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(54) **VALVE COMPONENT WITH MULTIPLE SURFACE LAYERS**

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(52) **U.S. Cl.** **251/368**; 137/625.17; 137/625.41; 428/408; 428/698; 428/701

(58) **Field of Search** 251/368; 137/625.41, 137/625.17; 428/408, 698, 701

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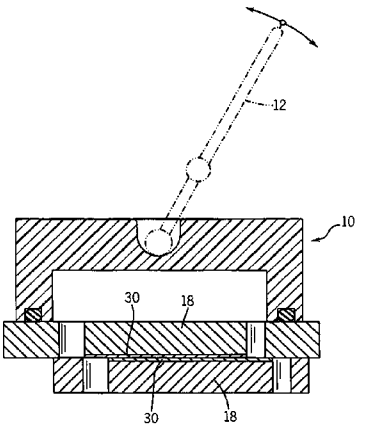
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A sliding component, particularly a disk valve plate. The sliding component includes a multi-layer surface structure comprising a strengthening layer harder than the substrate material, and an amorphous diamond top layer.

13 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets



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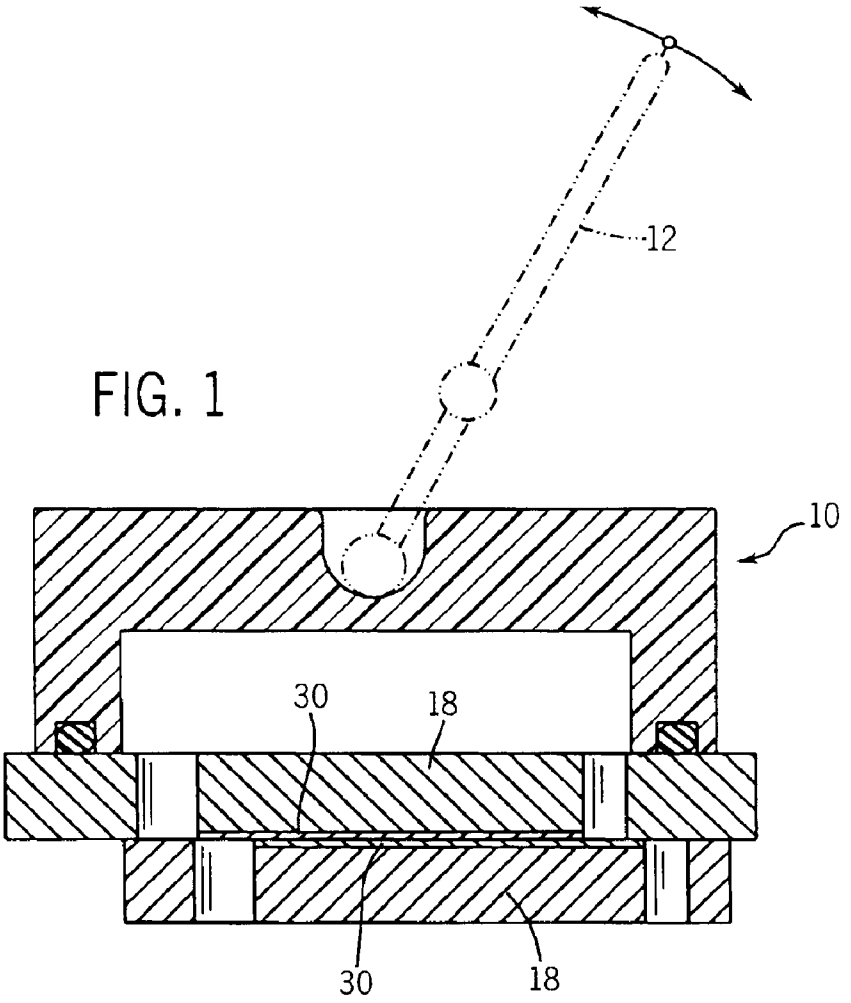

