

The current trend in automobiles is towards increased performance, comfort and efficiency. To achieve these goals, automobile companies are incorporating an ever increasing array of electronics into cars. As the electronic content within cars increases, auto manufacturers are utilizing multiplex bus designs to network all the sensors to a central point (usually the engine control unit [ECU]). Multiplex lines save wiring harness weight and decrease the harness' complexity, while allowing higher communication speeds. However, the multiplex structure tends to increase the occurrence and severity of Electromagnetic Interference (EMC) and Electrostatic Discharge (ESD).

Multilayer varistors (MLVs) are a single component solution for auto manufacturers to utilize on multiplex nodes to eliminate both ESD and EMC problems. MLVs also offer improved reliability rates (FIT rates <1 failure/billion hours) and smaller designs over traditional diode protection schemes.

TYPICAL MUX NODE APPLICATION

There are a variety of SAE recommended practices for vehicle multiplexing (J-1850, J-1939, J-1708, J-1587, CAN). Given the number of multiplexing specifications, it is easy to understand that bus complexity will vary considerably.

Each node has an interface circuit which typically consists of a terminating resistor (or sometimes a series limiting resistor), back to back Zener diodes (for over voltage protection) and an EMC capacitor. Such a method is compared to that of a multilayer varistor in Figure 1.

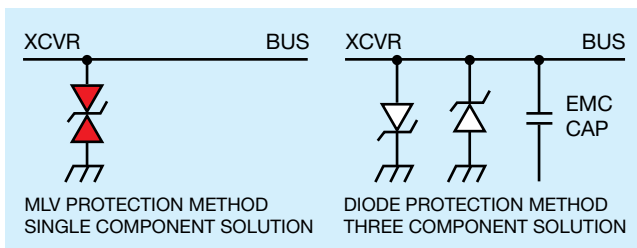


Figure 1. Comparison of past node protection methods to MLV node protection methods.

To more clearly understand the functional structure of a MLV, see the equivalent electrical model shown in Figure 2.

- MULTIPLE ELECTRODES YIELD A CAPACITANCE
- THE CAPACITANCE CAN BE USED IN DECOUPLING
- CAPACITANCE CAN BE SELECTED FROM 30pF TO 4700pF

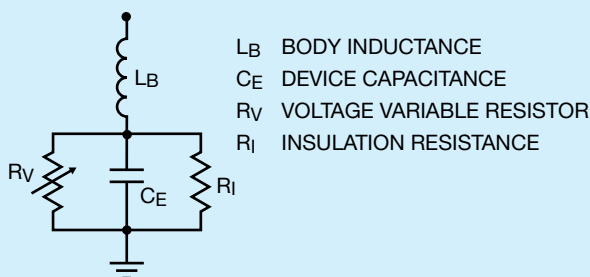


Figure 2. TransGuard® Equivalent Model.

As the schematic in Figure 1 illustrates, the implementation of MLV protection methods greatly simplifies circuit layout, saves PCB space and improves system reliability. The MLV offers many additional electrical improvements over the Zener/passive schemes. Among those advantages are higher multiple strike capability, faster turn on time and larger transient overstrike capability. Further clarification on the types of varistors compared to the performance of Zener diodes follows.

CONSTRUCTION AND PHYSICAL COMPARISON

The construction of Zinc Oxide (ZnO) varistors is a well known, relatively straightforward process in which ZnO grains are doped with cobalt, bismuth, manganese and other oxides. The resulting grains have a Schottky barrier at the grain interface and a typical grain breakdown voltage (V_b) of approximately 3.6V per grain.

Currently, there are two types of varistors. Single layer varistors (SLVs) – an older technology referred to as “pressed pill,” typically are larger, radial leaded components designed to handle significant power. Multilayer varistors (MLVs) are a relatively new technology packaged in true EIA SMT case sizes.

Beyond the ZnO material system and grain breakdown similarity, MLVs and SLVs have little in common. That is, to design a low voltage SLV, the grains must be grown as large as possible to achieve a physically large enough part to be handled in the manufacturing process. Typically it is very difficult to obtain a consistent grain size in a low voltage SLV process.

The electrical performance of SLV is affected by inconsistent grain size in two ways. First, low voltage SLVs often exhibit an inconsistent V_b and leakage current (I_L) from device to device within a particular manufacturing lot of a given rating. This contributes to early high voltage repetitive strike wear out.

Secondly, SLVs with similar voltage and energy ratings as MLVs typically exhibit a lower peak current capability due in part to increased resistance of the long current path of the large grains. This contributes to early repetitive high current wear out.

At higher voltages, the grain size variations within SLVs play a much smaller percentage role in V_b and leakage current values. As a result, SLVs are the most efficient cost effective way to suppress transients in high voltages (e.g., 115 VAC, 220 VAC).

