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(54) **POLYMERES ELASTOMERIQUES A GROUPEMENTS
FONCTIONNELS**

(54) **FUNCTIONALIZED ELASTOMERIC POLYMERS**

(57) Heat-curable elastomeric polymers comprising elastomeric polymers having at least one pendant carboxylic acid ester group, wherein the ester moiety contains certain types of reactive unsaturation.



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FUNCTIONALIZED ELASTOMERIC POLYMERS

This invention relates to certain functionalized elastomeric polymers. More particularly, the invention relates to elastomeric polymers functionalized by the presence therein of selected pendant ester groups, to a
5 process for preparing such polymers and to the heat-cured products based thereon.

Elastomeric polymers, both homopolymers and copolymers, are well known in the art and include natural rubber and a wide variety of synthetic
10 elastomeric materials.

It is known that the properties of many elastomeric polymers are often modified by "curing" or cross-linking the polymer, typically by adding a cross-linking or curing agent and maintaining the
15 resulting mixture at an elevated temperature. Cross-linking of natural rubber by heating with sulphur or a sulphur-containing compound is the commercial vulcanization needed to make the rubber suitable for many commercial applications. Other types of curing are
20 available, such as by heating with peroxides. These methods often have disadvantages such as a slow curing rate which requires additional materials to accelerate or promote the curing rate to a commercially acceptable level, the presence of undesirable side reactions
25 caused by the presence of free radicals generated by the curing process, or the release of volatile side products during curing. It would be of advantage to provide heat-curable elastomeric polymers, that is, functionalized elastomeric polymers which are curable
30 at acceptable rate without the emission of volatiles

and without the requirement for added curing agents and accelerators.

As a result of extensive research and experimentation a novel class of heat-curable elastomeric polymers was found, which polymers do not suffer from one or more of the disadvantages as mentioned hereinbefore, and which polymers are functionalized by the presence of pendant ester groups wherein the ester contains certain types of reactive unsaturation.

Accordingly this invention provides heat-curable elastomeric polymers comprising elastomeric polymers having at least one pendant carboxylic acid ester group $\sim\text{C}(\text{O})\text{OR}^1$ wherein the ester moiety is a group R^1 containing certain types of reactive unsaturation.

More specifically, the invention relates to elastomeric polymers characterized by the presence of at least one pendant ester group wherein each R^1 is independently propargyl, vinylbenzyl (formally named styrylmethyl) or 4-(2-oxazolinyl)benzyl, or contains an arylcyclobutene group.

A preferred group of arylcyclobutene group-containing ester groups comprises those of general formula $\sim\text{CO}(\text{O})\text{R-Z}$, wherein R is an alkylene group of up to 4 carbon atoms and Z is an arylcyclobutene group. Especially preferred elastomeric polymers of the present invention contain a plurality of pendant ester groups which are attached directly to a chain carbon atom of the elastomeric polymer or attached indirectly through a bridging moiety to such a carbon atom such as a vinylbenzyl ester moiety and more preferably a 4-vinylbenzyl group.

The nature of the carboxylic acid group-containing elastomeric polymers on which the elastomeric polymers of the present invention may be considered to be based, is not critical, provided such polymers contain at least one carboxylic acid group or a derivative thereof, such as a carboxylate group.

Carboxylic acid group-containing elastomeric polymers are well-known and include such polymers wherein the carboxylic acid functionality was introduced during the preparation of said polymers, such as for example 1,3-butadiene-acrylic acid copolymers as described e.g. in Polymer Bulletin 1986, 16, 35-41, as well as polymers wherein the carboxylic acid functionality was introduced subsequent to the preparation of the elastomeric polymer.

A number of methods are known in the art which serve to introduce carboxylic acid functionality onto the base elastomeric polymer molecule. In one modification, carboxylic acid groups are introduced directly onto carbon atoms of monomers which form a portion of the polymer by consecutive processes of metalation, carboxylation and acidification. The process of metalation is known in the art, being described more fully e.g. in U.S. 4,145,298.

