

Sliding vane technology offers critical advantages for biodiesel manufacturing processes

Pumping biodiesel

B100, sometimes called pure biodiesel, is usually blended with regular diesel fuel at an 80% diesel, 20% biodiesel ratio to form B20. The B20 blend, if formulated to conform to ASTM D975, can generally be used interchangeably with diesel fuel for normal usage as long as it meets the requirements of ASTM D6751 and the cold-flow properties of the blend are adequate for the geography and time of year the fuel will be used.

It can also be handled with most current technologies that handle petroleum diesel. In fact, in its B20 configuration biodiesel has been shown to have very little, if any, adverse effects on not only compression-ignition engines but also fuel-oil and heating-oil boilers, and turbines, or the pumps, hoses, seals, gaskets, swivels, loading arms, valves,

fittings and other equipment used in its handling, transportation and storage (B20 itself may degrade faster than diesel if oxidising metals such as copper, bronze, brass or zinc are present).

Areas of concern

While federal mandates appear to guarantee a boost in the use of alternative fuels now and into the future in order to ensure their safe implementation into the motor-fuel pool the companies that manufacture the equipment used for the processing, handling, transporting and storing of these up-and-coming fuels must first be confident in that equipment's ability to handle any new formulations.

Among the critical areas of concern for any manufacturer when designing and engineering new equipment



Sliding vane technology offers high efficiency and low maintenance advantages over traditional gear and centrifugal pumps

are material compatibility, operational reliability, maintenance requirements and energy savings.

As with any new fuel or chemical formulation, care has to be taken that material compatibility is ensured. With that in mind, studies have shown that

although B20 is well-suited for use with existing diesel technology, B100 and other higher biodiesel blends require special handling with equipment that has been engineered to be compatible with the fuel.

Specifically, B100 will degrade, soften or seep through some hoses, gaskets, seals, elastomers, glues and plastics with prolonged use; compounds especially susceptible to degradation include nitrile rubber, polypropylene and polyvinyl materials.

Non-metallic materials that have been shown to be compatible with B100 include PTFE, some FKM formulations, various fluorinated plastics and nylon. Metals that are compatible with B100 include ductile iron, stainless steel, carbon steel and aluminum, while brass, bronze, copper, lead, tin and zinc are incompatible.

Material compatibility concerns aside, when it comes to the type of pump that is best able to handle biodiesel through its production, transportation and storage phases, pumps that feature sliding vane



Blackmer sliding vane pumps in use at one of the largest biodiesel production facilities in the US

technology have proven to be the most efficient, reliable and environmentally safe options, while also providing energy-saving operation and low maintenance costs.

Sliding vane technology is featured in positive displacement pumps that are ideal for handling thin liquids. By constantly improving and upgrading its performance, today's sliding vane technology is able to meet the demands of reliability, product-loss prevention, environmental protection and process efficiency in biodiesel production.

Sliding vane technology – ideal for biodiesel

Sliding vane technology has always offered high efficiency and low maintenance advantages over traditional gear and centrifugal pumps. These are important factors in today's era of rising energy costs, lean personnel and high demand for increased profitability. But these reasons are only part of a much bigger picture.

For even greater flexibility, efficiency and productivity, advanced vane pump designs include motor speed technology, cutting-edge designed-in features such as a hydrodynamic journal bearing and one mechanical seal. These innovative features serve to further improve the



In addition to offering energy efficiency and maintenance advantages, sliding vane technology provides superior priming and suction capabilities

fundamental pumping process in the manufacture of biodiesel. In fact, sliding vane pumps have become the pump technology of choice in biodiesel production plants throughout the US for these same reasons.

The secret behind a sliding vane pump's enviable operational characteristics is the vanes that slide in and out of slots in the pump rotor. The pump's rotation draws liquid in behind each vane, through the inlet port and into the pumping chamber. As the rotor turns, the liquid is transferred between the vanes to the outlet where it is discharged. Each vane provides a positive mechanical and hydraulic displacement of the liquid.

Vanes are actuated by three forces: (1) centrifugal force from the rotor's rotation, (2)

push rods moving between opposing pairs of vanes, and (3) liquid pressure entering through grooves and acting on the rear of the vanes.

Each revolution of a sliding vane pump displaces a constant volume of fluid; variances in pressure have a negligible effect. Energy-wasting turbulence and slippage in the pump are minimized and high volumetric efficiency is maintained. The sliding vane technology also results in superior priming and suction capabilities, making the pumps the perfect choice for line-stripping, the evacuation of heels and pumping from underground or top unloaded storage tanks. Sliding vane pumps for biodiesel applications are available with capacities from 1 gallon per minute to 2,300 gallons per minute.

Recent advancements in sliding vane technology have taken the pumps' operation to new heights of efficiency and longevity. Sliding vane pumps with hydrodynamic journal bearings eliminate shaft-to-bearing contact, meaning that there is virtually no contact or wear, resulting in superior bearing life and pump efficiency.

Advanced sliding vane pumps can also include cavitation/noise-suppression liners that control the wear effects of cavitation and reduce noise levels up to 15 dbA.

Compactly designed, motor-speed sliding vane pumps have been created for reliable continuous-duty operation and set the industry standard in positive-displacement pumps for low- and medium-viscosity process applications. If need be, sliding vane pumps can be serviced with the piping attached, allowing for quick and easy maintenance. If the vanes become damaged, replacement is accomplished by simply removing the outboard head assembly, sliding out the old vanes, inserting new ones and reinstalling the head.

Taking note of the cautions that are required for the handling of B100, upgraded elastomer seals in many lines of sliding vane pumps allow for compatibility with all biodiesel blends. FKM formulations have been upgraded to high-grade compounds that allow for much broader compatibility with a wider range of fuels. These elastomers are UL-listed and approved for all ethanol and biodiesel blends, including B100.

With biodiesel production and use continuing to grow globally there is a profound need for materials and equipment that are capable of handling its production, transportation and storage. ●

For more information:

This article was written by Tom Stone, director of marketing for Blackmer, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 001 616 248-9252 or stone@blackmer.com, www.blackmer.com



ProVane pumps are used for methanol recovery, caustic, magnesol and tallow/soy oil transfer applications in the above facility