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(54) Title: CRACK-CONTAINING HOT-STAMPED STEEL PART WITH A THIN COATING WITH EXCELLENT SPOT-WELDABILITY AND EXCELLENT PAINTING ADHESION

$$(a) \quad E_{pc} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{33.3 - e_{IDL}}{0.9} + e_{IDL} - e_{coating}\right)^2 - 148(e_{IDL} - e_{coating})} - \left(\frac{33.3 - e_{IDL}}{0.9} + e_{IDL} - e_{coating}\right)$$

$$(b) \quad dC_{min}(e_{pflat}) = 8 + 630 * e^{-3.772 - 1.15 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat} - 1.71))} - 638 * e^{-4.1 - 1.25 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat} - 1.71))}$$

(57) Abstract: A hot-stamped coated steel part comprising a steel substrate and an aluminum alloy coating comprising, proceeding from steel substrate outwards, an interdiffusion layer and an outer layer, the total thickness of the coating ecoating and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer eIDL satisfying the following condition: $16 \leq E_{pc} < 40$ with (a). The hot-stamped coated steel part comprises an undeformed portion having a thickness ePflat from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, and at least one deformed portion. A lineic density of cracks dC in the coating in the undeformed portion is higher than or equal to a minimum lineic density of cracks dCmin(ePflat) defined as: (b)

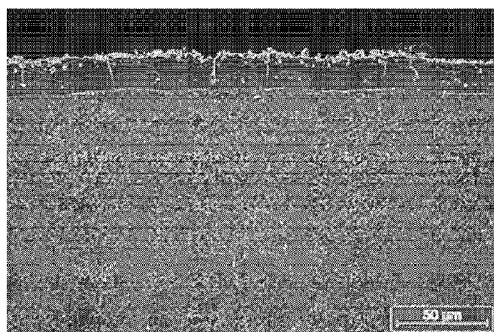


FIG.2

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Crack-containing hot-stamped steel part with a thin coating with excellent spot-weldability and excellent painting adhesion

The present invention concerns a hot-stamped coated steel part comprising a steel substrate and an aluminum alloy coating on at least one face of the steel substrate, the coating comprising an optimized crack density, the part having an excellent painting adhesion and an excellent spot weldability. The present invention also relates to a method for manufacturing a hot-stamped coated steel part.

Such parts can also be used for example in the automobile industry, for the fabrication of structural elements for anti-intrusion or energy absorption functions.

In such type of applications, it is desirable to have steel parts that combine high mechanical strength, high impact resistance, good corrosion resistance and dimensional accuracy. Automotive parts such as front or rear rails, roof rails, B-pillars, and chassis parts such as lower control arms, engine cradles, need more particularly these properties.

To meet these demands, such parts are now generally produced by hot stamping process (also named press-hardening). In hot-stamping process, as disclosed in particular in FR 2 780 984 and FR 2 807 447, a blank cut from a steel sheet, pre-coated with a metal or metal alloy, is heated in a furnace to a temperature at which the ferrite and cementite microstructure of a low carbon steel is at least partly transformed into austenite and then hot stamped in a die. During stamping, the part is held in the die to achieve a rapid cooling, leading to the formation of the desired hardened microstructure and the obtention of the desired mechanical properties. The pre-coating can be aluminum or an aluminum alloy. During the heating in the furnace, the pre-coating alloys with the steel substrate to form a compound that provides protection of the surface of the steel against decarburization and the formation of scale.

Recently, the focus was made on the coating of the part, after hot-stamping, and how it affects the properties of the parts in use.

In WO 2008/053273A1, it was proposed to restrict the pre-coating thickness to between 20 and 33 μm at every location, and to control the hot stamping process, especially the heating rate and the austenitization parameters, in order to achieve a favorable succession and morphology of continuous layers in the coating of the part, leading to an improved weldability.

However, it remains desirable to provide a hot-stamped steel part having a further improved spot weldability and an improved painting adhesion, which can be produced with a lower pre-coating thickness.

Additionally, even if painting adhesion can be improved in some cases, this improvement is achieved to the detriment of the spot weldability so that it remains desirable to provide a part combining an excellent painting adhesion and an excellent spot weldability.

Therefore, the invention aims at providing a hot-stamped coated steel part comprising
5 a steel substrate and an aluminum alloy coating on at least one face of the steel substrate having at the same time an excellent painting adhesion and an excellent spot weldability, and a method for manufacturing the same.

In particular, it is desired to provide a hot-stamped coated steel part having at least an undeformed portion with a welding range, as measured according to the standard SEP
10 1220-2 (2011), of more than 1 kA, together with an excellent painting adhesion. The painting adhesion is assessed by performing a dry painting test according to the standard ISO 2409:2013. The painting adhesion is considered as excellent if the result of the dry painting test is strictly lower than 1.

For this purpose, the invention relates to a hot-stamped coated steel part according
15 to claim 1.

The hot-stamped coated steel part preferably has one or more of the features of claims 2 to 13.

The invention also relates to a method for producing a hot-stamped coated steel part according to claim 14.

This method preferably includes one or more of features of claims 15 to 24.

The invention also relates to the use of a hot-stamped coated steel part according to the invention or produced by a method according to the invention for the manufacture of chassis or body-in-white parts or suspension arms for automobile vehicles.

The invention will now be described in detail and illustrated by examples without
25 introducing limitations, in view of the following figures, wherein:

- Figure 1 illustrated schematically an example of hot-stamped coated steel part according to the invention,

- Figure 2 is a cross-section of a coating in an undeformed portion of a part according to the invention, as observed in a given field of view,

- Figure 3 shows an example of cross-section of a coating in an undeformed portion
30 of another part, in which the lineic density of cracks is insufficient.

The invention relates to a hot-stamped coated steel part.

A hot-stamped coated steel part is a non-planar part produced by hot-stamping a blank.

A steel sheet refers to a flat sheet of steel. A steel sheet here designates a hot-rolled
35 steel sheet or a cold-rolled steel sheet in the form of a coil, or cut from such a coil.

A steel sheet has a top and bottom face, which are also referred to as a top and bottom sides or as a top and bottom faces or surfaces. The distance between said faces is designated as the thickness of the sheet. The thickness can be measured for example using a micrometer, the spindle and anvil of which are placed on the top and bottom faces, the axis between the spindle and the anvil being normal to the surface of the sheet. In a similar way, the thickness can also be measured on a formed part. In a similar way, the thickness can also be measured on a blank and on a part.

A blank of steel refers to a flat sheet of steel, which has been cut to any shape suitable for its use, or a blank produced by cutting two or more steel sheets materials which may have different thicknesses or different compositions into a required shape and assembled together, in particular welded together.

By average thickness of a part, or of a portion of a part, it is meant the overall average thickness of the material making up the part after it has been formed into a 3-dimensional part from an initially flat sheet.

By uniform thickness, it is meant that the thickness of the considered blank, part, sheet, or region or portion thereof, is constant, a maximum variation of the thickness in the blank, part, sheet or region or portion thereof, above or below the average thickness of the blank, part, sheet or region or portion, being of at most 0.1 mm. In particular, a uniform thickness implies that no variation in thickness was voluntarily introduced during production, especially during the production of the sheet in hot and/or cold-rolling, and during the forming operations of the production of the part.

In the following, the thickness of a blank, part, sheet, or region or portion thereof with a uniform thickness is defined as the average thickness of this blank, part, sheet, or region or portion thereof.

Besides, the term "thickness" is used to designate the thickness of a blank, part, sheet, or region or portion thereof of a uniform thickness, whereas "average thickness" is used more generally to designate the average thickness of a blank, part, sheet, or region or portion thereof, irrespective of whether the thickness is uniform or variable.

Tailor welded blanks are made by assembling together, for example by laser welding, several sheets or cut-out blanks of steel, known as sub-blanks, in order to optimize the performance of the part in its different areas, to reduce overall part weight, to reduce overall part cost and to reduce material scrap. The sub-blanks forming the tailor welded blanks can be assembled with or without overlap, for example they can be laser butt-welded (no overlap), or they can be spot-welded to one another (with overlap).

A flexible blank is a type of tailor welded blank including regions wherein at least part of the connection between the different sub-blanks is not rigid, allowing the sub-blanks to move in different directions during the forming operation in the corresponding regions.

By opposition to a tailor welded blank, a monolithic blank refers to a blank which consists of one single sub-blank, without several sub-blanks being combined together.

A tailor rolled blank is a blank having a varying thickness, i.e. variation of thickness along the blank, obtained by differential rolling during the steel sheet production process.

Hot stamping is a forming technology which involves heating a blank up to a temperature at which the microstructure of the steel has at least partially transformed to austenite, forming the blank at high temperature by stamping it and quenching the formed part to obtain a microstructure having a high strength. Hot stamping allows obtaining very high strength parts with complex shapes and presents many technical advantages.

A monolithic part is a hot-stamped part produced from a monolithic blank.

A monolithic part is for example produced from a monolithic blank with a uniform thickness, or from a monolithic tailor rolled blank.

A hot-stamped welded steel part, or hot-stamped laser welded steel part, is a hot-stamped part produced from a tailor welded blank, for example from a flexible blank. A hot-stamped welded steel part thus comprises two or more hot-stamped sub-parts and one or more hot-stamped weld(s) joining together the hot-stamped sub-parts.

In an embodiment, the hot-stamped coated steel part of the invention is a monolithic part.

In another embodiment, the hot-stamped coated steel part is a hot-stamped welded steel part.

The hot-stamped coated steel part of the invention preferably has an average thickness e_P comprised between 0.6 mm and 3.5 mm.

The range of 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm is the usual thickness used in the fabrication of structural or reinforcing parts for the automotive industry. This thickness range is also suited to industrial press hardening tools, in particular hot stamping presses or dies.

Additionally, as detailed below, the thermal process applied to a given steel sheet thickness has an effect on the coating, in particular on the formation of the cracks in the coating of the flat undeformed portion which are desired in the invention.

Preferably, the average thickness e_P of the hot-stamped coated steel part is within the range of 0.7 mm to 3.0 mm.

In an embodiment, the hot-stamped coated steel part has a uniform thickness e_P from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 to 3.0 mm.

In another embodiment, the hot-stamped coated steel part has a variable thickness (thus non-uniform). In that case, the hot-stamped coated steel part consists of two or more regions with different uniform thicknesses e_{Pi} which are preferably each from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 mm to 3.0 mm.

5 As an example, a hot-stamped coated steel part with a variable thickness can be produced from a tailor rolled blank having a varying thickness obtained by differential rolling during the steel sheet production process.

As another example, a hot-stamped coated steel part with a variable thickness can be a hot-stamped welded steel part produced from a tailor welded blank made of blanks with
10 different thicknesses.

The hot-stamped coated steel part comprises a steel substrate (also named steel base) having two main faces.

The steel in the substrate is a steel for hot-stamping, i.e. a steel capable of hardening after austenitization and rapid cooling by quenching.

15 In an embodiment, the part being produced from a monolithic blank, the steel substrate is made of a single steel.

In another embodiment, the part being a hot-stamped welded steel part, the steel substrate consists of two or more areas (or sub-parts) which can be made of the same steel or different steels, and may have the same or different microstructures.

20 In the following, by microstructure and composition of the steel of the steel substrate, it is meant the microstructure and the composition of the steel substrate (if the substrate is made of a single steel) or the microstructure or composition in one or more of the areas or sub-parts of the steel substrate.

The composition of the steel depends on the desired mechanical properties for the
25 part. But preferably, in the steel substrate or in each area of the steel substrate, the steel has a composition comprising, by weight %:

$$0.062\% \leq C \leq 0.4\%$$

$$0.4\% \leq Mn \leq 3.9\%$$

$$0.10\% \leq Si \leq 1.5\%$$

30 $0.005\% \leq Al \leq 1.0\%$

$$0.001\% \leq Cr \leq 2.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq Ti \leq 0.2\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq B \leq 0.010\%$$

$$Ni \leq 2\%$$

35 $Nb \leq 0.1\%$

$$Mo \leq 0.65\%$$

$$W \leq 0.30\%$$

$$N \leq 0.010\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq S \leq 0.05\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.1\%$$

$$Ca \leq 0.005\%$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

The level of impurities resulting from the elaboration process will depend on the production route used. For example, when using a Blast Furnace route with a low level of steel scrap (recycled steel), the level of impurities will remain very low. On the other hand, when elaborating the steel using an electric furnace, with a very high ratio of recycled scrap steel, the level of impurities will be significantly increased. In this latter case, for example, the level of Cu can go up to 0.25%, Ni can go up to 0.25%, Sn can go up to 0.05%, As can go up to 0.03%, Sb can go up to 0.03% and Pb can go up to 0.03%.