FIG. 1

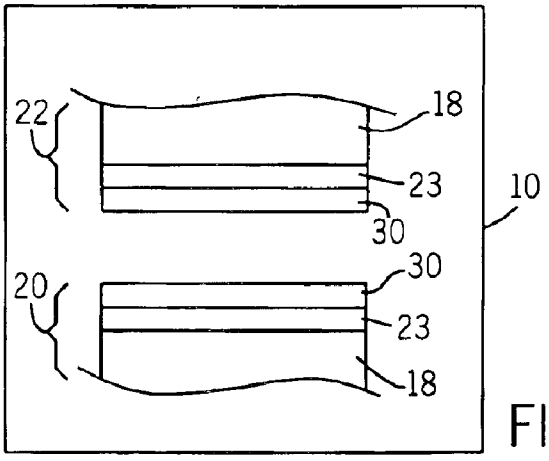

FIG. 2

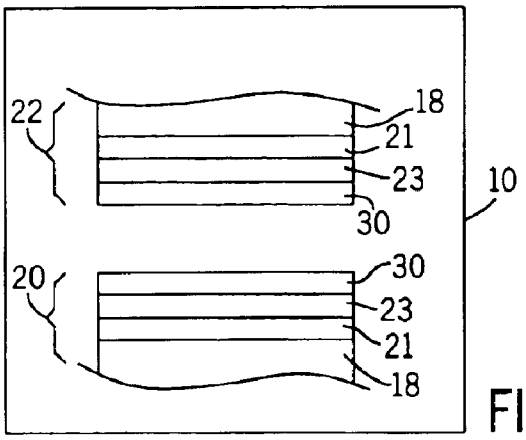

FIG. 3

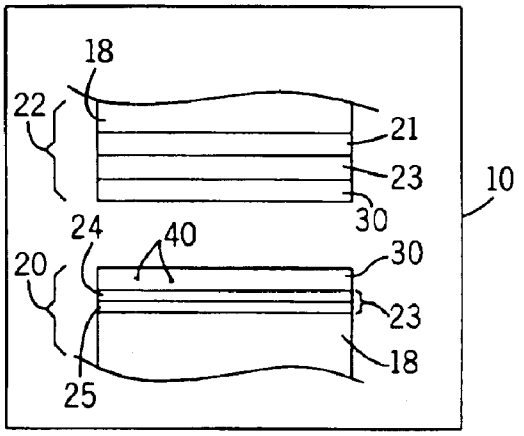

FIG. 4

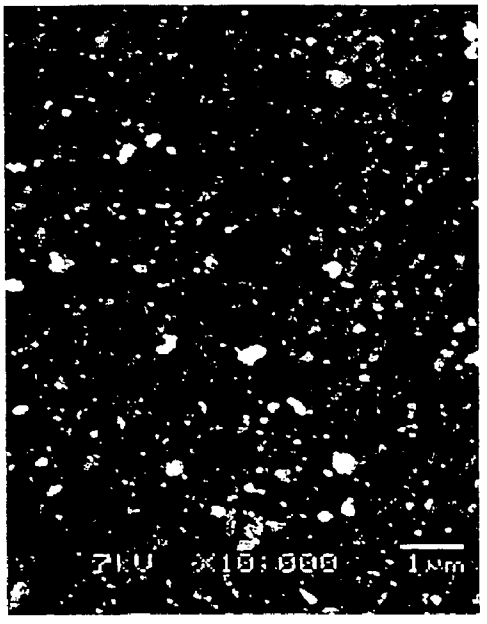

FIG. 5

VALVE COMPONENT WITH MULTIPLE SURFACE LAYERS

CROSS-REFERENCE OF PRIOR APPLICATION

This invention is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/322,871, filed Dec. 18, 2002 which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates generally to multi-layer surface coatings for use with articles of manufacture and products requiring low friction, low wear, and protective exterior surfaces. More particularly, the invention is related to articles having mutually sliding components, such as valve components for water mixing valves, having surface protective layers comprising a strengthening layer and an outer amorphous diamond coating.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In certain applications, such as for example, valve plates for fluid control valves, there is a need for mutually sliding surfaces to be wear resistant, abrasion resistant, scratch resistant, and to have a low coefficient of friction. The elements of one type of control valve for mixing of hot and cold water streams typically comprise a stationary disk and a moveable sliding disk, although the plate elements may be of any shape or geometry having a sealing surface, including e.g. flat, spherical, and cylindrical surfaces. The term "disk" herein therefore refers to valve plates of any shape and geometry having mating surfaces which engage and slide against each other to form a fluid-tight seal. The stationary disk typically has a hot water inlet, a cold water inlet, and a mixed water discharge outlet, while the moveable disk contains similar features and a mixing chamber. It is to be understood that the mixing chamber need not be in the disk but could part of an adjacent structure. The moveable disk overlaps the stationary disk and may be slid and/or rotated on the stationary disk so that mixed water at a desired temperature and flowrate is obtained in the mixing chamber by regulating the flowrate and proportions of hot water and cold water admitted from the hot water inlet and the cold water inlet and discharged through the mixed water discharge outlet. The disks mating sealing surfaces should be fabricated with sufficient precision to allow the two sealing surfaces to mate together and form a fluid tight seal (i.e. they must be co-conformal and smooth enough to prevent fluid from passing between the sealing surfaces). The degree of flatness (for a flat plate shape), or co-conformity (for non-flat surfaces) and smoothness required depend somewhat on the valve construction and fluids involved, and are generally well known in the industry. Other types of disk valves, while still using mating sealing surfaces in sliding contact with each other, may control only one fluid stream or may provide mixing by means of a different structure or port configuration. The stationary disk may for example be an integral part of the valve body.

Previous experience with this type of control valve has demonstrated there is a problem of wear of the mating surfaces of the disks due to the fact that the stationary and moveable disks are in contact and slide against each other (see for example U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,935,313 and 4,966,789). In order to minimize the wear problem, these valve disks are usually made of a sintered ceramic such as alumina (aluminum oxide). While alumina disks have good wear resistance, they have undesirable frictional characteristics in that operating force increases, and they tend to become

"sticky" after the lubricant grease originally applied to the disks wears and washes away. The scratch and abrasion resistance of alumina plates to large and small particles (respectively) in the water stream is good; however, they are still susceptible to damage from contaminated water streams containing abrasive particles such as sand; and improvement in this regard would be beneficial. Additionally, the porous nature of the sintered ceramic disks makes them prone to "lockup" during long periods of non-use, due to minerals dissolved in the water supply that precipitate and crystallize between coincident pores in the mating surfaces. One objective of the present invention is to provide disks having reduced wear, improved scratch and abrasion resistance and reduced frictional characteristics. Another objective is to provide non-porous or reduced-porosity valve disks to reduce the number of locations where precipitated crystals may form between the mating surfaces.

