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Published PDF deposited in Coventry University’s Repository

Original citation:
https://dx.doi.org/10.1109/TPEL.2018.2809923

DOI 10.1109/TPEL.2018.2809923
ISSN 0885-8993
ESSN 1941-0107

Publisher: IEEE

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Electrical Performance and Reliability Characterization of a SiC MOSFET Power Module With Embedded Decoupling Capacitors

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Abstract—Integration of decoupling capacitors into silicon carbide (SiC) metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor (MOSFET) modules is an advanced solution to mitigate the effect of parasitic inductance induced by module assembly interconnects. In this paper, the switching transient behavior is reported for a 1.2-kV SiC MOSFET module with embedded dc-link capacitors. It shows faster switching transition and less overshoot voltage compared to a module using an identical package but without capacitors. Active power cycling and passive temperature cycling are carried out for package reliability characterization and comparisons are made with commercial Si and SiC power modules. Scanning acoustic microscopy images and thermal structure functions are presented to quantify the effects of package degradation. The results demonstrate that the SiC modules with embedded capacitors have similar reliability performance to commercial modules and that the reliability is not adversely affected by the presence of the decoupling capacitors.

Index Terms—Embedded capacitor, metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor (MOSFET) module, silicon carbide, switching performance, thermo-mechanical reliability.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, silicon carbide (SiC) metal oxide semiconductor field effect transistor (MOSFET) power modules have been developing rapidly due to the increasing demand for hybrid electric vehicles/electric vehicles as well as compact solutions for solar inverters, industrial drives, and high-frequency power supplies. SiC MOSFETs have lower power losses compared to insulated gate bipolar transistors (IGBTs). Hence, they offer the potential to increase converter efficiency. As a result, the capacity and cost of the cooling system can be reduced [1]. The improved switching losses enable operation at very high switching frequencies. This allows a reduction in the physical size of magnetic components used in the input/output filter, which in turn reduces the volume and increases the power density of the converter [2]. In addition, the intrinsic body diode can provide the function of an antiparallel diode making it possible to reduce the assembly part, which cuts costs and mitigates implied reliability concerns from additional interconnects such as wire bonds and die attach. In order to fully exert potential benefits proffered by wide-bandgap semiconductors, integration techniques, commutation process, and packaging reliability need to be compatible with the device development.

With fast switching speed, the stray inductance induced by the bond wires or connection pins could cause overshoot and high-frequency parasitic ringing oscillation on the drain–source voltage or gate–source voltage [3]–[5]. Various solutions have been proposed in an effort to reduce the switching parasitic inductance in the current commutation pass. These include rearranging substrate copper trace layout and wire pattern, optimizing packaging design with low dc-link inductance, or replacement of bond wires and bus bars [5]–[9]. The other solution is the integration of dc capacitors inside the power module. This configuration provides a low loop inductance for the current commutation loop and thus minimizes the dc-side parasitic inductance [10], [11]. A few recent studies reporting on integrating capacitors in a SiC MOSFET module mainly focused on module design and electrical characterization [12]–[15]. Thermo-mechanical reliability with respect to module integration was not addressed.

In this work, electrical performance and assembly integration reliability of a 1.2-kV SiC MOSFET module with embedded decoupling capacitors are investigated. Switching transient behavior is compared between two modules in the identical package, one with embedded capacitors and the other one without. Active power cycling and passive temperature cycling, supported by transient thermal impedance characterization and scanning acoustic microscopy (SAM), are used to evaluate key degradation mechanisms. The thermal structure function is analyzed to elucidate degradation in the heat flow path inside the module. In addition, the capacitance of the integrated capacitor is characterized before and after cyclic stress.
II. ELECTRICAL PERFORMANCE

A. Switching Characterization Test Setup

The module under study incorporates a three-phase inverter in a single package with a full-bridge configuration and is equipped with integrated dc ceramic capacitors (CeraLink, 0.25 μF, 900 V) across each phase leg [16]. Each switch is composed of one CREE CPM2-1200-0025B SiC chip (1200 V, 98 A). Six chips are soldered onto three direct bonded copper (DBC) substrates, which are soldered down onto a copper baseplate. There are no antiparallel diodes enclosed in the module. Dimension of the baseplate is 113 mm × 55 mm. A photo and electrical circuit diagram of the module are presented in Fig. 1.

