MAGNA-POWER ELECTRONICS

SUPPORT

OVERVIEW OF CURRENT-FED POWER PROCESSING

Switching power supplies in the tens of kilowatt power range have been slowly replacing traditional silicon controlled rectifier (SCR) based topologies over the past several decades. The advantages and disadvantages are well known. High frequency operation of switching power supplies enables magnetic components to be reduced in size and weight and allows faster response times to line and load perturbations. The principle disadvantage is that the demands placed on switching devices tend to make high power switching power supplies less reliable than their SCR based counterpart.

Numerous power circuit topologies are currently being deployed for high-power switchmode applications. The most common configurations consist of three power conversion stages:

1. An AC to DC converter which converts the 3-phase incoming mains to a DC voltage.
2. A DC to AC inverter or converter which converts the voltage on the DC bus to a high-frequency AC voltage.
3. A secondary AC to DC converter which converts the high-frequency AC voltage to DC voltage.

The two AC to DC converters are very similar in function except for the operating frequencies; the converters consist primarily of rectifiers, low pass filters, and snubbers. The snubbers limit switching transient voltages and absorb energy stored from parasitic components. The second stage, the DC to AC converter, generates a high-frequency voltage which drives a transformer at a frequency generally at 20 kHz or above. The transformer is required for ohmic isolation and production of an output voltage as determined by the transformer turns ratio. The DC to AC converter is the most complex stage and there are numerous power processing topologies presently in production.

Most high-power DC to AC converters utilize a H-bridge configuration, four power devices, for exciting the high-frequency transformer. The H-bridge is controlled with pulse width modulated (PWM) or with other modulation strategies to produce a voltage of limited pulse width or amplitude. Modulation of the H-bridge produces a controllable output voltage.

DC to AC converter topologies fall into three groups: hard-switched converters, soft-switched converters, and resonant converters. The primary difference between the topologies is the switching device’s load line during the commutation period (switching transition). It is during the commutation period where power devices dissipate the most power.

Hard-switched converters allow the power devices and/or snubbers to absorb commutation energy. Soft-switched converters have additional passive circuitry to shape power waveforms to reduce losses during the commutation period. The advantage of reduced commutation losses is offset with increased circuitry complexity, additional on-state losses (due to waveform modification), and sensitivity to loading conditions. Resonant power converters have highly tuned tank circuits which cause either device voltage or current to appear sinusoidal. The advantages and disadvantages are similar to soft-switched converters. Resonant power converters are second-order and timing is more critical than soft-switched converters.

Hard-switched, soft-switched, and resonant converters are usually designed to operate from a DC voltage source and are commonly referred to as voltage-fed converters. Characteristically, voltage-fed converters are prone to shoot through problems which can occur when one device fails to turn off before the other series connected device turns on. While protective circuitry can

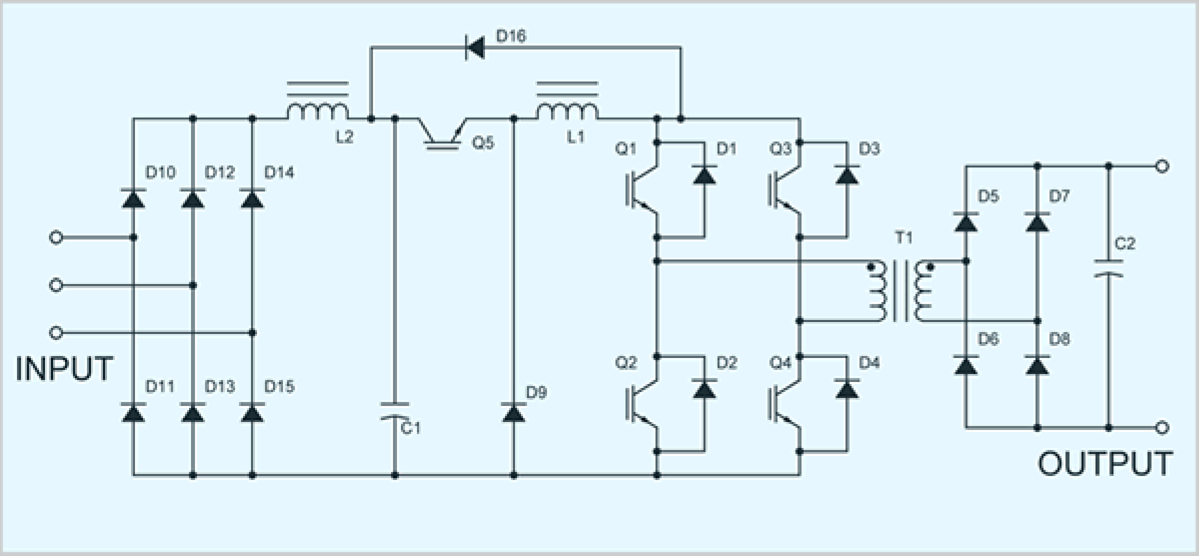

Figure 3. Rectifier, Chopper, and Current-fed Converter

The novel feature of the current-fed converter combined with an input chopper is its performance under abnormal operating conditions. Transformer T1, IGBT's Q1 through Q5, and diodes D1 through D8 can all operate in a shorted state with system level protection. Under such conditions, the rate of rise of current is a function of the applied voltage across inductor L1 divided by its inductance. Inductor L1 is typically sized to maintain a peak to peak ripple current within a fraction of it maximum value. As long as system shutdown occurs within the switching period of the chopper, peak currents are well controlled. Permitting an extended fault detection period allows fault protection circuitry to be well filtered enabling robust, nuisance free tripping operation in high electrical noise environments.

Another key feature of the chopper and current-fed converter combination is that each circuit can protect each other from abnormally high currents with a single detecting scheme. A fault in the converter stage can be protected with the chopper shutdown and a fault in the chopper stage can be protected with the current-fed converter shutdown.

The previous constraints placed on the switching states of the current-fed converter can be circumvented with the introduction of catch diode D16. This component provides a current return path for IGBT's Q1, Q3 or Q2, Q4 when the devices are turned off. Diode D16 clamps the maximum off state voltage of the H-bridge to the voltage across capacitor C1.

CONCLUSION

This article describes the general characteristics of high power voltage-fed and current-fed converters and their sensitivity to device parameter variations and erroneous switching states. Voltage-fed converters generally have series connected power devices across an input capacitor. Abnormal switching states can permit simultaneous device conduction causing currents to increase very rapidly. In addition, voltage-fed converters can also produce DC offsets which can cause the magnetic core of the main transformer to saturate. To protect power semiconductors under these conditions, high speed fault detection is required. The protection of power semiconductors in high, electrical noise environments is difficult.

Current-fed converters are the electrical dual of voltage-fed converters and prefer a shorted state to an open state of operation. These topologies cannot create fast rising current spikes and cannot cause magnetic core saturation under erroneous conditions. Current-fed converters operate with the robustness of SCR based power supplies, but at high-frequency. Current-fed converters require an additional power processing stage which can be used for control and enhanced system protection.

References

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