Hence, in an embodiment, the steel comprises up to 0.25% Cu, up to 0.05% Sn, up to 0.03% As, up to 0.03% Sb and/or up to 0.03% Pb as unavoidable impurities.

The above composition is favorable to the achievement of high mechanical properties, in particular a tensile strength TS in the range of 950 MPa to 2100 MPa.

The tensile strength is measured according to ISO standard NF EN ISO 6892-1, published in October 2009. The tensile test specimens are cut-out from flat portions of the hot stamped part.

In what follows, the contents in the elements are expressed by weight percent, unless otherwise explicated.

The carbon content depends on the desired tensile strength TS of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

Below a content of 0.062% of C, it is difficult to obtain a tensile strength of at least 950 MPa after hot-stamping under any cooling conditions. Above 0.4%, in combination with the other elements of the composition, the adhesion of the coating after hot stamping may not be satisfactory, and the resistance to delayed cracking and the toughness of the steel decrease. In an embodiment, the C content is of at most 0.38%.

The C content depends on the desired tensile strength TS of the hot-stamped part, produced by hot-stamping the steel sheet. In an embodiment, the C content is comprised between 0.062% and 0.095%. If a higher tensile strength is desired, in the order of 1500 MPa, the C content can be increased to the range of 0.15% to 0.30%. If a further increase of the tensile strength, to at least 1800 MPa is needed, the C content can be added in a content of up to 0.4%.

Apart from its deoxidizing role, manganese has an important effect on quenchability, in particular when its content is of at least 0.4%. Above 3.9%, the stabilization of austenite by Mn may be too important, which may lead to the formation of a too pronounced banded structure. Preferably, the Mn content is of at most 3.0%.

5 Silicon is added in a content of at least 0.10% to help deoxidizing the liquid steel and to contribute to the hardening of the steel by precipitating in solid solution. Its content is however generally limited in order to avoid excess formation of silicon oxides impairing the coatability of the steel. The silicon content is therefore generally lower than or equal to 1.5%, for example lower than or equal to 0.80%.

10 Aluminum may be added as a deoxidizer, in a content of at least 0.005%. Additionally, Al can protect boron by binding with N if the titanium content is insufficient. The Al content is preferably of at least 0.01%. The Al content is generally lower than or equal to 1.0% to avoid oxidation issues and avoid the formation of ferrite during hot-stamping. Preferably, the Al content is of at most 0.1%.

15 Cr may be added to increase the quenchability of the steel and to contribute to achieving the desired tensile strength after hot-stamping. When Cr is added, its content is higher than or equal to 0.01%, preferably higher than or equal to 0.1%, up to 2.0%. If no voluntary addition of Cr is performed, the Cr content may be present as an impurity in a content as low as 0.001%.

20 When titanium is added, its content is preferably of at least 0.008%, up to 0.2%. When the Ti content is comprised between 0.008% and 0.2%, precipitation at very high temperature occurs in the form of TiN and then, at lower temperature, in the austenite in the form of fine TiC, resulting in hardening. Furthermore, when titanium is added in addition to boron, titanium prevents combination of boron with nitrogen, the nitrogen being combined with titanium. Hence, the titanium content is preferably higher than $3.42 \cdot N$, N being the N content by weight percent in the composition. However, the Ti content should preferably remain lower than or equal to 0.2%, preferably lower than or equal to 0.1%, still preferably of at most 0.05%, to avoid precipitation of coarse TiN precipitates. If no voluntary addition of Ti is performed, Ti is present as an impurity in a content of at least 0.001%.

30 Boron is added in a content of at least 0.0005%, up to 0.010%, to increase the quenchability of the steel. Preferably, the B content is of at most 0.004%.

In an embodiment, Ni may be added in a content of at most 2% and generally at least 0.25% and preferably up to 0.5% to reduce susceptibility to delayed fracture by concentrating on the surface of the part. If not added, Ni may be present as an impurity in a content which may be as low as 0.001%. Depending on the production route used, the Ni content as an impurity can be as high as 0.25% (e.g. when producing the steel with a high

ratio of recycled scrap steel) or as high as 0.1% (e.g. when using a lower level of steel scrap).

Up to 0.1% of niobium is optionally added to provide precipitation hardening and microstructure refinement such as the prior austenitic grain size. Nb further improves the ductility of the steel. When Nb is added, its content is preferably of at least 0.01%. The Nb content is preferably of at most 0.06% to avoid the formation of coarse (Ti,Nb)(C,N) precipitates.

Molybdenum may be added in a content of at most 0.65%. When Mo is added, its content is preferably of at least 0.05%. Mo is preferably added together with Nb and Ti, to form co-precipitates which are very stable at high temperatures. Mo may also be added to increase the toughness of the steel playing a role grain boundary strengthener in solid solution state. An optimal effect is obtained when the Mo content is comprised between 0.15% and 0.25%.

W may be added to increase the quenchability and the hardenability of the steel by forming tungsten carbides. When W is added, its content is higher than or equal to 0.001%, and lower than or equal to 0.30%.

Sulfur, phosphorus and nitrogen are generally present in the steel composition as impurities.

The nitrogen content is generally of at least 0.0005%. The N content is generally of at most 0.010%, preferably of at most 0.005%, to prevent precipitation of coarse TiN precipitates.

When in excessive amounts, sulfur and phosphorus reduce the ductility. Therefore, their contents are limited to 0.05% and 0.1% respectively.

In particular, the presence of S in the liquid steel can lead to the formation of MnS precipitates which are detrimental to the properties. Preferably, the S content is of at most 0.01%, better of at most 0.005%. Achieving a very low S content, i.e. lower than 0.0001%, is very costly, and without any benefit. Therefore, the S content is generally higher than or equal to 0.0001%.

Preferably, the phosphorus content is of at most 0.05%, still preferably of at most 0.02%. Achieving a very low P content, i.e. lower than 0.0001%, is very costly. Therefore, the P content is generally higher than or equal to 0.0001%.

The steel may undergo a treatment for globularization of sulfides performed with calcium, which has the effect of improving the bending angle, due to MnS globularization. Hence, the steel composition may comprise at least 0.0001% of Ca, up to 0.005%.

The remainder of the composition of the steel is iron and impurities resulting from the elaboration process. As detailed above, the impurities resulting from the elaboration

process may include 0.25% or less of Cu, 0.05% or less of Sn, 0.03% or less of As, 0.03% or less of Sb and/or 0.03% or less of Pb.

The composition of the steel may be selected depending on the desired mechanical properties, in particular in terms of strength and ductility.

In particular, when a tensile strength in the range of 950 to 1200 MPa is desired, together with a bending angle higher than 75° (measured according to the VDA 238-100 bending standard of July 2020), in the whole part or in at least one area of the part, the steel of the steel substrate or in the at least one area of the steel substrate preferably has a composition in accordance with a first preferred composition, comprising, by weight%:

$$0.062\% \leq C \leq 0.095\%$$

$$1.4\% \leq Mn \leq 1.9\%$$

$$0.2\% \leq Si \leq 0.5\%$$

$$0.020\% \leq Al \leq 0.070\%$$

$$0.02\% \leq Cr \leq 0.1\%$$

$$\text{With } 1.5\% \leq (C + Mn + Si + Cr) \leq 2.7\%$$

$$0.0035\% \leq Ti \leq 0.072\%$$

$$0.0002\% \leq B \leq 0.004\%$$

$$0.04\% \leq Nb \leq 0.06\%$$

$$\text{with } 0.044\% \leq (Nb + Ti) \leq 0.09\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq N \leq 0.009\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq S \leq 0.003\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.020\%$$

$$Ca \leq 0.005\%,$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

On the other hand, when a tensile strength of at least 1400 MPa, is required, the steel of the steel substrate or in at least one area of the steel substrate preferably has a composition in accordance with a second preferred composition comprising, by weight%:

$$0.15\% \leq C \leq 0.30\%$$

$$0.5\% \leq Mn \leq 3.0\%$$

$$0.10\% \leq Si \leq 0.50\%$$

$$0.005\% \leq Al \leq 0.1\%$$

$$0.01\% \leq Cr \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq Ti \leq 0.2\%$$

$$0.0002\% \leq B \leq 0.010\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq N \leq 0.010\%$$

10

$$0.0001\% \leq S \leq 0.05\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.1\%$$

$$Ca \leq 0.005\%$$

the remainder being Fe and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

5 If an even higher tensile strength is required, of 1800 MPa or higher, the composition is preferably according to a third preferred composition, comprising, by weight%:

$$0.3\% \leq C \leq 0.4\%$$

$$0.5\% \leq Mn \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.40\% \leq Si \leq 0.80\%$$

$$10 \quad 0.01\% \leq Al \leq 0.1\%$$

$$0.1\% \leq Cr \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.008\% \leq Ti \leq 0.03\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq B \leq 0.003\%$$

$$Ni \leq 0.5\%$$

$$15 \quad 0.01\% \leq Nb \leq 0.1\%$$

$$0.1\% \leq Mo \leq 0.5\%$$

$$N \leq 0.005\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq S \leq 0.004\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.02\%$$

$$20 \quad Ca \leq 0.0010\%$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

The steel substrate of the hot-stamped coated steel part generally has a microstructure consisting of, in volume fraction, at least 60% martensite, at most 20% bainite and at most 5% ferrite and at most 15% austenite.

The martensite fraction can be as high as 100%, and the bainite, ferrite and austenite fractions each as low as 0%.

This microstructure description applies to the majority of the steel substrate, which means that this microstructure is present in at least 95% of the volume of the steel substrate.

30 The microstructure is determined through the following method: a specimen is cut from the hot-stamped coated steel part, polished as detailed below, and etched with Nital 2% (10s), to reveal the microstructure. The section is afterwards examined through optical microscope with a 500x magnification and, if it is required to distinguish martensite from bainite, with a Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) (Back Scattered Electron mode, 35 Magnification 500x, EHT (Electron High Tension Voltage) = 15.00 kV, Scale 10

micrometers). The determination of the volume fraction of each constituent (martensite, bainite, ferrite, austenite) is performed with image analysis through a method known per se.

In an embodiment, the austenite fraction is of at most 5% by volume and/or the bainite fraction is of at most 10% by volume.

5 In an embodiment, the microstructure consists of, by volume, at least 80% martensite, up to 10% of bainite, up to 5% austenite and up to 5% ferrite.

In a preferred embodiment, the microstructure is essentially martensitic, i.e. consists of, by volume, at least 95% martensite and up to 5% of bainite and/or ferrite.

Still preferably, the microstructure is fully martensitic.

10 The hot-stamped coated steel part comprises an undeformed portion and at least one deformed portion.

In an embodiment, the hot-stamped coated steel part comprises two or more undeformed portions.

15 Indeed, upon stamping to produce the part, in particular hot-stamping, one or more portions of the blank is not deformed, whereas other portions are deformed to arrive at the final non-planar geometry of the part. The or each undeformed portion is a portion which has not been subjected to a deformation during hot-stamping, nor, if performed, during a previous cold predeformation of the blank.

20 By undeformed, it has to be understood that during the stamping process, the undeformed portion was subjected to an equivalent deformation ε_b of at most 0.01. The equivalent deformation is defined as $\varepsilon_b = \frac{2}{\sqrt{3}} \sqrt{(\varepsilon_1^2 + \varepsilon_1 \varepsilon_2 + \varepsilon_2^2)}$, wherein ε_1 and ε_2 are the principal deformations.

The or each undeformed portion is a flat portion of the part.

