

Research/Technical Note

# The Influence of the Green Density on the Quality of ZTA Zirconia Toughened Alumina Plungers

Zlata Ibrisimovic Subasic<sup>1,\*</sup> , Minela Cejvan<sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup>Quality Control Department, Spark Plugs and Industrial Ceramics Factory ENKER D.D., Tesanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Health Studies, University of Bihac, Bihac, Bosnia and Herzegovina

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of the green density ( $\rho_g$ ) on the sintered density ( $\rho_s$ ), shrinkage according height and diameter (HS, DS), relative density, porosity and hardness of ZTA ceramic plungers. Zirconia toughened alumina is characterized by excellent properties of hardness, toughness, thermal and chemical resistance, which make composite material interesting for multiple applications. Some of the significant applications of ZTA ceramics are in the production of biomedical implants, cutting tools, parts for pumps and others. The material is composed of high purity alumina 90% and 10% of zirconium oxide. This material successfully compensate fragility of the alumina and zirconium oxide price. After 24 hours of milling in a ball mill (Dorst, Germany) slurry with a specific surface 25 832 cm<sup>2</sup>/g was transferred into a mixer with addition of binders (PVA + soap based binder) through a vibrating sieve (British and Foreign Patents). Solid content (%) of the slurry in amount of 69.16 was confirmed by thermogravimetric and differential gravimetric analyzes. The 1000 kg of the powder dried by spray drying (Spray dryer Niro) contains 2.6% of binders and 0.2% of moisture. Three sets of plungers with outer diameter of 3.6 cm, inner diameter of 2.0 cm and height of 7.6 cm were produced by cold isostatic pressing (CIP) using different pressures. The first set marked as 'A' was pressed by pressure of 80 MPa, the second set marked as 'B' was pressed by pressure of 100 MPa, and third set marked as 'C', was pressed by pressure of 150 MPa. According to statistical data processing, comparison and analysis of the results it is concluded that the quality of the ZTA plungers, in specific presented case, significantly depends on the green density ( $\rho_g$ ).

## Keywords

Zirconia Toughened Alumina, Green Density, Quality

## 1. Introduction

Ceramics can be defined as a solid compounds that are formed by the application of heat and sometimes heat and pressure, comprising at least two elements provided one of them is non – metal or metalloid. The other element (s) may be a metal (s) or another metalloid (s). Kingery defined ceramics on simpler way “ the art and science of making and

using solid articles, which have as their essential component, and are composed in a large part of inorganic, non-metallic materials”. In other words, what is not metal or a polymer, is a ceramics [1]. All materials properties, including ceramic materials depend on their microstructure. Selection of the raw materials, process parameters and technique of production as

\*Corresponding author: [ibrisimovicsubasiczlata@gmail.com](mailto:ibrisimovicsubasiczlata@gmail.com) (Zlata Ibrisimovic Subasic)

