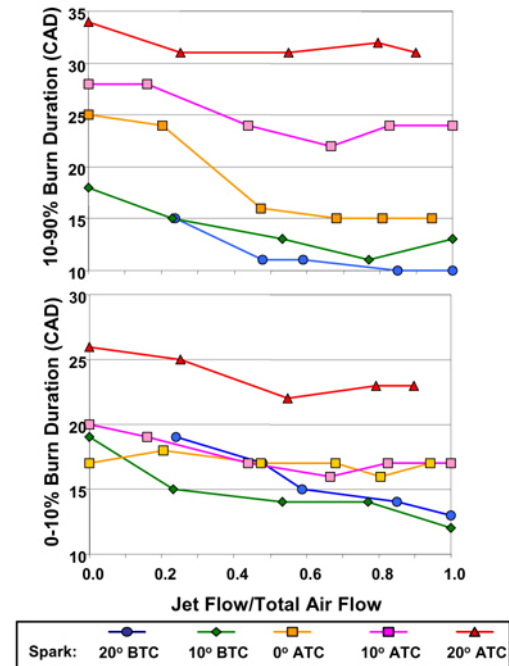


Fig. 2. The 0-10% and 10-90% burned durations for tumble flow; as function of the fraction of total air flow in the jet, and at different spark timings.

The effects of the tumble flow on the COV of NIMEP are shown in [Fig. 3](#). At each spark timing, the COV first decreases and then increases with the increase of the jet flow. This trend is more evident in [Fig. 4](#), in which the COV of NIMEP is plotted against the location at which 90% of the total fuel is burned (CA90). In this figure, the data points are segregated in groups according to the spark timing. In each group, the points are connected in the order of increasing jet flow. For the base line case (with no air jet flow), COV increases with the increase of CA90 produced by the spark retard. However, at each spark timing, there is an optimal charge motion that could reduce the COV values without significantly changing the CA90 values.