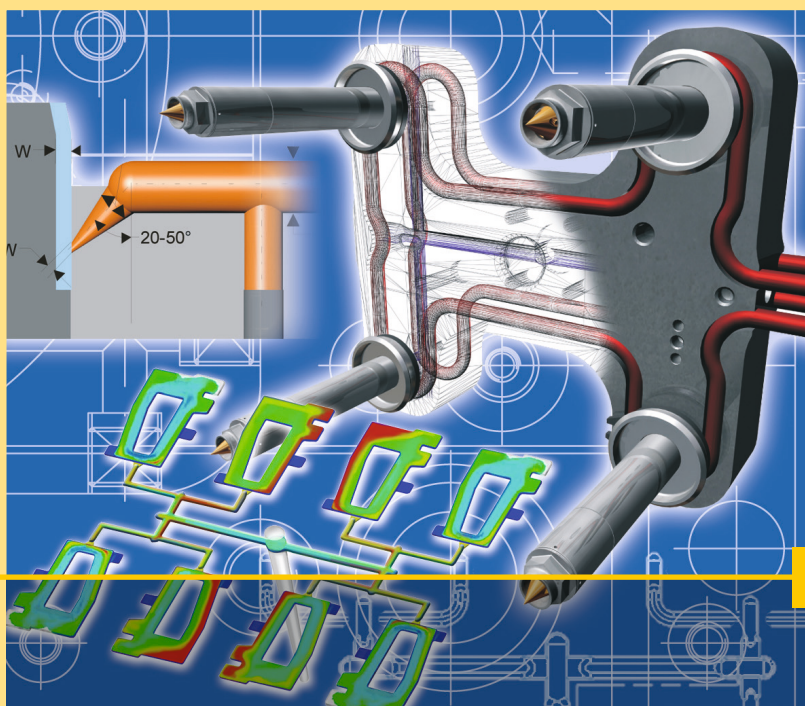


John P. Beaumont

# Runner and Gating Design Handbook

Tools for Successful Injection Molding



3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

HANSER

Beaumont  
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# Preface

Quality management methods, such as *Design for Six Sigma*, stress the critical review of fundamentals in order to identify and eliminate potential problems before they take their toll on the manufacturing process. In developing a mold design to produce an injection molded plastic part, one of the most fundamental and influential components is its melt delivery system. It also turns out that the melt delivery, or runner, system is probably the most underappreciated and misunderstood component of the injection mold. This makes it a prime candidate for critical review, particularly for the conscientious molder striving to improve his/her bottom line.

The melt delivery system begins with the injection molding machine's nozzle and continues into the mold, progressing through the sprue, runner, and gate. Though the melt may only experience these flow channels for a fraction of a second, their effects are dramatic and result in the most extreme conditions experienced by the plastic melt in any phase of nearly any plastics processing method. Shear rates in gates commonly exceed  $100,000 \text{ s}^{-1}$  and localized melt temperature in high shear laminates can spike at as much as  $200 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ , at rates that can exceed  $1000 \text{ }^\circ\text{C/s}$ . Due to the extremity of these conditions, the actual effect of these conditions on the melt is not well understood. Most material characterization methods do not even come close to measuring melt conditions under these extremes. Viscosity vs. shear rate data are generally developed at a maximum of  $10,000 \text{ s}^{-1}$ , DSC data at less than  $32 \text{ }^\circ\text{C/min}$ , and PVT data at less than  $3 \text{ }^\circ\text{C/min}$ . As a result of the limitations of material characterization methods as well as solution modeling and meshing issues, today's injection molding and fluid flow simulation programs are still struggling to accurately predict the extreme non-homogeneous asymmetric melt conditions developed in a branching runner. The challenge of dealing with these conditions has generally been underestimated.

The influences of these extreme melt conditions developed in the runner are just beginning to be understood. One of the most significant is the realization that the combination of laminar flow and high perimeter shear in a runner results in extreme non-homogeneous melt conditions across a runner. Not only can a  $200 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$  variation in melt temperature exist but, as a result of the non-Newtonian characteristics of the melt, the viscosity may easily vary 100-fold from the zero shear conditions in the center of a flow channel to the extreme shear conditions around the perimeter. This creates significantly asymmetric melt conditions when the melt branches in a runner or part-forming cavity. The conditions developed in the runner continue into the part, corrupting the expected filling pattern and influencing how the part is packed, its mechanical properties, shrinkage, and warpage. These are all factors that are hardly known by most in the molding industry and their dramatic effects are rarely fully appreciated. The

influence can be particularly acute in two-stage injection processes such as gas assist, structural foam, MuCell®, and co-injection.

As stated earlier, the melt delivery system consists of the molding machine's nozzle, sprue, runner, and gate. Each of these components, or regions, can have a significant influence on both the process and the molded part. Process effects include the ability to fill and pack the part, the injection fill rate, the clamp tonnage, and the cycle time. Effects on the part include size, weight, mechanical properties, and variations in these characteristics between parts formed in different cavities within a multi-cavity mold.

Despite the significant influence that the melt delivery system has on the molding process, its various components are generally poorly designed relative to the time, effort, and cost put into the other components/regions of a mold and molding machine. This book bridges the critical gap left by other publications dealing with injection molding, which generally touch only briefly on the design of the melt delivery system and its relationship to successful injection molding. In particular, the lack of information on cold runners needed to be addressed. Though a fair amount of published data on hot runners are available, these data are generally heavily influenced by the bias of companies that sell these systems. There are over 50 companies offering hot runner systems and components commercially, while there is no company at all offering cold runner systems. As a result, one can imagine the lackluster image of cold runners, as there is no company commercially promoting them.

