(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 244 849 (13) A

(43) Date of A publication 11.12.1991

(21) Application No 9111555.0

(22) Date of filing 29.05.1991

(30) Priority data
(31) 9012062 (32) 30.05.1990 (33) GB

(51) INT CL[5]
H01B 13/32

(52) UK CL (Edition K)
H1A A1C A3M A5

(56) Documents cited
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(58) Field of search
UK CL (Edition K) H1A
INT CL[5] H01B 13/32
Online databases : WPI

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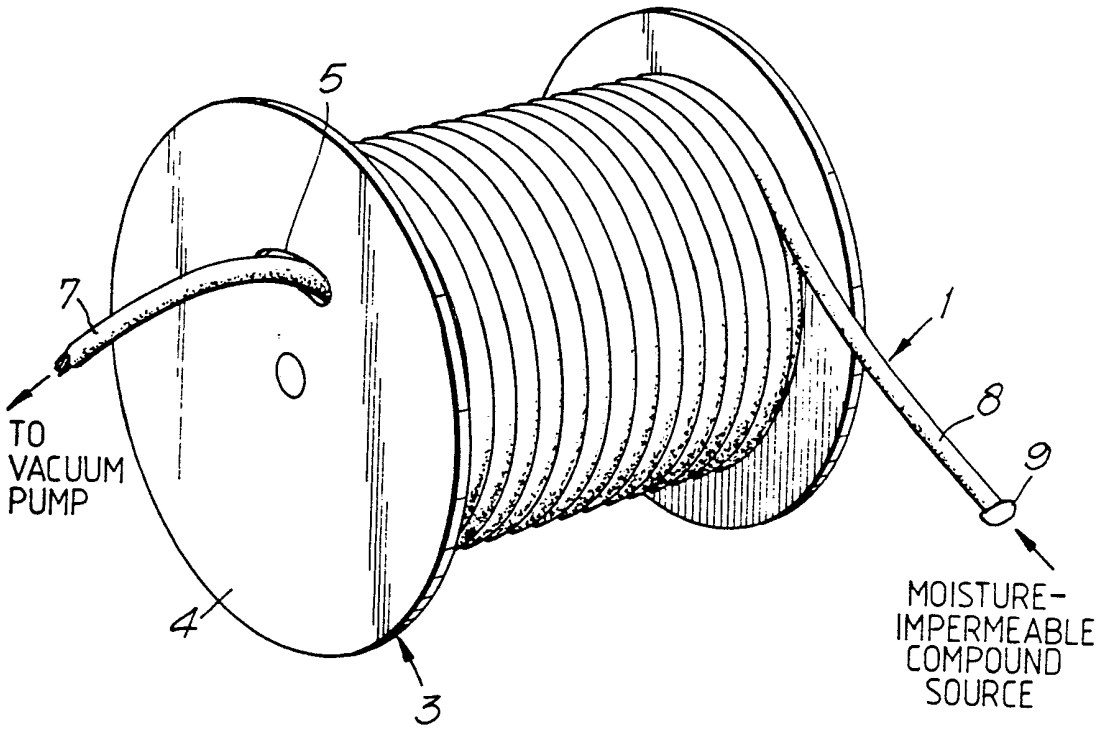
(54) Moisture-impermeable stranded electric conductor

(57) A stranded conductor is covered with a fluid-impermeable layer of plastics material by extrusion and wound around a drum 3 to leave each end exposed and accessible. One end 8 is sealed and air is evacuated from the conductor interstices. Semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is allowed to flow along the evacuated conductor until the interstices are filled throughout the length of the core. The moisture-impermeable compound in the interstices is then permitted to solidify or thicken to such an extent that it will not readily flow from the conductor. The cable may be heated before filling with the compound.