25 The or each undeformed portion is for example a flange of the part or a flat portion located between two deformed portions of the part. As an example, the part being hat-shaped, the flat portions may further include a flat top portion of the hat-shaped stamped part.

An example of such a part is illustrated schematically on Figure 1.

30 Figure 1 shows a hot-stamped coated steel part 1 which has been welded to a flat part 2 by a plurality of spot welds 3. The spot welds 3 are located, in this example, at the flanges 8 of the hot-stamped coated steel part 1.

35 The exemplary hot-stamped coated steel part 1 is a hat-shaped part (or "omega" shaped part) comprising a flat top portion 4, two first curved portions 5 (or radius) extending from two opposite longitudinal edges of the flat top portion 4, two side walls 6 each extending from the longitudinal edge of a first curved portion 6, two second curved portions

7 each extending outwards from the longitudinal edge of a side wall 6, and two flat flanges 8 each extending from the longitudinal edge of a second curved portion 7 to an outside edge of the part 1. The flanges 8 therefore form the edges of the part 1.

In this example, the flanges 8 and the flat top portion 4 are flat undeformed portions of the hot-stamped coated steel part 1.

The undeformed portions can be distinguished from deformed portions in their shape, and/or by observing the cracks in the coating of these portions.

Indeed, as detailed below, the coating of a deformed portions contain wide cracks which are not or seldom present in the coating of an undeformed portion.

Each undeformed portion, though it was not subjected to a deformation, has been subjected to the same thermal cycle as the deformed portion(s).

The hot-stamped coated steel part of the invention is distinct from a flat blank that would have been produced through austenitizing and quenching, without any deformation, not only in that it includes at least one deformed portion resulting from the hot-stamping, but also in that the whole hot-stamped coated steel part has been subjected to a thermal cycle, through hot-stamping, which is different from the thermal cycle experienced by undeformed sheets.

In particular, each undeformed portion, though it was not subjected to a deformation, has experienced the same thermal cycle as the deformed portion(s) in hot-stamping, during the heating, the transfer to the die and the holding in the die.

Thus, in the hot-stamped coated steel part, the or each deformed portion(s) was deformed during hot-stamping, and the or each undeformed portion(s), though not deformed, was subjected to the same thermal cycle as the deformed portion(s) during hot-stamping.

The hot-stamped coated steel part of the invention, obtained with an in-die hot stamping process, is also distinct from a sample that would have been produced by heating in an experimental furnace or any surface contact free technique, e.g. in a Gleeble machine, and uniaxially deformed within this furnace. Indeed, such a sample does not have an undeformed portion, and was subjected to a uniaxial deformation (tensile deformation), whereas in hot-stamping the deformation is not uniform through the part, and three dimensional. Additionally, the thermal cycle experienced by the hot-stamped coated steel part is different from the thermal cycle experienced in an experimental furnace which does not involve any transfer nor stamping in a die.

The or each flat undeformed portion(s) of the part is a portion having a uniform thickness e_{flat} from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 mm to 3.0 mm.

For example, if a flange consists of two regions with different thicknesses $e_{\text{flat}(1)}$ and $e_{\text{flat}(2)}$, each of these regions is a distinct undeformed portion.

If the hot-stamped coated steel part has a uniform thickness, the thickness of the flat undeformed portion (or each undeformed portion) equals the thickness e_P of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

If the hot-stamped coated steel part has a variable thickness and comprises two or more undeformed portions, the thicknesses of the undeformed portions, noted $e_{\text{flat}(i)}$, with $i=1\dots n$ being an index associated to the respective undeformed portions, n being the number of undeformed portions, may differ from each other, or may be the same.

The hot-stamped coated steel part comprises, on a least face of the steel substrate, a coating.

The coating is an aluminum alloy coating.

This coating comprises aluminium and iron, and preferably further includes silicon.

The coating results from the interdiffusion between an aluminium alloy pre-coating and the steel during the hot-stamping.

The coating comprises an interdiffusion layer, which is located on the innermost side of the coating, that is, is in contact with the steel substrate.

The interdiffusion layer generally has a Fe content of at least 80%, up to 95%, and an Al content of 4% to 20%, with up to 2% Si.

In an embodiment, the interdiffusion layer has a composition consisting of 86-95% Fe, 4-10% Al and 0-2% Si.

The coating further comprises an outer layer extending from the diffusion layer to the surface of the coating.

The outer layer generally comprises or consists of intermetallic compounds of Fe, Al and possibly Si.

The outer layer may consist of a single layer or may itself be composed of sub-layers of different intermetallic compounds.

For example, the outer layer consists of one to four sub-layers.

However, in the present invention, the inventors found that whatever the layers in the coating, in particular whatever their composition and numbers, the aim of the invention is achieved if the linear density of cracks respects the condition defined below.

In the hot-stamped coated steel part according to the invention, the total thickness of the coating e_{coating} and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer e_{IDL} satisfy the following condition:

$$16 \leq E_{\text{pc}} < 40$$

with

$$E_{pc} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{33.3 - e_{IDL}}{0.9} + e_{IDL} - e_{coating}\right)^2 - 148(e_{IDL} - e_{coating})} - \left(\frac{33.3 - e_{IDL}}{0.9} + e_{IDL} - e_{coating}\right)$$

If the value of E_{pc} is lower than 16, the coating may not protect enough the part for the intended uses, and if the value of E_{pc} is of 40 or more, the targeted excellent spot weldability and painting adhesion may not be guaranteed, as detailed below.

In the hot-stamped coated steel part according to the invention, the coating is such that, in at least one undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part, and provided that $16 \leq E_{pc} < 40$, the coating has a lineic density of cracks dC higher than or equal to a minimum lineic density of cracks $dC_{min}(e_{pflat})$ depending on the thickness e_{pflat} of the undeformed portion, and defined as:

$$dC_{min}(e_{pflat}) = 8 + 630 * e^{-3.772 - 1.15 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat} - 1.71))} - 638 * e^{-4.1 - 1.25 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat} - 1.71))}$$

In this expression, $dC_{min}(e_{pflat})$ is the minimum lineic density of cracks expressed in number of cracks per mm, and e_{pflat} designates the thickness of the undeformed portion in mm. The lineic density of cracks dC is as well a number of cracks per mm. "e" designates the exponential function.

Here "lineic density of cracks", designating a number of cracks per millimeter, is of course not a volumic density, but a lineic density in that it measures how many cracks are present in a cross-section of the coating over a given length in a direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate.

Indeed, the inventors conducted an intensive research to solve the problems of increasing the spot weldability and the painting adhesion, and surprisingly discovered that, contrary to the established belief that cracks would be detrimental to the properties of a hot-stamped coated steel part, if the lineic density of cracks exceeds a threshold, the spot weldability and the painting adhesion are together drastically increased.

The inventors also discovered that the relevant portion(s) of the part with respect to the lineic density of cracks is the undeformed portion(s), which though having been subjected to the same thermal cycle as the deformed portion, was not subjected to a deformation, either because it was located on the flange of the hot-stamped part, or because it is located in a flat zone between two deformed portions of the part (e.g. the flat top portion of a hat-shaped part as illustrated on Figure 1).

Indeed, in the deformed portions, the coating is subjected to deformations upon stamping, which, owing to the difference in dilatation between the substrate and the coating, and depending on the temperature of deformation and the applied deformation rate at each location, will result in cracks in the coating. However, the inventors found that having a high number of cracks in some deformed portions is not sufficient to ensure an excellent spot weldability and excellent painting adhesion, at least in that it does not guarantee such properties in other portions of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

Preferably, the undeformed portion is located in the flange of the part, which is the area the most likely to be subjected to spot welding, so that having an excellent spot weldability (as well as an excellent painting adhesion) in this portion is particularly desirable.

The inventors further discovered that the threshold for the lineic density of cracks is not an absolute value, but depends on the thickness of the undeformed portion, and that achieving the desired spot weldability and painting adhesion requires a higher lineic density of cracks as the thickness of the undeformed portion decreases.

As a result of these investigations, the inventors found that, provided that the coating of the part is such that $16 \leq E_{pc} < 40$, excellent spot weldability and painting adhesion are achieved when, in the undeformed portion, the lineic density of cracks in the coating is higher than or equal to dC_{min} .

Preferably, the lineic density of cracks in the coating remains of at most $4 \cdot dC_{min}$, preferably at most $3 \cdot dC_{min}$.

Preferably, the hot-stamped coated steel part comprising two or more undeformed portions, the lineic density of cracks $dC(i)$ in each undeformed portion is higher than or equal to the minimum lineic density of cracks, noted $dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i))$, associated to the thickness $e_{pflat}(i)$ of this undeformed portion.

Hence, the undeformed portions each having a thickness $e_{pflat}(i)$ from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, $i=1 \dots n$ being an index associated to the respective undeformed portions, $n \geq 2$ being the number of undeformed portions, a lineic density of cracks $dC(i)$ in the coating in each undeformed portion of thickness $e_{pflat}(i)$ is higher than or equal to $dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i))$ with:

$$dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i)) = 8 + 630 * e^{-3.772 - 1.15 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat}(i) - 1.71))} - 638 * e^{-4.1 - 1.25 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat}(i) - 1.71))}$$

wherein $dC(i)$ and $dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i))$ are expressed in numbers of cracks per mm, and $e_{pflat}(i)$ designates the thickness of the considered undeformed portion expressed in mm.

This formula is valid whether the undeformed portions all have the same thickness or different thicknesses.

The cracks in the coating extend from the surface of the coating in a direction substantially orthogonal to the surface of the steel substrate (i.e. the interface between the steel substrate and the coating), over a depth of at least 5 μm . The cracks have a width (in a direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate) lower than 2 μm .

Thus, the cracks are distinct from possible gaps in the coating, having a width of more than 2 μm , from cracks in deformed portions, which may also have a width of more than 2 μm , and from porosities or coating defects, which affect the coating over a depth lower than 5 μm .

Additionally, as mentioned above, in the undeformed portion, the cracks generally have a width of at most 1 μm . In particular, the average width of the largest cracks, the largest cracks being the cracks with a width larger than the width of 90% of the cracks in the coating, is lower than 1 μm . In other words, among the cracks observed, the 10% of cracks with the largest widths have an average crack width of less than 1 μm . The average width of the largest cracks here designates the average value computed from the widths of all the largest cracks.

By contrast, in a deformed portion, the coating comprises more cracks with a width larger than 1 μm , such that the average width of the cracks is generally larger than 1 μm . In any case, the or each deformed portion is such that the average width of the cracks having a width larger than the width of 90% of the cracks is larger than 1 μm .

Preferably, the coating in the undeformed portion does not comprise any gaps or cracks having a width of 2 μm or more.

The lineic density of cracks is determined as the ratio between the number of cracks observed in cross-sections of the undeformed portion with a bright field optical microscope over a total length of observation (in a direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate) of at least 5 mm, and this total length (i.e. the number of cracks divided by the total length).

Especially, the lineic density of cracks in the coating is determined by observing cross-sections of the coating of two samples taken from the undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part with a bright field microscope with a 500x magnification, over several fields of view, such that the total length of the fields of view (in a direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate) is of at least 5 mm. Then, the lineic density of cracks is determined as the ratio between the number of cracks observed and the total length of the field of view.

Indeed, the inventors have found that, to guarantee the targeted excellent spot weldability and excellent painting adhesion, having a lineic density of cracks of at least $dC_{\min}$ over only a small portion of the coating is not sufficient. They further found that to achieve

these properties, having a lineic density of cracks of at least $dC_{\min}$ measured over a length of at least 5 mm is necessary.

The average width of the largest cracks is determined by measuring the widths of all the cracks observed over the length of observation, identifying, from these measurements, the largest cracks and computing the average value of the widths of these largest cracks.

In details, the features of the coating described above are determined as follows.

First, samples are taken from the part and prepared.

To that end, the part is cut in the middle of its length to create suitable sized samples of 20x30 mm, in the undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

The cutting step is performed carefully with Hard Iron cutting wheels (for example Struers 60A25) or preferably a micro-cutting device to avoid excessive stress which may damage the samples.

The samples are then cleaned (preferably with ultrasonic bath) and dried with ethanol and compressed air.