Evidence of the lack of understanding of runners includes the fact that the significant effects of shear-induced flow imbalances in runners were not documented, or clearly understood, until 1997 when I published the first journal article on this phenomenon. For the first time, it became obvious that the industry standard "naturally balanced" runners were creating significant imbalances. Melt filling imbalances, developed from shear-induced melt variations, were found to be the norm in most of the industry standard geometrically balanced runner designs being used. This phenomenon was being overlooked by the entire molding industry for both cold and hot runner molds. In addition, the industry's leading state-of-the-art mold-filling simulation programs had been developed without the realization of the shear-induced imbalance. As a result, these programs did not predict the imbalance and left the analyst with a false impression that these runners provided uniform melt, filling, and packing conditions. The problem still exists today and should be considered when using analysis programs.

Of particular interest is the evolution of the runner from a basic necessity required to connect the injection unit and the mold's cavity to its emergence as a significant process tool. Newer melt rotation technologies, such as MeltFlipper® and iMARC™, have introduced the concept of 3D injection molding.

This book takes an independent view of both hot and cold runners, trying not to make a judgment as to which is best for a given application. Rather, it addresses some of the critical design issues unique and common to both. The early chapters lay a foundation for designing runners by establishing an understanding of the rheological characteristics of plastic melt and how the influence of runner design and gating positions can affect the molded part. Chapter 4 provides important strategies for runner designs and gating position, which are critical to the successful molding of a plastic part. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the melt delivery system, followed by Chapter 6 and 7, which teach the development and solutions to shear-induced imbalances. These three chapters (5, 6, and 7) address issues which are common to both cold and hot runners, blending basic geometrical channel issues with melt rheology.

Chapter 8 focuses on cold runner designs including specific guidelines for runner and a wide variety of gate designs. Chapters 9 through 13 provide a close look at the design of hot runner systems and their unique capabilities and challenges. Chapter 14 provides a summary on the process of designing and selecting a runner system. Finally, the book concludes with an extensive troubleshooting chapter with contributions from John Bozzelli and David Hoffman.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Runner and Gating Design Handbook* includes numerous updates and new instructional figures that are scattered throughout each of the 15 chapters. Chapters 6 and 7 include additional information and examples to aid in the understanding of critical shear induced melt variations that are developed in the runners of all injection molds. Autodesk Moldflow analyses and related discussions were added to help further understand the complexities of this phenomenon. Chapters 9 through 12 have expanded on all aspects of hot runners, including the design of manifolds, nozzles, gate tip designs, valve gated nozzles, and valve gate actuation. A new Chapter 15.3, "Injection Molding Process Development", written by Dave Hoffman of the American Injection Molding Institute (AIM Institute), was added.

This book is intended to provide the reader with a better understanding of the critical role the runner plays in successful injection molding. It is hoped that this understanding should go a long way toward reducing mold commissioning times, improving product realization, increasing productivity, improving customer satisfaction, and achieving quality goals such as Six Sigma.





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Further I would like to thank and acknowledge John Bozzelli, Dave Hoffman, and John Kleese who either directly or indirectly contributed toward material contained in this book. First, I would like to thank John Bozzelli (of Injection Molding Solutions) and David Hoffman (from the American Injection Molding Institute) for their significant contributions to Chapter 15, *Troubleshooting*. John Bozzelli's contribution of an extensive troubleshooting guide (Section 15.2 - "*Injection Molding Troubleshooting Guidelines for Scientific Injection Molding*") contains a wealth of information based on his extensive industry experience. Hoffman's "*Two Stage Molding Set-Up*", Section 15.3, provides a practical guide to setting up an injection process. Additionally, some of the material contained in the hot runner portion of this book is based on material presented by John Klees, formerly of Klees Enterprise. John's willingness to share this information is deeply appreciated.

I would also like to thank the various former students that assisted with research, editing, and illustration development for this book. In particular, I would like to thank Scott Cleveland, Amanda Neely, Mason Myers, and Kory Slye, as well as my son Alex Beaumont. Further, I would like to thank both INCOE and Husky who provided both technical information and a number of the figures found in the hot runner sections of this book.



# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>V</b>
<b>Acknowledgments</b> .....	<b>IX</b>
<b>1 Overview of Runners, Gates, and Gate Positioning</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Primary Parting Plane Runners .....	1
1.2 Sub Runners .....	2
1.2.1 Cold Sub Runners .....	2
1.2.2 Hot Sub Runners .....	4
1.3 Hybrid Sub-Runner and Parting Line Runner .....	5
1.4 Gate Designs .....	5
<b>2 Rheology and Melt Flow in an Injection Mold</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 Laminar vs. Turbulent Flow .....	8
2.2 Fountain Flow .....	10
2.3 Factors Affecting Viscosity .....	10
2.3.1 Common Viscosity Models .....	12
2.3.2 Non-Newtonian Fluids .....	14
2.3.3 Temperature .....	17
2.3.4 Pressure .....	17
2.4 Melt Compressibility .....	18
2.5 Melt Flow Characterization .....	19
2.5.1 Melt Flow Index .....	19
2.5.2 Capillary Rheometers .....	20
2.5.3 Nozzle Rheometers .....	25
2.6 Melt Flow in a Mold .....	26
2.6.1 Spiral Flow Molds .....	27
2.6.2 Injection Molding Simulation .....	28
2.6.3 Moldometer .....	30

