



41st Danubia-Adria Symposium

Advances in Experimental Mechanics

September 23-26, 2025
Kragujevac, Serbia

PROCEEDINGS



Edited by:
Miroslav Živković
Vladimir Milovanović
Vladimir Dunić
Aleksandar Bodić

<https://www.das2025.fin.kg.ac.rs/>

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ISBN: 978-86-6335-157-8

DOI: 10.46793/41DAS2025

Edited by: **Miroslav Živković, Vladimir Milovanović,
Vladimir Dunić, Aleksandar Bodić**
Faculty of Engineering University of Kragujevac

Publisher: **Faculty of Engineering University of Kragujevac**

For the publisher: **Slobodan Savić**
Faculty of Engineering University of Kragujevac

**Place and year of
publication** Kragujevac, 2025

Technical editor: **Aleksandar Bodić, Vladimir Milovanović**
Faculty of Engineering University of Kragujevac

Printed by: **Inter Print**
Juriša Gagarina 12, 34000 Kragujevac, Serbia

Circulation: 100 Copies

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The publication of this Proceedings was financially supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation, Republic of Serbia.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS:

THE INFLUENCE OF BUILD PARAMETERS ON THE COLLAPSE BEHAVIOUR OF A HIGHLY POROUS RANDOM OPEN-CELL LATTICE 3D PRINTED IN IN718 ALLOY *Tomasz Libura, Judyta Sienkiewicz, Zbigniew Nowak, Zbigniew Kowalewski, Alexis Rusinek, George Voyiadjis, Urvashi Gunpath, Paul Wood*3

INFLUENCE OF STRINGER GEOMETRY ON THE STRUCTURAL INTEGRITY OF CRACKED STIFFENED PLATES *Stefan-Dan Pastrama*5

IMPLEMENTATION AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION OF NON-EQUIVALENT BIAXIAL MEASUREMENTS FOR HYPERELASTIC MATERIALS *Kristóf Havasi, Attila Kossa*7

GRP TANK LOADING INVESTIGATION USING CFS AND DFOS SENSORS *Karel Doubrava, Nikola Schmidová, David Blaha, Zdeněk Padovec, Ctirad Novotny, Radek Kottner, Radek Sedláček, Milan Růžicka*9

IDENTIFICATION OF ENERGETIC AND DISSIPATIVE FLOW STRESS USING INFRARED THERMOGRAPHY *Nikola Lalović, Thomas Böhlke*11

NOVEL TEST METHODS FOR TRIBO/MECHANICAL PROPERTIES IN THE CONTEXT OF ALTERNATIVE FUELS *Florian Grün, Peter Oberreiter, Philipp Renhart, Michael Pusterhofer*13

THE DEPENDENCE OF THE DEGREE OF NON-ADDITIVITY OF MECHANICALLY LOADED SYSTEMS ON THE LOADING RATE *Dimos Triantis, Ilias Stavrakas, Ermioni Pasiou, Stavros Kourkoulis*15

IMPACT VELOCITY INFLUENCE ON THE FRACTURE BEHAVIOUR OF PORCINE FEMURS UNDER DYNAMIC LOADING *Petra Bagavac, Marijo Bekić, Lovre Krstulović-Opara*17

EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS OF HIGH-SPEED GEARBOXES *Nenad Kolarević, Milosav Ognjanović, Miloš Stanković, Aleksandar Dimić, Nikola Davidović, Marko Miloš*19

POSTER AND ORAL PRESENTATIONS:

EXPERIMENTAL STUDY OF HEAT EFFECT ON THE DEFORMATIONS OF AL/CU BIMETAL IN 3-POINT BENDING *Robert Uścinowicz*25

DYNAMIC CALIBRATION OF A MODEL OF A MIXED STRUCTURE BRIDGE DECK BASED ON DYNAMIC TESTS OF THE BRIDGE *Cristian Lucian Ghindea, Radu Iuliu Cruciat, Andrei Gheorghe Pricopie, Adrian Aurelian Diaconu, Ionut Radu Racanel*27