The samples are then cold mounted with a resin. Cold mounting is chosen rather than hot mounting because the gap between the resin and the sample is very low or inexistent. This is important because gaps can be the cause of several preparation issues, such as etching problems, scratches, or coating damages. The resin is preferably a Liquid EpoFix® resin, mixed with Epofix Hardener®. The polymerization lasts 10 hours. Two protective metal sheets (guard plates) are provided on opposing sides of the samples in order to protect the coating from surface damage during polishing. Each time, two samples are mounted together so as to ensure that these two samples are then submitted to the same polishing.

The samples are then polished cautiously. The polishing step is an important step for assessing the features of the coating, as an incorrectly conducted polishing will introduce defects in the coating. These defects include incrustated diamond particles, damages in the coating such as coating flaking, and more importantly cracks in the coating, in particular longitudinal cracks. Longitudinal cracks, extending in a direction substantially parallel to the surface of the steel substrate, can reflect preparation problems and must be avoided during polishing to ensure reliable results when counting the number of cracks.

The polishing is divided in three main stages: disk polishing, diamond polishing and oxide polishing. The samples must be cleaned and dried after each polishing step to remove abrasive contamination and must be checked under optical microscope.

First, samples are polished with abrasive disk SiC paper P320 during 120s, using a rotational speed of 150RPM (revolution per minute) for the sample holder and 100RPM for

the disk, turning in the same direction. The force is applied at 15 N. Samples are cleaned by water.

Then, diamond polishing 9 μ m is used to remove material from the surface without introducing scratches or deformation. This step is important because it ensures the flatness of the polished surface. The rotational speed is the same as the previous step, but the sample rotation is opposite to the disk rotation. This stage is set to 300s and using a force of 20N. The polishing disk is damped by a lubricant at an optimal amount (0.5mL/30s) to guarantee a better material removal. Samples are cleaned by water.

The final step is an oxide polishing, using a colloidal silica solution (1mL/5s). This step lasts 90s, with a rotational speed of 150RPM for the sample holder and 60RPM for the disk, turning in the same direction. The applied force is 20 N. Samples are cleaned firstly by water, follow by ethanol.

The samples are then etched with Nital (2% for 5-10s) to reveal the steel microstructure and the steel/coating interface.

To determine the total thickness of the coating e_{coating} and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer e_{IDL} , a sample is imaged with a Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) (Back Scattered Electron mode, Magnification 500x, WD (Working distances) preferably of 10 mm, EHT (Electron High Tension Voltage) = 15.00 kV, Scale 10 micrometers) to show a cross-section of the coating as well as at least part of the base steel.

From the images, the interdiffusion layer can be identified as the light layer which is the closest to the steel substrate.

The total thickness of the coating (including the interdiffusion layer) and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer are measured at five spots spaced horizontally apart by 15 μ m.

The total thickness of the coating and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer are then computed as the averages of the values obtained. The total thickness of the coating e_{coating} and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer e_{IDL} are therefore average thicknesses.

Besides, the composition of the interdiffusion layer can be determined as follows.

The sample is observed with the Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) to show a cross-section of the coating as well as at least part of the base steel.

By Energy Dispersive Spectroscopy (EDS), at five different horizontal locations, two spots spaced vertically in the interdiffusion layer are considered, and the composition is determined at the ten spots.

The composition of the interdiffusion layer is then computed as the average of the values obtained.

If needed, the composition of the whole coating can be measured with EDS.

The determination of the lineic density of cracks in the coating of the undeformed portion is performed as follows.

Two samples mounted in the same resin are imaged with a bright field optical microscope (magnification 500x) to show a cross-section of the coating as well as at least part of the steel substrate, at several locations of the samples.

Then, for each sample, ten distinct and non overlapping fields of view are randomly selected and observed. Each field of view has a length (in the direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate) of at least 250 μm .

The total length of observation, being the total length of the fields of view (in the direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate) for the two samples, is therefore of 5 mm or more ($250 \mu\text{m} * 2 * 10$).

In each field of view, first, the absence of longitudinal cracks that would extend in a direction substantially parallel to the surface of the steel substrate, is verified. If longitudinal cracks are present, the field of view is disregarded and replaced, because the presence of such cracks implies that the preparation of the sample (cutting, polishing) was incorrectly performed at this location.

Then in each field of view, the cracks extending from the uppermost surface of the coating, substantially orthogonally to the surface of the steel substrate, in the direction of the steel substrate, are identified.

To distinguish cracks from possible gaps in the coating, only the cracks having a width of less than 2 μm are identified as cracks. Cracks with a width of 2 μm can be identified without difficulty with the magnification of 500x, but if required, the width of the cracks can be measured as detailed below. Additionally, to distinguish cracks from porosities or coating defects, the length of the cracks are measured, and only the cracks having a depth of at least 5 μm (in a direction substantially orthogonally to the surface of the steel substrate), are considered as cracks.

The number of cracks is counted in each field of view, and the total number of cracks in the observed twenty fields of view is computed.

The lineic density of cracks in the coating is then determined as the ratio between the total number of cracks and the total length of the fields of view for the two samples.

The determination of the average width of the largest cracks, or more generally of the width of any crack can be performed as follows.

The cross-sections used for assessing the lineic density of cracks are observed with a bright field microscope with a 500x magnification, using a camera with a resolution of 3072*2048 pixels, the images being displayed such that one pixel of the camera is displayed as one pixel on the image. The magnification in imaging is of 3020x.

The width of each of the cracks in all the fields of view is determined.

To that end, for each crack, the width is measured at three locations located at the center of the crack and at a distance of 2 μm on each side of the center. The average value of the three measurements is determined as the width of this crack.

5 The cracks with the largest widths, i.e. larger than the widths of 90% of the cracks in the coating, are then identified. These cracks are therefore the 10% of cracks having the largest widths. The average width of these cracks is then computed as the sum of their individual widths divided by their number.

10 If the number of cracks is such that 90% of the number of cracks is not an integer, the result of 90% by the number of cracks is rounded to the closest integer (For instance, 90% of 108 cracks is 97 cracks and 90% of 135 cracks is considered as 122 cracks).

The hot-stamped coated steel part according to the invention has a welding range, as measured according to the standard SEP 1220-2 (2011), of more than 1 kA, at least in the undeformed portion.

15 The hot-stamped coated steel part further has an excellent painting adhesion, in that, at least in the undeformed portion, when subjected to a dry painting adhesion, the dry painting adhesion is strictly lower than 1.

A method for producing the hot-stamped coated steel part according to the invention will now be disclosed.

20 The method comprises providing a steel blank having an average thickness generally of 0.6 to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 to 3.0 mm. This thickness is generally the same as the average thickness e_P of the hot-stamped coated steel part destined to be produced from the blank.

25 The blank comprises, on at least one face, an aluminium or an aluminum alloy pre-coating, the pre-coating having an average thickness comprised between 8.0 μm and 19.90 μm .

Preferably, the blank comprises an aluminium or an aluminum alloy pre-coating having an average thickness comprised between 8.0 μm and 19.90 μm on each of its two main faces.

30 This pre-coating can be aluminum or an aluminum alloy (comprising over 50% aluminum).

Advantageously the pre-coating is an aluminum-silicon alloy comprising by weight 7% to 15% silicon, 2% to 4% iron and optionally from 0.0015% to 0.0030% of calcium, the remainder being aluminum and inevitable impurities resulting from elaboration.

Preferably, the pre-coating comprises, by weight, from 8% to 11% Si, from 2% to 4% Fe, optionally from 0.0015% to 0.0030% of Ca, the remainder being Al and impurities resulting from the smelting.

The pre-coating is generally obtained by hot-dip coating in an Al or Al-alloy bath.

5 In an embodiment, the blank is a monolithic blank, i.e. a blank consisting of one single sub-blank obtained by cutting a pre-coated steel sheet.

The monolithic blank is for example a tailor rolled blank, i.e. a blank having a variable thickness obtained by differential rolling during the steel sheet production process.

10 In another embodiment, the blank is a tailor welded blank produced by assembling, in particular welding together, for example by laser welding, several blanks cut from different pre-coated steel sheets, known as sub-blanks.

In an embodiment, the blank has a uniform thickness from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 mm to 3.0 mm.

15 In another embodiment, the blank being a tailor rolled blank or a tailor welded blank, the blank has a variable thickness.

In this case, the blank is made of two or more regions having different thicknesses e_{Bi} each of 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 mm to 3.0 mm. Each region of the blank with a given thickness e_{Bi} corresponds to a region of thickness e_{Pi} of a final hot-stamped coated steel part.

20 In any case, the blank comprises a flat portion with a uniform thickness e_{Bflat} which is destined to become, after the hot-stamping process, an undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part. The thickness e_{Bflat} is also from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, preferably from 0.7 mm to 3.0 mm.

25 In other words, the thickness e_{Bflat} is the thickness of a portion of the blank transformed into the corresponding undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part upon hot-stamping.

The thickness e_{Bflat} of the portion of the blank equals the thickness e_{pflat} of the corresponding undeformed portion of the part.

30 In an embodiment, the blank comprises two or more portions each with a uniform thickness $e_{Bflat(i)}$ (with $i=1\dots n$, n being the number of such portions) which are destined to become, after the hot-stamping process, two or more undeformed portions of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

35 Each thickness $e_{Bflat(i)}$ is comprised between 0.6 mm and 3.5 mm, preferably between 0.7 mm and 3.0 mm. Additionally, each thickness $e_{Bflat(i)}$ is equal to the thickness $e_{Pflat(i)}$ of a corresponding undeformed portion of the part.

If the thickness of the blank is uniform, the thickness e_{Bflat} , or if applicable each thickness $e_{Bflat(i)}$, equals the thickness e_B of the blank.

The blank or, if the blank is a tailor welded blank, each sub-blank, is preferably made of a steel having a composition as disclosed above, in particular according to the first, second or third preferred composition. The sub-blanks may have the same steel composition, or different steel compositions.

The blank or each sub-blank is for example produced as follows.

A semi-product in the form of a slab, a thin slab or and ingot, able to be further hot-rolled, is provided, preferably with the steel composition described above. The thickness of this semi-product is typically comprised between 50 and 250 mm.

If needed, this semi-product is heated to a temperature generally comprised between 1100°C and 1300°C, then hot-rolled with a finish rolling temperature preferably comprised between 880 and 950°C so to obtain a hot-rolled steel sheet. The hot-rolled steel sheet is coiled at a temperature T_c lower than or equal to 750°C, and generally higher than or equal to the M_s temperature of the steel.

At this stage, the thickness of the hot-rolled steel sheet may be in the typical range of 1.5-4 mm. Depending on the thickness of the hot-rolled steel sheet and the desired thickness for the sheet, the steel sheet may be pickled in usual conditions and further cold rolled, or directly annealed with the process described below.

If the blank to be produced is a tailor rolled blank, the steel sheet can be produced by differential rolling (or continuous flexible rolling), i.e. by a process wherein the sheet thickness obtained after rolling is variable in the rolling direction, in relationship with the load which has been applied through the rollers to the sheet during the rolling process

After hot-rolling or cold-rolling, the steel sheet is annealed at a temperature typically comprised between A_{c1} and A_{c3} , generally between 700 and 850°C, in preparation for the coating, and, in case a cold-rolling was performed, to recrystallize the grains. The sheet is then hot-dipped in an Al or Al-alloy bath at a temperature generally of about 670-680°C, the exact temperature depending on the composition of the bath.

A preferred pre-coating is Al-Si which is obtained by hot-dipping the sheet in a bath comprising, by weight, from 7% to 15% of Si, from 2% to 4% of Fe, optionally from 0.0015% to 0.0030% of Ca, the remainder being Al and impurities resulting from the smelting.

Preferably, the bath comprises, by weight, from 8% to 11% Si, from 2% to 4% Fe, optionally from 0.0015% to 0.0030% of Ca, the remainder being Al and impurities resulting from the smelting.

The pre-coated steel sheet is thereafter cooled to room temperature.