<b>3</b>	<b>Filling and Packing Effects on Material and Molded Part</b> .....	<b>33</b>
3.1	Process Effects on Material Flow Characteristics .....	33
3.1.1	Melt Thermal Balance – Conductive Heat Loss vs. Shear Heating ..	33
3.1.2	Development of a Frozen Boundary Layer .....	36
3.2	Factors Affecting Plastic Material Degradation .....	42
3.2.1	Excessive Shear .....	42
3.2.2	Excessive Temperature .....	44
3.3	Effects of Mold Fill Rate on Fill Pressure .....	46
3.4	Post Filling or Packing Phase .....	47
3.4.1	Thermal Shrinkage as Plastic Cools .....	47
3.4.2	Compensation Flow to Offset Volumetric Shrinkage .....	48
3.4.3	Pressure Distribution During the Post Filling Phase .....	49
3.4.4	Gate Freeze-Off .....	50
3.5	Melt Flow Effects on Material and Molded Parts .....	51
3.5.1	Shrinkage .....	51
3.5.1.1	Volumetric Shrinkage .....	52
3.5.1.2	Orientation-Induced Shrinkage .....	54
3.5.2	Development of Residual Stresses and Warpage .....	58
3.5.2.1	Warpage and Residual Stress from Side-to-Side Shrinkage Variations .....	58
3.5.2.2	Warpage and Residual Stress from Global/Regional Shrinkage Variations .....	59
3.5.2.3	Warpage and Residual Stress from Orientation-Induced Shrinkage Variations .....	60
3.5.3	Physical Properties as Effected by Orientation .....	60
3.6	Annealing a Molded Part .....	61
3.7	Summary .....	61
<b>4</b>	<b>Gate Positioning and Molding Strategies</b> .....	<b>65</b>
4.1	Gate Positioning Considerations .....	65
4.2	Design and Process Strategies for Injection Molding .....	67
4.2.1	Maintain Uniform Wall Thicknesses in a Part .....	67
4.2.2	Use Common Design Guidelines for Injection Molded Plastic Parts with Caution .....	70
4.2.3	Avoid Flowing from Thin to Thick .....	71
4.2.4	Establish a Simple Strategic Flow Pattern within a Cavity .....	72
4.2.5	Avoid Picture Framing .....	76
4.2.6	Integral Hinges .....	78

4.2.7	Balanced Filling throughout a Mold . . . . .	81
4.2.7.1	Gating Position(s) within a Cavity . . . . .	82
4.2.7.2	Multi-Cavity Molds . . . . .	86
4.2.8	Provide for Uniform Temperatures (Mold and Melt) . . . . .	89
4.2.9	Eliminate, Strategically Place, or Condition Welds . . . . .	90
4.2.10	Avoiding Flow Hesitation . . . . .	91
4.2.11	Managing Frictional Heating of the Melt . . . . .	93
4.2.12	Minimize Runner Volume in Cold Runners . . . . .	93
4.2.13	Avoid Excessive Shear Rates . . . . .	94
4.2.14	Avoid Excessive, and Provide for Uniform Shear Stresses . . . . .	96
<b>5</b>	<b>The Melt Delivery System . . . . .</b>	<b>99</b>
5.1	Runner Design Fundamentals . . . . .	99
5.2	Overview of Runner/Melt Delivery System . . . . .	100
5.2.1	Machine Nozzle . . . . .	101
5.2.1.1	Nozzle Filter . . . . .	102
5.2.1.2	Static Mixers . . . . .	103
5.2.2	Sprue . . . . .	103
5.2.3	Runner . . . . .	103
5.2.4	Gate . . . . .	104
5.3	Melt Flow through the Melt Delivery System . . . . .	104
5.3.1	Melt Preparation – The Injection Molding Machine . . . . .	104
5.3.1.1	Pressure Development from a Molding Machine . . . . .	105
5.3.1.2	Flow through a Runner Channel . . . . .	106
5.3.2	Effect of Temperature on Flow . . . . .	107
5.3.2.1	Melt Temperature . . . . .	107
5.3.2.2	Mold Temperature . . . . .	109
5.3.3	Cold vs. Hot Runners . . . . .	110
5.3.4	Pressure Drop through the Melt Delivery System (Nozzle vs. Sprue vs. Runner vs. Gate vs. Part Forming Cavity) . . . . .	110
5.4	Use of Mold Filling Analysis . . . . .	111
5.5	Runner Cross-Sectional Size and Shape . . . . .	113
5.5.1	The Efficient Flow Channel . . . . .	113
5.5.2	Pressure Development in the Runner . . . . .	113
5.5.2.1	Flow through a Hot Runner vs. a Cold Runner . . . . .	117
5.5.3	Runner Effect on Cycle Time . . . . .	117
5.5.3.1	Cold Runner and Sprue Cooling Time . . . . .	117
5.5.3.2	Hot Runner . . . . .	118
5.5.4	Constant Diameter vs. Graduated Diameter Runners . . . . .	118