Sintered ceramics in particular are relatively difficult and expensive (due to their hardness) to grind and polish to a degree of co-conformity and smoothness adequate for sealing. It would be advantageous to use a material for the disks, such as metal, which is less expensive, easier to grind and polish and which is not porous. However, the wear resistance and frictional behavior of bare metallic disks is generally not acceptable for sliding seal applications. A further objective of the present invention is to provide disks made of metal a base material and having improved wear, scratch, and abrasion resistance and improved frictional characteristics as compared to uncoated ceramic disks.

It is disclosed in the prior art (e.g. U.S. Pat. No. 4,707,384 and 4,734,339, which are incorporated herein by reference) that polycrystalline diamond coatings deposited by chemical vapor deposition (CVD) at substrate temperatures around 800–1000 C. can be used in combination with adhesion layers of various materials in order to provide scratch and wear resistant components. Polycrystalline diamond films, however, are known to have rough surfaces due to the crystal facets of the individual diamond grains, as is apparent in the photographs of FIGS. 2 and 3 in the '384 patent. It is known in the art to polish such surfaces in order to minimize the coefficient of friction in sliding applications, or even to deposit the polycrystalline diamond on a smooth substrate and then remove the film from the substrate and use the smooth side of the film (which was previously against the substrate) rather than the original surface as the bearing surface. The present invention overcomes prior art problems by providing a number of advantageous features, including without limitation providing a smooth and very hard surface for sliding applications, while avoiding difficult and expensive post-processing of a polycrystalline diamond surface layer. The methodology also advantageously employs substrate materials (such as, suitable metals, glasses, and composite and organic materials) that cannot be processed at the elevated temperatures necessary for CVD deposition of polycrystalline diamond.

It is also disclosed in the prior art (e.g. U.S. Pat. No. 6,165,616, which is incorporated herein by reference) that engineered interface layers may be employed to relieve thermally-induced stress in a polycrystalline diamond layer. These thermally induced stresses arise during cooling of the substrate after coating deposition at relatively high temperatures, and are due to the difference in thermal expansion coefficient between the substrate and the diamond coating. Rather complicated engineering calculations are specified in '616 to predetermine the desired interface layer composition and thickness. The interface layer thickness' disclosed in '616 to minimize the thermally-induced stress

in the diamond layer are of the order 20 to 25 microns according to FIGS. **1** through **3**. Such thick interface layers are expensive to deposit, due to the time necessary to deposit them and the high cost of the equipment required. The present invention also advantageously includes, without limitation, minimizing the coating cost but still achieving desired results by employing much thinner interface layers than those taught by '616, and to avoid creating the thermally-induced stresses which necessitate such complicated engineering calculations by depositing a hard surface layer at a relatively low temperature compared to the prior art, such as the '616 patent.

It is further disclosed in the prior art (e.g. U.S. Pat. No. 4,935,313 and 4,966,789, which are incorporated herein by reference) that cubic crystallographic lattice carbon (polycrystalline diamond) and other hard materials may be used as surface coatings on valve disks, and that pairs of mutually sliding valves discs which differ from each other in either surface composition or surface finish are preferable to those which are the same in these characteristics, with respect to minimizing friction between the plates. The present invention provides mating valve disk surfaces having a lower friction coefficient than the disclosed materials in water-lubricated or fluid wetted surface applications such as water valves, and to allow identical processing of both mating surfaces in order to avoid the need to purchase and operate different types of processing equipment. The present invention further provides, without limitation, mating valve disk surfaces having a lower friction coefficient than the disclosed materials in water-lubricated or fluid wetted surface applications such as water valves. Furthermore, both mated sliding surfaces of the disks can be hard and have an abrasion resistance to contaminated water streams and to allow identical processing of both mating surfaces in order to avoid the need to purchase and operate different types of processing equipment.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to a component having a wear resistant, scratch resistant, abrasion resistant, and low-friction surface. More particularly, it is directed to components having a multi-layer structure comprising a thin strengthening layer having higher hardness than the substrate material, and a thin amorphous diamond wear-resistant and friction-reducing layer deposited on the strengthening layer. The amorphous diamond layer provides a low-friction, wear and abrasion resistant sealing surface with particular advantages in water-lubricated or fluid wetted applications. The incorporation of a strengthening layer to support the top amorphous diamond layer, provides better scratch and abrasion resistance than an amorphous diamond layer alone, and allows a thinner amorphous diamond layer to be used. The strengthening layer is particularly useful to avoid problems with large particles caught between the mating surfaces, which can break through a thin diamond coating because of plastic deformation of the softer substrate beneath.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is one form of valve incorporating a multi-layer structure with an amorphous diamond layer overlying a substrate;

FIG. **2** is a detail of one form of multi-layer structure of the invention;

FIG. **3** illustrates yet another multi-layer structure with an added additional adhesion-promoting layer;

FIG. **4** is a further form of multi-layer structure of FIG. **2** wherein a strengthening layer includes two layers of different materials; and