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a result have specific microstructure of material. Producing of composite materials have purpose to attempt to eliminate negative characteristics and to take advantage of good characteristics of each material. Composite ZTA material presents promising material, dependently of mass fraction of  $ZrO_2$ , because of its mechanical properties, biocompatibility and aesthetic criteria [2]. Zirconia toughened alumina spray dried granules were sieved on sieves (Endecot, Italy) in five size fraction ranging:  $< 80 \mu m$ , from  $80 \mu m$  to  $105 \mu m$ , from  $105 \mu m$  to  $150 \mu m$ , from  $150 \mu m$  to  $180 \mu m$ , from  $180 \mu m$  to  $220 \mu m$  and  $> 220 \mu m$  to determinate the granule size distribution (according to the ASTM E11-20). The ceramic green body can be directly fabricated to the final shape, before sintering. The desired shapes can be easily formed due to the low mechanical strength of weakly bonded ceramic powders in green body phase. Pressing is the most widely used shaping technique for advanced ceramics. Desired shapes can be produced by pressing under uniaxial or isostatic pressure. The external heat may be applied at the same time, in order to further enhance densification [3]. Green density is defined as the total mass of a body divided by the green volume [4, 13]. For a green body the green volume includes the volume of solid particles, the volume of any temporary additives and liquid present, and the volume of empty pore space. Many American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) methods for determining bulk (green) density are described but this methods are mostly based volume displacement by Archimedes principle. That is acceptable for glasses and refractory materials but for green ceramics this method is not suitable. For green body ceramics, mercury pycnometer is recognized as the benchmark for measuring bulk density of a body, but mercury is significant health hazard. Some of the different methods for bulk density determining (according ASTM C914 – 95) are: mercury method, water displacement of bodies coated with wax or water repellent spray, mineral oil and powder pycnometer methods. All of this methods have their advantages and disadvantages, according to that, in this work green density was determined by mass – volume measurement method [4]. Thirty samples with different range of green densities were analyzed. The average green density of samples marked as 'A' is  $2.290 \text{ g/cm}^3$ , and the average green density of the samples marked as 'B' is  $2.318 \text{ g/cm}^3$ . Samples marked as 'C' have average green density  $2.471 \text{ g/cm}^3$ . Value of green density provides information needed to control quality of the ceramics piece (after sintering) [4]. Sintering is most common way for ceramic powder consolidation. The process is irre-

versible and due to the heating the particles connect between each other and densification was performed. The sintering temperature is temperature lower than melting temperature. The green piece is high temperatures affected which causes thermal activation of mechanism of substance transport. The main goal is to achieve improvement of properties and density closest to relative density [5]. The advantage of application ZTA plungers, pistons and other ceramic pieces in pumps is related to their wear and corrosion resistance, and extending work life of pumps. Ceramic components in pumps are used in chemical, petrochemical industry, paper industry, cement production and others [6]. The satisfactory quality of ZTA plunger is defined in table 1 according to basic parameters which are discussed in this study. Basic parameters of quality for ZTA plungers are density  $3.980 \text{ g/cm}^3$  and Vickers hardness  $15 \text{ GPa}$ . Required surface quality is  $\leq 0.2 \mu m$ .

**Table 1.** Quality parameters of ZTA plunger.

Properties	Value
Density ( $\text{g/cm}^3$ )	3.980
Hardness (GPa)	15
Roughness Ra ( $\mu m$ )	$\leq 0.2$

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Materials

This research (selection of the materials, preparation of ceramic powder, analyzing of the powder and machining of the green and sintered ZTA plungers) was entirely done in the Factory of spark plugs and industrial ceramics Enker D.D. in Tesanj, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Aluminium oxide is only thermodynamically stable in form of  $\alpha - Al_2O_3$ , and it is classified commercially according purity, grain size, morphology, content of  $\alpha$ - alumina [1, 7]. In this study, ceramic powder was prepared from high purity  $Al_2O_3$  (Almatis, Germany), average grain size (d50)  $1.5 \mu m$  and zirconia oxide  $ZrO_2$  average grain size (d50)  $0.6 - 0.7 \mu m$ . According producers specification content of  $Al_2O_3$  is 99.86 % and CaO,  $Fe_2O_3$ ,  $B_2O_3$ ,  $SiO_2$ ,  $Na_2O$  were confirmed. Table 2 presents chemical composition of alumina.

**Table 2.** Chemical composition of alumina.

Sample	wt.%					
	CaO	$SiO_2$	$Fe_2O_3$	$B_2O_3$	$Na_2O$	$Al_2O_3$
$Al_2O_3$ powder	0,019	0,0056	0,0143	0,0110	0,05	balance

Aluminium oxide has fracture toughness  $4 - 6 \text{ MPa m}^{1/2}$  and when initial crack appears, it can't be stopped by plastic deformation, the result is cracking of the ceramic piece. On the other hand, zirconia oxide has high toughness and when they join together, they formed material with excellent properties [2, 8]. The table 3 presents chemical composition of  $\text{ZrO}_2$ .