5.6	Designing Runners for Shear- and Thermally-Sensitive Materials . . . . .	121
5.7	Runner Layouts . . . . .	122
5.7.1	Geometrical Balanced Runners . . . . .	122
5.7.2	Non-Geometrically Balanced Runners . . . . .	125
5.7.3	Fishbone Runners vs. Geometrically Balanced Runners . . . . .	125
5.7.3.1	Flow Balance Ratio . . . . .	127
5.7.3.2	Melt Variation in Unbalanced Molds . . . . .	128
5.7.3.3	Artificial Balancing of Runners . . . . .	128
5.7.3.4	Do the Artificially Balanced Runners Reduce Runner Volume? . . . . .	131
5.7.4	Family Molds . . . . .	135
<b>6</b>	<b>Filling, Melt, and Product Variations Developed in Multi-Cavity Molds . . . . .</b>	<b>137</b>
6.1	Sources of Product Variation in Multi-Cavity Molds of Mold Filling Imbalances . . . . .	138
6.1.1	Product Variations Resulting from the Runner Design . . . . .	138
6.1.2	Product Variations Resulting from Non-Runner Layout Issues . . . . .	140
6.2	Imbalance Effects on Process, Product, and Productivity . . . . .	144
6.2.1	Artificial Balancing of Runners . . . . .	148
6.3	Shear-Induced Melt/Molding Variations from Geometrically Balanced Runners . . . . .	150
6.3.1	Development and Stratification of Melt Variations Across a Runner Channel . . . . .	150
6.3.2	Laminate Separation in Branching Runners Causing Cavity-to-Cavity Product Variations . . . . .	152
6.3.3	Shear-Induced Melt Imbalances in Stack Molds . . . . .	157
6.3.4	Development of Intra-Cavity Variations and Influence on Residual Stresses and Warpage . . . . .	158
6.3.4.1	Warpage . . . . .	164
6.3.4.2	Core Deflection . . . . .	166
6.3.4.3	Effect on Concentric Parts (Gears, Fans, and Others) . . . . .	167
6.3.5	Alternative Theories of the Cause of Mold Filling Imbalances . . . . .	168
6.3.5.1	Cooling Variations . . . . .	169
6.3.5.2	Plate Deflection . . . . .	169
6.3.5.3	Corner Effect of Branching Runners . . . . .	170
6.3.5.4	Melt Pressure as the Cause of Filling Imbalance . . . . .	172
6.4	Runner Layouts . . . . .	172
6.4.1	Identification of Various Flow Groups in Common Geometrically Balanced Runners . . . . .	173

6.4.2	Apparent Geometrically Balanced Runner Layouts .....	175
6.5	Effect of Shear-Induced Melt Variations on Two-Stage Injection Processes ..	176
6.5.1	Gas Assist Injection Molding .....	176
6.5.2	Co-Injection Molding .....	179
6.5.3	Structural and Microcellular Foam Molding .....	181
6.6	The Cost of Melt Imbalances .....	182
<b>7</b>	<b>Managing Shear-Induced Melt Variations for Successful Molding .....</b>	<b>185</b>
7.1	Static Mixers .....	186
7.2	Artificial Balancing .....	188
7.2.1	Varying Sizes of Branching Runners or Gates to Achieve a Filling Balance .....	188
7.2.2	Varying Temperatures to Control Filling Balance .....	189
7.3	Melt Rotation Technology .....	190
7.3.1	Melt Rotation Technology in Hot Runner Molds .....	197
7.3.2	Melt Rotation Technology in Cold Runner Molds .....	198
7.3.3	Melt Rotation for Intra-Cavity Imbalances .....	199
7.3.4	Multi-Axis Melt Symmetry .....	200
7.3.5	In-Mold Adjustable Rheological Control (iMARC™) .....	202
7.3.5.1	3D Molding .....	203
7.4	Melt Rotation for Controlling Two Stage Injection Processes .....	207
7.5	Controlling Warpage through Melt Rotation Technology .....	209
7.5.1	Development of Warpage Potential .....	211
7.5.2	Controlled Warpage through Melt Rotation Technology .....	214
7.5.3	New Application for 3D Molding .....	216
7.6	MeltFlipper® Melt Rotation Technologies .....	217
7.6.1	Important MeltFlipper Patent Issues .....	217
7.6.2	Melt Rotation in Cold Runner Molds .....	218
7.6.3	Melt Rotation Technology in Hot Runner Molds .....	220
7.6.4	Multi-Axis Melt Symmetry .....	220
7.6.5	In-Mold Adjustable Rheological Control (iMARC™) .....	222
<b>8</b>	<b>Cold Runner Molds .....</b>	<b>225</b>
8.1	Sprue .....	226
8.1.1	Cold Sprue .....	227
8.1.2	Hot Sprue .....	232
8.2	The Cold Runner .....	233



8.2.1	Important Machining Considerations	235
8.2.2	Sizing of Runners	235
8.2.3	Venting	236
8.2.4	Runner Ejection	237
	8.2.4.1 Sprue Puller	237
	8.2.4.2 Secondary Sprue/Cold Drop	238
	8.2.4.3 Runner	238
8.2.5	Cold Slug Wells	239
8.3	Runners for Three-Plate Cold Runner Molds	240
8.4	Gate Designs	244
	8.4.1 Sprue Gate	245
	8.4.2 Common Edge Gate	246
	8.4.3 Fan Gate	247
	8.4.4 Film Gate or Flash Gate	248
	8.4.5 Ring Gate	249
	8.4.6 Diaphragm (Disk) Gate	250
	8.4.7 Tunnel Gate	252
	8.4.8 Cashew or Banana Gate	254
	8.4.9 Jump Gate	255
	8.4.10 Pin Point Gate	256
	8.4.11 Chisel Gate	257
	8.4.12 Overflow Gate	257
8.5	Effects of Gate Diameter in Multi-Cavity Molds	258
	8.5.1 Study 1	258
	8.5.2 Study 2	259
	8.5.3 Measuring Tolerances	262
<b>9</b>	<b>Hot Runner Molds</b>	<b>267</b>
9.1	Overview	267
	9.1.1 Advantages and Disadvantages of Hot Runner Systems	268
	9.1.1.1 Advantages of Hot Runners	268
	9.1.1.2 Disadvantages of Hot Runners	270
	9.1.1.3 Summary of Attributes of Different Runner Systems	271
9.2	Overview of Multi-Cavity Hot Runner Systems (Contrasting Systems)	272
	9.2.1 Externally Heated Manifold and Drops/Nozzles	273
	9.2.2 Externally Heated Manifold with Internally Heated Drops	274
	9.2.3 Internally Heated Manifold and Internally Heated Drops	275
	9.2.4 Insulated Manifold and Drops	276
9.3	Stack Molds	278