CONSTITUTIVE MODELLING OF POLYMER FOAMS USING AN ASYMMETRIC POISSON'S RATIO <i>Márton Kammerer, Attila Kossa</i>	29
MECHANICAL RESPONSE OF PA6 UNDER ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS: A DUAL APPROACH USING EXPERIMENTS AND NUMERICAL ANALYSES <i>Nicolae Stefanoaea, Olivia-Laura Petrascu, Adrian Marius Pascu</i>	31
COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF THE ELASTIC MODULUS IN CEMENT PASTES USING ULTRASONIC AND 3-MIN-CREEP TESTING <i>Sophie Schmid, Olaf Lahayne, Bernhard Pichler</i>	33
EXPERIMENTAL ANALYSIS OF ELECTRIC SOOTER DYNAMICS <i>Zsombor Magyari, Roland Zana, Dénes Takács</i>	35
EFFECTS OF STEERING ANGLE SATURATION ON STABILITY OF REVERSING TRAILERS <i>Levente Mihalyi, Denes Takacs</i>	37
MULTITECHNIQUE CHARACTERIZATION OF CEMENT PASTE WITH AND WITHOUT GRAPHENE OXIDE <i>Muhammad Shahid, Sophie Schmid, Olaf Lahayne, Agathe Robisson, Bernhard Pichler</i>	39
ANALYSIS OF TEST STRAIN IN A FOUR-POINT BENDING CALIBRATION SETUP FOR STRAIN GAGES <i>Thomas Lehmann, Tobias Jähnichen, Jörn Ihlemann</i>	41
STABILITY LOSS OF TAPE-SPRINGS UNDER COMPRESSIVE LOADS: A FINITE ELEMENT ANALYSIS <i>Péter Máté, András Szekrényes</i>	43
EXPERIMENTAL AND NUMERICAL ANALYSIS OF LASER-CUT PNEUMATIC SOFT ROBOT STRUCTURES <i>Kata Ruzsa, Szabolcs Berezvai</i>	45
OPTIMISING GAIT STABILITY ANALYSIS IN PATIENTS WITH MUSCULOSKELETAL DISORDERS <i>Kristóf Bányi, Zsófia Pálya, Mária Takács, Rita Kiss</i>	47
ALTERNATIVE METHOD OF STRESS PARAMETERS DETERMINATION DURING TENSILE TESTS USING METRIC ENTROPY AND DIC <i>Zbigniew Kowalewski, Mateusz Kopec, Grzegorz Garbacz, Adam Brodecki</i>	49
INFLUENCE OF TEMPERATURE ON MODE I FRACTURE TOUGHNESS OF A DUCTILE ADHESIVE <i>Lukáš Horák, Jan Krystek</i>	51
INVESTIGATION OF RESIDUAL STRESS EVOLUTION DUE TO CYCLIC LOADING BY YIELD SURFACE TRACKING <i>Radim Halama, Michal Kořínek, Jiří Čapek, Karel Trojan, Radim Petkov, Adam Gladiš, Jiří Hajnýš, Nikolaj Ganev</i>	53
DEVELOPMENT OF CONSTRUCTION FOR THE TRANSFER OF HEAVY PRISMATIC PROFILES <i>Miroslav Milutinović, Aleksandar Okilj, Sanjin Troha</i>	55