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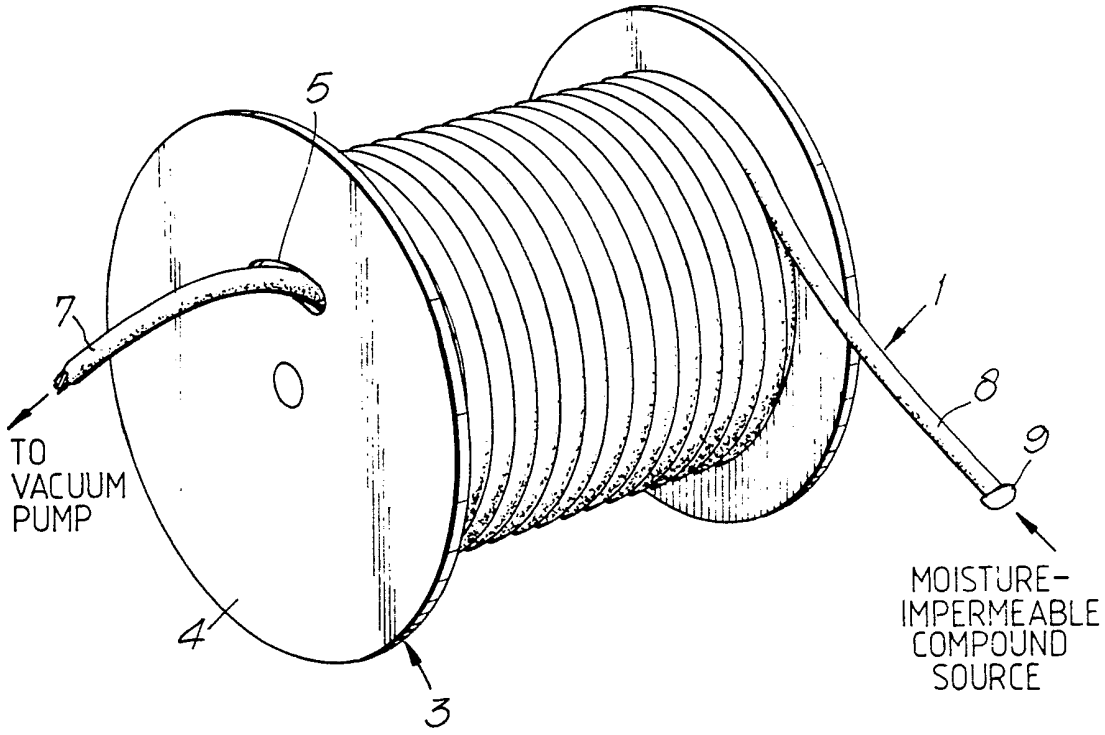
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MOISTURE-IMPERMEABLE STRANDED ELECTRIC CONDUCTOR

This invention relates to electric cables of the kind having one or more than one electric conductor comprising a plurality of wires or other flexible elongate elements of metal or metal alloy stranded or otherwise assembled together, the or each conductor being surrounded by at least one extruded layer of plastics material. For convenience, all such flexible elements of metal or metal alloy hereinafter will be included in the generic term "wires". The plastics material of the extruded layer immediately adjacent the outermost layer of wires of the or each conductor substantially fills interstices between the wires of the outermost layer of wires and is usually, but not necessarily, semi-conductive because it is the normal practice for the extruded layer of plastics material immediately adjacent the conductor to constitute a conductor screen.

With a view to substantially reducing risk of moisture penetration along interstices within a conductor consisting of a plurality of wires stranded or otherwise assembled together, it is common practice for the interstices wholly bounded by the wires of the conductor to be substantially filled with a semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound throughout substantially the whole length of the conductor.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an improved method of manufacturing an electric cable comprising at least one cable core having a substantially moisture-impermeable multi-wire electric conductor, which method of manufacture is simple and substantially less expensive than methods of manufacture hitherto proposed and used.

According to the invention, the improved method comprises causing a flexible elongate core of metal or metal alloy to travel continuously in the direction of its length; helically winding around the advancing metal core at least one layer of wires to form a flexible multi-wire conductor; extruding over the multi-wire conductor at least one fluid-impermeable layer of plastics material to form an electric cable core; winding the cable core around the hub of a cable drum in such a way that each end of the wound cable core is exposed and accessible; sealing the end of the multi-wire conductor at one exposed end of the wound cable core and evacuating air from the interstices bounded by the wires of the multi-wire conductor from the end of the multi-wire conductor at the other exposed end of the wound cable core; connecting a source of semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state to the end of the multi-wire conductor at one exposed end of the wound cable core and allowing moisture-impermeable compound to be drawn into

and to flow along the interstices throughout the length of the multi-wire conductor until the interstices are substantially filled throughout the length of the conductor and permitting or causing the moisture-impermeable compound in said interstices to thicken or solidify to such an extent that it will not readily flow from the conductor.

Where the electric cable core is to constitute the core of a single core electric cable, preferably, before the cable core is wound around the hub of the cable drum, the cable sheath and any other protective layer are applied to the cable core.

Where the electric cable core is to constitute one core of a multi-core electric cable, preferably, before the cable core is wound around the hub of a cable drum, the cable cores are laid-up or otherwise assembled together, a cable sheath and any other protective layer are applied to the assembled cores to form a multi-core electric cable and the electric cable is wound around the hub of the cable drum. The multi-wire conductors of the cable cores of the wound multi-core cable may be evacuated and moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state drawn into the evacuated interstices of the multi-wire conductors concurrently, or the multi-wire conductors may be evacuated and filled with moisture-impermeable compound independently and in turn.

