



Designation: B 607 – 91 (Reapproved 1998)

Standard Specification for Autocatalytic Nickel Boron Coatings for Engineering Use¹

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This standard has been approved for use by agencies of the Department of Defense.

1. Scope

1.1 Nickel boron coatings are produced by autocatalytic (electroless) deposition from aqueous solutions. These solutions contain either an alkylamineborane or sodium borohydride as a reducing agent, a source of nickel ions, a buffer, complexant, and control chemicals.

1.2 This standard describes the requirements for coatings of autocatalytic nickel boron deposited from aqueous solutions onto substrates for engineering use. The specification classifies these coatings into two types:

1.2.1 *Type 1 coatings* have a boron content of 0.1 to less than 3.5 mass percent with the balance nickel.

1.2.2 *Type 2 coatings* have a boron content of 3.5 to 6 mass percent and a minimum of 90 mass percent nickel.

1.3 The coatings are hard and uniform in thickness, even on irregular shaped parts, and used in a wide range of applications.

1.4 Process solutions formulated with an alkylamineborane usually produce coatings that contain 0.1 to 3.5 % boron. Thin coatings of this type provide bondability and solderability on electronic components such as lead frames, electrical contacts, and headers. To maintain solderability, these coatings are generally not heat treated.

1.5 Process solutions formulated with sodium borohydride are strongly alkaline and are frequently used to plate steel and titanium parts to impart surface hardness and wear resistance properties. Deposits produced from these processes can contain 3 to 5 % boron and thallium or other metals which are used to stabilize the plating solution and modify the coating properties.

1.6 The physical and mechanical properties of these deposits such as density, hardness, stress, and melting point will vary with the boron content. The variation of boron content also affects the quantity and structure of nickel boride precipitated during heat treatment. In the as-plated condition the deposit consists of a predominantly amorphous mixture of nickel and boron with a hardness of about 700 HKN. When the deposit is heated above 300°C the nickel crystallizes, forming nickel clusters of Ni (111) and boron precipitates as nickel boride, Ni₃B (211) and (311), increasing the hardness to greater than 1000 HK₁₀₀ for Type 2 coatings.

1.7 The nickel boron coatings are microporous and offer limited corrosion protection. Their columnar structure, however, is beneficial in reducing wear because it provides a means of trapping lubricants within the surface of the coated part.

1.8 This document describes only autocatalytic nickel boron coatings that have been produced without use of external electric sources.

1.9 The following hazards caveat pertains only to the Test Methods section of this specification: *This standard does not purport to address the safety problems associated with its use. It is the responsibility of the user of this standard to establish appropriate safety and health practices and determine the applicability of regulatory limitations prior to use.*

NOTE 1—The following AMS standards are not requirements. They are referenced for information only: AMS 2399 and AMS 2433.

2. Referenced Documents

2.1 ASTM Standards:

- B 374 Terminology Relating to Electroplating²
- B 487 Test Method for Measurement of Metal and Oxide Coating Thickness by Microscopical Examination of a Cross Section²
- B 567 Test Method for Measurement of Coating Thickness by Beta Backscatter Method²
- B 568 Test Method for Measurement of Coating Thickness by X-Ray Spectrometry²
- B 571 Test Method for Adhesion of Metallic Coatings²
- B 578 Test Method for Microhardness of Electroplated Coatings²
- B 602 Test Method for Attribute Sampling of Metallic and Inorganic Coatings²
- B 656 Guide for Autocatalytic (Electroless) Nickel-Phosphorus Deposition on Metals for Engineering Use²
- B 667 Practice for Construction and Use of a Probe for Measuring Electrical Contact Resistance³
- B 678 Test Method for Solderability of Metallic-Coated Products²
- B 697 Guide for Selection of Sampling Plans for Inspection of Electrodeposited Metallic and Inorganic Coatings²

¹ This specification is under the jurisdiction of ASTM Committee B-8 on Metallic and Inorganic Coatings and is the direct responsibility of Subcommittee B08.08.01 on Engineering Coatings.

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² Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 02.05.

³ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 03.04.



B 762 Method of Variables Sampling of Metallic and Inorganic Coatings²

D 2670 Test Method for Measuring Wear Properties of Fluid Lubricants (Falex Pin and Vee Block Method)⁴

D 2714 Test Method for Calibration and Operation of the Falex Block-on-Ring Friction and Wear Testing Machine⁴

E 39 Test Methods for Chemical Analysis of Nickel⁵

F 519 Test Method for Mechanical Hydrogen Embrittlement Testing of Plating Processes and Aircraft Maintenance Chemicals⁶

2.2 *Aerospace Materials Specifications:*

AMS 2399 Electroless Nickel-Boron Plating⁷

AMS 2433 Electroless Nickel-Thallium-Boron Plating⁷

2.3 *U.S. Government Standards:*

MIL-STD-105 Sampling Procedures and Tables for Inspection by Attributes⁸

MIL-STD-13165 Shot Peening of Metal Parts⁸

3. Terminology

3.1 *Definitions*—Many terms used in this standard are defined in Terminology B 374.