FIG. **5** is a photomicrograph of the surface appearance of an exterior amorphous diamond layer over an underlying substrate or layer.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Embodiments of the invention are illustrated generally in the figures, where FIG. **1** shows one form of the valve **10** with handle **12** incorporating the invention. In particular, FIGS. **2–4** illustrate a portion of a valve **10** having a substrate **18** for a sliding component **20** and/or a fixed component **22** of the valve **10** which can comprise a base material wherein the base material can be the same or different in the sliding component **20** and the fixed component **22**. In other embodiments, one of the components **20**, **22** can be fixed. Preferably the base material is a sintered ceramic or a metal. Base materials can also comprise glasses or glassy materials, cermets, polymeric materials, composite materials, intermetallic compounds such as iron aluminide, and other materials mechanically suitable for the application. The metals can include, for example, any conventional metal, including without limitation, stainless steel, brass, zirconium, titanium, aluminum, and alloys of the latter three materials. Stainless steel, titanium, and zirconium, and aluminum are the most preferred metals, with the term stainless steel referring to any type such as 304, 316, etc., and customized variations thereof and with the terms titanium, zirconium, and aluminum understood to include alloys comprised mostly of those metals. Sintered (powdered) stainless steel is a preferred substrate material because it can be economically molded into complex shapes suitable for disks and can be economically ground and polished to achieve a mating smooth sealing surface. In the case of sintered stainless steel, "fully dense" substrates and metal injection molded substrates are preferred. Titanium and zirconium are preferred base materials because they can be easily oxidized or anodized to form a hard surface layer. Ceramics can be any conventional ceramic material, including without limitation, for example, sintered alumina (aluminum oxide) and silicon carbide, with alumina being a preferred material. Composite materials can include, for example, any conventional cermets, fiber reinforced epoxies and polyamides, and carbon-carbon composites. Glass and glassy materials can include for example borosilicate glass such as Pyrex™, and materials such as toughened laminated glass and glass-ceramics. Glass, glassy materials and cermets are preferred substrates because they can be economically molded into complex shapes suitable for disks and can be economically ground and polished to a flat and smooth surface. Iron aluminide is understood to be a material consisting mainly of that iron and aluminum but may also contain small amounts of such other elements as molybdenum, zirconium, and boron.

As shown in FIG. **2**, a strengthening layer **23** can also be placed directly on the substrate surface **18**. This layer **23** can comprise a material having higher hardness than the substrate **18**. Suitable materials for the strengthening layer **23** can include compounds of Cr, Ti, W, Zr, and any other metals conventionally known for use in hard coatings. The compounds include without limitation are nitrides, carbides, oxides, carbo-nitrides, and other mixed-phase materials incorporating nitrogen, oxygen, and carbon. One highly preferred material for the strengthening layer **23** is chromium nitride. Chromium nitride in the present application

most preferably refers to a single or mixed phase compound of chromium and nitrogen having nitrogen content in the range of about 10 to about 50 atomic percent. The term chromium nitride also refers to a material containing such doping or alloying elements as yttrium, scandium, and lanthanum in addition to chromium and nitrogen.

Another material suitable for the strengthening layer **23** is conventional DLC (Diamond-Like Carbon), which is a form of non-crystalline carbon well known in the art and distinct from amorphous diamond. DLC coatings are described for example in U.S. Pat. No. 6,165,616 (in which they are called (a-C) coatings). DLC can be deposited by sputtering or by conventional CVD. DLC is an amorphous material with mostly sp2 carbon bonding and little of the tetrahedral sp3 bonding that characterizes amorphous diamond. The hardness of DLC is substantially lower than that of amorphous diamond and is more similar to the hardness of conventional hard coating materials such as titanium nitride and chromium nitride. The internal stresses in DLC coatings are also lower than those in amorphous diamond coatings, allowing DLC to be deposited in thicker layers than amorphous diamond without loss of adhesion. The term DLC as used herein includes hydrogenated forms of the material.

The strengthening layer **23** functions primarily to improve scratch and abrasion resistance of the multilayer coating. The hardness of the strengthening layer **23** should be at least greater than that of the substrate **18** in order to perform its intended function of improving the scratch resistance of the coated disk. The thickness of the strengthening layer **23** is at least a thickness sufficient to improve the scratch resistance of the substrate **18**. For materials typically used as hard coatings, such as those disclosed above, this thickness is generally from around 500 nm to around 10 microns, and preferably from about 2000 nm to around 5000 nm. In testing of faucet water valves it has been found that a chromium nitride strengthening layer having a thickness of about 5 microns provides adequate scratch and abrasion resistance (in conjunction with a thin amorphous diamond top layer) for types and sizes of contaminants considered to be typical in municipal and well water sources.

In some embodiments of the present invention as shown in FIG. **3** and for component **22** of FIG. **4**, a thin adhesion-promoting layer **21** can be deposited on the substrate **18** and then the strengthening layer **23** on the layer **21**. This layer **21** functions to improve the adhesion of the overlying strengthening layer **23** to the substrate **18**. Suitable materials for the adhesion-promoting layer **21** include preferably chromium and also can include titanium, tungsten, other refractory metals, silicon, and other materials known in the art to be suitable as adhesion-promoting layers. The layer **21** can conveniently be made using the same elemental material chosen for the strengthening layer **23**. The layer **21** has a thickness that is at least adequate to promote or improve the adhesion of layer **23** to the substrate **18**. This thickness is generally from about 5 nm to about 200 nm, and most preferably from about 30 nm to about 60 nm. The adhesion-promoting layer **21** can be deposited by conventional vapor deposition techniques, including preferably physical vapor deposition (PVD) and also can be done by chemical vapor deposition (CVD).