**Table 3.** Chemical composition of zirconia.

Sample	wt. %					
	ZrO <sub>2</sub> + HfO <sub>2</sub>	SiO <sub>2</sub>	Fe <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	B <sub>2</sub> O <sub>3</sub>	Na <sub>2</sub> O	TiO <sub>2</sub>
ZrO <sub>2</sub> powder	99,9	< 0,1	< 0,1	< 0,1	< 0,1	< 0,1

## 2.2. Methods

For all sintered samples green density, shrinkage (according height and diameter) and sintered density were determined. With caliper (Mitutoyo, Japan) height (H, mm) and outer diameter (D, mm) were measured. Internal diameter was measured with micrometer (Mitutoyo, Japan). Mass of the green bodies was measured by analytical balance (Shimadzu, Japan). The green volume (V, cm<sup>3</sup>) was obtained by relation:

$$V = (D^2 - d^2) \cdot \frac{\pi}{4} \cdot H, (\text{cm}^3) \quad (1)$$

Where D is average value outer diameter of plunger (mm), d is average value internal diameter of plunger (mm) and H is average value height of plunger (mm).

The green density was obtained by relation:

$$\rho_g = \frac{m}{V}, (\text{g/cm}^3) \quad (2)$$

Where  $\rho_g$  is green density of plunger, m is mass of green plunger and V is a volume of the green plunger.

The shrinkage according height (H, mm) was obtained according relation:

$$HS = \frac{H_g - H_s}{H_g} \cdot 100, \% \quad (3)$$

Where is  $H_g$  average height of the green plunger and  $H_s$  is average height sintered plunger.

The shrinkage according diameter (D, mm) was obtained according relation:

$$DS = \frac{D_g - D_s}{D_g} \cdot 100, \% \quad (4)$$

Where  $D_g$  is average diameter of the green plunger and  $D_s$  is average height sintered plunger.

Sintered density was evaluated using the Archimedes method (Radwag, UK), according to ASTM C373 – 88.

The relative density ( $\rho_R$ ) was obtained by relation:

$$\rho_R = \frac{\rho_s}{\rho_t} \cdot 100, \% \quad (5)$$

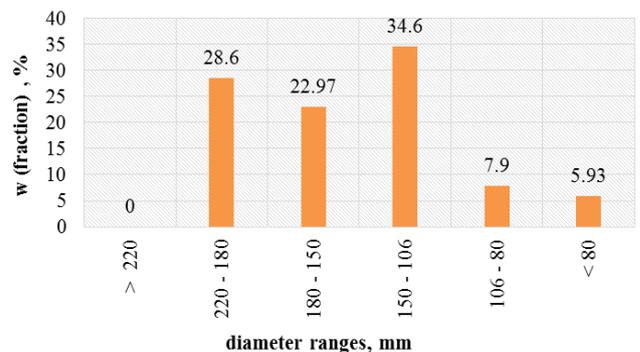
Where  $\rho_R$  is relative density,  $\rho_s$  is sintered density and  $\rho_t$  is a theoretical density. Value of theoretical density is  $4.1719 \text{ g/cm}^3$ .

Penetrant test was obtained according to ISO 3452 – 1. The samples were totally immersed in fluorescent penetrant solution. Checking of samples is conducted by UV lamp test. The methodology used for the determination of hardness, was in accordance with ASTM C1327-99. Three Vickers impressions had been carried through in the surfaces of each sample, which already were polishing, using an applied load of 49 N during fifteen seconds. After the diagonal length measurement, the values of the Vickers hardness (GPa) were calculated, by the following equation:

$$HV = 0,0018544 \cdot \frac{P}{d^2} \quad (6)$$

Where HV is Vickers hardness (GPa), P is applied load (N) and d (mm) is arithmetic mean of the two diagonal lengths [9].

## 3. Results and Discussion



**Figure 1.** Particle size distribution of the spray – dried alumina granules.

Particle size distribution, that follows normal distribution (figure 1) shows that 94% of particles are in the range of 80  $\mu\text{m}$  to 220  $\mu\text{m}$ . Particle's shape and size distribution are important properties of the powder because of ensuring the proper filling the mould in the process of green body production [10, 11].