Preferably, in all cases, semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is not permitted to be drawn into the interstices of the multi-wire conductor or conductors of the wound core or cores until substantially all air has been evacuated from the interstices, thereby substantially reducing the risk of formation of any air pockets within the semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound-filled interstices of the or each multi-wire conductor.

In some circumstances, before semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is drawn into the interstices of the multi-wire conductor or conductors of the wound core or cores, the conductor of the or each core is heated with a view to preventing premature cooling and thickening of the compound being drawn into the interstices before the interstices of the conductor are substantially filled through the length of the conductor. Such heating may be effected before, during or after evacuating air from the interstices and is preferably achieved by passing an appropriate current along the conductor.

Evacuation of air from the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each wound cable core may be effected at either exposed end of the wound cable core but, preferably, it is effected at the exposed leading end of the wound cable core and, for this

purpose, preferably the leading end of the wound cable core, that is to say the end of the wound cable core nearer the hub of the cable drum, protrudes through a hole in a flange of the cable drum. Evacuation of air preferably is effected by means of a vacuum pump which can be detachably connected to the end of the multi-wire conductor at an exposed end of the wound cable core and which, preferably, incorporates means for temporarily sealing the end of the conductor with respect to the vacuum pump.

Preferably, a source of said semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is detachably connected to the end of the conductor at the exposed trailing end of the wound cable core and, preferably also, a temporary seal is effected between the conductor and the source whilst the interstices of the conductor are being evacuated. The source of semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound preferably is heated to maintain compound in the source at such a temperature that the compound is in said liquid or semi-liquid state.

As the semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound, it is preferred to employ a compound which, when heated to a temperature above approximately 150°C, is sufficiently liquefied for the compound to be drawn into evacuated interstices of a multi-wire conductor of a wound cable core and which, when permitted to cool to

a temperature below approximately 130°C, will thicken or solidify to such an extent that the compound will not readily flow from the conductor.

The elongate metal core around which at least one layer of wires is helically wound may be a single central wire or it may comprise a plurality of wires stranded together.

The invention further includes an electric cable comprising at least one cable core having a multi-wire conductor, wherein the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each core have been filled with semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound by the improved method hereinbefore described.

By virtue of the improved method of the present invention, semi-conductive, moisture-impermable compound is not introduced into the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each cable core of an electric cable until after manufacture of the cable has been completed and need not be introduced until after electrical testing of the cable has been carried out.

The invention is further illustrated by a description, by way of example, of the preferred method of manufacturing a single core electric cable comprising a cable core having a substantially moisture-impermeable multi-wire electric conductor with reference to the accompanying drawing which shows a diagrammatic perspective view of the final steps of the method.

The initial steps in the manufacture of the single core electric cable are conventional in the electric cable manufacturing industry and require no detailed description or illustration. These steps comprise causing a single central copper wire to travel continuously in the direction of its length; helically winding around the advancing wire a layer of copper wires and helically winding around the last-applied layer of copper wires at least one additional layer of copper wires to form a flexible multi-wire conductor; extruding over the multi-wire conductor at least one fluid-impermeable layer of plastics material to form an electric cable core; and applying to the cable core an overall protective sheath. Thereafter, as illustrated diagrammatically in the drawing, the sheathed cable core 1 is wound around the hub of a cable drum 3 in such a way that the leading end 7 of the sheathed cable core protrudes through a hole 5 in a flange 4 of the drum so that the end of the multi-wire conductor 2 at the leading end of the sheathed cable core is exposed and accessible. The end of the multi-wire conductor 2 at the trailing end 8 of the sheathed cable core 1 is then sealed at 9, a vacuum pump (not shown) is detachably connected to the end of the multi-wire conductor 2 at the leading end 7 of the sheathed cable core and air is evacuated from the interstices bounded by the wires of the multi-wire conductor of the wound sheathed cable

core. After evacuation of air from the multi-wire conductor 2 of the wound cable core 1 has been effected, the vacuum pump is disconnected from, or sealed with respect to, the end of the multi-wire conductor at the leading end 7 of the wound sheathed cable core and a source of semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound (not shown) heated to maintain the compound in a liquid state is connected to the end of the multi-wire conductor at the trailing end 8 of the wound sheathed cable core. Moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid state is allowed to be drawn into and along the interstices of the multi-wire conductor 2 of the wound sheathed cable core 1 until the interstices are filled throughout the length of the multi-wire conductor and, thereafter, the source of semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound is disconnected from the trailing end 8 of the wound sheathed cable core and the moisture-impermeable compound filling the interstices of the multi-wire conductor 2 is permitted to thicken or solidify to such an extent that it will not readily flow from the conductor.