EXPERIMENTAL DETERMINATION OF THE EFFICIENCY OF A COMPOUND PLANETARY GEARBOX <i>Sanjin Troha, Kristina Marković, Željko Vrcan, Filip Šulj, Miroslav Milutinović</i>	57
EFFECT OF PRIOR CREEP ON TENSILE PROPERTIES OF AA2124/SiC COMPOSITES <i>Agnieszka Rutecka, Zbigniew Kowalewski</i>	59
DETERMINATION OF FOUR CHARACTERISTIC REGIONS IN THE STRESS–STRAIN RESPONSE OF APM FOAM UNDER COMPRESSION USING DVC <i>Zvonimir Tomičević, Borna Božović, Daniel Kytýř, Petr Koudelka</i>	61
DEVELOPMENT OF A TEST DEVICE (FIXTURE) FOR DETERMINING THE PULL-OUT FORCE OF SWAGED BALL TERMINATIONS ON CONTROL CABLES <i>Milan Blagojević, Živče Šarkočević, Milan Bojović, Ivica Čamagić</i>	63
QUANTITATIVE DETERMINATION OF GLASS FIBER CONTENT IN FIBER REINFORCED COMPOSITE MATERIALS <i>Milan Blagojević, Živče Šarkočević, Ivica Čamagić</i>	65
NUMERICAL ANALYSIS OF BARREL LOADS IN THE DESIGN PHASE OF AN ARTILLERY SYSTEM <i>Bogdan Todorović, Aleksandra Obradović, Nebojša Hristov, Damir Jerković</i>	67
AUTOMATION OF CONSTITUTIVE MODEL PARAMETER IDENTIFICATION <i>Dragan Rakić, Slobodan Radovanović, Miroslav Živković</i>	71
FATIGUE PERFORMANCE COMPARISON OF STRENGTH 700 AND 55NiCrMoV7 STEELS <i>Dušan Arsić, Gordana Jovičić, Miroslav Živković, Miloš Pešić, Marko Topalović, Đorđe Ivković, Marko Delić</i>	75
EXPERIMENTAL DETERMINATION OF THE EFFECT OF AXIAL FORCE ON A HEADLESS SCREW CONNECTION <i>Anđela Perović, Miloš Matejić, Vladimir Milovanović</i>	79
INITIAL EXPENDABLE TURBOJET PROTOTYPE TESTING EXPERIENCES <i>Nikola Davidović, Nenad Kolarević, Milos Stanković, Marko Miloš</i>	83
HARDNESS MEASUREMENT OF ROLLING BEARING BALLS SUBJECTED TO MULTI-CYCLE CRYOGENIC TREATMENT <i>Jovana Antić, Žarko Mišković, Danilo Pejčić, Martin Dix, Alexander Pierer, Jürgen Heidrich, Matthias Milbrandt</i>	87
EXPERIMENTAL AND ANALYTICAL METHODS FOR DETERMINING INTERLAMINAR SHEAR STRENGTH OF COMPOSITES MADE BY FDM 3D PRINTING <i>Nenad Grujović, Strahinja Milenković, Fatima Živić</i>	91
MEASUREMENT OF PIEZOELECTRIC PROPERTIES OF HYDROGELS <i>Fatima Živić, Marija Branković, Danilo Petrović, Petar Todorović, Nenad Grujović</i>	95