Figure 2 shows the dependence of the sintered density on the green (raw) density. As expected, as the green density increases, the sintered density also increases. Dense, uniform particle packing geometry in a green ceramic powder compact is the primary criterion in achieving high end point density body with desired microstructure and this is always the goal to be achieved by the relevant researchers and manufacturers [12].

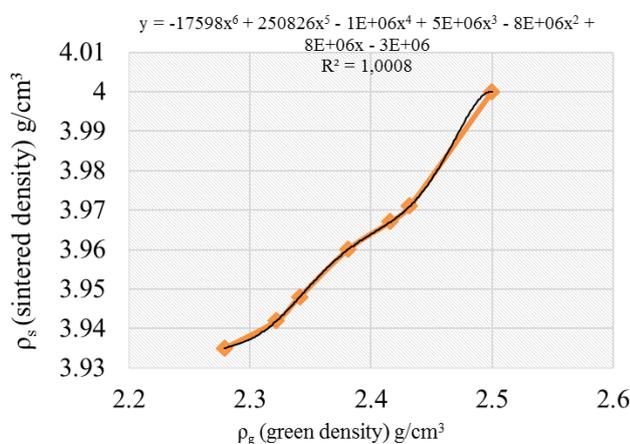


Figure 2. Dependence of the sintered density on the green density.

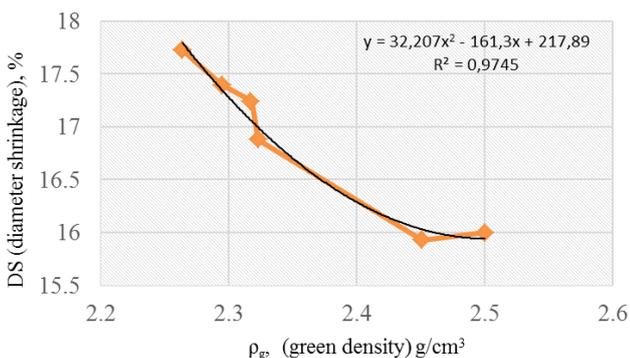


Figure 3. Diameter shrinkage dependence on green density.

The dependence of the shrinkage (by height and diameter) is significant. For the green sample with a green density ( $\text{g}/\text{cm}^3$ ) 2.264 the shrinkage (%) is 17.71. For the green density ( $\text{g}/\text{cm}^3$ ) 2.511, the shrinkage (%) is 15.59 (figure 3). The samples 'A' have the lowest value of green density and the samples 'C' have the highest value of the green density. The average shrinkages for the samples 'A', 'B', 'C' are presented on the figure 4.

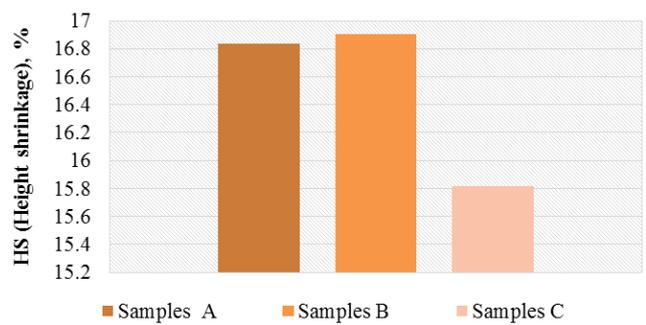


Figure 4. Height shrinkage of 'A', 'B', 'C' samples.

The average and standard deviation of diameter (D), height (H), green density ( $\rho_g$ ) and sintered density ( $\rho_s$ ) are shown in the table 4.

Table 4. Dimensions, green and sintered density (average value and experimental standard deviation).