CLAIMS:

1. A method of manufacturing an electric cable comprising at least one cable core having a substantially moisture-impermeable multi-wire electric conductor, which method comprises causing a flexible elongate core of metal or metal alloy to travel continuously in the direction of its length; helically winding around the advancing metal core at least one layer of wires to form a flexible multi-wire conductor; extruding over the multi-wire conductor at least one fluid-impermeable layer of plastics material to form an electric cable core; winding the cable core around the hub of a cable drum in such a way that each end of the wound cable core is exposed and accessible; sealing the end of the multi-wire conductor at one exposed end of the wound cable core and evacuating air from the interstices bounded by the wires of the multi-wire conductor from the end of the multi-wire conductor at the other exposed end of the wound cable core; connecting a source of semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state to the end of the multi-wire conductor at one exposed end of the wound cable core and allowing moisture-impermeable compound to be drawn into and to flow along the interstices throughout the length of the multi-wire conductor until the interstices are substantially filled throughout the length of the

conductor and permitting or causing the moisture-impermeable compound in said interstices to solidify or thicken to such an extent that it will not readily flow from the conductor.

2. A method as claimed in Claim 1 in which the electric cable core is to constitute the core of a single core electric cable, wherein, before the cable core is wound around the hub of the cable drum, a cable sheath is applied to the cable core.

3. A method as claimed in Claim 1 in which the electric cable core is to constitute one core of a multi-core electric cable, wherein, before the cable core is wound around the hub of a cable drum, the cable core is laid-up or otherwise assembled with at least one other cable core of similar construction, a cable sheath is applied to the assembled cores to form a multi-core electric cable, and the electric cable is wound around the hub of the cable drum.

4. A method as claimed in Claim 3, wherein the multi-wire conductors of the cable cores of the wound multi-core cable are evacuated and moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is drawn into the evacuated interstices of the multi-wire conductors concurrently.

5. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims wherein semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is not

permitted to be drawn into the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each wound cable core until substantially all air has been evacuated from the interstices.

6. A method as claimed in any one of the proceeding Claims, wherein the multi-wire conductor of the or each wound core is heated before semi-conductive moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is drawn into the interstices of the conductor to prevent premature cooling and thickening of the compound as it is being drawn into the interstices.

7. A method as claimed in Claim 6, wherein said heating is effected by passing an appropriate current along the conductor.

8. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims, wherein evacuation of air from the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each wound cable core is effected at the exposed leading end of the wound cable core.

9. A method as claimed in Claim 8, wherein the leading end of the or each wound cable core protrudes through a hole in a flange of the cable drum.

10. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims, wherein evacuation of air from the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each wound cable core is effected by means of vacuum pump which is detachably connected to the end of the multi-wire

conductor at an exposed end of the wound cable core and which incorporates means for temporarily sealing the end of said multi-wire conductor with respect to the vacuum pump.

11. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims, wherein a source of said semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound in a liquid or semi-liquid state is detachably connected to the end of said multi-wire conductor at the exposed trailing end of the wound cable core.

12. A method as claimed in Claim 11, wherein a temporary seal is effected between said multi-wire conductor and the source of semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound whilst the interstices of said conductor are being evacuated.

13. A method as claimed in Claim 11 or 12, wherein the source of semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound is heated to maintain compound in the source at such a temperature that the compound is in said liquid or semi-liquid state.

14. A method as claimed in any one of the preceding Claims, wherein the semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound is a compound which, when heated to a temperature above approximately 150°C, is sufficiently liquefied for the compound to be drawn into evacuated interstices of said multi-wire conductor of the or each wound cable core and which, when permitted

to cool to a temperature below approximately 130°C, solidifies or thickens to such an extent that the compound will not readily flow from the conductor.

15. A method of manufacturing an electric cable comprising a cable core having a substantially moisture-impermeable multi-wire electric conductor substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawing.

16. An electric cable comprising at least one cable core having a multi-wire cable conductor, wherein the interstices of the multi-wire conductor of the or each core have been filled throughout their lengths with semi-conductive, moisture-impermeable compound by the method claimed in any one of the preceding Claims.

Published 1991 at The Patent Office, Concept House, Cardiff Road, Newport, Gwent NP9 1RH. Further copies may be obtained from Sales Branch, Unit 6, Nine Mile Point, Cwmfelinfach, Cross Keys, Newport, NP1 7HZ. Printed by Multiplex techniques ltd, St Mary Cray, Kent.