<b>10</b>	<b>Hot Runner Flow Channel Design</b>	<b>281</b>
10.1	Layout for Balanced Molding	282
10.2	Cross-Sectional Shape	284
10.3	Corners	284
10.3.1	Drilled Runner Channels	285
10.3.2	Machined Laminate Plate Runner Channels	287
10.4	Effect of Diameter	287
10.4.1	Pressure	287
10.4.2	Shot Control	290
10.4.3	Color Change	291
10.4.4	Material Change	294
<b>11</b>	<b>Hot Runner Drops, Nozzles, and Gates</b>	<b>295</b>
11.1	Hot Drops	296
11.1.1	Externally Heated Hot Drops (Nozzles)	297
11.1.2	Internally Heated Hot Drops	298
11.1.3	Heat Conducting Nozzles	299
11.2	Restrictive/Pin Point Gates	300
11.3	Gate Design Considerations	302
11.3.1	Gate Freeze-Off	302
11.3.2	Stringing/Drooling	303
11.3.3	Packing	304
11.3.4	Nozzle Tips for Hot Runner Thermal Gates	305
11.3.4.1	Ported Tips	306
11.3.4.2	Torpedo-Style Tips	308
11.3.5	Mechanical Valve Gates	309
11.3.5.1	Consideration of Valve Pin Flow Restrictions	312
11.3.5.2	Sequential Valve Gates	313
11.3.5.3	Valve Pin Movement Control for Sequential Gating	315
11.3.6	Thermal Shut-Off Gates	321
11.3.7	Hot Edge Gates	322
11.3.8	Multi-Tip Nozzles	323
11.4	Special Nozzle Arrangement	324
<b>12</b>	<b>Thermal Issues of Hot Runner Systems</b>	<b>327</b>
12.1	Heating	327
12.1.1	Coil (Cable) Heaters	328
12.1.2	Band Heaters	328
12.1.3	Tubular Heaters	329

12.1.4	Cartridge Heaters .....	330
12.1.5	Heat Pipe Technology .....	330
12.2	Heater Temperature Control .....	331
12.2.1	Thermocouples .....	331
12.2.2	Temperature Controllers .....	332
12.3	Power Requirements .....	334
12.4	Thermal Isolation of the Hot Runner .....	335
12.5	Gate Temperature Control .....	338
12.5.1	Gate Heating .....	340
12.5.2	Gate Cooling .....	340
<b>13</b>	<b>The Mechanics and Operation of Hot Runners .....</b>	<b>341</b>
13.1	Assembly and Leakage Issues .....	341
13.1.1	System Design .....	342
13.1.2	Hot Runner System Machining and Assembly .....	347
13.2	Mold and Machine Distortions .....	353
13.3	Startup Procedures .....	355
13.4	Color and Material Changes .....	355
13.5	Gates .....	356
13.5.1	Vestige .....	356
13.5.2	Clog .....	356
13.5.3	Wear .....	357
13.6	Maintenance .....	357
<b>14</b>	<b>Process of Designing and Selecting a Runner System (Gate and Runner) – A Summary .....</b>	<b>359</b>
14.1	Number of Gates .....	359
14.2	Gating Position on a Part .....	359
14.2.1	Cosmetic .....	359
14.2.2	Effect on Shrinkage, Warp, and Residual Stress .....	360
14.2.2.1	Orientation .....	360
14.2.2.2	Volumetric Shrinkage (Regional) .....	360
14.2.2.3	Unbalanced Filling .....	361
14.2.3	Structural Issues .....	361
14.2.3.1	Gate Stress .....	361
14.2.3.2	Flow Orientation .....	361
14.2.4	Gating into Restricted, or Otherwise Difficult to Reach Locations ...	362

14.3	Cavity Positioning .....	362
14.4	Material .....	362
14.5	Jetting .....	362
14.6	Thick vs. Thin Regions of the Part .....	363
14.6.1	Volumetric Shrinkage .....	363
14.6.2	Hesitation .....	363
14.7	Number of Cavities .....	363
14.8	Production Volume .....	363
14.9	Precision Molding (Precision Size, Shape, Weight, Mechanical Properties, and Consistency) .....	364
14.10	Color Changes .....	364
14.11	Material Change .....	365
14.12	Regrind of Runners .....	365
14.13	Part Thickness .....	365
14.13.1	Thin Part .....	365
14.13.2	Thick Part .....	366
14.14	Part Size .....	366
14.15	Labor Skill Level .....	366
14.16	Post Mold Handling .....	367
14.17	Part/Gate Stress Issues .....	367
14.18	Hot and Cold Runner Combinations .....	367
14.19	Two-Phase Injection Processes .....	367
<b>15</b>	<b>Troubleshooting .....</b>	<b>369</b>
15.1	Flow Grouping Mold Diagnostics .....	369
15.1.1	Shear-Induced Flow Imbalance Developed in a Geometrically Balanced Runner .....	370
15.1.2	Steel Variations in the Mold .....	371
15.1.3	Cooling Effects .....	371
15.1.4	Hot Runner Systems .....	371
15.1.5	Summary of Test Data .....	371
15.1.6	Flow Grouping: Method of Application .....	372
15.2	Injection Molding Troubleshooting Guidelines for Scientific Injection Molding .....	375
15.3	Injection Molding Process Development .....	418
15.3.1	The Molding Process .....	418

