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Quality improvement of laser welds on thick duplex plates by laser cladded buttering

Anne Straße[a*], Andrey Gumenyuk[a], Michael Rethmeier[a]

[a]*Bundesanstalt für Materialforschung und -prüfung (BAM), Unter den Eichen 87, 12205 Berlin, Germany*

Abstract

Because of its excellent corrosion resistance, high tensile strength and high ductility, duplex stainless steel 2205 offers many areas of application. Though laser beam welding accompanied by high cooling rates, duplex steels tend to perform higher ferrite contents in weld metal as the base metal, which leads to a reduction of ductility and corrosion resistance of the weld joint. To overcome this problem, a solution, based on buttering the plate edges by laser metal deposition (LMD) with material containing higher Ni concentrations prior to laser welding was suggested. In this context different process parameters for LMD process were investigated. In a second step the possibility of welding those edges defect free while achieving balanced austenite-ferrite ratio was verified with metallographic analysis, Electron Backscatter Diffraction (EBSD) and impact testing according to Charpy.

Keywords: Laser Metal Deposition; Laser Beam Welding; Duplex; Stainless Steel

1. Introduction

Laser beam welding of thick plates has great relevance especially for applications like the chemical and the offshore industry. Here defect free welds with a homogenous microstructure are critical. But often it is necessary to add filler materials to achieve the desired properties of weld seams. A known problem with laser beam welding of thick plates with filler materials is the decreasing detectability of the elements of said filler materials in the depth of the welds. Gook et al., 2014 proved that up to a depth of 14 mm the elements are traceable, even if they are not transported uniformly through the molten pool, which results in weld seams with different properties between the upper and the lower part of the weld seam. An example for this

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +49-30-8140-4864; fax: +49-30-8104-74623
E-mail address: anne.strasse@bam.de

is the duplex stainless steel 2205. Those steels are characterized by a balanced austenite-ferrite ratio, which is accompanied by the combined properties of both microstructures, an excellent ductility and tensile strength. Welding, especially laser beam welding, of those materials leads to a massive change of the austenite-ferrite ratio to a much higher ferrite content, up to 90 % and with that to changed properties of the weld seam in comparison to the base material, e.g. a reduced ductility as proposed by Kotecki, 1986. A solution for this problem is the usage of nitrogen for a better formation of the austenite phase. Lai et al., 2016 suggested the usage of nitrogen as shielding gas for laser welding processes, as the gas stabilizes the forming of austenite. Another approach to reduce the ferrite content of the welds is the usage of filler materials in form of electrodes with a higher Ni-content. This leads to a higher austenite ratio in the microstructure. Muthupandi et al., 2005 studied the influence of such electrodes for laser beam and electron beam welding processes. Wu et al., 2004 used a powder nozzle to distribute nickel powder into the molten pool. As mentioned before the filler material only reaches a depth of maximal 14 mm, this solution is only feasible for thinner plates. For thick plates Westin et al., 2011 proposed nickel foils which were placed between both welding partners before the tacking, but the handling of foils is complicated and time consuming. In this paper another approach for the homogenous distribution of the filler material by laser cladded buttering is proposed.

In the last years Laser Metal Deposition (LMD) became more important for different types of applications, for repair of worn out components, e.g., of the tip of turbine blades and in the additive manufacturing of whole components as well. Another common application is cladding of components with corrosion or wear resistant layers. In this study the edges of the welding partners were coated with a duplex steel and nickel powder mixture before the laser welding to ensure a homogenous distribution of the alloying elements in the laser weld seams, which must display a balanced duplex microstructure.

2. Experimental setup

Base plates for the cladding of the edges were duplex stainless steel 2205 (material number: 1.4462) with the dimensions 300 mm x 100 mm x 15 mm. For the LMD process, duplex powder 2205 with a grain size of 53 - 250 µm and nickel powder with a grain size of 45 - 125 µm were used. Table 1 shows the chemical composition of the base material and the powders. The resulting powder mixture contained a 12 % total amount of nickel.