The switching transient characterization is carried out for two modules, labeled as PM_1, the module without capacitors, and PM_2,C_{int} that has integrated capacitors. They are assembled with the identical packaging. Fig. 2 shows the electrical circuit for the measurement of switching current and voltage waveforms. It is mainly constituted by a half-bridge with two SiC MOSFET switches S1 and S2, an inductive load, an external decoupling capacitor (C_{dcp}) and a bulk capacitor (C_{bulk}) linking the power supply and C_{dcp}. Switching characterization is carried out on switch S1, and S2 is switched OFF.

Fig. 3(a) shows the internal layout of prototype PM_1. As the decoupling capacitor C_{dcp} is connected externally to the module, a Rogowski coil is attached through the module terminal pins to measure the device switching current I_D [see Fig. 3(b)], where the measurement position is indicated as I_D in Fig. 2.

Fig. 4(a) shows the internal layout of prototype PM_2,C_{int}. A Rogowski coil is wound around the bonding wires of device S1 in order to measure its switching current. Under this condition, the measurement position is indicated as I_{loop} in Fig. 2, which shows that the current i_{loop}, measured by the Rogowski coil in the module includes device gate loop current i_{g}. In order to obtain the device switching current i_D (i_D = i_{loop} − i_{g}) and compare it with the above-mentioned condition, i_{g} is measured by another identical Rogowski coil, as shown in Fig. 4(b).

In Figs. 3(a) and 4(a), the device switching loop is marked with red lines, and it can be seen that the switching loop in the power module that has the integrated capacitors is smaller than the one without capacitors.

B. Comparison in Switching Transients

The used Rogowski coil (CWTUM/06/R) has a bandwidth of 30 MHz and the peak di/dt measurement rate of 70 kA/μs.
while the oscilloscope (DPO4104B) has a bandwidth of 1 GHz. The switching waveforms of drain current $i_D$ and drain–source voltage $V_{DS}$ are recorded at 600 V and 30 A, which are displayed in Fig. 5. From the turn-ON waveforms [see Fig. 5(a)], it can be seen that the drain current $i_D$ of PM$_2$C$_{int}$ shows faster damping compared to PM$_1$. Also, PM$_2$C$_{int}$ has a current transition rate of 2.5 A/ns, which is faster than that of PM$_1$ (2 A/ns).

The turn-OFF waveforms for both modules are presented in Fig. 5(b). Comparing with PM$_1$, the overshoot voltage of PM$_2$C$_{int}$ is 108 V less. Meanwhile, the resonance frequency at the end of the switching is around 25 MHz for PM$_1$ and 100 MHz for PM$_2$C$_{int}$.

Based on device switching waveforms shown in Fig. 5, device switching losses ($E_{ON}$ and $E_{OFF}$) are obtained for the two power modules and they are listed in Table I.

It is found that $E_{OFF}$ of PM$_1$ is higher than that of PM$_2$, because of higher overshoot $V_{DS}$ voltage during device turn-OFF transition. However, $E_{ON}$ of PM$_1$ is much lower than that of PM$_2$. This is supposedly due to the snubber effect of increased $L_{para}$ value in the power loop of PM$_1$. At turn-ON switching, during the rise of $I_D$, bigger value of $L_{para}$ gives rise to a higher voltage drop $L_{para} \frac{dI_D}{dt}$ of device $V_{DS}$ voltage, which decreases $I_D$, $V_{DS}$ overlapping surface and time. This result corresponds with the results among $E_{ON}$, $E_{OFF}$, and $L_{para}$ presented by Wang et al. [17] for SiC MOSFET. The comparison of device switching losses shows that there might be less switching losses of devices in PM$_1$. However, as device switching loop increases in PM$_1$, parasitic resistance value is bigger in PM$_1$ than that in PM$_2$, which causes more losses of the whole current conduction loop in PM$_1$ than those in PM$_2$.

It needs to be noted that even though PM$_2$C$_{int}$ encloses decoupling capacitors, $C_{dcp}$ is still necessary for the measurement in order to avoid a lower resonance frequency between $C_{int}$ and the lumped parasitic inductance $C_{bulk}$ in the loop ($L_{para2} + L_{para3}$ shown in Fig. 2), which may be observed if loop resistance is inferior to $\sqrt{(L_{para2} + L_{para3})/C_{int}}$. This lower frequency resonance ($f = \frac{1}{2\pi \sqrt{(L_{para2} + L_{para3})/C_{int}}}$) may lead to another $V_{DS}$ overshoot voltage. More discussions on different resonance frequencies observed in device switching can be found in [18]. A comparison of the $V_{DS}$ switching waveform in the PM$_2$C$_{int}$ module with and without $C_{dcp}$ is shown in Fig. 6. It can be seen that using 1 $\mu$F$C_{dcp}$ helps to damp the 793-kHz lower frequency resonance.