15.3.1.1	Mold Cooling .....	419
15.3.1.2	Clamp Unit - Initial Settings .....	420
15.3.1.3	Injection Unit - Initial Settings .....	422
15.3.1.4	Fill Time Scan - Evaluating First Stage Flow Rate .....	424
15.3.1.5	Pack Scans - Evaluating Second Stage Pack Pressure and Pack Time .....	430
15.3.1.6	Evaluate Cushion, Cooling Time, and Cycle Time .....	434
15.3.2	Process Monitoring and Process Documentation .....	436
15.4	List of Amorphous and Semi-Crystalline Resins .....	440
<b>Index</b>	.....	<b>443</b>

# 1

## Overview of Runners, Gates, and Gate Positioning

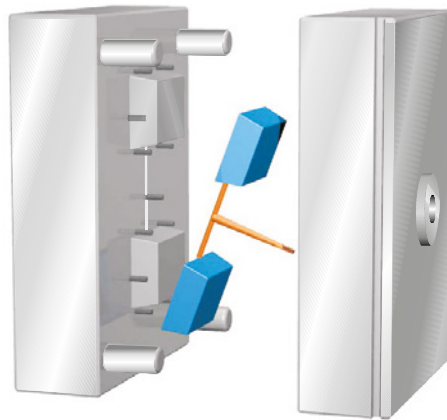
In many cases, the mold design dictates the gating position, although ideally, the optimum gate position should be determined based on part requirements and afterwards the mold design selected to provide for the desired gate position. Available gating positions, and gate designs, are significantly influenced by whether the runner travels along the primary parting plane of the mold (the parting plane where the part forming cavity is defined) or whether it *does not* travel along this plane.

This chapter provides only a brief introduction and orientation of basic runner types and their influence on gate design and gating location. More detail on each of these subjects is presented later in the book.

### ■ 1.1 Primary Parting Plane Runners

In the dominant runner type used in the industry the runner and part forming cavities are located along the same primary parting plane. Primary parting planes, often referred to as the parting lines, are where the mold opens and closes to allow ejection of the molded part and/or of the runner. The primary parting plane is the one where the molded part is formed and ejected. The *primary parting plane runner* is used in *two plate cold runner molds*. A cold runner mold is defined as a mold in which the plastic material in the runner is cooled and ejected from the mold during each mold cycle. Molten plastic material is injected through the runner, the gate, and then into the part-forming cavity. This molten plastic is then cooled by the mold, and when sufficiently solidified, the mold opens and the runner, gate, and part are ejected along the same primary parting plane. Figure 1.1 illustrates the position of the runner within the mold and its ejection from the primary parting plane. Notice that the part and runner are formed and ejected along the same parting plane.

After the molded part and runner are ejected, the mold again closes, creating a flow channel (runner path) between the injection molding machine nozzle to the part forming cavity. As the primary parting plane runner is located along the same parting plane as the part forming cavity, gating into the part is limited to its perimeter, or very near its perimeter. Sub gates, such as the tunnel, cashew, and jump gates, allow gating to be positioned within a short distance from the actual perimeter of the part (for gate designs see Section 8.4).



**Figure 1.1** 2-plate mold open and ejecting parts and runner

## ■ 1.2 Sub Runners

A second runner type does not travel along the primary parting plane of the mold. This *sub-runner* generally travels parallel to the primary parting plane, but not along it. The sub-runner can be used in either a cold runner or a hot runner mold.

### 1.2.1 Cold Sub Runners

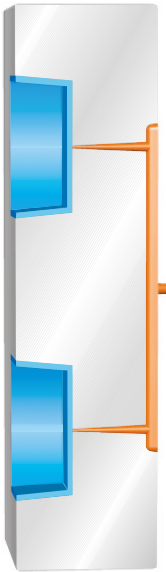
In a cold runner mold, the sub-runner travels along a second parting plane other than the primary parting plane where the part is formed. The two parting planes are normally parallel to each other and are separated, and partially defined, by at least one mold plate. The sub-runner and part forming cavities are connected by an extension of the sub-runner referred to as a *secondary sprue*. The bridging secondary sprue passes through the at least one separating mold plate and connects to the part-forming cavity through a small gate opening. The secondary sprues are normally parallel to the opening direction of the mold and perpendicular to the sub-runner (see Figure 1.2).

During molding, after the plastic melt in the runner and part forming cavity solidify, the mold will open along the two parting planes. The part is ejected from the opened primary parting plane and the runner (which includes the secondary sprue and gate) is ejected from the opened second parting plane as seen in Figure 1.3.

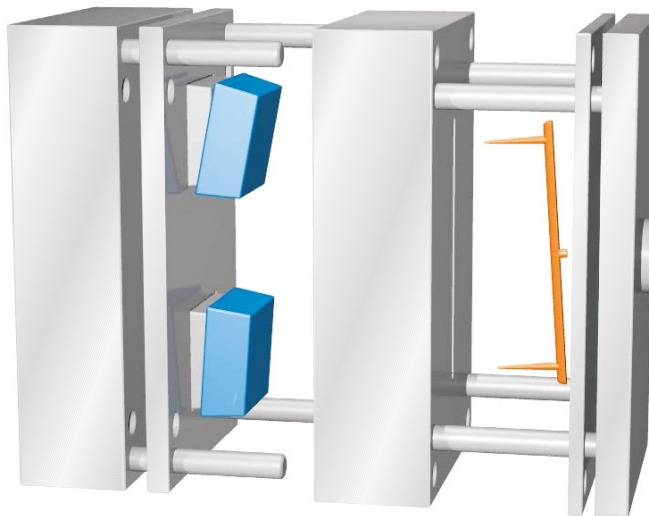
This type of mold is commonly referred to as a *three-plate cold runner mold*. The terms two-plate and three-plate cold runner molds refer to the minimum number of mold plates required to form and to allow removal of both the part and the solidified runner. With the two-plate cold runner mold, the part and runner are formed and removed between at least a first and second mold plate. With the three-plate cold runner mold, the part is formed and removed between at

least a first and second plate and the runner and gate are formed and removed between at least a third plate and often the same second plate used to help form the part.