PVD processes are well known and conventional and include cathodic arc evaporation (CAE), sputtering, and other conventional deposition processes. CVD processes can include low pressure chemical vapor deposition (LPCVD), plasma enhanced chemical vapor deposition (PECVD), and thermal decomposition methods. PVD and CVD techniques and equipment are disclosed, inter alia, in J. Vossen and W. Kern "Thin Film Processes II", Academic Press, 1991; R. Boxman et al, "Handbook of Vacuum Arc Science and Technology", Noyes, 1995; and U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,162,954 and 4,591,418, with the patents incorporated herein by reference.

In the case of sintered ceramic materials, although the individual granules forming the sintered material may have high hardness, the scratch resistance of the overall sintered structure as measured by scratch testing is much lower than that of the material forming the granules (e.g. alumina). This is due to the fact that the materials typically used to sinter or bond the alumina granules together, typically silicates, are not as hard as the granules themselves. The hardness of the strengthening layer **23** can be similar to or even less than the hardness of the individual granules comprising the ceramic disk, and still being harder than the overall sintered ceramic structure. It has been found by experiment, for example, that the depth of the scratch caused by a stylus (radius=100 microns) sliding under a load of 30 Newtons is approximately 4–6 microns on an uncoated sintered alumina substrate, while the scratch depth on an identical substrate coated with a 3 micron thick chromium nitride strengthening layer is only 2–3 microns.

The strengthening layer **23** can be formed by conventional vapor deposition techniques including, but not limited to sputtering, cathodic arc evaporation (CAE), and CVD. The most preferred methods are sputtering, CAE, or other means which may be carried out at a relatively low temperature, thereby minimizing thermally-induced stresses in the coating stack upon cooling. If the strengthening layer **23** is deposited by CAE, it is also desirable to use macroparaticle filtering in order to control and to preserve the smoothness of the surface of the substrate **18**. The strengthening layer **23** can also be formed by other well-known methods for forming hard coatings such as spray pyrolysis, sol-gel techniques, liquid-dipping with subsequent thermal treatment, nano-fabrication methods, atomic-layer deposition methods, and molecular-layer deposition methods.

The strengthening layer **23** can alternatively be formed by a process that produces a hardened surface layer on the substrate base material. Such processes include, for example, thermal oxidation, plasma nitriding, ion implantation, chemical and electrochemical surface treatments such as chemical conversion coatings, anodizing including hard anodizing and conventional post-treatments, micro-arc oxidation and case hardening. The strengthening layer **23** can also include multiple layers **24** and **25** as shown in FIG. **4**, in which the layers **24** and **25** together form the strengthening layer **23**. For example, the layer **24** can be an oxide thermally grown on the substrate base material while the layer **25** is a deposited material such as CrN. The strengthening layer **23** can also include more than two layers, and can preferably comprise for example a superlattice type of coating with a large number of very thin alternating layers. Such a multilayer or superlattice form of the strengthening layer **23** can also include one or multiple layers of amorphous diamond.

In the multi-layer structure of FIGS. **1–4** the amorphous diamond layer **30** is deposited over the strengthening layer **23** to form an exterior surface layer. The purpose of the amorphous diamond layer **30** is to provide a very hard wear abrasion resistant and lubricous top surface on the sliding components. Amorphous diamond is a form of non-crystalline carbon that is well known in the art, and is also sometimes referred to as tetrahedrally-bonded amorphous carbon (taC). It can be characterized as having at least 40 percent sp3 carbon bonding, a hardness of at least 45

gigaPascals and an elastic modulus of at least 400 gigaPascals. Amorphous diamond materials are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,799,549 and 5,992,268, both of which are incorporated herein by reference. The amorphous diamond material layer **30** can be applied processes including, for example, conventional filtered cathodic arc evaporation and laser ablation. The term amorphous diamond as used herein includes all forms of taC type carbon and may also contain doping or alloying elements such as nitrogen and metals, and also includes nano-structured materials containing amorphous diamond. Nano-structured materials mean herein materials having structural features on the scale of nanometers or tens of nanometers, including but not limited to superlattices.

The thickness of the amorphous diamond layer **30** is at least a value effective to provide improved wear and abrasion resistance of the sliding component. This thickness is generally at least about 100 nm, preferably at least about 200 nm and more preferably at least about 300 nm. The upper thickness range of the layer **30** is determined by material characteristics, economic considerations and the need to minimize thickness-dependent intrinsic stresses in the layer **30** as discussed below. Also amorphous diamond layer **30** advantageously exhibits an extremely smooth surface topology as can be seen by reference to the photo of FIG. **5**, principally because there are no individual diamond grains in an amorphous coating. In addition, the surface topography of the thin amorphous diamond layer **30** essentially replicates that of the subsurface upon which it is deposited, and therefore the amorphous diamond layer **30** has substantially the same average surface roughness as that of the subsurface. Graphitic inclusions, visible as light spots in FIG. **5**, do not contribute to the surface roughness, as the term is used herein, because they are very soft and are reduced to a lubricative powder when the sliding surfaces are brought into contact. Amorphous diamond has the further advantage that it can be deposited at much lower temperatures (generally below approximately 250 C) than polycrystalline diamond, thus eliminating the need for the thick, engineered interface layers disclosed in the prior art (see, e.g. U.S. Pat. No. 6,165,616) for relieving the thermally-induced stress in the diamond layer. These thermally induced stresses arise during cooling after deposition at the high temperatures characteristic of CVD, and are due to the difference in thermal expansion coefficient between the substrate and the diamond coating. We have found that the type of calculations disclosed in the '616 patent for determining the thickness of its thermally-induced stress relieving interface layer are not necessary for amorphous diamond films due to the low deposition temperature.