The carboxylation process which is applied to the metalated elastomeric polymer is also well known in the art, and is described more fully in e.g. U.S. 4,145,490, U.S. 3,976,628 and published European Patent Application 215,501. The metalation process serves to introduce the alkali metal onto the polymer, particularly in any aromatic portion of the elastomeric polymer molecule, e.g., onto carbon atoms of aromatic rings pendant from the polymer chain, but may also introduce alkali metal onto aliphatic carbon atoms, particularly carbon atoms which are allylic to

carbon-carbon unsaturation in any aliphatic portion of the polymer molecule. The metalated polymer reacts with carbon dioxide to produce an alkali metal salt of the carboxylated elastomeric polymer. Finally the alkali metal salt is acidified as by contact with dilute mineral acid, e.g., hydrochloric acid, and is recovered as the carboxylic acid-modified elastomeric polymer. A further source of metalated elastomeric polymers are elastomeric polymers prepared via an anionic polymerization process employing an organo alkali metal catalyst, and which polymers have an alkali metal atom on the end of the polymer chain.

In an alternate modification, the carboxylate-modified elastomeric polymers are those polymers wherein the carboxylic acid function is attached to a monomer which forms a portion of the elastomeric polymer indirectly through a bridging or connecting group. Such carboxylic acid-modified polymers are typically produced by employing the carbon-carbon unsaturation of aliphatic portions of the molecule, or carbon atoms adjacent thereto, as active sites for introduction of the carboxylic acid function. One conventional type of this process involves, in effect, the addition of the elements of a mercaptocarboxylic acid across a carbon-carbon double bond of the aliphatic portion of the elastomeric polymer molecule.

The mercaptocarboxylic acid addition is well known in the art and is described e.g. in U.S. 3,052,657 and in published Japanese Patent Application 54050590.

An alternate process of introducing pendant carboxylic acid groups or precursors thereof onto the elastomeric polymer molecule is to graft acid monomers onto the aliphatic portion of the polymer. In a generally preferred process, elastomeric polymers having carbon-carbon unsaturation in the aliphatic

portion thereof are reacted with a maleic acid compound to form what is commonly referred to as a maleated polymer. The production of these maleic acid compound-modified elastomeric polymers is well known in the art, e.g. from U.S. 4,292,414; U.S. 4,427,828; U.S. 4,033,888; U.S. 4,628,072; U.S. 4,659,970 and U.S. 4,657,921. Other related processes are described in U.S. 4,578,429 and U.S. 4,670,173.

The elastomeric polymers useful as base polymers from which the carboxylic acid group-containing elastomeric polymers may be produced are the materials commonly known as "rubbers" and include natural rubber as well as the numerous synthetic elastomers. The synthetic elastomeric polymers are illustrated by homopolymers such as polybutadiene, polyisoprene and polychlorobutadiene (chloroprene) as well as by copolymers of butadiene or isoprene with styrene, acrylonitrile, alpha-methylstyrene and methacrylonitrile and the terpolymers known as EPDM polymers, for example, terpolymers of ethylene, propylene and a diene monomer such as cyclopentadiene. Such polymers, if not homopolymers, are suitably random as in the case of butadiene-acrylonitrile rubber or alternatively are block copolymers as in the case of the thermoplastic elastomeric polymers of the polystyrene-polybutadiene-polystyrene type. Such elastomeric polymers are more fully described, for example, by Billmeyer, Jr. in Textbook of Polymer Science, 3rd Edition, 1984, 371-82, and in Kirk-Othmer Encyclopedia of Chemical Technology, 1965, Vol. 7, 677-716, Vol. 17, 543-684 and Supplement Volume, 1971, 910-32.

In the preferred embodiment of the invention, the elastomeric polymer to be functionalized is a modified block copolymer which has been selectively hydrogenated. The preferred block copolymer base

polymers suitable for selective hydrogenation are thermoplastic elastomers characterized by at least one block of at least predominantly polymerized vinyl aromatic hydrocarbon (A block) and at least one block
5 of at least predominantly polymerized conjugated alkadiene (B block). Preferred vinyl aromatic compounds are styrene and styrene homologs. Preferred alkadienes are butadiene and isoprene, particularly butadiene.

These block copolymers are well known in the art
10 and the characterization and preparation of such polymers are illustrated by U.S. 3,251,905; U.S. 3,390,207; U.S. 3,598,887; U.S. 4,219,627; U.S. 4,408,357; U.S. 4,497,748 and U.S. 4,426,495.