Table 1. Chemical composition (wt.-%) of the investigated materials

Material	Form	Fe	Cr	Ni	Mo	Nb	Mn	N	C	Si	P
Duplex (1.4462)	Base Material	Bal.	22.96	5.18	3.00	-	1.82	0.17	0.02	0.29	0.03
Duplex (1.4462)	Powder	Bal.	22.80	5.57	3.16	-	1.09	0.16	0.02	0.68	0.02
Nickel (24.053)	Powder	-	-	Bal.	-	-	-	-	0.05	-	-

The clads were produced in a five-axis laser cell (TruLaser Cell 3000, Trumpf), that is coupled with a 16 kW Yb:YAG-disk laser (TruDisk 16002, Trumpf) with a wavelength of 1030 nm. A three-jet nozzle with a working distance of 16 mm and a powder feeder (Flowmotion Twin, Medicoat) were used.

The cladding was executed with a constant powder mass flow of 15 g·min-1, a spot diameter of 1.6 mm, a laser power of 0.8 kW, a speed of 0.8 m·min-1 and a stepover of 1.5 mm. For all experiments the carrier gas was helium with a gas flow of 4 l·min-1 and shielding gas was argon with 10 l·min-1. The experimental setup is shown in Figure 1.

For a longer coverage of the edges with shielding gas, protection sheets were used on either side of the plate. Those were clamped in the vice about 1 - 2 mm under the base plate. One layer per edge was cladded

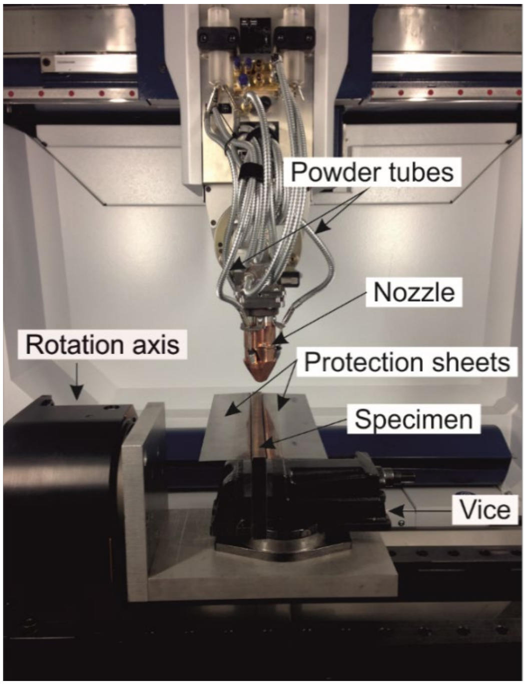

Fig. 1. Experimental setup for the coatings

using a bidirectional strategy. The stepover was chosen in respect with the intention to produce preferably smooth coatings for the following laser beam welding process. Initially, the plates were tacked at three points. Finally, the tacking was done with a cladding track on the upper and the lower side of the weld seam. For those tack welds the welding parameters were the same as for the clad layers.

The laser beam welding was performed with a 20 kW Yb-fiber laser (YLR-20000, IPG) with a wavelength of 1064 nm, a focus diameter of 0.56 mm and a beam parameter product of 11.2 mm·mrad.

After the cladding the edges and the tacking, the plates were welded with different welding gases. Shielding gas and the gas in the dragging nozzle was always argon, for the root shielding nozzle the influence of argon was tested as well as nitrogen. The laser power was 14.3 kW by a speed of 1.5 m·min^{-1} with a defocusing of -5 mm. The experimental setup is shown in Figure 2.