One characteristic of amorphous diamond is that it develops high intrinsic (non-thermally-induced) internal stresses, which increase as the coating thickness increases and which are predominately related to atomic bonding distortions and not to thermal expansion/contraction. While this intrinsic stress is believed to contribute to the high hardness of the material, it also limits the coating thickness since stress-induced forces tend to cause delamination of the coating from the substrate **18** (or the strengthening layer **23**) above a certain thickness. Although amorphous diamond can be deposited directly on a metal, glass or iron aluminide disk (optionally with an adhesion layer), it is difficult to deposit a thick enough layer to provide adequate scratch resistance for water valve applications. Scratch resistance is important because water supplies sometimes contain abrasive contaminants due to pipeline breaks, construction, etc. The additional strengthening layer **23** of the present invention provides better support of the amorphous diamond layer **30** than does the softer substrate material, advantageously allowing a thinner layer of amorphous diamond to be used, while still obtaining improved scratch and abrasion resistance. The strengthening layer **23** can also be chosen to be a material that has a greater deposition rate and/or is less expensive to deposit than the amorphous diamond layer **30**, in order to minimize overall coating cost while maintaining performance. In the most preferred embodiment, an upper thickness limit for the amorphous diamond layer **30** of around 1–2 microns can be used to avoid stress-induced delamination, while an upper thickness of around 800 nm, and more preferably around 300–500 nm, can be desirable for economic reasons while still achieving the desired performances characteristics.

Amorphous diamond is well suited to wet sliding applications in water valve applications. In particular it has been shown to have a very low coefficient of friction and also extremely low abrasion wear in water-lubricated sliding tests in which both sliding surfaces are coated with amorphous diamond. In contrast, DLC coatings are known to have higher friction coefficients higher wear rates, and to deteriorate in frictional performance with increasing humidity. A further advantage of amorphous diamond is that the relatively low deposition temperature allows a wider choice of substrate materials and minimizes or eliminates permanent thermally induced distortion of the substrate.

Regarding the low coefficient of friction reported for amorphous diamond coatings in water-lubricated sliding tests, it is thought that this may be due at least in part to graphitic inclusions (commonly called macroparticles) that are incorporated in amorphous diamond coatings made by some methods. Such graphitic inclusions can be numerous in carbon coatings deposited by cathodic arc evaporation, depending on the choice target materials and use of macroparticle filtering means as discussed below. These graphitic inclusions do not degrade the performance of the amorphous diamond coating due their softness and the small fraction of the total surface area they occupy. Rather, it is thought that they may improve performance by increasing lubricant retention between the sliding plates.

It is disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,401,543 (incorporated herein by reference) that amorphous diamond coatings which are essentially free of macroparticles can be deposited by cathodic arc evaporation from a vitreous carbon or pyrolytic graphite cathode. The maximum density of macroparticles (graphitic inclusions) in such coatings, as calculated from the areal dimensions of the photographic figures and the macroparticle counts disclosed, is around 200 macroparticles per square millimeter. Such macroparticle-free amorphous diamond coatings can be used as layer **30** in the present invention, but are less-preferred than those deposited from an ordinary graphite cathode and containing substantial numbers of graphitic inclusions, such as, for example, at least about 500 per square millimeter. They are also less preferred because the required vitreous carbon or pyrolytic graphite cathodes are quite expensive compared to ordinary graphite.

The number of graphitic inclusions **40** incorporated into coatings (see FIG. **4** showing them schematically) deposited by filtered arc evaporation from an ordinary graphite cathode can be controlled according to the present invention by choosing the filter design and operating parameters so as to allow the desired number of macroparticles to be transmitted through the source. The factors influencing the transmission of macroparticles through a filter are discussed e.g. in U.S. Pat. No. 5,840,163, incorporated herein by reference. Filter

designs and operating parameters are conventionally chosen to minimize the number of macroparticles transmitted through the source, however this choice also generally reduces the (desired) output of carbon ions and hence reduces the deposition rate. Contrary to this usual practice, we find that it is preferable for purposes of minimizing coating cost to choose the filter design and operating parameters so as to maximize the carbon ion output of the source (i.e. the deposition rate) without exceeding the maximum tolerable number of graphitic inclusions incorporated into the coating. The maximum tolerable number of inclusions is that number above which the performance of the coated parts deteriorates unacceptably due to the increasing fraction of the surface area occupied by the inclusions. Critical performance factors can include non-leakage of the working fluid, sliding friction coefficient, scratch and abrasion resistance, and wear life. We have found that graphitic inclusion surface densities substantially higher than 500/mm^2 are tolerable, and may be beneficial as described above.