Block copolymers of the SBS (polystyrene-
15 polybutadiene-polystyrene) type are particularly preferred. These block copolymers are now conventional and a number are commercial, being marketed by Shell Chemical Company as KRATON (KRATON is a trade mark) Thermoplastic Rubber.

20 The selectively hydrogenated block copolymers of these types are also well known in the art with a number being commercial. For example, certain of the selectively hydrogenated block copolymers are marketed by Shell Chemical Company as KRATON G Thermoplastic
25 Rubber.

Although the polymers are suitably maleated or are reacted with mercaptocarboxylic acids to introduce pendant carboxylic acid groups, the preferred method of introducing functionality is through a metalation/-
30 carboxylation process as described above.

Preferably the carboxylated polymer will contain a plurality of at least 2 carboxylic acid moieties per polymer molecule, more preferably at least 5 and most preferably at least 10 carboxylic acid moieties per
35 elastomeric polymer molecule.

Another feature of the present invention is a process for the preparation of the heat-curable elastomeric polymers, which comprises the neutralization of a carboxylic acid-modified elastomeric polymer, followed by reaction with a compound of formula YR^1 , wherein Y is halogen or sulphonic ester and R^1 is a group containing certain types of reactive unsaturation. More particularly R^1 represents propargyl, vinylbenzyl, 4-(2-oxazolinyl)-benzyl or the group $\sim R-Z$, wherein Z is an aryl-cyclobutene group.

Suitable groups Y in the above formula are those groups commonly referred to as good leaving groups in nucleophilic substitution reactions, such as for example chloro, bromo or iodo, preferably chloro or bromo; or sulphonic ester such as aryl sulphonate, e.g., tosylate, brosylate or nosylate; alkyl sulphonate, e.g., mesylate; and fluoroalkyl sulphonate, e.g., triphlates, nonaphlates or tresylates. R is preferably methylene or ethylene.

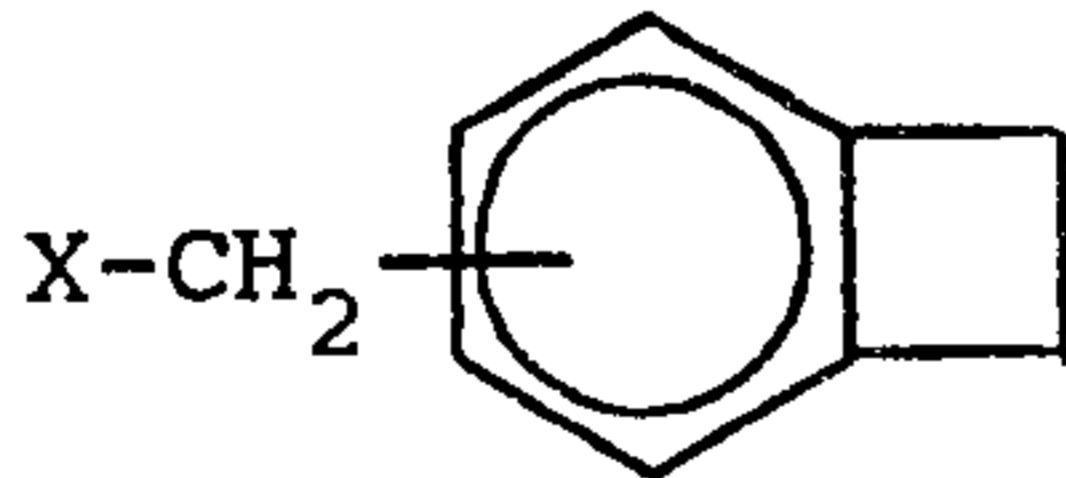
In a preferred embodiment the group Y of the compound YR^1 is halogen, i.e. fluoro, chloro, bromo or iodo, and R^1 is propargyl, vinylbenzyl, preferably 4-vinylbenzyl or 4-(2-oxazolinyl)benzyl; or Y is halogen or sulphonic ester and R^1 contains an arylcyclobutene group. When Y represents halogen, chloro and bromo are preferred halogens.

