International Journal of Research in Advanced Engineering and Technology
www.allengineeringjournal.in
ISSN: 2455-0876
Received: 31-08-2024, Accepted: 30-09-2024, Published: 15-10-2024
Volume 10, Issue 2, 2024, Page No. 31-34

Robustness of wheel, crawler, four leg of inspection robot for different terrains used in oil field, refinery and plant

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Abstract

Traditional tracked vehicles are effective on rugged terrains but often lack speed and precision on flat surfaces. Conversely, wheeled systems excel in speed and maneuverability on smooth ground but face difficulties with traction and stability on uneven terrains. The integration of swing wheels offers a hybrid solution, allowing vehicles to switch between modes based on surface conditions, thus enhancing adaptability in environments with varying terrains, such as construction sites, disaster zones, and military operations.

Keywords: Tracked vehicles, rugged terrains, swing wheels

Introduction

Mobile track systems play a crucial role in industries requiring terrain adaptability, stability, and maneuverability, such as construction, military, and agriculture. These systems are engineered to navigate complex environments, including rough terrains, uneven surfaces, and confined spaces. Recent technological advancements have heightened the demand for mobile platforms capable of operating in such challenging conditions, with a particular emphasis on developing hybrid solutions like track mobile systems equipped with swing wheels, which balance flexibility and control.

Traditional tracked vehicles are effective on rugged terrains but often lack speed and precision on flat surfaces. Conversely, wheeled systems excel in speed and maneuverability on smooth ground but face difficulties with traction and stability on uneven terrains. The integration of swing wheels offers a hybrid solution, allowing vehicles to switch between modes based on surface conditions, thus enhancing adaptability in environments with varying terrains, such as construction sites, disaster zones, and military operations.

This review article aims to evaluate the performance, terrain adaptability, and robustness of track mobile systems, specifically those incorporating swing wheels, wheeled configurations, and crawler designs.

Background

The evolution of track mobile systems has been marked by significant advancements to meet the needs of various industries, including military, agriculture, construction, and disaster relief. Initially developed for military vehicles to navigate rough terrains, these systems have expanded to agricultural machinery, reducing soil compaction, and construction equipment, offering stability on loose and uneven surfaces. Recent trends emphasize hybrid systems combining tracked and wheeled capabilities, providing a versatile approach that enhances speed on firm terrain while retaining the traction advantages of tracks on rough surfaces.

The swing wheel mechanism, an innovation in hybrid systems, enables vehicles to transition dynamically between wheeled and tracked modes, enhancing adaptability across terrains. However, this mechanism introduces mechanical complexity and challenges related to power efficiency, durability, and control. Research highlights the importance of advanced sensors and real-time control algorithms to optimize terrain adaptability while minimizing mechanical stress and energy consumption.

Tracked mobility systems offer significant benefits in environments with soft, uneven terrain by distributing weight over a larger surface area, improving traction, and reducing ground pressure. These systems are vital in sectors like agriculture, construction, and defense. However, the mechanical complexity, power requirements, and maintenance demands of tracked systems remain challenges. Innovations such as real-time track tension adjustments and the use of segmented tracks show promise in improving flexibility and performance.

Material selection is critical in designing track mobile systems. High-strength steel, aluminum alloys, and advanced composites are commonly used to balance strength and weight. Finite element analysis (FEA) assists in optimizing materials for durability and performance, ensuring structural integrity under operational stresses. The ongoing development of corrosion-resistant t materials and coatings also aims to extend the operational life of vehicles in harsh environments.

Despite these advancements, gaps remain in the integration of advanced control systems and optimization of power management for hybrid tracked-wheeled vehicles. Further research into artificial intelligence and machine learning could enhance terrain adaptability and energy efficiency. Additionally, understanding long-term durability and maintenance needs in extreme environments is crucial for improving the reliability and effectiveness of these systems.

1. Track mobil system with swing wheel

The design of track mobile systems with swing wheel mechanisms integrates sophisticated mechanical and structural elements to ensure versatility and efficiency across various terrains. This summary provides an overview of the swing wheel mechanism, tracked mobility system, and design analysis using SolidWorks.

Swing Wheel Mechanism Design

The swing wheel mechanism enables dynamic switching between tracked and wheeled modes, optimizing mobility for different terrains. The system incorporates two degrees of freedom (DoF) for the wheels: one for rotation (allowing the wheels to lift or lower) and another for steering.