3.2 *Definitions of Terms Specific to This Standard:*

3.2.1 *cold shut*—a void on the surface which has been closed by machining and then partially opened through cleaning.

3.2.2 *hot halide stress-corrosion cracking*—a type of mechanical failure produced by halogenated solvents that have been absorbed onto titanium and then in the presence of heat cause microcracking, and the loss of mechanical strength.

3.2.3 *lap cracks*—a surface imperfection caused by cold working of steels producing a void which can be duplicated in the deposit.

3.2.4 *significant surface*—those substrate surfaces which the coating must protect and that are essential to the appearance.

4. Classification

4.1 The classification by type of these coatings establishes the amount of boron in the alloy.

4.1.1 *Type 1*—Coatings shall contain 0.1 to less than 3.5 mass percent boron with the balance nickel.

4.1.2 *Type 2*—Coatings shall contain 3.5 to 6 mass percent boron and a minimum of 90 mass percent nickel.

4.2 The classification by class of these coatings establishes the post treatment to be performed on the part(s). The post treatment steps are designed to reduce the potential for hydrogen embrittlement, increase the adhesion of the coating to the substrate, improve the fatigue properties of the part(s), and increase the wear resistance and hardness of the coating:

4.2.1 *Class 1*—Parts are supplied as plated with no post heat treatment.

4.2.2 *Class 2*—Parts are heat treated after plating to increase hardness. The coating is heat treated at 365 to 385°C for 90 min (see 7.2.4).

4.2.3 *Class 3*—Parts are heat treated after plating at 180 to 200°C for 2 to 23 h to improve coating adhesion on steel and for hydrogen embrittlement relief of steels (see 7.2.4).

4.2.4 *Class 4*—Parts are heat treated after plating at 120 to 130°C for a minimum of 1 h to improve adhesion on heat-treatable (age-hardened) aluminum alloys and carburized steels (see 7.2.4).

4.2.5 *Class 5*—Parts are heat treated after plating at 365 to 375°C for a minimum of 4 h to improve adhesion on titanium and titanium alloys (see 7.2.4).

4.3 The classification by grade establishes the minimum thickness of the coating:

4.3.1 *Grade A*—Parts are plated to a minimum coating thickness of 0.5 µm.

4.3.2 *Grade B*—Parts are plated to a minimum coating thickness of 12 µm.

4.3.3 *Grade C*—Parts are plated to a minimum coating thickness of 25 µm.

4.3.4 *Grade D*—Parts are plated to a minimum coating thickness of 75 µm.

5. Ordering Information

5.1 The purchaser should be aware of several processing considerations or options available to the processor and when ordering should supply the information described in 5.1.1 through 5.1.15 in the purchase order and drawings.

5.1.1 Title, ASTM designation, and year of issue of this specification.

5.1.2 Composition and metallurgical condition of the basis metal, assemblies of dissimilar materials must be identified.

5.1.3 Classification of the coating: type, class, and grade for this specification (see Section 4).

5.1.4 Minimum thickness required on the significant surface, and any maximum dimensions or tolerance requirements, if any (see 7.2.2).

5.1.5 Method of adhesion testing from Test Method B 571 to be used in acceptance requirements (see 8.3).

5.1.6 Requirements for certification and test reports (see Section 11).

5.1.7 Requirements for heat treatment of the part(s) for stress relief prior to plating (see 7.2.4).

5.1.8 Optional sampling plan for lot inspection of the part(s) (see 9.1 and 13.1).

5.1.9 Increased sampling frequency, if any, for qualification tests (see 7.3).

5.1.10 Supplemental requirements for shot peening of the part(s) (see 12.1).

5.1.11 Supplemental requirements for wear testing (see 12.2 and 12.3).

5.1.12 Supplemental requirements for heat treatment in vacuum or inert or reducing atmosphere (see 7.2.1 & 12.4).

5.1.13 Supplemental contact resistance requirements (see 12.5).

5.1.14 Supplemental solderability requirements (see 12.6).

5.1.15 Supplemental U.S. Government requirements, if any (see Section 13).

⁴ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 05.02.

⁵ Discontinued; see 1995 Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 03.05.

⁶ Annual Book of ASTM Standards, Vol 15.03.

⁷ Available from Society of Automotive Engineers, Inc. (SAE), 400 Commonwealth Drive, Warrendale, PA 15096.

⁸ Available from Standardization Documents Order Desk, Bldg. 4 Section D, 700 Robbins Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19111-5094, Attn: NPODS.



6. Materials and Manufacture

6.1 *Pretreatment*—Parts can be processed in accordance with Practice B 656.

6.1.1 A suitable method should be used to remove surface oxides and foreign materials which can cause poor adhesion and increased porosity.

6.1.2 A suitable method should be used to condition and activate the surface so that an adherent coating will be produced.