MLV MANUFACTURE

The construction of a MLV was made possible by employing a variety of advanced multilayer chip capacitors (MLCC) manufacturing schemes coupled with a variety of novel and proprietary ZnO manufacturing steps. In the MLCC process, thin dielectrics are commonly employed to obtain very large capacitance values. It is that capability to design and manufacture multilayer structures with dielectric thicknesses of ≤ 1 mil that allows MLVs to be easily made with operating/working voltages (V_{wm}) as low as 3.3V (for use in next generation silicon devices).

Once a particular working voltage has been determined (by altering the ZnO dielectric thickness), the multilayer varistor's transient energy capability is determined by the number of layers of dielectric and electrodes. It is, therefore, generally easy to control the grain size and uniformity within a MLV due to the relative simplicity of this process.

MLVs exhibit capacitance due to their multiple electrode design and the fact that ZnO is a ceramic dielectric. This capacitance can be utilized with the device's series inductance to provide a filter to help limit EMI/RFI. The equivalent model of a MLV is shown in Figure 2.

MLVs are primarily used as transient voltage suppressors. In their "on" state, they act as a back-to-back Zener, diverting to ground any excess, unwanted energy above their clamping voltage. In their "off" state, they act as an EMC capacitor (capacitance can be minimized for high speed applications). A single MLV, therefore, can replace the diode, capacitor and resistor array on multiplex node applications.

Any TVS will see a large number of transient strikes over its lifetime. These transient strikes will result from different events such as well known ESD HBM, IC MM, alternator field decay, load dump models and uncontrolled random events. It is because of the repetitive strikes that all TVS suppressors should be tested for multiple strike capability. Typically, a TVS will fail due to high voltage, high current or over-energy strikes.

High voltage repetitive strikes are best represented by IEC 61000-4-2 8kV waveforms. MLVs demonstrate a greatly superior capability to withstand repetitive ESD high voltage discharge without degradation.

High current repetitive strikes are represented by 8x20 μ s 150A waveforms. A comparison between MLVs, SLVs and SiTVS is shown in Figures 3A, B, C respectively.

SILICON TVS MANUFACTURE

The construction of a silicon TVS departs dramatically from that of either single layer varistor or multilayer varistor construction. Devices are generally produced as Zener diodes with the exception that a larger junction area is designed into the parts and additional testing was likely performed. After the silicon die is processed in accordance to standard semi-conductor manufacturing practice, the TVS die is connected to a heavy metal lead frame and molded into axial and surface mount (SMT) configuration.

MLVs COMPARED TO DIODES

The response time for a silicon diode die is truly sub-nanosecond. The lead frame into which the die is placed and the wire bonds used for die connections introduce a significant amount of inductance. The large inductance of this packaging causes a series impedance that slows the response time of SiTVS devices. A best case response time of 8nS on SOT23 and a 1.5nS to 5nS response time on SMB and SMC products respectively are rather typical. MLVs turn on time is < 7 nS. MLVs turn on time is faster than SiTVS and that fast turn on time diverts more energy and current away from the IC than any other protection device available.

CONCLUSION

The technology to manufacture MLVs exists and allows the manufacture of miniature SMT surge suppressors. MLVs do not have the wear out failure mode of first generation (single layer) varistors. In fact, MLVs exhibit better reliability numbers than that of TVS diodes. MLVs are a viable protection device for auto multiplex bus applications.

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150 AMP Current Repetitive Strike Comparison

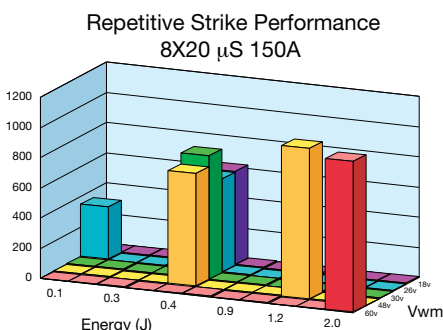


Figure 3A. Multilayer Varistor.

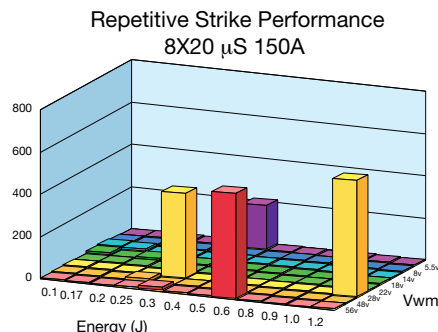


Figure 3B. Single Layer Varistor.

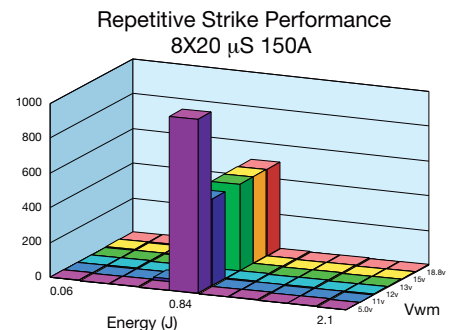


Figure 3C. Silicon TVS.