Unsaturated organic halides of formula YR^1 include propargyl bromide, propargyl chloride, 4-vinylbenzyl chloride and 4-(2-oxazolinyl)benzyl bromide. The preferred R^1 group is propargyl and the preferred unsaturated halide is propargyl bromide.

Preferably the arylcyclobutene group is a group of formula $\sim R-Z$, wherein R is an alkylene group of up to 4 carbon atoms and Z is an arylcyclobutene group.

The arylcyclobutene group Z is an aryl group which contains one or more cyclobutene rings fused to an aromatic ring. An aryl group refers to any aromatic moiety of up to 20 carbon atoms and from one to 3 aromatic rings, inclusive. Suitable aryl groups include the single ring group benzene, fused-ring aromatic compounds, e.g. naphthalene, phenanthrene or anthracene, directly joined aryl compounds, e.g., biphenyl, or indirectly joined aromatic compounds comprising two or more aromatic moieties joined by an alkylene group, e.g., diphenyl alkanes. Z may contain substituents on the aromatic moiety other than the group -R-Y, such as lower alkyl, e.g., methyl or ethyl, or cyano, provided the substituents are inert under the conditions of the process of the invention. The cyclobutene ring may also contain such substituents, however, it is noted that substitution on the cyclobutene ring may affect the temperature at which the arylcyclobutene will undergo heat induced curing which likely involves ring opening to give reactive o-quinodimethane structures. Substitution of the cyclobutene ring generally lowers the temperature at which ring opening occurs. When the cyclobutene ring is unsubstituted, the ring opening typically does not occur at temperatures below 200 °C. Preferred arylcyclobutenes are unsubstituted other than by hydrogen and the group -R-Y, and the preferred arylcyclobutene group Z is benzocyclobutene.

The preferred arylcyclobutene compound Y-R-Z is a halomethylbenzocyclobutene of the formula



where X is upper halo, but preferably is chloro or bromo and most preferably is chloro.

The preparation of halomethylbenzocyclobutene is known, e.g. from J. Chem. Soc. Chem. Commun., 1979, 207 and the preparation of selected benzocyclobutene compounds will be described hereinafter.

5 The neutralization is conveniently conducted by contacting the carboxylic acid-modified elastomeric polymer in liquid phase non-aqueous solution with a substantially equivalent amount of base. Suitable bases to be employed in the neutralization include alkali
10 metal bases such as alkali metal hydroxides, e.g., sodium hydroxide or potassium hydroxide, or alkali metal carbonates and bicarbonates such as sodium bicarbonate, potassium carbonate, lithium bicarbonate and sodium carbonate. Preferred bases, however, are
15 organic bases such as quaternary ammonium hydroxides and particularly the tetraalkylammonium hydroxides. Illustrative tetraalkylammonium hydroxides are those wherein each alkyl independently is alkyl of up to 10 carbon atoms inclusive, preferably of up to 4 carbon
20 atoms inclusive, such as tetramethylammonium hydroxide, tetrabutylammonium hydroxide, trimethylpropylammonium hydroxide and methyltriethylammonium hydroxide. Neutralization is conducted in substantially neutral liquid phase solution in an inert reaction diluent.
25 Suitable diluents are organic diluents and include ethers, cyclic or acyclic, such as diethylether, diethylene glycol dimethyl ether, tetraethylene glycol diethyl ether, tetrahydrofuran and dioxane; sulphur-containing diluents such as dimethyl sulphoxide
30 and sulfolane; and amides free from hydrogen substitution on the amide nitrogen such as N,N-dimethylformamide, N,N-diethylacetamide and N-methyl-2-pyrrolidone. Preferred diluents are tetrahydrofuran and dioxane. The neutralization is
35 typically conducted by dissolving the carboxylic

acid-modified elastomeric polymer in the reaction diluent and adding base to the resulting mixture to the point of neutrality. Best results are obtained in the subsequent esterification process if care is taken to avoid the addition of excess base during neutralization. It is possible and generally preferred to follow the course of the neutralization through the use of an indicator such as phenolphthalein or by potentiometric methods to avoid the addition of substantial amounts of excess base, e.g., more than a 5-10% excess of base over that required for neutralization.