The adhesion of the amorphous diamond layer **30** to a nitride form of the strengthening layer **23** can in some cases be improved by the introduction of a carbon-containing gas, such as methane, during a short period at the end of the deposition of the strengthening layer **23**. This results in a thin transition zone of carbo-nitride and/or carbide material between the strengthening layer **23** and the amorphous diamond layer **30**. In other cases the adhesion can be improved by turning off all reactive gasses during a short period at the end of the deposition of the strengthening layer **23**. This results in a thin metal layer between the strengthening layer **23** and the amorphous diamond layer **30**. It has also been noted that the introduction of methane during the filtered-arc deposition of the amorphous diamond layer **30** increases the coating deposition rate, and can also improve the coating hardness and scratch resistance. In still other cases, for example the case in which the amorphous diamond layer **30** is to be deposited on a thermally oxidized metal surface, it can be desirable to deposit the separate adhesion-promoting layer **21** between the strengthening layer **23** and the amorphous diamond layer **30**. Suitable materials for the adhesion layer **21** can include for example refractory carbide-forming metals, such as, Ti and W, and various transition metals such as Cr, and can also include carbides of those metals.

In order that the invention may be more readily understood the following examples are provided. The examples are illustrative and do not limit the invention to the particular features described.

EXAMPLE 1

Clean stainless steel valve disks are placed in a vacuum deposition chamber incorporating an arc evaporation cathode and a sputtering cathode. The arc source is fitted with filtering means to reduce macroparticle incorporation in the coating, as described for example in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,480,527 and 5,840,163, incorporated herein by reference. Sources of argon and nitrogen are connected to the chamber through a manifold with adjustable valves for controlling the flowrate of each gas into the chamber. The sputtering cathode is connected to the negative output of a DC power supply. The positive side of the power supply is connected to the chamber wall. The cathode material is chromium. The valve disks are disposed in front of the cathode, and may be rotated or otherwise moved during deposition to ensure uniform coating thickness. The disks are electrically isolated from the chamber and are connected through their mounting rack to the negative output of a power supply so that a bias voltage may be applied to the substrates during coating.

Prior to deposition the vacuum chamber is evacuated to a pressure of 2×10e-5 Torr or less. Argon gas is then introduced at a rate sufficient to maintain a pressure of about 25 milliTorr. The valve disks are then subjected to a glow discharge plasma cleaning in which a negative bias voltage of about 500 volts is applied to the rack and valve disks. The duration of the cleaning is approximately 5 minutes.

A layer of chromium having a thickness of about 20 nm is then deposited on the valve disks by sputtering. After the chromium adhesion layer is deposited, a strengthening layer of chromium nitride having a thickness of about 3 microns is deposited by reactive sputtering.

After the chromium nitride layer is deposited, the valve disks are disposed facing the arc source, and a top amorphous diamond layer having a thickness of about 300 nm is deposited by striking an arc on the carbon electrode and exposing the substrates to the carbon plasma exiting the source outlet. A negative DC bias of about 500 volts is initially applied to the substrates to provide high-energy ion bombardment for surface cleaning and bonding improvement. After about 5 minutes at high bias voltage, the bias voltage is reduced to about 50 volts for the remainder of the deposition process. An argon pressure of about 0.5 milliTorr is maintained in the chamber during deposition. Pulsed or AC bias voltages may alternatively be employed, and a higher or lower argon may also be maintained in order to stabilize the arc source operation and optimize coating properties.

It has been found by experiment that valve disks made of stainless steel and coated according to the above example were able to withstand more than 15,000 test cycles in circulating water carrying 20 micron silica sand, while standard uncoated alumina valve disks failed under the same conditions in less than 2500 cycles.

EXAMPLE 2

Clean zirconium valve disks are placed into an air oven, heated to a temperature of 560 C., held at this temperature for about 6 hours, and cooled. A strengthening layer of zirconium oxide is thereby formed on the substrate surface, having a thickness of 5–10 microns. The disks are then placed in a vacuum deposition chamber incorporating a filtered arc evaporation cathode and a sputtering cathode. An adhesion layer of chromium having a thickness of about 20 nm is deposited on the valve disks by sputtering as described in example 1. After the chromium adhesion layer is deposited, an amorphous diamond layer is deposited as described in Example 1.

Valve disks made of zirconium and treated as described to form a multilayer structure on their surfaces were tested for scratch resistance, using a scratch tester with variable loading. The scratch depths generated on the treated Zr disks by a stylus tip having 100 micron radius under a load of 3 Newtons were around 4.7 microns deep, while those on untreated Zr disks were about 9.5 microns or more than twice as deep. Scratch test performance is believed to be a relevant predictor of scratch and abrasion resistance in field applications.

EXAMPLE 3

Clean molded-glass valve disks are placed in a vacuum deposition chamber incorporating a laser ablation source, a PECVD source, and a sputtering cathode. The valve disks

are subjected to a RF (radio-frequency) discharge plasma cleaning by known means. An adhesion layer of titanium having a thickness of about 20 nm is then deposited on the valve disks by sputtering. A strengthening layer of DLC having thickness of about 3 microns is then deposited on top of the adhesion layer by PECVD using known deposition parameters. An amorphous diamond layer having thickness of about 300 nm is then deposited on top of the DLC layer by laser ablation using typical deposition parameters.