Properties	Samples A	Samples B	Samples C
$\rho_g, \text{g}/\text{cm}^3$	$2.290 \pm 0.014$	$2.318 \pm 0.046$	$2.471 \pm 0.031$
$\rho_s, \text{g}/\text{cm}^3$	$3.934 \pm 0.002$	$3.948 \pm 0.007$	$3.987 \pm 0.010$
DS, mm	$17.456 \pm 0.332$	$17.120 \pm 0.14$	$15.302 \pm 0.416$
HS, mm	$16.833 \pm 0.431$	$16.904 \pm 0.06$	$15.819 \pm 0.423$

The table 5 presents the values of the relative density and porosity for samples A, B, C and standard deviation.

Table 5. Relative density and porosity (average value and standard deviation).

Properties	Samples A	Samples B	Samples C
$\rho_R, \%$	$94.313 \pm 0.0705$	$94.644 \pm 0.191$	$95.577 \pm 0.256$
Porosity, %	$5.686 \pm 0.0705$	$5.355 \pm 0.191$	$4.422 \pm 0.256$

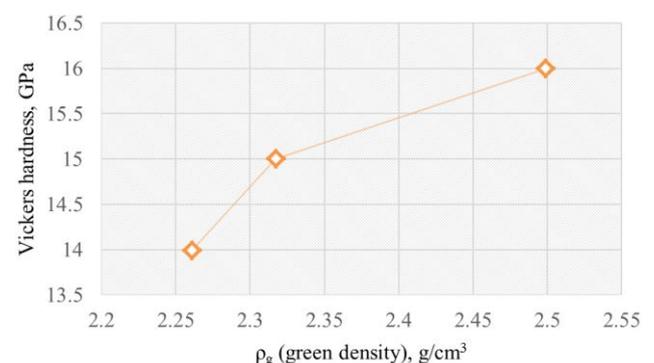


Figure 5. Influence of the green density on the Vickers hardness.

As expected, influence of the green density on hardness is obvious (figure 5). Moreover, plungers with green densities lower than 2.5 g/cm<sup>3</sup> have Vickers hardness lower than required. Penetrant test was conducted effectively and examined plungers don't have any cracks or open porosity. Surface quality was determined by appliance for roughness measurement (Mitutoyo, Japan). All samples have average roughness  $\leq 0.2 \mu\text{m}$ .

## 4. Conclusions

The particle size distribution is in accordance to the prescribed values for ZTA spray-dried powder, which is an important characteristic for molding (cold isostatic pressing of the green body).

The sintered density is significantly dependent on the green (raw) density in the production process of ZTA plungers. By recording and analyzing the changes during pressing in the value of green density we have clear goal of green density to achieve the satisfied plunger quality.

According to expectation, it was obtained that the shrinkage according to height and diameter decreases with the increase of the green density of the plunger.

An increase of green density results an increase of relative density and thus decreases porosity.

The highest values of the Vickers hardness have the samples with the highest green density.

It is concluded that the overall quality of the ZTA plungers depends on the green density of the bodies.

An interesting step for further research would be to test the samples from sets "A", "B" and "C" in the real conditions of exploitation of the ceramic plunger in pumps in order to compare durability and working life.

## Abbreviations

ZTA: Zirconia Toughened Alumina

V: volume

D: outer diameter

d: internal diameter

H: height

D<sub>g</sub>: green diameter

H<sub>g</sub>: green height

D<sub>s</sub>: sintered diameter

H<sub>s</sub>: sintered height

$\rho_g$ : green density

$\rho_s$ : sintered density

$\rho_R$ : relative density

$\rho_t$ : theoretical density

HS: shrinkage according height

DS: shrinkage according diameter

PVA: Poly Vinyl Alcohol

CIP: Cold Isostatic Pressing

ZrO<sub>2</sub>: zirconium oxide

Al<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>: aluminium oxide

CaO: calcium oxide

Fe<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>: ferric oxide

B<sub>2</sub>O<sub>3</sub>: boric oxide

SiO<sub>2</sub>: silicon dioxide

Na<sub>2</sub>O: sodium oxide

TiO<sub>2</sub>: titanium dioxide

HfO<sub>2</sub>: hafnium oxide

UV: Ultraviolet

HV: Vickers Hardness

P: Load

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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