INFLUENCE OF PALLET PLACEMENT METHOD ON BEAM BEHAVIOR IN RACK STRUCTURE <i>Mirjana Piskulić, Rodoljub Vujanac, Nenad Miloradovic, Mirko Blagojevic</i>	99
ANALYTICAL AND FEM ASSESSMENT OF A DOUBLE-SIDED BUTT WELDED S1000QL SPECIMEN FOR TENSILE TESTING PREPARATION <i>Snežana Joksić, Jovana Živić, Marija Matejić, Miloš Matejić, Živče Šarkočević, Ivica Čamagić</i>	103
QUASI-STATIC TENSILE TESTING OF HIGH-STRENGTH BALLISTIC STEEL USING DIGITAL IMAGE CORRELATION – PRELIMINARY STUDY <i>Miloš Pešić, Aleksandar Bodić, Marko Topalović, Snežana Vulović, Vladimir Dunić, Vladimir Milovanović, Miroslav Živković</i>	107
QUASI-STATIC AND DYNAMIC BEHAVIOR OF VANADIUM-CARBIDE REINFORCED ALUMINUM ALLOY STUDIED VIA DIGITAL IMAGE CORRELATION – PRELIMINARY STUDY <i>Miloš Pešić, Aleksandar Bodić, Marko Topalović, Snežana Vulović, Vladimir Dunić, Vladimir Milovanović, Miroslav Živković</i>	111
EXPERIMENTAL VALIDATION OF FRICTION STIR WELDING PARAMETERS FOR EN AW 6060 T6 ALUMINUM ALLOY <i>Aleksandar Bodić, Vladimir Milovanović, Miroslav Živković, Miloš Pešić, Dušan Milojević, Marko Topalović</i>	115
RESIDUAL STRESS-INDUCED DAMAGE IN BRAKE DRUMS <i>Dobrivoje Čatić, Vladimir Čatić</i>	119
INFLUENCE OF CRACKS ON THE STRUCTURAL STABILITY OF CYLINDRICAL STEEL EQUALIZATION TANKS <i>Vladimir Milovanović, Stefan Dikić, Saša Spasenić, Mileta Ristivojević, Sreten Spasenić, Aleksandar Bodić, Miloš Pešić</i>	123
STRUCTURAL ASSESSMENT AND REDISIGN OF THE WATER CHAMBER IN A DOMESTIC GASIFICATION BOILER <i>Filip Nastić, Mladen Josijević, Davor Končalović, Dušan Gordić, Vladimir Vukašinović</i>	127
INFLUENCE OF FEED RATE ON SURFACE ROUGHNESS OF AL6088 ALLOY IN THE BALL BURNISHING PROCESS <i>Vladimir Kočović, Dragan Džunić, Sonja Kostić, Živana Jovanović Pešić, Milan Đorđević, Ljiljana Brzaković, Đorđe Vukelić</i>	131

EFFECT OF ELECTRON BEAM PROCESSING PARAMETERS ON THE SURFACE ROUGHNESS OF TITANIUM SAMPLES: PART II <i>Živana Jovanović Pešić, Aleksandra Vulović, Strahinja Milenković, Đorđe Ilić, Dragan Džunić</i>	135
2D AXISYMMETRIC VS. 3D SOLID ELEMENT PHASE-FIELD DAMAGE MODELING <i>Vladimir Dunić, Aleksandar Bodić, Miroslav Živković</i>	139
ANALYSIS OF DEEP DRAWING PROCESS USING FEA AND FLD <i>Marko Delić, Vesna Mandić, Srbislav Aleksandrović, Dušan Arsić, Đorđe Ivković</i>	143
DEVELOPMENT AND EXPERIMENTAL TESTING OF A HYDRAULIC STAND WITH PUMPS INTENDED FOR A CENTRAL HEATING SYSTEM <i>Mladen Josijević, Dušan Gordić, Davor Končalović, Filip Nastić</i>	147
FINITE ELEMENT ANALYSIS OF PLATELET ACTIVATION AND CELL MECHANICS IN CIRCULATING TUMOR CELL ARREST <i>Vladimir Simić, Aleksandar Nikolić, Miljan Milošević, Shao Ning, Fransisca Leonard, Miloš Kojić</i>	151
CONDITIONS RELATED TO THE ROOF STRUCTURE STRENGTH OF BUSES POWERED BY NATURAL GAS AND FUEL CELLS <i>Saša Milojević, Snežana Vulović, Marija Rafailović, Slobodan Savić</i>	155
CFD INVESTIGATION OF TURBULENT WATER FLOW IN A PIPE ELBOW: ASSESSMENT OF CAVITATION RISK <i>Payle Ljubojević, Saša Stašević</i>	159
KINEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE COMPLEX PLANETARY GEAR TRAIN OVERVIEW <i>Stefan Čukic, Slavica Miladinović, Anđela Perović, Lozica Ivanović, Saša Milojević, Blaža Stojanović</i>	163
IMPROVEMENT OF THE TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF ZA-27 ALLOYS REINFORCED WITH SIC AND Al_2O_3 <i>Dragan Džunić, Stefan Miletić, Milan Ivković, Slobodan Mitrović</i>	167
CHALLENGES OF ADDITIVE MANUFACTURING IN MACHINE ELEMENT APPLICATIONS <i>Ivan Simonović, Aleksandar Marinković, Jovana Antić, Nenad Kolarević</i>	171
AUTHOR INDEX	175