Neutralization of the carboxylic acid-modified elastomeric polymer results in conversion to the corresponding elastomeric polymer modified by the presence of carboxylate groups. Reaction of the base with pendant carboxylic acid groups results in the conversion of carboxylic acid to carboxylate groups. When the elastomeric polymer is a maleated polymer derived from maleic anhydride, a somewhat more complex reaction takes place. The pendant anhydride groups formed as depicted above are ring opened by reaction with base to form a carboxylate group and a second group the nature of which depends upon what materials are present during neutralization. In such instances it is helpful to employ an amount of an alkanol, e.g., ethanol or methanol, in the neutralization process to produce an ester group as well as a carboxylate group on ring opening of the anhydride moiety. Such alkanol is conveniently provided by employing an alcoholic solution of the base.

The carboxylate-modified elastomeric polymer is esterified by contact of the modified polymer and the unsaturated organic halide or unsaturated sulphonic ester reactant at an elevated temperature in liquid

phase solution. Best results are obtained by adding the unsaturated organic halide or sulphonic ester reactant to the carboxylate-modified elastomeric polymer in the substantially neutral solution in which the

5 carboxylate-modified polymer was prepared. Suitable esterification promoters, such as tetraalkylammonium halides, may be added to the solution to accelerate the reaction or improve the esterification yield. Suitable

10 reaction temperatures are in the range of from 20 °C to 150 °C, preferably from 50 °C to 100 °C. Suitable reaction pressures are those which are sufficient to maintain the reaction mixture in a liquid phase. Such pressures are typically up to 20 atmospheres but more often are from 1 atmosphere to 10 atmospheres.

15 The quantity of unsaturated organic halide or sulphonic ester reactant to be employed will vary to some extent depending upon the degree to which the elastomeric polymer has been functionalized and the extent to which it contains pendant carboxylate groups.

20 In general, quantities of unsaturated organic halide or sulphonic ester reactant in the range of from 1 mole to 100 moles per mole of carboxylate-modified elastomeric polymer are satisfactory.

25 According to a more specific embodiment, amounts of arylcyclobutene compound in the range of from 10 moles to 50 moles per mole of carboxylate-modified elastomeric polymer are preferred. Subsequent to reaction, the ester-modified elastomeric polymer is recovered by conventional methods such as selective

30 extraction or precipitation with a non-solvent.

The ester-modified elastomeric polymers of the invention offer utilities associated with the elastomeric polymers from which they are produced. The polymers are useful in a number of moulding

applications including the moulding of gears and valves and have additional utility in the production of adhesives. Those polymers of relatively low carbon-carbon aliphatic unsaturation offer good resistance to oxidative and chemical degradation in applications where shaped articles are desired and moreover exhibit good paintability and printability. However, unlike most conventional elastomeric polymers the ester-modified elastomeric polymers of the invention are heat-curable or heat-cross-linkable when heated to temperatures above 175 °C, preferably above 200 °C, without the emission of volatiles and without the requirement for additional curing agents or accelerators. The resulting cured polymer products offer the dimensional stability normally associated with cross-linked materials as well as toughness and tensile strength. They are particularly useful as thermoset toughness and in adhesive formulations.

The invention is further illustrated by the following Examples which should not be regarded as limiting the invention, and for which the following information is provided.

Materials used:

Polymer A:

a selectively hydrogenated polystyrene-polybutadiene-polystyrene block copolymer (KRATON G 1652) modified to contain 0.12 meq of grafted maleic anhydride per gram of polymer, primarily in the aliphatic part of the block copolymer, the modification having been accomplished via extruder maleation.

Polymer B:

similar to polymer A, and containing 0.22 mmol of acid functionality per gram of polymer, primarily in the styrene block, modification achieved via metalation.

Polymer C:

similar to polymer A, but based on a higher molecular weight, selectively hydrogenated block copolymer (KRATON G 1650) and containing 0.9 mmol of acid functionality per gram of polymer, primarily in the styrene block, and introduced via metalation.

4-Chloromethylbenzocyclobutene:

prepared from p-methyl benzyl chloride in two steps according to the procedure reported by G.W. Ewing and V. Boekelheide in J. Chem. Soc. Chem. Commun., 1979, 207. The p-methylbenzyl chloride was first alkylated with paraformaldehyde in the presence of $ZnCl_2$ and a catalytic amount of HCl to give 2,4-bis(chloromethyl)toluene. Subsequent ring closure, with the elimination of HCl, to form the benzocyclobutene was performed by vacuum pyrolysis at 700 °C and <1 torr to give 4-chloromethylbenzocyclobutene.