In summary, the module with integrated capacitors suppresses the parasitic inductance within the device switching loop, which results in faster switching transition and less overshoot voltage. It is worth pointing out that the Ceralink capacitors, which employ an antiferroelectric dielectric, have strong voltage and
temperature capacitance sensitivities. However, in this decoupling application, the primary function is to provide a low-impedance, high-frequency return path for the commutation loop, so the actual capacitance value has a relatively small effect on the measured response.

### III. RELIABILITY CHARACTERIZATION

#### A. Passive Temperature Cycling Test

1) Passive Cycling Experimental Setup: The two modules PM_1 and PM_2 were placed in an ESPEC three-zone environmental thermal shock test chamber. The baseplate temperature ranges from –55 °C to +90 °C. Each cycle had a period of 20 min with a heating time and cooling time at 10 min.

SAM characterization was carried out using PVA TePla AM300. C-mode scanning (interface scan) was conducted with a 35-MHz transducer to provide a planar view on several focused depths corresponding to specific internal layers. This creates two-dimensional grayscale images from the reflected ultrasonic echoes, in which discontinuities show different brightness from the intact area. The modules were imaged prior to cycling (under as-received condition) in order to provide a basis for comparison. The same samples were subsequently imaged at 1000, 1490, 2516, 5750, and 9317 cycles.

2) SAM Tomography Images and Comparisons: A schematic cross section of the module assembly structure is presented in Fig. 7. In Fig. 8, SAM images for the substrate ceramic layer are displayed for PM_2. A growing white area indicates delamination in the module substrate mount-down solder as the temperature cycling progressed. It initiated
Fig. 9. SAM images showing delamination of the substrate mount-down solder layer for commercial IGBT1 during the passive temperature cycling test.

Fig. 10. Estimated attached area of the substrate mount-down solder as a percentage of the total area during temperature cycling of –50 °C to 90 °C.

3) Characterization of the Embedded Capacitors: To verify the integrity of the embedded decoupling capacitor, the capacitance value was measured before and after cycling using an impedance analyzer at 1 kHz and with a dc bias voltage of 0 V. Before cycling, the measured capacitance is around 137 nF and it remained unchanged after 9317 temperature cycles.

B. Active Power Cycling Test

1) Power Cycling Experimental Setup: To further investigate the module packaging reliability, the SiC MOSFET module with embedded capacitors is undertaken power cycling test using a “MentorGraphics” Power Tester 1500 A [13]. During cycling, the module was mounted on a water-cooled cold plate with a 50-μm-thick Kapton film as the thermal interface between the cold plate and the baseplate. The use of the Kapton film increases the case-to-ambient thermal resistance in order to achieve a larger temperature swing at the substrate–case interface accelerating degradation of the internal thermal path. Forward voltage drop of the body diode $V_f$ was used as a thermosensitive electrical parameter to estimate the module junction temperature. A calibration of $V_f$ as a function of temperature was prepared in advance.

At the heating stage, all six MOSFETs are switched ON with a +15 V gate bias voltage and a constant total heating current of 153 A flows through all six devices (in three parallel branches), generating a power dissipation of 890 W. At the end of the heating phase, the MOSFETs are switched OFF with a –5 V gate bias and the heating current is removed. The heating time and cooling time are fixed at 8 and 22 s, respectively. During cycling, the ON-state voltage and maximum/minimum junction temperature of the six MOSFET devices are monitored individually. The maximum temperature for the six MOSFETs varies between 137 °C and 154 °C, while cold plate temperature was maintained at 10 °C. An average junction temperature swing from 21 °C to 147 °C ($\Delta T = 126 °C$) was achieved across the six devices.

The power cycling test was terminated at 4728 cycles when the ON-state voltage increased by 16%. Fig. 11 shows the record of ON-state voltage and maximum junction temperature for one
of the devices throughout the cycling. They kept unchanged until around 3400 cycles. Significant incremental steps started from 4200 cycles. And the staircase nature is known to be the result of wire bond lift-offs [20], [21]. Increase of the ON-state voltage leads to an increase of power loss and therefore a rise in the junction temperature.