QUASI-STATIC TENSILE TESTING OF HIGH-STRENGTH BALLISTIC STEEL USING DIGITAL IMAGE CORRELATION – PRELIMINARY STUDY

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1. Introduction

High-strength ballistic steels are widely used in protective structures, military vehicles, and safety equipment due to their superior strength, hardness, and energy absorption capabilities, which are essential for resisting high-velocity impacts and ensuring structural integrity [1]. While their primary application is in high-strain-rate conditions, understanding their quasi-static behavior is equally important, as it provides baseline mechanical properties for material modeling and structural performance predictions.

The mechanical response of high-strength steels is strongly influenced by factors such as microstructure, chemical composition, and strain rate. Investigations of strain localization phenomena under varying loading conditions have shown that these materials can exhibit complex deformation patterns, particularly when subjected to dynamic or quasi-static tensile loads [2].

In recent years, full-field optical measurement techniques, particularly Digital Image Correlation (DIC), have gained prominence in the characterization of metallic materials. DIC enables non-contact, high-resolution mapping of strain fields over the specimen surface, allowing for a more detailed understanding of deformation

mechanisms compared to traditional measurement methods. A comprehensive review of DIC applications in laboratory structural tests confirms its versatility in evaluating mechanical behavior and identifying strain localization zones [3].

This study presents quasi-static tensile testing of a high-strength ballistic steel specimen with full-field strain measurements obtained using a Digital Image Correlation (DIC) system. The objective is to determine the material's key mechanical properties, visualize strain distribution during deformation, and provide experimental data suitable for validation of future numerical simulations.

2. Materials and Methods

The material is S1100QL, a quenched and tempered high-strength steel commonly used in protective/ballistic applications. It has a low-carbon alloyed composition with Cr–Mo–Ni additions, exhibiting typical room-temperature properties of approximately 1.1 GPa yield strength and 1.25–1.55 GPa ultimate tensile strength.

Axisymmetric threaded tensile specimens were machined from plate stock. The gauge was lightly polished, then coated with a matte white base and a fine black speckle for DIC, as shown in Fig. 1.



Fig. 1. Threaded tensile specimen (S1100QL) with DIC speckle applied to the gauge.

Tensile tests were performed on a universal Instron machine in displacement control at 0.001 mm/min, under laboratory conditions. Force and crosshead displacement were acquired and synchronized with imaging. At least five repeats were conducted to check repeatability.

Full-field strain was measured with MatchID using a monochrome industrial camera and macro lens with symmetric continuous LED lighting. DIC settings (subset/step) were kept constant across all tests and chosen according to speckle size.

Axial engineering strain was obtained from a virtual extensometer along the gauge; engineering stress was computed from the measured force and initial area. Yield strength was determined by the 0.2% offset method; localization and necking were assessed from DIC major-strain maps.

3. Experimental setup

Universal testing machine. Quasi-static tensile tests were performed on a universal Instron frame in displacement control at a very low crosshead rate (0.001 mm/min). Axial force was measured by the machine load cell; crosshead motion was used only for control.

Specimen mounting. Axisymmetric threaded specimens were gripped coaxially. A small seating load was applied before recording to remove slack and ensure alignment. The gauge section was lightly polished and prepared for optical measurements.