Preparation of 4-chloromethylbenzocyclobutene was also effected by a similar procedure beginning with o-methylbenzyl chloride, however, the procedure yielded about a 1:2 mixture of 3-chloromethylbenzocyclobutene and 4-chloromethylbenzocyclobutene.

Example I

A sample of the polymer A was dissolved in tetrahydrofuran and titrated to the phenolphthalein end point with 1 N methanolic tetra-n-butylammonium hydroxide. The resulting polymer solution was refluxed with two equivalents of propargyl bromide, vinylbenzyl bromide or 4-(2-oxazolinyl)benzyl bromide per equivalent of anhydride for four hours. The esterified polymer product was recovered as a precipitate upon addition of methanol. In all cases, the nuclear magnetic resonance spectra were consistent with the presence of the desired reactive unsaturated group within the polymer. Also prepared by this procedure,

although not of the invention, were polymers having pendant benzyl and allyl ester groups (hereinafter referred to as Comparative Experiments).

Example II

5 To evaluate the thermal cross-linkability of the polymeric esters produced according to Example I as well as those of the Comparative Experiments, the polymers were compression moulded at 250 °C for 10 minutes. In the case of the polymeric ester containing pendant 4-(2-oxazolinyl)benzyl ester groups, a mixture of the polymer with an equal proportion by weight of the polymer A was employed and the sample was moulded at 200 °C for 1 hour. The resulting films were evaluated for solubility and the glass transition temperature of the polystyrene block by employing a Rheobibron dynamic mechanical analyzer. The results are shown in the following Table.

Table

Pendant Ester Group	Solubility in THF	Glass Transition Temp. of Polystyrene Block
benzyl	yes	104 °C (Comp. Exp.)
allyl	disintegrates	-- (Comp. Exp.)
propargyl	no	112 °C
vinylbenzyl	no	115 °C
polymer A	yes	128 °C (Comp. Exp.)
polymer A + 4-(2-oxazolinyl)-benzyl	no	128 °C

Example III

The procedure of Example I was repeated with the exception that 5.9 mmol of 4-chloromethylbenzocyclobutene was used per 0.36 mmol of neutralized anhydride and refluxing was continued for 24 h. The ester-modified product was recovered by precipitation with a mixture of acetone and isopropanol. The presence of ester linkages was confirmed by the appearance of a strong carbonyl absorption at approximately 1740 cm^{-1} in the infrared and the disappearance of the carboxylate absorption at 1550 cm^{-1} .

Example IV

The polymer A and the ester-modified polymer product of Example III were separately compression moulded at $250\text{ }^{\circ}\text{C}$ for 5 minutes. The resulting moulded article of polymer A was soluble in tetrahydrofuran, however, the resulting moulded article of ester-modified polymer was insoluble in tetrahydrofuran, thereby confirming incorporation of benzocyclobutene and cross-linking of the polymer during the compression moulding.

Example V

The procedure of Example III was repeated with the exception that 50 g of polymer B was used in combination with 22.2 mmol of 4-chlorobenzocyclobutene, and that the esterification was conducted in the presence of 1.16 mmol of tetrabutylammonium iodide as an esterification promoter. The cooled mixture was filtered to remove trace amounts of gel and the filtrate was added to 2 litres of isopropanol with stirring. The precipitated product was recovered by filtration, washed with isopropanol and dried in vacuo to give 45 g of product. The $^1\text{H-NMR}$ spectra were consistent with the presence of benzocyclobutene methyl ester groups.

The esterified polymer and a sample of KRATON G 1652 were compression moulded at 250 ° for 5 minutes.

The stress-strain and stress relaxation behaviour at 70 °C of the two compression moulded samples were compared. The stress-strain curves were measured at a strain rate of 0.5 in/min while the stress relaxation tests were done at an initial stress of 125 psi. The results showed that cross-linking of the styrene block improved the tensile properties and resistance to stress relaxation at 70 °C. For tensile properties, cross-linking increased flow stress and ductility; for stress relaxation behaviour, the strain rate reduction for equivalent stress reduction was greater.