6.2 *Basis Material and Workmanship*—Nickel boron coatings will replicate the surface finish of the basis material. Imperfections in the surface of the basis material including scratches, porosity, pits, inclusions, roll and die marks, lap crack, burrs, cold shuts, and surface roughness that could adversely affect the coating should be brought to the attention of the purchaser prior to processing (see 7.2.1).

6.3 *Stress Relief*—Surface-hardened parts can require stress relief before plating. The stress relief heat treatment can reduce the hardness of some alloys and should therefore be reviewed by all parties before processing (see 5.1.7 and 7.2.4). Shorter times and higher temperature can be used if the resulting loss of surface hardness is acceptable to the purchaser.

6.4 *Hydrogen Embrittlement Relief*—Hydrogen embrittlement of high strength steels can be initiated by several different processing operations. Exposure of the parts to hydrogen sources will generally induce the condition. Care must be exercised whenever high strength steel is processed to ensure minimal exposure and timely relief treatment.

6.5 *Stress-Corrosion Cracking*—Titanium and titanium alloys are subject to stress-corrosion cracking after processing. Pretreatment solutions including rinses should not contain methanol, halogenated hydrocarbon, or more than 50 ppm chlorides, all of which can cause subsequent stress-corrosion cracking when the parts are heated to 260°C or higher.

7. Requirements

7.1 *Process*—The nickel boron coatings shall be produced by autocatalytic nickel deposition from aqueous solutions.

7.2 *Acceptance Requirements*—The acceptance requirements in 7.2.1 through 7.2.4 are required for all lots of part(s). Each lot of part(s) shall be sampled with the recommended procedure described in Section 9 of this specification.

7.2.1 *Appearance*—The coating shall have a uniform appearance without visible imperfections such as blisters, pits, pimples, and cracks.

7.2.1.1 Imperfections that arise from the surface condition of the basis metal and that cannot be removed using conventional metal finishing techniques and that persist in the coating shall not be cause for rejection.

7.2.1.2 Discoloration caused by heat treatment shall not be cause for rejection unless specified in the ordering information (see 5.1.12 and 12.4).

7.2.2 *Thickness*—The coating thickness shall be measured and conform to the specified grade.

7.2.3 *Adhesion*—The coating shall pass the adhesion test of Test Method B 571 as specified in the ordering information (see 5.1.15).

7.2.4 *Heat Treatment:*

7.2.4.1 All steel part(s) with a tensile strength of 1000 MPa or greater shall be heat treated at $190 \pm 15^\circ\text{C}$ for stress relief in accordance with Table 1 before plating and baked within 3 h after plating for hydrogen embrittlement relief.

7.2.4.2 Class 2 coated part(s) shall be heat treated after plating in accordance with Table 2 for precipitation hardening of the deposit.

7.2.4.3 Heat treatment for Class 3 coated steel part(s) shall be in accordance with Table 1.

7.2.4.4 Heat treatment for Class 4 and 5 coated part(s) other than steel basis material shall be in accordance with Table 3.

7.3 *Qualification Requirements*—Coating and process attributes that require testing on a monthly basis, or more frequently when specified in the ordering information by the purchaser. A test specimen or part, processed in a manner that duplicates the characteristics of production parts, shall be produced and used in these tests.

7.3.1 *Hardness*—The hardness of the Type 2, Class 2, Grade C and D coating shall be not less than 1000 HK₁₀₀ as measured by Test Method B 578.

7.3.2 *Composition*—The coating composition produced from the process shall be analyzed for nickel and boron. The alloy produced shall be within the range specified for the coating type.

7.3.3 *Hydrogen Embrittlement*—The process and coating shall be evaluated for freedom from hydrogen embrittlement and pass requirements of Test Method F 519.

8. Test Methods

8.1 Test Specimens:

8.1.1 When separate test specimens are required, the number to be used, the material from which they are to be made, and their shape and size shall be specified by the purchaser.

8.1.2 When separate test specimens are used for acceptance or qualification testing of the coating, the specimens shall be made of the same material as the part(s), have the same metallurgical condition as the part(s), and be processed with the part(s).

8.2 *Thickness*—The thickness shall be measured at any place on the significant surface designated by the purchaser, and the measurement shall be made with an accuracy of better than 10 % by a method selected by the purchaser. Fig. X1.1 describes the density of these coatings in relationship to their boron content.

8.2.1 *Weigh, Plate, Weigh Method*—Using a similar substrate material, weigh to the nearest milligram before and after plating. Calculate the thickness from the increase in mass, surface area, and density of the coating.

TABLE 1 Heat Treatment for Stress Relief Before Plating and for Hydrogen Embrittlement Relief After Plating

NOTE 1—Heat treatment for stress relief of surface hardened steels prior to plating shall be $140 \pm 10^\circ\text{C}$ for 5 h.

Tensile strength steel, MPa	Heat treatment, minimum, at $190 \pm 15^\circ\text{C}$, h
1000 to 1450	2
1450 to 1800	18
over 1800	23