

Steelworld

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Editorial Desk

Dear Readers,

Within the umbrella of iron & steel industry, special steels assume a very vital and prestigious position. Owing to their special properties, these steels find applications in variety of industries and a lot of metallurgical thinking is required to formulate their parameters. Many steel mills producing TMT or similar steels may operate without a qualified metallurgist but this is impossible in case of mills producing special steels. Thousands of compositions and grades as well as numerous intricate parameters and applications make this sector really challenging and thus exciting!

The sector has been growing with double digit rate for the last decade or so with an approximate domestic consumption of 7 MT, around 8 to 9 % of the total steel consumption in the country. Out of many customer industries, automobile forms the most important and the biggest user of special steel products. It consumes around 50% of the special steels produced and the remaining 50% finds its application in other industries like power, defense, aerospace, white goods, construction etc. Naturally the fortunes of special steel producing mills dance on the tunes of automobile industry. The auto industry too had witnessed an explosive growth in the last decade not only in terms of numbers but also in terms of the perception of the consumer. The customer expectations have undergone a phenomenal change in this period. They want more fuel efficient, lightweight, aerodynamic shape and a good looking smart vehicle. We have also seen that many auto parts which were originally made of steel, are now being made by other metals like aluminium or even by composites for weight and price considerations. The steel industry had to lose this business permanently. The special steels industry is also gearing up for the challenging requirements of auto sector. They have developed micro alloyed steels which eliminate the need of heat treatment, lightweight steels specially for auto industry are also being developed.

Presently auto sector is somewhat stagnated as far as sales are concerned and this has put a tremendous back pressure on forging companies as well as special steel mills. In my opinion, these two sectors have bit over expanded their capacities and thus though in the last decade or so, the demand has climbed up substantially, the capacity has gone ahead of it. Today many special steel mills are operating below 75 % of capacity utilization but at the same time I must mention that the industry sentiment is quite positive and everybody is expecting the things to improve in coming months!!!

D. A. Chandekar