Tracked mobility system

The tracked system spans the vehicle's length, distributing weight to minimize ground pressure, and features high-traction treads for enhanced grip. The system is powered by two 400W brushless DC motors with independent drive capabilities, enabling differential steering and zero-radius turning. This design allows the vehicle to navigate obstacles and inclines up to 35° efficiently.

Chassis and suspension design

A rocker-bogie suspension system was implemented, ensuring stability and traction when traversing obstacles up to 200 mm high. The chassis, made from 6061-T6 aluminum, balances strength and weight, providing a robust yet lightweight frame that supports operational efficiency and portability.

CAD modeling and analysis with solidworks

SolidWorks was used extensively to model and simulate the vehicle. The design process involved modular chassis modeling, integration of the swing wheel mechanism, and detailed track assembly. Finite Element Analysis (FEA) and motion simulations assessed the system's structural integrity, mobility, and performance under various conditions, verifying that the vehicle can endure stress and maintain balance during transitions and terrain changes.

Final considerations

The final design emphasizes the versatility and durability required for challenging environments such as construction sites and disaster zones. By combining tracked and wheeled mobility, the swing wheel mechanism enables seamless transitions, enhancing the system's adaptability and performance.

2. Material selection and structural analysis

In the development of the track mobile system with a swing wheel, material selection and structural integrity are crucial for ensuring performance in challenging environments, such as construction sites and off-road terrains. The system's design prioritizes a balance between strength, weight, and environmental resistance to optimize functionality.

Material selection criteria

Material selection considers strength, durability, weight, environmental resistance, and cost-effectiveness:

Strength and Durability: Materials must withstand mechanical stresses like impacts, torsion, and payload weight during mode transitions. Components such as swing arms and tracks need high tensile and yield strengths to prevent deformation and fatigue.

Weight and Maneuverability: Lightweight materials are essential for mobility and energy efficiency, particularly for components like the swing wheels. High-strength, low-density materials are chosen to maintain maneuverability and operational efficiency.

Corrosion and Environmental Resistance: The vehicle's deployment in outdoor settings requires materials resistant to water, dust, and extreme temperatures.

3. Kinematic and dynamic analysis

This chapter addresses the kinematic and dynamic aspects of the robotic arm and tracked mobility system in the track mobile system.

3.1. Kinematic analysis of the robotic arm

The robotic arm features a six-degree-of-freedom (DoF) configuration, allowing complex maneuvers essential for the system's functionality. The analysis involves:

Manipulability: The arm’s dexterity is evaluated using the Jacobian matrix, and the manipulability index indicates the system’s control efficiency, critical for precision tasks in confined or hazardous environments.

3.2. Dynamic analysis of the robotic arm

The dynamic behavior of the robotic arm is modeled using Lagrangian mechanics:

Actuation Control: PID (Proportional-Integral-Derivative) control is implemented for precise joint movements, minimizing errors and ensuring smooth operations, especially for tasks involving sensitive objects.

3.3. Dynamic analysis of the tracked mobility system

The mobility system is designed for robust terrain traversal:

Dynamics of Tracked Vehicles: Newton-Euler equations model the forces acting on the system, including traction, friction, and slope forces, ensuring that the system can manage inclines up to 30°. The brushless DC motors provide adequate torque for overcoming terrain resistance.

4. Implementation of control systems

The control system architecture for the track mobile system is designed to enable precise motion control, sensor integration, and real-time decision-making, ensuring operational effectiveness in hazardous environments. The architecture consists of three main components:

Arm Control System (ACS): Manages the multi-DoF robotic arm responsible for manipulating hazardous objects. It uses PID controllers and sensor feedback loops to maintain precise and stable control. Brushless DC motors paired with harmonic drives are selected to provide high torque, ensuring the robot can handle payloads up to 10 kg. Kinematic solvers for forward and inverse kinematics calculate the arm's position and joint angles, enabling it to operate safely in confined spaces.

Mobility Control System (MCS): This subsystem controls the tracked mobility, allowing the robot to traverse complex terrains like rubble or stairs. Using differential steering and PID controllers, the system manages speed and direction for stability. The rocker-bogie suspension, modeled in SolidWorks, provides adaptability on rough terrain. Sensors such as IMUs and gyroscopes monitor the robot's tilt and orientation, ensuring stability during movement.