Example VI

The procedure of Example V was repeated with the exception that polymer B was replaced with polymer C and that the reaction mixture was refluxed for 4 h. The polymer product was precipitated by addition of isopropanol with stirring. The precipitated product was recovered by filtration, washed with isopropanol and dried in vacuo. The nearly quantitative conversion of the carboxylate ions to 4-benzocyclobutene methyl esters was confirmed by the disappearance of the carboxylate absorption at 1560 cm^{-1} in the infrared and the appearance of a strong carbonyl absorption at approximately 1720 cm^{-1} .

Example VII

Compression moulding of the polymer of Example VI at 250 °C for 5 minutes gave cross-linked films which were insoluble in either toluene or THF, whereas films moulded at 150 °C for 30 minutes were soluble.

Dynamic thermomechanical analysis showed that cross-linking via benzocyclobutenes raised the glass transition temperature of the polystyrene domain by 8 °C but had no effect on the glass transition

temperature of the rubber phase. This suggests that cross-linking occurs mostly in the polystyrene phase.

THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN EXCLUSIVE PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:

1. Heat-curable elastomeric polymers comprising elastomeric polymers having at least one pendant carboxylic acid ester group, wherein the ester moiety is a group R^1 , wherein each R^1 is independently propargyl, vinylbenzyl or 4-(2-oxazolinyl) benzyl, or contains an arylcyclobutene group.
2. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in claim 1, wherein each R^1 independently represents propargyl, vinyl-benzyl (formerly named styrylmethyl) or 4-(2-oxazolinyl) benzyl, or a group R-Z wherein R is an alkylene group of up to 4 carbon atoms, and Z is an arylcyclobutene group.
3. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in claim 2, wherein the elastomeric polymers have at least two pendant ester groups wherein R^1 is propargyl, vinylbenzyl, or 4-(2-oxazolinyl) benzyl.
4. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in claim 2, wherein R^1 represents a group of general formula -R-Z, wherein R is an alkylene group of up to 4 carbon atoms, and Z is an arylcyclobutene group.

5. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in any one of claims 1-3, wherein the elastomeric polymers are selectively hydrogenated block copolymers based on block copolymers comprising at least one block of predominantly polymerized vinyl aromatic compound and at least one block of predominantly polymerized conjugated alkadiene.

6. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in claim 5, wherein the elastomeric polymers are selectively hydrogenated polystyrene-polybutadiene-polystyrene block copolymers.

7. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in any one of claims 1-6, wherein the pendant ester group is based on maleic acid functionality which is attached directly to an aromatic monomer entity forming part of the elastomeric polymer.

8. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in any one of claims 1-6, wherein the pendant ester group is based on a maleic acid anhydride group attached directly to an aliphatic monomer entity forming part of the elastomeric polymer.

9. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in any one of claims 5 or 6, wherein R^1 is propargyl.

10. Heat-curable polymers as claimed in claim 4, wherein R is methylene or ethylene and Z is benzocyclobutene.
11. A process for the preparation of heat-curable elastomers as claimed in claim 1, which comprises the neutralization of a carboxylic acid-modified elastomeric polymer, followed by reaction with a compound of formula YR^1 wherein Y is halogen or sulphonic ester and R^1 represents propargyl, vinylbenzyl or 4-(2-oxazoliny) benzyl, or contains an arylcyclobutene group.
12. A process as claimed in claim 11, wherein Y is halogen and R^1 is propargyl, vinylbenzyl or 4-(2-oxazoliny) benzyl or a group -R-Z, wherein R is an alkylene group of up to 4 carbon atoms, and Z represents an arylcyclobutene group.
13. A process as claimed in claim 12, wherein R^1 is a group -R-Z arylcyclobutene group.
14. A process as claimed in any one of claims 11-13 wherein Y is chloro or bromo.
15. Heat-cured elastomeric polymers based on heat-curable polymers as claimed in any one of claims 1-10, and heated to a temperature of at least 175°C.

16. Heat-cured elastomeric polymers as claimed in claim 15, wherein the polymers have been heated to a temperature of at least 200°C.

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PATENT AGENTS