The pre-coated steel sheet is cut to obtain a blank (or a sub-blank), whose geometry is related to the final geometry of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

If the blank from which the part is to be produced is a tailor welded blank, the sub-blanks thus produced as disclosed above are welded together

5 In an embodiment, the sub-blanks have the same compositions. In another embodiment, the composition of the sub-blanks differ. This is in particular the case if different mechanical properties are required at different locations of the final part. As an example, the composition of the steel in a first sub-blank is selected among the three preferred compositions above, and the composition of a second sub-blank is selected
10 among the two other preferred compositions, or within the same preferred composition as the first sub-blank but with a different specific composition.

In an embodiment, the sub-blanks have the same uniform thickness. In another embodiment, the sub-blanks have different thicknesses.

As an option, before the heating and hot-stamping steps in the die, the blank can be
15 cold formed so to obtain a predeformed blank. This cold predeformation makes it possible to reduce the amount of deformation in the next hot stamping step. In any event, the portion(s) of the blank destined to become, after the hot-stamping process, an undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part is not deformed during such a cold predeformation. Hence, this portion of the blank remains a flat portion. On the other hand,
20 the portions of the blank which are then subjected to a deformation in hot-stamping are only partly deformed during the cold predeformation. Consequently, it is ensured that the cold predeformation has no impact on the targeted coating properties.

Then, the blank (either flat or cold predeformed), is heated in a furnace to a temperature T_{heat} comprised between 850 and 970°C.

25 The heating comprises a first heating stage, wherein the temperature of the blank remains below the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating, and a second heating stage, wherein the temperature of the blank is higher than or equal to the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating, up to the heating temperature T_{heat} .

30 The heating means are not limited and can be radiation, conduction, induction, or resistance-based.

The time spent by the blank during each of these two stages can be adjusted by controlling the furnace, in particular by using a furnace with different sections each having independent settings, for instance in terms of power and temperature, so that the heating rate can be adjusted in each of these sections independently from each other. For example,
35 if a high heating rate is desired in the first heating stage, a first section of the furnace can be set to a high temperature and high power to ensure such a rapid heating. If a low heating

rate is then desired up to the final heating temperature T_{heat} , several sections can be used with slight increases in furnace temperature from a section to the other, to ensure a longer time above the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating. Or conversely, if a short heating time is desired from the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating and the heating temperature T_{heat} , a high temperature can be set in a section of the furnace, and the blank can be transferred to a section at the targeted heating temperature T_{heat} before this temperature is reached.

Besides, the skilled person knows how to determine the melting temperature of a pre-coating knowing its composition, for example using a ternary phase diagram.

The heated blank is then held at the heating temperature T_{heat} in order to get a fully austenitic structure in the steel.

Preferably, the total dwell time in the furnace, including the heating and the holding, is comprised between 1.5 min and 15 min.

The heated blank is then transferred to a die (or hot-stamping press). The transfer time is preferably of at most 15 s, still preferably of at most 10 s or at most 8 s.

The die is then closed to stamp the blank into a part, the temperature of the blank when the die is closed being noted T_{close} .

Preferably, the elapsed time between the transfer of the heated blank into the die and the closing of the die is of less than 8 s.

The heating and holding causes the interdiffusion of the pre-coating with the steel substrate. In particular, during the heating and holding, iron diffuses from the steel substrate towards the coating and aluminium diffuses from the coating to the steel substrate, this interdiffusion leading to the formation of the interdiffusion layer of the coating.

Additionally, depending on the composition of the pre-coating, one or more intermetallic phases can be created by interdiffusion above the interdiffusion layer (thus in the outer layer of the part) in the form of a solid solution.

According to the invention, the heating, the holding, the transfer, the closing of the die and the cooling in the die are controlled, as a function of the thickness e_{Bflat} of the flat portion of the blank transformed into the undeformed portion upon hot-stamping, in order to achieve a lineic density of cracks dC in the coating of the undeformed portion of the hot-stamped steel part higher than or equal to dC_{min} .

In particular, the inventors have found that the relevant factor for achieving the desired lineic density of cracks in the coating of the undeformed portion, i.e. a lineic density of cracks dC higher than or equal to dC_{min} , is not the time spent in the furnace, but the time t_M spent by the blank above the melting temperature of the pre-coating T_{melt} in the hot-stamping process, in combination with the temperature T_{close} of the blank when the die is closed.

This time t_M includes the heating in the second stage mentioned above (above T_{melt}), the holding time t_{heat} at the heating temperature T_{heat} , the transfer time and the time spent by the blank within the die (before and after stamping) until the formed blank reaches the temperature T_{melt} upon cooling.

This time t_M can be determined and controlled during the hot-stamping process by monitoring the temperature of the blank during the heating and adjusting the time spent above T_{melt} as detailed above, by controlling the holding time t_{heat} at the heating temperature T_{heat} , and by controlling the time spent by the blank during the transfer to the die and the cooling within the die down to T_{melt} .

The inventors have found that in order to obtain a lineic density of cracks of at least dC_{min} , the temperature T_{close} must be comprised between 720 and 820°C, and the time t_M spent above the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating must be comprised between a minimum time t_{Mmin} and a maximum time t_{Mmax} which depend on the thickness e_{Bflat} of the flat portion of the blank destined to become the undeformed portion, on the heating temperature T_{heat} and on the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating.

The minimum time t_{Mmin} and maximum time t_{Mmax} are defined as follows:

$$t_{Mmin} = \frac{5.9 * e_{Bflat} + 2.6}{\left(\frac{T_{heat} - T_{melt}}{1000}\right)^2}$$

and

$$t_{Mmax} = \frac{4.96 + 0.444 * e_{Bflat} + 2.71 * \arctan(9.52 * (e_{Bflat} - 1.71))}{\left(\frac{T_{heat} - T_{melt}}{1000}\right)^5}$$

In these expressions, t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} are expressed in seconds, T_{heat} designates the heating temperature of the blank in °C, T_{melt} designates the melting temperature of the pre-coating in °C and e_{Bflat} designates the thickness of the flat portion of the blank which is not deformed upon hot-stamping and thus destined to become the undeformed portion of the part, in mm.

Indeed, the inventors have found that satisfying these conditions allows achieving, after hot-stamping and cooling, a hot-stamped coated steel part such that the lineic density of cracks in the coating of the undeformed portion is higher than or equal to dC_{min} .

By contrast, when the time t_M does not satisfy the above relationship and/or the temperature T_{close} is above 820°C or below 720°C, the lineic density of cracks is insufficient, so that it is not possible to achieve at the same time an excellent spot weldability and an excellent painting adhesion.

In particular, below the minimum time t_{Mmin} , the lineic density of cracks is insufficient, and neither the painting adhesion nor the spot weldability is satisfactory.

On the other hand, above the maximum time t_{Mmax} , the lineic density of cracks is insufficient, and even if the painting adhesion may be enhanced by the higher time spent above the melting temperature, the spot weldability becomes too low.

Of course, given that both t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} depend on the heating temperature T_{heat} , not only the time t_M , but also the heating temperature T_{heat} can be adjusted so that the time t_M is comprised between t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} .

In an embodiment, the blank having a uniform thickness e_B , which is then equal to the thickness e_{Bflat} of the portion of the blank destined to become the undeformed portion of the part, t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} thus become:

$$t_{Mmin} = \frac{5.9 * e_B + 2.6}{\left(\frac{T_{heat} - T_{melt}}{1000}\right)^2}$$

and

$$t_{Mmax} = \frac{4.96 + 0.444 * e_B + 2.71 * \arctan(9.52 * (e_B - 1.71))}{\left(\frac{T_{heat} - T_{melt}}{1000}\right)^5}$$

If the blank has a variable thickness, preferably, and depending on the required properties, the time t_M may be adjusted so that it is comprised between the times $t_{Mmin}(e_{Bi})$ and $t_{Mmax}(e_{Bi})$ for additional portions/regions of the blank with thicknesses e_{Bi} .

In that case, the values of t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} can be calculated for each of the considered portion as a function of the thickness of this portion of the blank e_{Bi} . Then, the time t_M is selected between the maximal value of the computed minimum times t_{Mmin} and the minimal value of the computed maximum times t_{Mmax} :

$$\text{Max}[t_{Mmin}(e_{Bflat}), t_{Mmin}(e_{Bi}) \dots] \leq t_M \leq \text{Min}[t_{Mmax}(e_{Bflat}), t_{Mmax}(e_{Bi}) \dots]$$

The values of t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} being increasing functions of the thickness, this can be simplified as follows:

$$t_{Mmin}(\text{Max}(e_{Bflat}, e_{Bi} \dots)) \leq t_M \leq t_{Mmax}(\text{Min}(e_{Bflat}, e_{Bi} \dots))$$

In other words, if it is desired to ensure a lineic density of cracks above the minimum lineic density of cracks dC_{min} in two or portions of the part, produced from two or more portions of the blank with different thicknesses, the time t_M is then comprised between the minimum time t_{Mmin} defined for the thickest portion and the maximum time t_{Mmax} defined for the thinnest portion.

Preferably, if the hot-stamping is performed to create a hot-stamped coated steel part comprising two or more undeformed portions, by hot-stamping the blank such that two or more portions with thicknesses $e_{Bflat(i)}$ with $i=1 \dots n$, are not deformed, the time t_M is comprised between the minimum time t_{Mmin} required for the thickest portion and the maximum time t_{Mmax} required for the thinnest portion.

$$t_{Mmin}(\text{Max}(e_{Bflat(i)} \text{ with } i = 1 \dots n)) \leq t_M \leq t_{Mmax}(\text{Min}(e_{Bflat(i)} \text{ with } i = 1 \dots n))$$

In that case, it is ensured in all the considered flat portions of the blank corresponding to undeformed portions of the part are produced with a time t_M comprised between the minimum and maximum times t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} corresponding to their actual thicknesses $e_{Bflat(i)}$.

5 Still preferably, the blank having a minimum thickness e_{Bmin} and a maximum thickness e_{Bmax} , the time t_M is comprised between the minimum time t_{Mmin} required for the maximum thickness e_{Bmax} and the maximum time t_{Mmax} required for the minimum thickness e_{Bmin} :

$$t_{Mmin}(e_{Bmax}) \leq t_M \leq t_{Mmax}(e_{Bmin})$$

10 In that case, it is ensured that all the regions of the blank are hot-stamped with a time t_M comprised between the minimum and maximum times t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} corresponding to their actual thicknesses.

Preferably, the temperature T_{close} of the blank when the die is closed is of at least 740°C.

In an embodiment, the temperature T_{close} is of at most 800°C.

15 Especially, a temperature T_{close} of at most 800°C allows achieving a lineic density of cracks of at most $4 \cdot dC_{min}$, reducing the risks of powdering.

The heated blank is hot-stamped and die-quenched in the die.

In hot-stamping, as detailed above, one or more portion of the blank is not subjected to a deformation and at least one portion is deformed through hot-stamping.

20 The portion of the blank not subjected to a deformation becomes the undeformed portion of the hot-stamped coated steel part obtained by the process.

The portion(s) of the blank subjected to a deformation create the deformed portion(s) of the hot-stamped coated steel part.

25 The modes and quantities of deformation in the deformed portions differ from one place to another because of the geometry of the final part and of the forming tools. For example, some zones may be in expansion, while others are deformed in restraint. Whatever the deformation mode, as outlined above, an equivalent deformation ε_b can be

defined at each location in the press hardened part, as $\varepsilon_b = \frac{2}{\sqrt{3}} \sqrt{(\varepsilon_1^2 + \varepsilon_1 \varepsilon_2 + \varepsilon_2^2)}$, wherein

30 ε_1 and ε_2 are the principal deformations. Thus, ε_b expresses the amount of strain introduced by the hot stamping process in each zone of the deformed portions.

In the undeformed portion(s), the equivalent deformation ε_b is of at most 0.01.

The hot-stamped blank is then kept within the dies so as to ensure a proper cooling rate and to avoid part distortion due to shrinkage and phase transformations.

The hot-stamped blank is mainly cooled by conduction through heat transfer with the die. The die may include coolant circulation so as to increase the cooling rate, or heating cartridges so as to lower cooling rates. Thus, the cooling rates can be adjusted through the implementation of such means.