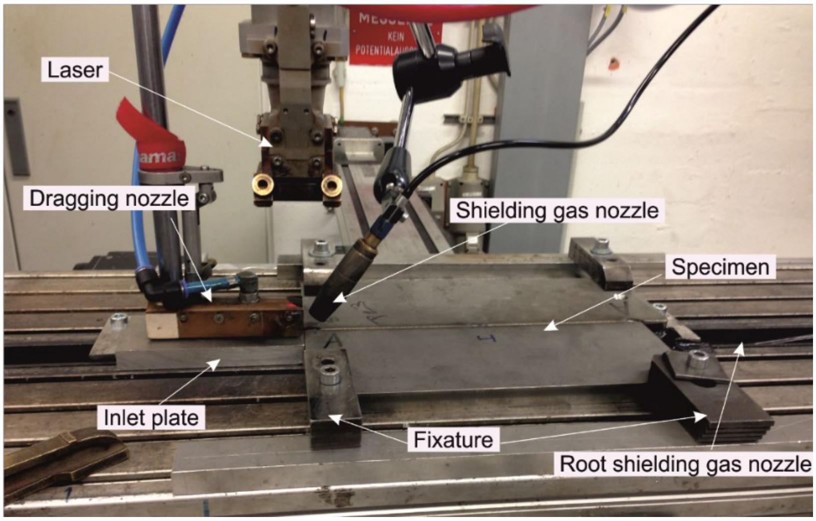

Fig. 2. Experimental setup for the laser welds

Different destructive and non-destructive tests were executed to ensure the quality of the coatings and the welds. Microsections as well as electron backscatter diffraction (EBSD) and impact testing according to Charpy was used to characterize their properties.

3. Results and Discussion

The buttering of edges with twenty single tracks is shown in Figure 3. The optical analysis of the microstructure showed that the austenite-ferrite ratio of the coatings was balanced due to the higher nickel content of the powder.

The LMD-tracks were set closer than the usual overlap to realize an even surface. Other stepovers with a more moderate space between the lines were tested as well, but they resulted in surfaces, that were too uneven for the laser welding process. However, the edges display a certain waviness and a dipping at the

Fig. 3. Microsection of buttering

corners, which proved to be problematic with the laser welding, were a technical zero-gap is preferred. Thus, the weld seams showed irregularities in the upper and the root side. To overcome this problem, LMD-tacking with the same parameter as the buttering was applied on both sides of the plates to fill the gaps instead of the typical tacking with laser beam at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the plates. The weld with this tacking showed a good weld seam appearance with only minimal relapse on the root side, shown in Figure 4.

Fig. 4. Microsection of weld seam with LMD-tacking

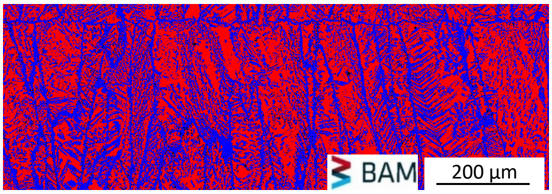

Fig. 5. EBSD-analysis of weld seam with argon as root shielding gas (blue: austenite, red: ferrite)

The optical and EBSD-analysis of the welds with buttered edges displayed a significantly better austenite-ferrite ratio than the ones which were welded without any buttering. For the last ones, the seams showed almost no austenite content (≤ 10 %), whereas the austenite content of the welds with the coated edges was about 40-50 %, depending on the root shielding gas. Figure 5 depicts a part of an EBSD-analysis of one of the weld seams. The ferrite phase was colored red, while the austenite is shown in blue. The amount of austenite measured with EBSD for this weld was 41.8 %. Those, that were performed with nitrogen as root shielding gas, displayed a higher austenite content up to 56.8 %, which affirms the discoveries of Lai et al., 2016.

Impact testing was executed by means of undersize Charpy-V samples with the dimensions 7.5 mm x 10 mm x 55 mm. The notch was placed in the middle of the weld seam and the testing performed at a temperature of -20 °C. Specimens welded with and without buttering were compared. The surface of the unbuttered ones implied brittle fractures and reached values of 28.91 $J \cdot cm^{-2}$, whereas the buttered ones displayed a ductile fracture behavior with notch impact values of 140.15 $J \cdot cm^{-2}$. The results show, that due to the buttering the weld seams endure satisfactory notch impact values in contrast to that of unbuttered ones.

4. Conclusions

Laser beam welding of 15 mm thick duplex plates buttered by LMD clads with a powder mixture containing 12 % nickel was performed. The microsections as well as the EBSD-analysis showed a balanced duplex structure throughout the whole weld seam. The austenite content in the welds with nitrogen as shielding gas was higher by 15 %. The impact testing of the specimen confirmed the better notch impact strength of the welds with coated edges.

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