Sensor Integration and Feedback System (SIFS): This system integrates various sensors for real-time feedback. Position encoders, force sensors, cameras, lidar, ultrasonic sensors, and IMUs provide data crucial for both arm and mobility control. The integration allows for semi-autonomous operation, where path planning algorithms (e.g., A* pathfinding) use lidar-generated occupancy grids for obstacle avoidance.

5. Experimental Setup and Testing

To evaluate the performance of the track mobile system with a swing wheel mechanism, virtual simulations were conducted in SolidWorks. These simulations focused on assessing the system's kinematics, structural integrity, dynamic behavior, and mechanical response under different operational scenarios. The objectives were to validate the kinematic transitions of the swing wheel, test dynamic performance on diverse terrains, and ensure the structural integrity of critical components under stress.

5.1. Objectives

Simulations aimed to:
Validate the swing wheel mechanism's kinematics for seamless transitions.
Test the dynamic stability of the tracked mobility system across various terrains.
Analyze the structural performance of components like the chassis and swing arms under stress.
Use Finite Element Analysis (FEA) for material assessment under load.
Optimize design parameters for improved efficiency and durability.

5.2. Simulation setup

SolidWorks tools such as Motion Analysis, Dynamic Simulation, and FEA were utilized to replicate real-world conditions. Simulations included terrain modeling, tracked movement, and dynamic loading scenarios to evaluate how the system behaves under varied operational conditions.

5.3. Kinematic analysis of swing wheel mechanism

Kinematic testing confirmed the swing wheel's ability to transition smoothly between modes. Actuator forces were sufficient to operate under simulated load conditions, and the mechanism achieved a transition time of 3 seconds, demonstrating the system's reliability.

5.4. Dynamic simulation of the tracked mobility system

Dynamic simulations assessed the robot's capability on rough terrains and inclines. The tracked system climbed a 30° incline, maintained stability over obstacles, and performed zero-radius turns, validating its maneuverability and suspension performance.

5.5. Finite Element Analysis (FEA)

FEA was used to test the structural integrity of components such as the chassis and robotic arm under operational loads. Results showed stress levels within material limits (e.g., 65 MPa in the arm joints vs. a 1500 MPa yield strength for CFRP) and acceptable deformation levels (1.2 mm), ensuring the system's robustness and durability. Safety factors of 3.5 for the arm and 2.5 for the chassis indicated a well-optimized design.

Discussion

The development and testing of the track mobile system with a swing wheel mechanism highlighted key insights into its mobility, stability, and structural integrity. Virtual simulations confirmed the system's effectiveness, but also indicated areas for potential enhancement.

Kinematic and Dynamic Performance: The kinematic analysis validated smooth transitions between tracked and wheeled modes. However, a minor repeatability deviation of 1.5 mm suggests the need for improved actuator control algorithms and higher-resolution feedback mechanisms. Dynamic performance demonstrated the system's ability to navigate rough terrains and slopes effectively. Despite its robustness, minor slippage on loose terrain points to the need for friction compensation and adaptive power control to maintain traction.

Structural Integrity and Material Choices: Finite Element Analysis (FEA) confirmed that 6061-T6 aluminum and CFRP are suitable materials, offering adequate strength while maintaining a low weight. The CFRP swing arms showed a high safety factor, supporting the system's operational demands without compromising stability. However, optimizing the robot's weight further could enhance mobility, reduce ground pressure, and improve energy efficiency.

Control Systems and Feedback Integration: The PID controllers and sensor feedback systems effectively managed the robot's movement and adjustments in real-time. Nonetheless, incorporating advanced sensor fusion (e.g., vision-based sensors) could enhance environmental awareness and autonomous navigation capabilities. Expanding the control system with machine learning algorithms and path-planning functionalities would further reduce operator involvement and improve efficiency in hazardous scenarios.

Design Limitations and Future Work: The system requires enhancements in battery life, environmental resistance, and autonomy for real-world applications. Prototyping and field testing are necessary to validate simulated results and ensure the system's performance under actual conditions.

Conclusion

The design and simulation of the track mobile system with a swing wheel configuration have shown significant potential for enhancing mobility, stability, and adaptability across varied terrains. The integration of wheeled and tracked modes offers flexibility crucial for navigating complex environments like construction sites or disaster zones. SolidWorks simulations confirmed the system's effectiveness in meeting performance standards for mobility, structural integrity, and dynamic adaptability. The selection of 6061-T6 aluminum for the chassis and CFRP for swing arms demonstrated a balance between strength and weight, providing sufficient durability under expected operational loads.

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