5 The hot-stamped blank is cooled to a temperature lower than 400°C.

The cooling rate applied depends on the composition of the steel and on the desired structure and mechanical properties.

10 The average cooling rate from the temperature T_{heat} to 400°C (including the cooling during the transfer and the cooling in the die) is generally of at least 27°C/s, preferably of at least 50°C/s, and generally lower than 200°C/s.

Preferably, the blank is cooled within the die, from the temperature of the blank when the die is closed to 400°C, with an average cooling rate of at least 30°C/s, still preferably of at least 50°C/s.

15 For instance, if the steel has a composition in accordance with the first preferred composition above, the hot-stamped blank is preferably first cooled in a temperature range between 750 and 450°C, at a first average cooling rate comprised between 40 and 360°C/s. Within this range, a transformation of austenite into martensite and possibly bainite occurs. In a further step, the hot-stamped blank is cooled in a temperature range comprised 450°C and 250°C, at an average cooling rate between 15 to 150°C/s, slower than the first cooling rate.

If the steel has a composition in accordance with the second preferred composition, the hot-stamped blank is preferably cooled within the die with an average cooling rate of at least 30°C/s from the exit of the furnace to a temperature below 400°C, to achieve a structure consisting essentially of martensite.

25 If the steel has a composition in accordance with the third preferred composition, the hot-stamped blank is preferably cooled within the die to obtain a structure consisting of martensite or consisting of martensite and bainite.

30 In any case, the hot-stamped blank are cooled to a temperature lower than 400°C within the die and then cooled to room temperature, to obtain a hot-stamped coated steel part.

EXAMPLES

35 Steels with compositions according to Table 1, expressed in weight percent, have been provided under the form of blanks cut from pre-coated steel sheets with uniform thicknesses e_B of 1.8 mm or 1.2 mm.

The blanks were pre-coated on both sides with an Al-Si pre-coating, with a composition comprising 8% to 11% Si, 2% to 4% Fe, the remainder being Al and impurities resulting from the smelting. The pre-coatings all had a melting temperature T_{melt} of 577°C.

The pre-coating thickness was adjusted to the range of 8.0 to 19.90 μm in the case of Steel A, and in the range of 19.91 to 40 μm in the case of Steel B, as a comparison.

Steel	C (%)	Mn (%)	Si (%)	Al (%)	Mo (%)	Ti (%)	Nb (%)	Cr (%)	Ni (%)	N (%)	B (%)	S (%)	P (%)	Cu (%)
A	0.225	1.13	0.23	0.04	0.002	0.036	0.001	0.18	0.01	0.006	0.0028	0.0018	0.013	0.010
B	0.223	1.18	0.26	0.03	0.002	0.038	0.001	0.19	0.01	0.006	0.0029	0.0011	0.013	0.009

Table 1

The remainder of the compositions is iron and unavoidable impurities (the unavoidable impurities including Cu whose content is reported above).

These pre-coated steel sheets have been cut into blanks.

The blanks were then heated in a furnace at a temperature T_{heat} , maintained at T_{heat} and then transferred in a die within 8 s.

The blanks were then hot-stamped within the die so as to create a part having deformed portions and a flat undeformed portion. In each case, the die was closed when the temperature T_{close} of the blank was of 750°C.

The hot-stamped blanks were then cooled in the die to a temperature lower than 400°C, then extracted from the die and cooled to room temperature to obtain hot-stamped coated steel parts.

The heating, holding, transfer, and cooling in the die were adjusted to arrive at varying times t_M above the melting temperature of the pre-coating T_{melt} .

For each example, the time t_M spent by the blank above the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating is reported in Table 2, and compared with the minimum and maximum times $t_{M\text{min}}$ and $t_{M\text{max}}$.

The minimum and maximum times $t_{M\text{min}}$ and $t_{M\text{max}}$ were computed with the above equations from the thickness e_B of the blank, which equals the thickness of the portion of the blank from which the undeformed portion results.

Ex.	Steel	Pre-coating thickness (μm)	e_B (mm)	T_{heat} ($^{\circ}\text{C}$)	$t_{M\text{min}}$ (s)	t_M (s)	$t_{M\text{max}}$ (s)
1	A	12.2	1.8	880	144	157	3007
2				900	127	337	2184
3				950	95	<u>1717</u>	1064
4	B	<u>30.2</u>	1.2	880	105	184	699

Table 2

The hot-stamped blanks were then cooled within the die to a temperature lower than 400°C to achieve hot-stamped coated steel parts having a martensitic structure.

The hot-stamped coated steel parts have a uniform thickness e_P equal to the thickness e_B of the blank from which these parts were produced (and such that $e_P = e_{P\text{flat}}$)

Samples were taken from an undeformed portion of each part, and prepared as described above.

The total thickness of the coating e_{coating} and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer e_{IDL} were determined using the protocol disclosed above, as well as the lineic density of cracks in the coating.

The lineic density of cracks in the coating of the undeformed portion was in each case determined by observing, for each of two samples, ten fields of view, with a total length of observations for the two samples of 5.29 mm.

The value of E_{pc} determined according to the above formula, from the measured total thickness of the coating e_{coating} and thickness of the interdiffusion layer e_{IDL} , are reported in Table 3 below.

The lineic density of cracks dC is also reported in Table 3, together with the minimal lineic density of cracks dC_{min} .

The painting adhesion was assessed as follows for each part.

A sample was taken from the undeformed portion of each part.

The samples were first degreased, then cleaned with Gardoclean®5176 and a surfactant at 55°C for 6 min. A refining was performed with Gardolene® ZL6.

A phosphating step was realized by dipping the samples into a bath comprising a solution of Gardobond® R24 TA and additives during 3 minutes at 50° C.

An e-coating layer of 20 μm was then deposited by dipping the samples into a bath comprising an aqueous solution comprising Pigment Paste® W9712-N6 and Resin Blend® W7911-N6 of PPG Industries, and applying a nominal voltage with a voltage ramp-up

duration of 30s, for a total duration of 180 seconds, at 30° C. Then, the samples were wiped and cured in an oven at 175° C for 30 min.

The dry painting adhesion test was then performed on a first set of samples, by cross hatching the e-coating layer with a cutter (1 mm spaced scratches), ripping the e-coating layer with an adhesive tape (with 460 N/m) and assessing the amount of removed e-coating with naked eye in accordance with ISO 2409:2013: 0 means excellent, in other words, there was a little or no paint removed and 5 means very bad, in other words, a high amount of paint (> 65%) was removed.

Additionally, the spot weldability was assessed by determining the welding range for each of the samples according to the standard SEP 1220-2 (2011).

For example 4, having a thickness of 1.2 mm, the following parameters were used:

- Electrode: F1-16-20-5.5
- Welding force: 4 kN
- Welding current: Mid frequency direct current
- Welding time: 1 pulse of 320 ms
- Holding time: 200 ms

For examples 1 to 3, having a thickness of 1.8 mm, the following parameters were used:

- Electrode: F1-20-20-8
- Welding force: 5 kN
- Welding current: Mid frequency direct current
- Welding time: 3 pulses of 200 ms (pause time 40 ms)
- Holding time: 300 ms

The dry painting adhesion and welding ranges thus assessed are reported in Table 3.

Ex.	E_{pc}	e_p (mm)	dC_{min} (/mm)	dC (/mm)	Dry painting adhesion	Welding range
1	23.7	1.8	10.8	17.8	0	> 1kA
2	25.0	1.8	10.8	25.5	0.5	> 1kA
3	18.7	1.8	10.8	<u>0</u>	0	<u>≤ 1 kA</u>
4	<u>58.5</u>	1.2	17.7	<u>14.2</u>	<u>1</u>	> 1kA

Table 3

Referring to Tables 2 and 3, examples 1 and 2 were produced with a method according to the invention, and have a value of E_{pc} from 16 to less than 40, and a lineic density of cracks higher than or equal to the minimal lineic density of cracks dC_{min} .

Figure 2 illustrates the coating of example 2 in cross-section, as seen in one of the fields of view observed to assess the lineic density of cracks. In this image, which was contrasted only for illustration purposes, several cracks extending from the surface of the coating towards the steel substrate are observed.

Of course, as noted above, the lineic density of cracks for example 2 was not determined based on this single field of view, but rather by observing 20 fields of view to make sure that the lineic density of cracks over a sufficient length of observation is of dC_{min} (i.e. 10.8 cracks/mm) or more.

In the examples of the invention it was observed that the cracks are generally uniformly distributed in the coating of the flat undeformed portion, which was not the case for comparative example 4 discussed below.

It was further confirmed that in the undeformed portion, the average value of the widths of the widest cracks (i.e. the cracks having a width higher than 90% of the population of the cracks) was of less than 1 μm . Additionally, in examples 1 and 2, no crack or gap with a width of 2 μm or more was observed.

By contrast, Figure 3 illustrates the coating in an undeformed portion of a part not in accordance with the invention, having only a few number of cracks.

These examples 1 and 2 consequently have an excellent dry painting adhesion, in each case lower than 1 and in fact of 0, meaning that during the tests, no or little paint was removed, together with an excellent spot weldability, the welding range being broader than 1 kA.

Thus, examples 1 and 2 demonstrate that the hot-stamped coated steel parts according to the invention, having a lineic density of cracks higher than or equal to dC_{min} , achieve excellent painting adhesion and spot weldability.

By contrast, comparative example 3 was produced with a too long time t_M above the melting temperature of the pre-coating. This example consequently has a lineic density of cracks lower than dC_{min} . As a consequence, example 3 does not have satisfactory spot weldability, the welding range being well below 1 kA.

Example 4 was produced from a pre-coated steel sheet with a pre-coating thickness of more than 19.90 μm . Hence, though the time t_M was comprised between T_{Mmin} and T_{Mmax} in hot-stamping, example 4 has a value of E_{pc} above 40, and has a lineic density of cracks lower than dC_{min} . Indeed, the values of T_{Mmin} and T_{Mmax} are closely related to the thickness of the pre-coating, so that having a time t_M comprised between T_{Mmin} and T_{Mmax} is not

sufficient to achieve the targeted lineic density of cracks is the pre-coating thickness is not comprised between 8.0 and 19.90 μm .

As a result, example 4 does not have a satisfactory painting adhesion.

5 The examples thus confirm that provided that E_{pc} is from 16 to less than 40 and the undeformed portion of the part is such that its coating has a lineic density of cracks higher than or equal to dC_{min} , an excellent spot weldability and an excellent painting adhesion are achieved at least in this portion.

10 Additionally, the examples demonstrate that by adjusting the process so that the temperature T_{close} and the time spent by the blank above the melting temperature of the coating is properly controlled, the desired sufficient lineic density of cracks and consequently, the desired properties can be achieved.

Thus, the steel parts manufactured according to the invention can be used with profit for the manufacture of chassis or body-in-white parts or suspension arms for automobile vehicles.

CLAIMS

1. A hot-stamped coated steel part comprising a steel substrate and an aluminum alloy coating on at least one face of the steel substrate, the coating comprising, proceeding from steel substrate outwards, an interdiffusion layer and an outer layer, wherein the total thickness of the coating e_{coating} and the thickness of the interdiffusion layer e_{IDL} satisfy the following condition:

$$16 \leq E_{\text{pc}} < 40$$

with

$$E_{\text{pc}} = \sqrt{\left(\frac{33.3 - e_{\text{IDL}}}{0.9} + e_{\text{IDL}} - e_{\text{coating}}\right)^2 - 148(e_{\text{IDL}} - e_{\text{coating}})} - \left(\frac{33.3 - e_{\text{IDL}}}{0.9} + e_{\text{IDL}} - e_{\text{coating}}\right)$$

e_{IDL} designating the thickness of the interdiffusion layer in mm, and e_{coating} designating the total thickness of the coating in mm,

and wherein, the hot-stamped coated steel part comprising an undeformed portion having a thickness e_{Pflat} from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, and at least one deformed portion, a lineic density of cracks dC in the coating in the undeformed portion is higher than or equal to a minimum lineic density of cracks $dC_{\text{min}}(e_{\text{Pflat}})$ defined as:

$$dC_{\text{min}}(e_{\text{Pflat}}) = 8 + 630 * e^{-3.772 - 1.15 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{\text{Pflat}} - 1.71))} - 638 * e^{-4.1 - 1.25 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{\text{Pflat}} - 1.71))}$$

wherein dC and $dC_{\text{min}}(e_{\text{Pflat}})$ are expressed in numbers of cracks per mm, and e_{Pflat} designates the thickness of the undeformed portion in mm.

2. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to claim 1, wherein the lineic density of cracks dC in the coating in the undeformed portion is lower than or equal to $4 * dC_{\text{min}}(e_{\text{Pflat}})$.
3. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 or 2, wherein the hot-stamped coated steel part has a uniform thickness e_{P} comprised between 0.6 mm and 3.5 mm.
4. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 or 2, wherein the hot-stamped coated steel part has a variable thickness, the hot-stamped coated steel part consisting of two or more regions with distinct thicknesses e_{Pi}

each comprised between 0.6 mm and 3.5 mm, the hot-stamped coated steel part having an average thickness e_P comprised between 0.6 mm and 3.5 mm.

5. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the hot-stamped coated steel part comprising two or more undeformed portions each having a thickness $e_{pflat}(i)$ from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, a lineic density of cracks $dC(i)$ in the coating in each undeformed portion is higher than or equal to $dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i))$ with:

$$dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i)) = 8 + 630 * e^{-3.772 - 1.15 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat}(i) - 1.71))} - 638 * e^{-4.1 - 1.25 * \arctan(4.16 * (e_{pflat}(i) - 1.71))}$$

wherein $e_{pflat}(i)$ designates the thickness of the considered undeformed portion expressed in mm, with $i=1 \dots n$, $n \geq 2$, and $dC(i)$ and $dC_{min}(e_{pflat}(i))$ are expressed in numbers of cracks per mm and designate respectively the lineic density of cracks and the minimum lineic density of cracks in the coating of the considered undeformed portion of thickness $e_{pflat}(i)$.

6. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 to 5, wherein in cross-section, the cracks in the coating of the undeformed portion extend from an uppermost surface of the coating towards the steel substrate, in a direction substantially orthogonal to the surface of the steel substrate, over a depth of at least 5 μm , the cracks each having a width lower than 2 μm in a direction substantially parallel to the surface of the steel substrate.

7. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the lineic density of cracks is determined as a ratio between a total number of cracks observed in several cross-sections of the undeformed portion with a bright field optical microscope, over a total length of observation of at least 5 mm in a direction parallel to the surface of the steel substrate, and the total length of observation.

8. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 to 7, wherein the hot-stamped coated steel part is a monolithic part, or a hot-stamped welded part consisting of at least two hot-stamped coated sub-parts and at least one hot-stamped weld joining together the hot-stamped coated sub-parts.

9. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to claim 8, wherein the hot-stamped coated steel part or each hot-stamped coated sub-part has a structure consisting of, by volume, at least 60% martensite, at most 20% bainite, at most 5% ferrite and at most 15% austenite.

5

10. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 8 or 9, wherein the steel in the hot-stamped coated steel part or in each hot-stamped coated sub-part has a chemical composition comprising, by weight%:

$$0.062\% \leq C \leq 0.4\%$$

10

$$0.4\% \leq Mn \leq 3.9\%$$

$$0.10\% \leq Si \leq 1.5\%$$

$$0.005\% \leq Al \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq Cr \leq 2.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq Ti \leq 0.2\%$$

15

$$0.0005\% \leq B \leq 0.010\%$$

$$Ni \leq 2\%$$

$$Nb \leq 0.1\%$$

$$Mo \leq 0.65\%$$

$$W \leq 0.30\%$$

20

$$N \leq 0.010\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq S \leq 0.05\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.1\%$$

$$Ca \leq 0.005\%$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

25

11. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to claim 10, wherein the steel in the hot-stamped coated steel part or in at least one hot-stamped coated sub-part has a chemical composition comprising, by weight%:

30

$$0.062\% \leq C \leq 0.095\%$$

$$1.4\% \leq Mn \leq 1.9\%$$

$$0.2\% \leq Si \leq 0.5\%$$

$$0.020\% \leq Al \leq 0.070\%$$

$$0.02\% \leq Cr \leq 0.1\%$$

35

$$\text{With } 1.5\% \leq (C + Mn + Si + Cr) \leq 2.7\%$$

$$0.0035\% \leq Ti \leq 0.072\%$$

37

$$0.0002\% \leq B \leq 0.004\%$$

$$0.04\% \leq Nb \leq 0.06\%$$

$$\text{with } 0.044\% \leq (Nb+Ti) \leq 0.09\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq N \leq 0.009\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq S \leq 0.003\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.020\%$$

$$Ca \leq 0.005\%,$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

12. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to claim 10, wherein the steel in the hot-stamped coated steel part or in at least one hot-stamped coated sub-part has a chemical composition comprising, by weight%:

$$0.15\% \leq C \leq 0.30\%$$

$$0.5\% \leq Mn \leq 3.0\%$$

$$0.10\% \leq Si \leq 0.50\%$$

$$0.005\% \leq Al \leq 0.1\%$$

$$0.01\% \leq Cr \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq Ti \leq 0.2\%$$

$$0.0002\% \leq B \leq 0.010\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq N \leq 0.010\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq S \leq 0.05\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq P \leq 0.1\%$$

$$Ca \leq 0.005\%$$

the remainder being Fe and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

13. The hot-stamped coated steel part according to claim 10, wherein the steel in the hot-stamped coated steel part or in at least one hot-stamped coated sub-part has a chemical composition comprising, by weight%:

$$0.3\% \leq C \leq 0.4\%$$

$$0.5\% \leq Mn \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.40\% \leq Si \leq 0.80\%$$

$$0.01\% \leq Al \leq 0.1\%$$

$$0.1\% \leq Cr \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.008\% \leq Ti \leq 0.03\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq B \leq 0.003\%$$

38

$$\text{Ni} \leq 0.5\%$$

$$0.01\% \leq \text{Nb} \leq 0.1\%$$

$$0.1\% \leq \text{Mo} \leq 0.5\%$$

$$\text{N} \leq 0.005\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq \text{S} \leq 0.004\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq \text{P} \leq 0.02\%$$

$$\text{Ca} \leq 0.0010\%$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

10

14. A method for producing a hot-stamped coated steel part, comprising the successive steps of:

- providing a steel blank having an average thickness e_B from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm, the steel blank comprising, on at least one face, an aluminum or aluminum alloy pre-coating, the pre-coating having an average thickness comprised between 8.0 μm and 19.90 μm ,
- heating the steel blank in a furnace to a heating temperature T_{heat} comprised between 850°C and 970°C and holding the steel blank at the heating temperature T_{heat} in order to get a fully austenitic structure in the steel of the blank,
- transferring the heated blank to a die, then closing the die,
- hot-stamping the blank in the die, such that a flat portion of the blank having a thickness $e_{B\text{flat}}$ from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm is not subjected to a deformation, and at least one portion of the blank is deformed through hot-stamping, to thereby obtain a hot-stamped blank comprising an undeformed portion and at least one deformed portion,
- cooling the hot-stamped blank to a temperature less than 400°C to obtain a hot-stamped coated steel part,

wherein the temperature T_{close} of the blank when the die is closed is comprised between 720°C and 820°C, and the time t_M spent by the blank above the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating upon heating, holding, transfer and hot-stamping, is comprised between a minimum time $t_{M\text{min}}$ and a maximum time $t_{M\text{max}}$, wherein:

$$t_{M\text{min}}(e_{B\text{flat}}) = \frac{5.9 * e_{B\text{flat}} + 2.6}{\left(\frac{T_{\text{heat}} - T_{\text{melt}}}{1000}\right)^2}$$

30

and
$$t_{Mmax}(e_{Bflat}) = \frac{4.96 + 0.444 * e_{Bflat} + 2.71 * \arctan(9.52 * (e_{Bflat} - 1.71))}{\left(\frac{T_{heat} - T_{melt}}{1000}\right)^5}$$

in which t_{Mmin} and t_{Mmax} are expressed in seconds, T_{heat} designates the heating temperature of the blank in °C, T_{melt} designates the melting temperature of the pre-coating in °C and e_{Bflat} designates the thickness of the portion of the blank not subjected to a deformation, in mm.

15. The method according to claim 14, wherein the pre-coating is an aluminum-alloy pre-coating comprising, by weight, 7% to 15% silicon, 2% to 4% iron and optionally from 0.0015% to 0.0030% of calcium, the remainder being aluminum and unavoidable impurities.

16. The method according to claim 15, wherein the pre-coating is an aluminum-alloy pre-coating comprising, by weight, from 8% to 11% silicon, from 2% to 4% iron, optionally from 0.0015% to 0.0030% of calcium, the remainder being aluminum and unavoidable impurities.

17. The method according to any one of claims 14 to 16, wherein in hot-stamping the blank in the die, two or more flat portions of the blank each having a thickness $e_{Bflat(i)}$ of from 0.6 mm to 3.5 mm are not subjected to a deformation, and the time t_M spent by the blank above the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating is comprised between the minimum time $t_{Mmin}(\text{Max}(e_{Bflat(i)}))$ required for the flat portion with the highest thickness and the maximum time $t_{Mmax}(\text{Min}(e_{Bflat(i)}))$ required for the flat portion with the lowest thickness.

18. The method according to any one of claims 14 to 17, wherein, the blank having a variable thickness ranging from a minimum thickness e_{Bmin} to a maximum thickness e_{Bmax} in hot-stamping the blank in the die, the time t_M spent by the blank above the melting temperature T_{melt} of the pre-coating is comprised between the minimum time $t_{Mmin}(e_{Bmax})$ required for the maximum thickness e_{Bmax} and the maximum time $t_{Mmax}(e_{Bmin})$ required for the minimum thickness e_{Bmin} .

19. The method according to any one of claims 14 to 18, wherein the steel blank is a monolithic blank, a tailor rolled blank or a tailor welded blank produced by welding together at least two sub-blanks.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein the blank or each sub-blank is produced by cutting a pre-coated steel sheet having a chemical composition comprising, by weight%:

$$0.062\% \leq C \leq 0.4\%$$

$$0.4\% \leq \text{Mn} \leq 3.9\%$$

$$0.10\% \leq \text{Si} \leq 1.5\%$$

$$0.005\% \leq \text{Al} \leq 1.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq \text{Cr} \leq 2.0\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq \text{Ti} \leq 0.2\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq \text{B} \leq 0.010\%$$

$$\text{Ni} \leq 2\%$$

$$\text{Nb} \leq 0.1\%$$

$$\text{Mo} \leq 0.65\%$$

$$\text{W} \leq 0.30\%$$

$$\text{N} \leq 0.010\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq \text{S} \leq 0.05\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq \text{P} \leq 0.1\%$$

$$\text{Ca} \leq 0.005\%$$

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

21. The method according to claim 20, wherein the chemical composition of the blank or at least one sub-blank comprises, by weight%:

$$0.062\% \leq C \leq 0.095\%$$

$$1.4\% \leq \text{Mn} \leq 1.9\%$$

$$0.2\% \leq \text{Si} \leq 0.5\%$$

$$0.020\% \leq \text{Al} \leq 0.070\%$$

$$0.02\% \leq \text{Cr} \leq 0.1\%$$

$$\text{With } 1.5\% \leq (\text{C} + \text{Mn} + \text{Si} + \text{Cr}) \leq 2.7\%$$

$$0.0035\% \leq \text{Ti} \leq 0.072\%$$

$$0.0002\% \leq \text{B} \leq 0.004\%$$

$$0.04\% \leq \text{Nb} \leq 0.06\%$$

$$\text{with } 0.044\% \leq (\text{Nb} + \text{Ti}) \leq 0.09\%$$

$$0.001\% \leq \text{N} \leq 0.009\%$$

$$0.0005\% \leq \text{S} \leq 0.003\%$$

$$0.0001\% \leq \text{P} \leq 0.020\%$$

41

 $\text{Ca} \leq 0.005\%$,

the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

5 22. The method according to claim 20, wherein the chemical composition of the blank or at least one sub-blank comprises, by weight%:

 $0.15\% \leq \text{C} \leq 0.30\%$ $0.5\% \leq \text{Mn} \leq 3.0\%$ $0.10\% \leq \text{Si} \leq 0.50\%$

10 $0.005\% \leq \text{Al} \leq 0.1\%$

 $0.01\% \leq \text{Cr} \leq 1.0\%$ $0.001\% \leq \text{Ti} \leq 0.2\%$ $0.0002\% \leq \text{B} \leq 0.010\%$ $0.0005\% \leq \text{N} \leq 0.010\%$

15 $0.0001\% \leq \text{S} \leq 0.05\%$

 $0.0001\% \leq \text{P} \leq 0.1\%$ $\text{Ca} \leq 0.005\%$

the remainder being Fe and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

20 23. The method according to claim 20, wherein the chemical composition of the blank or at least one sub-blank comprises, by weight%:

 $0.3\% \leq \text{C} \leq 0.4\%$ $0.5\% \leq \text{Mn} \leq 1.0\%$ $0.40\% \leq \text{Si} \leq 0.80\%$

25 $0.01\% \leq \text{Al} \leq 0.1\%$

 $0.1\% \leq \text{Cr} \leq 1.0\%$ $0.008\% \leq \text{Ti} \leq 0.03\%$ $0.0005\% \leq \text{B} \leq 0.003\%$ $\text{Ni} \leq 0.5\%$

30 $0.01\% \leq \text{Nb} \leq 0.1\%$

 $0.1\% \leq \text{Mo} \leq 0.5\%$ $\text{N} \leq 0.005\%$ $0.0001\% \leq \text{S} \leq 0.004\%$ $0.0001\% \leq \text{P} \leq 0.02\%$

35 $\text{Ca} \leq 0.0010\%$

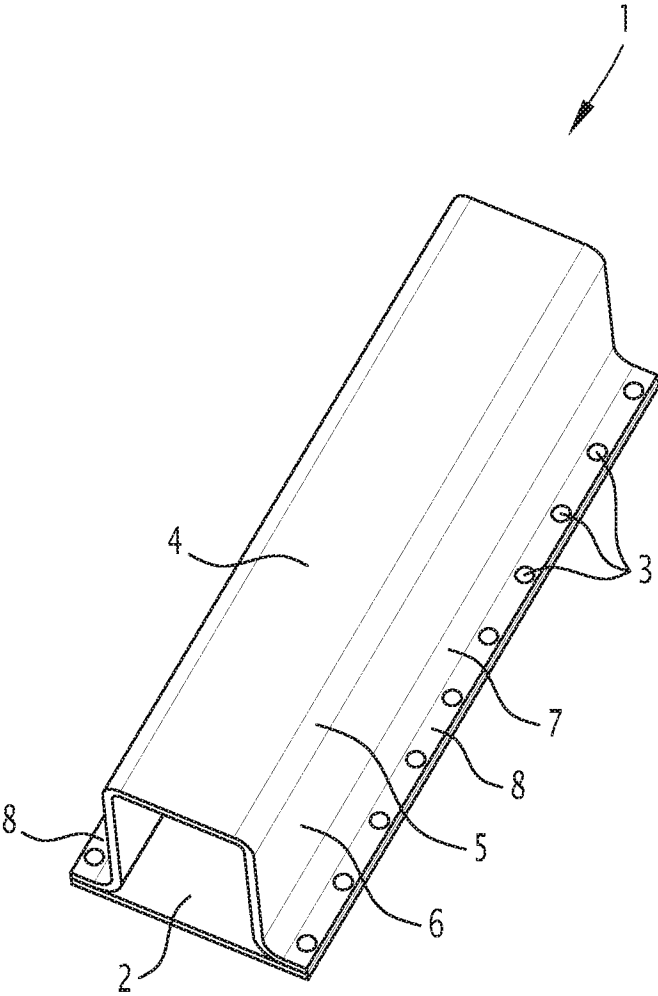
the balance of the composition consisting of iron and unavoidable impurities resulting from elaboration.

24. The method according to any one of claims 19 to 23, wherein providing the blank or each sub-blank comprises the following successive steps:

- providing a steel semi-product,
- optionally reheating the semi-product to a temperature between 1100°C and 1300°C,
- hot rolling the semi-product to obtain a hot-rolled steel sheet,
- coiling the hot-rolled steel sheet at a coiling temperature lower than or equal to 750°C,
- optionally pickling the hot-rolled steel sheet,
- optionally cold rolling the hot-rolled steel sheet to obtain a cold rolled steel sheet
- heating the hot rolled steel sheet or the cold rolled steel sheet to an annealing temperature between Ac1 and Ac3,
- hot-dip coating the steel sheet in an Al or Al-alloy bath at a temperature of 670°C to 680°C,
- cooling the pre-coated steel sheet to room temperature,
- cutting the pre-coated steel sheet to obtain the blank or the sub-blank,
- optionally welding together the sub-blanks to produce a tailor welded blank.

25. Use of a hot-stamped coated steel part according to any one of claims 1 to 13 or produced by a method according to any one of claims 14 to 24 for the manufacture of chassis or body-in-white parts or suspension arms for automobile vehicles.

FIG.1



2/3

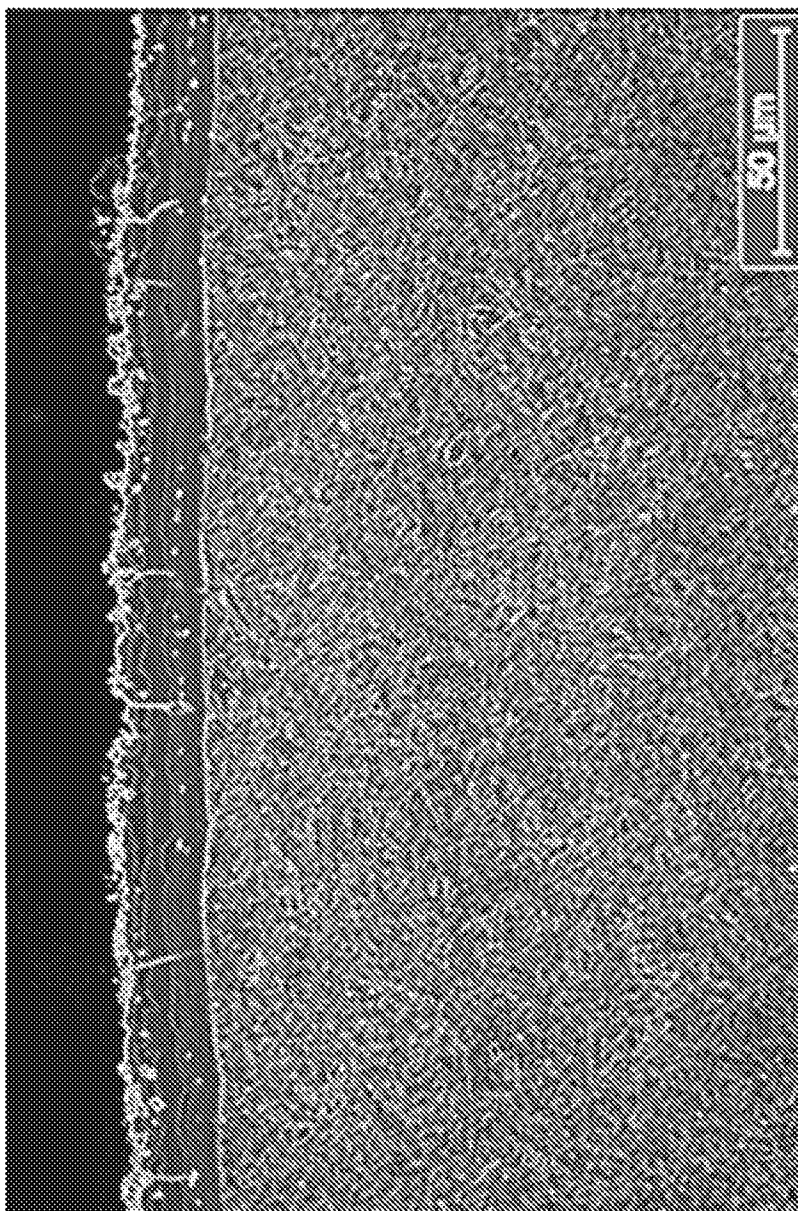


FIG.2

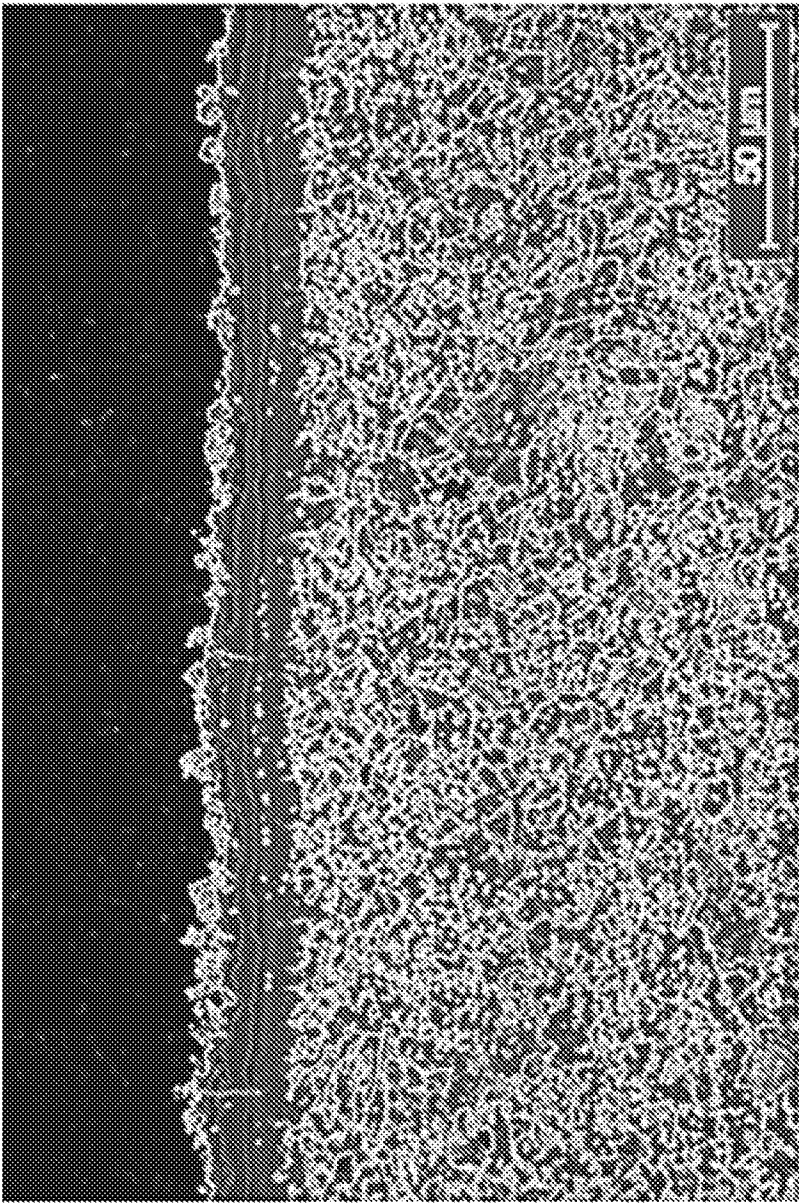


FIG.3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/IB2023/056829

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER		
INV.	B32B15/01	B32B15/02
	C23C2/40	C21D1/673
		C21D9/46
ADD.		
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC		
B. FIELDS SEARCHED		
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)		
B32B B21D C23C C21D C22C		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
EPO-Internal, WPI Data		
C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☒ See patent family annex.		
* Special categories of cited documents : "A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance "E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date "L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified) "O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means "P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed "T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention "X" document of particular relevance;; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone "Y" document of particular relevance;; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art "&" document member of the same patent family		
Date of the actual completion of the international search		Date of mailing of the international search report
13 December 2023		22/12/2023
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016		Authorized officer Vermeulen, Yves

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C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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