Digital Image Correlation (DIC). Full-field strain was measured with a MatchID system using a monochrome industrial camera and a macro lens. Four continuous LED lights were arranged symmetrically around the gauge to provide uniform, shadow-free illumination and minimize glare, as shown in Fig.2. The gauge was coated with a matte white base and a fine black speckle. Calibration was performed before testing; correlation parameters were kept constant across repeats. Axial strain for the stress-strain curves was obtained from a virtual extensometer along the gauge.



Fig.2. DIC arrangement with four continuous LED lights providing symmetric illumination of the gauge region – left; magnified - right

Synchronization and reduction. Force and images were time-aligned through the acquisition software. Engineering stress was computed from the measured force and initial cross-sectional area; the 0.2% offset method was used for yield strength. Localization and necking were assessed from DIC major-strain maps.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Quasi-static stress-strain response

The S1100QL exhibits a steep elastic segment followed by a short uniform-plastic regime and a pronounced post-UTS softening due to necking (Fig. 3). Five repeats overlap closely in the elastic and early plastic range, indicating stable alignment and repeatable measurement. Scatter around the peak stress is modest, and all curves show a similar transition to localization with substantial post-necking ductility. The strength levels and overall curve shape are consistent with the expected behavior of quenched-and-tempered high-strength steels tested at very low rates.

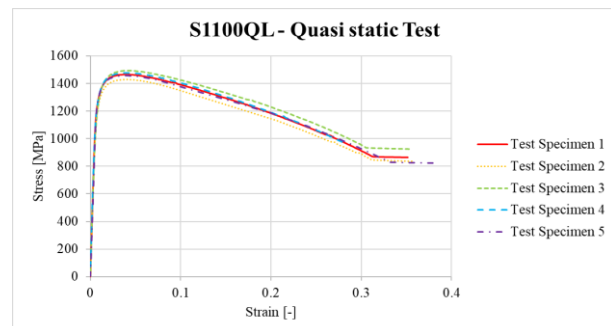


Fig. 3. Quasi-static engineering stress-strain curves for S1100QL

Fig. 3 shows the engineering stress-strain curves for S1100QL from five quasi-static tests. Strain was obtained with a DIC virtual extensometer in the

gauge, and the curves are marked at the 0.2% proof stress, the UTS, and the onset of localization.

4.2 Full-field strain evolution (DIC)

DIC maps confirm a clear progression from homogeneous straining to a sharply confined neck (Fig. 4). At the start of loading, the field is essentially uniform. With the onset of plasticity, a faint axial band forms at mid-gauge and steadily intensifies. As the curve approaches UTS, this band evolves into a dominant localization zone; strain gradients steepen while the surrounding field remains comparatively low. In the last frame before fracture, the major-strain peak is strongly concentrated within a narrow region, consistent with the observed post-UTS softening on the engineering curve and with pronounced lateral contraction.

Fig. 4 presents the evolution of the DIC major-strain field at four representative instants – start of test, early plasticity (band nucleation), localization growth, and the final pre-fracture frame – plotted with a common color scale and field of view.

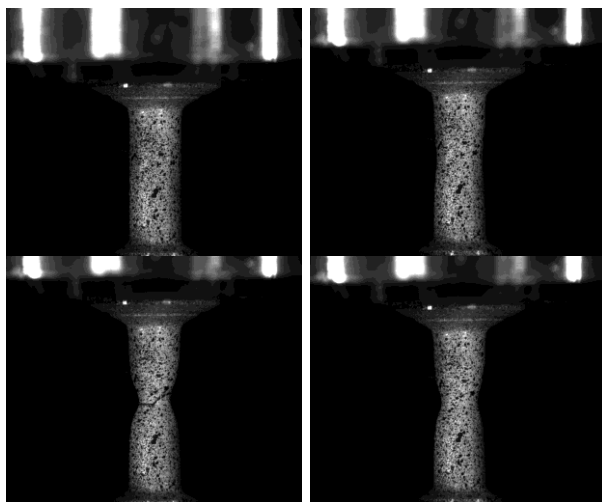


Fig. 4. DIC major-strain fields: baseline → band nucleation → localization growth → fracture (clockwise)

4.3 Necking and fracture appearance

Macroscopic inspection shows a single, centrally located neck with deformation confined to the gauge (Fig. 5). The overall appearance is consistent with ductile tensile failure controlled by localized necking typical of very high-strength Q&T steels.