This type of mold is used when it is desirable to gate the part in a location other than the perimeter. It is commonly used for molding gears where it is desirable to gate in the center hub of the gear.



**Figure 1.2** Cold runner with secondary sprue feeding the part forming cavities in a 3-plate cold runner mold



**Figure 1.3** Typical 3 plate cold runner mold open and ejecting parts off the primary parting plane and ejecting the cold runner along the secondary parting plane

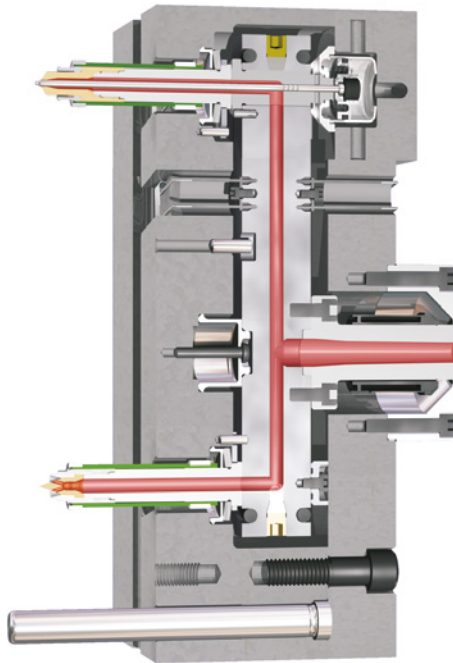


### 1.2.2 Hot Sub Runners

A second variation of the sub-runner mold is the *hot runner mold*. This type of runner provides the same gating flexibility as the three-plate cold runner mold. However, unlike a cold runner mold, the melt that travels through the runner remains molten, and is not ejected between molding cycles. The design of hot runner systems is more complex than that of cold runners. Their design and contrast to cold runners are discussed later in Chapter 9.

Two variations of a hot runner are illustrated in Figure 1.4. Here the melt travels in a *hot manifold* along a path, which is normally parallel with the platens of the molding machine. A hot drop, or nozzle, is then used to deliver the melt from the manifold to the part-forming cavity. Special attention is required to isolate the heat from the hot manifold and drop from the part-forming cavity, which requires good cooling. This figure illustrates both a valve gated nozzle (top) and a more conventional open gated nozzle (bottom).

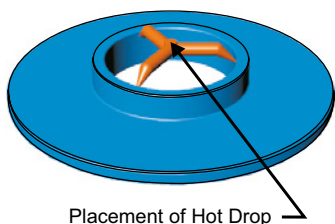
Unlike the cold runner molds, the runner in the hot runner mold remains molten during processing and is not ejected each cycle. Like the three plate cold runner mold, this type of mold provides more gating options than the two-plate cold runner mold.



**Figure 1.4** Externally heated hot runner illustrating manifold and drops. The figure illustrates two types of nozzles: the top nozzle is valve gated and the bottom nozzle has a more conventional open gate design (Courtesy: Husky)

## ■ 1.3 Hybrid Sub-Runner and Parting Line Runner

It is common for a mold to contain both a sub runner and a parting plane runner. This is most common when a hot runner is used. Here, the hot runner would deliver the melt to a cold runner, or gate, along the primary parting line. An example is a two-cavity mold, used to produce the flat donut shaped part shown in Figure 1.5. The hot drop delivers the melt to a cold runner located within the center region of the part. The cold runner then radiates out and gates the part along its inner edge.



**Figure 1.5** Round part internally gated by a sub-runner which is fed by a hot drop

## ■ 1.4 Gate Designs

Parting line runners are the most restrictive on gating position but provide the greatest flexibility in gating design. The three-plate cold runner mold is limited to restrictive pin point gates, which must allow the gate to be separated, or torn, from the part as the mold opens. Parting line runners can use similar restrictive gates to provide for automatic degating during mold opening, but they are *not required* to use these types of gates. Parting line runners provide for gates to be formed along the parting plane of the mold. This provides significant flexibility in their design to achieve a desired effect. Some of these gates include fan, film, tab, edge, and diaphragm gates. The effects that can be achieved with these gates could include keeping the runner and gate attached to the part to facilitate post-mold handling, using broader gates to limit shear rates and gate region shear stress during mold filling, using broader gates to improve flow patterns across a cavity, and using thicker gates to improve packing.

The hybrid sub-runner and parting plane runner, presented above, increases gating opportunities. An example where this hybrid design might be used is when molding a cylindrical part, where a diaphragm gate is desirable (see Figure 8.31 in Chapter 8). Here, a hot drop feeds directly into a diaphragm gate, which in turn feeds the cavity. The above-mentioned gates, as well as additional gating options, such as valve gates used in hot runners and gates providing automatic degating in cold runners, will be presented in Chapters 8 and 11.

Though a vast majority of hot runner molds have restrictive gates, there are additional options available. These options include valve gates and edge gates.



# 2

## Rheology and Melt Flow in an Injection Mold

This chapter will present both a foundation in melt rheology and flow of plastics in a mold. Rheology is a reasonably well established scientific field, but the science of how polymer melts flow in a mold is not so well understood. The rheology of polymer melts is quite complex and can include influences of shear, temperature, and pressure, converging and diverging flow, elastic effects, tensile viscosities, etc. As this is not a book on rheology, this chapter only provides an introductory overview of some of the issues that most molders and mold designers should understand. This foundation also ties into a number of the later chapters.