EXAMPLE 4

Clean stainless steel valve disks are placed in a vacuum chamber containing a filtered arc evaporation source and a sputtering cathode. The chamber is evacuated, nitrogen gas is introduced, a plasma discharge is established between the disks and the chamber walls, and the disk surface is plasma-nitrided according to known parameters. Nitrogen diffuses into the stainless substrates to form a surface layer harder than the bulk substrate, and the process is continued for a period of time sufficient for the layer depth to reach about 2 microns. A superlattice consisting of multiple alternating layers of carbon nitride and zirconium nitride is then deposited on the nitrided stainless steel surface by filtered arc evaporation and sputtering respectively. The alternating individual layers are about 10 nm thick, and about 100 layers of each material is deposited for a total superlattice thickness of about 2 microns. The ratio of nitrogen to carbon in the carbon nitride layers is preferably around 1.3, since carbon nitride+zirconium nitride superlattices having this N:C ratio have been shown to have primarily sp3-bonded carbon and hardness in the range of 50 gigaPascals. Carbon nitride as used herein refers to a material having a N:C ratio between about 0.1 and 1.5.

The large number of thin layers may conveniently be deposited by mounting the substrate on a rotating cylinder such that the substrates pass first in front of one deposition source and then the other, such that one pair of layers is deposited during each revolution of the cylinder. The total strengthening layer thickness is about 4 microns including the plasma-nitrided stainless steel layer. An amorphous diamond layer having thickness of about 200 nm is then deposited on top of the superlattice layer by filtered arc evaporation as described in Example 1.

The construction and arrangement of the elements shown in the preferred and other exemplary embodiments is illustrative only. Although only a few embodiments have been described in detail in this disclosure, those skilled in the art who review this disclosure will readily appreciate that many modifications are possible (e.g., variations in sizes, dimensions, structures, shapes and proportions of the various elements, values of parameters, use of materials, etc.) without materially departing from the novel teachings and advantages of the subject matter recited herein. The order or sequence of any process or method steps may be varied or re-sequenced according to alternative embodiments. Other substitutions, modifications, changes and omissions may be made in the design, operating conditions and arrangement of the preferred and other exemplary embodiments without departing from the scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of forming a sliding component of a disk valve, comprising the steps of:

providing a base material;

depositing a strengthening layer on the base material; and

depositing by physical vapor deposition a smooth amorphous diamond layer on the strengthening layer, the temperature during the deposition of the strengthening layer and the amorphous layer being less than about 200° C.–300° C., thereby avoiding any need to calculate predetermined mechanical and thermal properties of the base material, the strengthening layer and the amorphous diamond layer.

2. The method as defined in claim **1** wherein the depositing step includes forming a graphite phase within the amorphous diamond layer.

3. The method as defined in claim **1** wherein the step of depositing a smooth amorphous diamond layer comprises forming a superlattice structure comprised of a plurality of amorphous diamond layers.

4. The method as defined in claim **3** wherein the step of depositing a plurality of amorphous diamond layers comprises forming a superlattice multi-layer with at least one layer of amorphous diamond and another layer of different phase of diamond.

5. The method as defined in claim **3** wherein the step of forming a superlattice includes forming a multi-layer of at least one layer of amorphous diamond and another layer of different phase of diamond.

6. The method as defined in claim **3**, wherein the step of depositing a strengthening layer comprises forming a layer of thickness less than about 5000 nanometers.

7. A method of forming a sliding component for a disk valve comprising the steps of:

providing a base material;

forming on said base material a strengthening layer comprising a material harder than said base material, the thickness of said strengthening layer being at least a value sufficient to improve the scratch resistance of said component; and

forming on top of said strengthening layer a layer of amorphous diamond by a process which includes forming graphitic inclusions in said amorphous diamond layer and which is conducted at sufficiently low temperature that said amorphous diamond layer is not caused to delaminate from said strengthening layer by thermally-induced stresses upon cooling, said amorphous diamond layer having a thickness at least sufficient to improve the wear resistance of said component and having an average surface roughness which is not substantially higher than that of said strengthening layer.

8. The method as defined in claim **7** in which said strengthening layer comprises chromium nitride.

9. The method as defined in claim **7** wherein said thickness of said strengthening layer is less than about 10 microns.

10. A method for forming a disk valve for fluid flow control, the disk valve having two plates with mating surfaces which slide against each other, said mating surfaces each having an average surface roughness and said surface roughnesses both being low enough to substantially prevent transmission of a fluid between said mating surfaces, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a base layer;

depositing on the base layer a strengthening layer comprising a material harder than said base material; and

vapor depositing an amorphous diamond layer on said strengthening layer, said amorphous diamond layer having a thickness of at least a value sufficient to improve the wear resistance of said plate and having an average surface roughness which is not substantially higher than that of said strengthening layer.

11. The method as defined in claim 10 wherein said strengthening layer is formed by depositing a plurality of a superlattice layers of carbon nitride and a metal nitride.

12. The method as defined in claim 11 wherein the depositing step comprises alternately depositing a layer of the carbon nitride and a layer of the metal nitride.

13. The method as defined in claim 10 wherein the step of depositing a strengthening layer is selected from the group of a depositing a plasma-nitrided layer and depositing an ion-implanted layer.

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