2) Thermal Structure Function and SAM Tomography Imaging: Transient thermal impedance measurements and SAM were performed at as-received condition, at 1000 and 4728 power cycles. A total of six chips are heated up together and the thermal characterization is recorded for each chip individually. Cumulative and differential structure functions are extracted for one chip and displayed in Fig. 12. They provide a map of the heat conduction path from junction (at the origin of the resistance axis) to ambient (water), which appears as vertical lines at the right-hand side indicating infinite heat capacitance. The wide flat region is the thermal interface, i.e., Kapton film, which has a large thermal resistance. The variability of the junction-to-ambient thermal resistant is caused by remounting the module following SAM and also due to the inconsistent heat sink thermal resistance as a result of variable water temperature and the flow rate.

However, the junction-to-case thermal resistance $R_{thjc}$ is not affected by these factors. It can be seen from the graph that junction-to-case resistance stays unchanged after 4728 cycles, indicating no significant reduction of the solder attach area. This agrees with the SAM tomography images of the substrate mount-down solder shown in Fig. 13.

3) Comparisons With a Commercial SiC MOSFET Module: For comparison, a commercial three-phase SiC MOSFET module with similar power ratings was tested with the same thermal interface between module baseplate and the cold plate. The module includes six SiC MOSFETs and six SiC Schottky diodes soldered on aluminum nitride (AlN) DBC substrates, which are mounted on a Cu baseplate. The antiparallel diodes were subjected to power cycling. A constant heating current of 115 A was applied and shared among three legs so the monitored forward voltage and junction temperature are a global measurement across the whole module. This led to an initial temperature swing of 13–146 °C ($\Delta T = 133$ °C). The module was subjected to 4152 power cycles.

Fig. 14 shows the maximum junction temperature and forward voltage ($V_f$) of the freewheeling diodes during the power cycling test. The forward voltage increased 9% at the end of the test. Before 4000 cycles, it increases gradually indicating growing degradation in the thermal stack. The steep increase at the end of the test is considered to be caused by the wire bond lift-offs.
The cumulative and differential structure function is extracted for the whole module and displayed in Fig. 15. It can be seen that the cumulative structure function has shifted to the right as the cycling number increases, which accounts for a change in the internal structure of the module resulting in an increase of junction-to-case thermal resistance [22]. In the differential structure function, each peak is related to a different material in the thermal stack and $K$ is a value proportional to the cross-sectional area squared. Right shift of peaks indicates the increase of the thermal resistance of the assembly layers.

SAM tomography confirms that the degradation took place at the substrate mount-down solder layer, which is shown as the white area in the photo of 4152 cycles (see Fig. 16).

4) Discussion: Assembly materials, layer thickness, and cycling time are all possible factors contributing to different failure modes presented in these two modules. Both the commercial SiC MOSFET module under test and PM$_{2C_{int}}$ are constructed with a Cu baseplate and AlN–copper substrate. PM$_{2C_{int}}$ has a thinner baseplate (2.8 mm) than the commercial module (3 mm), which possibly induces less strain in the substrate mount-down solder layer. Also, the substrate mount-down solder material in PM$_{2C_{int}}$ is SnSb5, which has a higher melting point and hence higher creep resistance than the eutectic SnAg used in the commercial module [23]. In addition, the power cycling time for PM$_{2C_{int}}$ is 30 s (8-second heating and 22-second cooling), which is much shorter than the cycling time for the commercial SiC MOSFET of 2 min (60-second heating and 60-second cooling). Longer cycling duration induces larger temperature swing and thus higher thermo-mechanical stress at the baseplate/substrate interface.

IV. CONCLUSION

In this work, a high-power SiC MOSFET module with embedded decoupling capacitors has been studied from the switching and packaging reliability perspective. Switching transient characterization of the module with integrated capacitors showed faster switching transition and less overshoot voltage compared with the same semiconductors in an identical package but without embedded capacitors, indicating suppression of the parasitic inductance within the device switching loop and thus providing favorable conditions for high-frequency operation. During active power cycling tests at comparable temperature swings, the SiC module prototype demonstrated a similar lifetime to the commercial SiC module. However, the two modules are composed of different materials and display different dominant degradation modes.
temperature cycling under identical conditions, the substrate mount-down solder in the SiC module prototype showed similar degradation rate as the commercial Si-based IGBT. In addition, the capacitance of the integrated capacitor remained unchanged after cyclic passive temperature stress. Together, the tests demonstrate that the SiC MOSFET module with embedded decoupling capacitors has improved switching behavior and can be expected to display similar levels of thermo-mechanical reliability to commercial power modules.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was supported by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council [grant number EP/K035304/1], (UK EPSRC) through the Centre for Power Electronics; and by the Advanced Propulsion Centre UK.

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