Fig. 5 presents the fractured S1100QL specimen after a quasi-static test, indicating gauge-confined deformation and a single-neck failure mode.



Fig. 5. Fractured S1100QL specimen; single neck centered in the gauge.

4.4 Implications for modeling

For parameter identification, the pre-necking segment of the true stress–strain curve (converted from engineering data using DIC-based strain) can be used, as it represents uniform deformation and yields robust rate-independent parameters. The onset of localization (from DIC) serves as a practical marker separating uniform from post-instability behavior. Because deformation becomes strongly confined after this point, model validation should prioritize field-level comparisons (major-strain maps and axial profiles) rather than relying on global elongation alone.

4.5 Measurement repeatability and uncertainty

Repeat tests show tight overlap in the elastic and early plastic range, and only modest scatter around the peak, indicating that the test alignment, gripping, and optical tracking were stable. Using identical DIC settings across repetitions minimized correlation-parameter bias, while four symmetric LED lights ensured uniform illumination and limited speckle glare. The remaining variability near UTS is consistent with specimen-to-specimen differences in the exact onset and sharpening of localization. Because global elongation can be biased by miniature threaded geometry, field-aware quantities (localization onset and local peak strain) together with classic strengths are emphasized.

4.6 Practical metrics for design and model calibration

For engineering use, three metrics are particularly informative and straightforward to extract from the present dataset:

- 0.2% proof stress – a conservative sizing parameter, directly read from the curves;
- UTS – an upper bound for load-carrying capacity before diffuse instability;
- Localization indicators from DIC – (i) global strain at localization onset, marking the transition from uniform to post-instability behavior, and (ii) the peak local major strain in the last frame, characterizing the severity of the neck.

In constitutive identification, the pre-necking true curve (converted using DIC-based axial strain) supports fitting rate-independent plasticity parameters (e.g., E , σ_y , and an isotropic hardening law K , n). The localization onset provides a practical delimiter for the fitting window, while the final DIC field offers a target for validating strain localization in finite-element simulations (e.g., comparison of major-strain maps and axial profiles rather than global elongation only).

5. Conclusions

Quasi-static tensile tests on S1100QL show a steep elastic response, a short uniform-plastic regime, and a rapid transition to localized necking. Full-field DIC confirmed the evolution from near-homogeneous straining to a single, centrally located neck with strongly confined major-strain just before fracture. Repeat curves overlapped closely, indicating stable alignment and measurement; the resulting strength levels and deformation pattern are consistent with the expected behavior of quenched-and-tempered high-strength steels at a very low rate. For engineering use and constitutive calibration, the pre-necking true stress-strain segment provides a reliable basis for rate-independent parameters, while DIC-based indicators – the global strain at localization onset and the peak local major strain – quantify the onset and severity of localization. These results establish a clean quasi-static baseline for S1100QL and a field-resolved reference for validating numerical simulations.

The present results are limited to very low loading rates and room temperature; as such, they establish a baseline for S1100QL under quasi-static conditions. Future work should pair these data with elevated strain-rate tests (e.g., tensile SHB) and temperature variations to cover the operating envelope used in protective applications. On the analysis side, reporting a work-to-fracture metric (area under the engineering curve up to the last frame) and a DIC-based neck width would add complementary measures of energy absorption and localization severity.

Acknowledgement

This research is partly supported by the Science Fund of the Republic of Serbia, #GRANT No 7475, Prediction of damage evolution in engineering structures – PROMINENT, and by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation, Republic of Serbia, Agreement No.

451-03-136/2025-03/200378 and Agreement No. 451-03-137/2025-03/200107.

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