As complex as the field of rheology is, the science and understanding of polymer melt flow in a mold reaches a higher level of complexity. Essentially we have a hot molten, highly complex, fluid flowing through a cold boundary (mold), where melt laminates are simultaneously flowing while freezing. The thermal conditions of the melt are constantly changing along its flow path and through the cross sections of the flow path. There are highly complex contrasting conditions of frictional heating in highly sheared outer laminates that are in the immediate proximity of the surrounding cold mold, where the melt is nearly instantaneously freezing upon contact with the cold steel of the mold. This near instantaneous freezing is occurring at cooling rates that can be well over 1000 °F per second. Just inside these frozen boundaries is the highest sheared region where studies have indicated melt temperatures can approach 1000 °F and several hundred degrees hotter than the melt in the middle of a flow channel such as a runner. I make these statements in this book despite the fact that there is still no technology that exists today that can measure the temperature variations that exist in a flowing melt stream, i. e. they cannot be proven true or false. These statements regarding temperature are based on simulation, mathematical modeling, fundamental laws of physics, and evidence of the impact on downstream flow channels and parts molded from these materials. Much like in the field of astronomy, we have not yet seen a black hole in space, but we know of their existence due their influence on their surroundings. Some of the issues and studies related to flow in a mold are discussed throughout this book.

The field of rheology can be defined as the study of deformation and flow of more complex fluids such as non-Newtonian polymers, pastes, suspensions, and foods. Whereas fluid mechanics would be the study of simpler fluids such as water, most oils, and air.

The earlier portion of this chapter (Sections 2.1 through 2.5) will focus on the main aspects of the rheology of plastic materials, and how important these aspects are to the process of plastic materials. This includes:

- How to distinguish between laminar flow and turbulent flow
- Calculating Reynolds number

- Fountain flow
- Viscosity of plastic materials
- Factors affecting viscosity
- Common viscosity models
- Melt compressibility
- Melt flow characteristics
- Calculating viscosity

## ■ 2.1 Laminar vs. Turbulent Flow

Owing to the relatively high viscosity of commercial polymers, it is generally expected that flow of a polymer melt during injection molding is laminar. This is true even in the case when melt is passing through small restrictive pinpoint gates. As a result of this laminar flow behavior, processes such as co-injection are made possible.

Turbulent flow is the condition where the fluid in a channel is swirling and mixing. This condition is highly desirable for a coolant in the cooling channels of a mold in order to increase the efficiency of heat transfer from the mold to the coolant. In contrast to this is laminar flow where the fluid is flowing in distinct laminates, or layers, and does not mix. Whether flow is turbulent or laminar is a function of the viscosity of the fluid and its velocity. This can be easily determined by calculating the Reynolds number (Re#).

$$\text{Re\#} = \frac{\text{velocity} \times \text{diameter}}{\text{kinematic viscosity}} \quad (2.1)$$

Where:

$$\text{kinematic viscosity} = \frac{\text{dynamic viscosity}}{\text{melt density}} \quad (2.2)$$

$$\text{velocity} = \frac{\text{flow rate}}{\text{area}} \quad (2.3)$$

Turbulence has been found to begin at a Reynolds number of 2300 and the transition to fully developed turbulence occurs at 4000. As highly turbulent flow of water in a mold's cooling system is considered ideal to achieve the best heat transfer, it is recommended that when designing the cooling system a Re# of around 10,000 should be targeted. This is not only to assure that turbulence exists, but also that a high level of turbulence is present in order to optimize heat extraction.

The Reynolds number calculated for most polymer melts during injection molding is much lower. In most cases the Reynolds number through even small restrictive gates is less than 10. Therefore it should be expected that flow of commercial thermoplastic polymers through an injection mold's sprue, gates, and cavity is always laminar. Although the term turbulence is often incorrectly used to describe the cause of flaws in injection molded parts, it should never actually exist. An example of calculating the Reynolds number for an ABS resin flowing through a small 1 mm diameter gate is provided in the following:



### Example:

Given is a four-cavity hot runner mold with 1 mm diameter gates. Each cavity has a volume of 8 cm<sup>3</sup>. The molding machine injects material at a rate of 32 cm<sup>3</sup>/s. This results in a fill time of 1 second/cavity and a flow rate through each gate of 8 cm<sup>3</sup>/s.

Shear rate through the gates is:

$$\dot{\gamma} = \frac{32Q}{\pi d^3} = \frac{32 \times 8 \text{ cm}^3/\text{s}}{\pi \times 0.1^3} = 81,528 \text{ s}^{-1} \quad (2.4)$$

This is a rather high shear rate for most materials.

- Flow rate/gate = 8.0 cm<sup>3</sup>/s (8.0 × 10<sup>-6</sup> m<sup>3</sup>/s)
- Diameter of each gate = 1.0 mm (0.0010 m)
- Cross-sectional area of each gate = 0.783 mm<sup>2</sup> (7.83 × 10<sup>-7</sup> m<sup>2</sup>)
- Dynamic viscosity = 8 Pa·s = 8 kg/m·s

$$\text{Gate velocity} = \frac{8.0 \times 10^{-6} \text{ m}^3/\text{s}}{7.83 \times 10^{-7} \text{ m}^2} = 10.22 \text{ m/s}$$

$$\text{Kinematic viscosity} = \frac{8 \text{ kg/m} \times \text{s}}{890 \text{ kg/m}^3} = 0.008989 \text{ m}^2/\text{s}$$

$$\text{Re\#} = \frac{10.22 \text{ m/s} \times 0.001 \text{ m}}{0.008989 \text{ m}^2/\text{s}} = 1.14$$

This value for the Reynolds Number is a small fraction of the 2300 required for turbulence to occur.