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TRANSISTOR CHARACTERIZATION AND DERATING FOR SECOND BREAKDOWN

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# TRANSISTOR CHARACTERIZATION AND DERATING FOR SECOND BREAKDOWN

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## ABSTRACT

Two modes attributing to secondary breakdown in transistors have been found - the current and voltage modes. Localized spots due to current constriction as a result of either mode causes an exponential rise in thermal resistance prior to secondary breakdown. These localized secondary breakdown spots have been calculated to be between 900°- 1100°C in silicon. The study indicates that the maximum secondary breakdown power is a function of the device design and should be considered in light of other device performance requirements.

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### LIST OF SYMBOLS

- $\theta$  = The thermal resistance over entire operating bias range.
- $\theta_0$  = The thermal resistance over a portion of the operating bias range, where  $\theta$  is relatively constant.
- $C$  = The slope of thermal resistance versus voltage curve.
- $V_0$  = The bias voltage at which the slope of capacitance versus voltage curve departs from the normal cube or square root dependence. Also the voltage above which  $\theta$  rises exponentially with voltage.
- $T_{crit}$  = The difference in temperature between the localized hot spot in the junction and the ambient causing second breakdown.
- $I_{sb}(I_m)$  = The current at which secondary breakdown occurs.
- $k$  = The slope of thermal resistance versus current curve. Also the negative slope of the low frequency small signal current gain versus current curve.
- $I_0$  = The bias collector current at which the thermal resistance begins increasing exponentially.
- $P_{MS}$  = The maximum secondary breakdown device power.
- $P_V$  = The derated secondary breakdown power with applied voltage above  $V_0$ .
- $\gamma$  = Emitter efficiency.
- $\beta$  = Base transport factor.
- $\alpha^*$  = Collector multiplication ratio.
- $M$  = Avalanche-current multiplication factor.

## TRANSISTOR CHARACTERIZATION AND DERATING FOR SECOND BREAKDOWN

### INTRODUCTION

Second breakdown still appears to be a major limiting factor in the power performance and power handling capability of transistors. This is clearly evidenced by recent specifications on power transistors which have been released by manufacturers supplying devices for large signal applications. In addition, some manufacturers have prepared for their users extensive amounts of data on derating for second breakdown in pulse applications.<sup>1,2</sup> It is, therefore, quite apparent that the second breakdown problem has been recognized in devices intended for audio, switching, and r-f power applications.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

The present state-of-the-art in characterizing transistors for their second breakdown limitation has been by brute force techniques. In order to publish second breakdown derating curves as a function of voltage, temperature, time, etc., manufacturers have been forced to utilize destructive testing. At present it appears that there are no elegant methods developed for predicting the onset of second breakdown.

Although the problem of second breakdown has been with the industry since junction transistors were first made, it was not recognized as such until 1958.<sup>3</sup> Solutions to the second breakdown problem have been few and have been limited to circuit considerations either internal or external to the device.

An interim solution involving device design has been proposed by one of the authors.<sup>6</sup> For devices which lend themselves to this type of voltage limitation, punch-through prior to collector-base avalanche breakdown reduces the voltage effects of second breakdown. This type of design is limited primarily to the homogeneous base transistor, such as the alloy or single diffused junction device.

At the time of this writing, it is felt that while the problem of second breakdown has been widely recognized it is still one of the major limiting factors with respect to power handling ability of transistors. Furthermore, little progress has been made to date on a practical basis toward the solution of the problem with the possible exception of the punch-through limited transistor. Second breakdown cannot be completely eliminated, but device design steps must be taken to extend it beyond the normal operating range of the transistor.

The purpose of this paper is to report the latest findings on second breakdown and to possibly shed some light on a parametric non-destructive characterization of second breakdown.

## DISCUSSION

### Parametric Indications Related to Second Breakdown

The effectiveness of second breakdown in reducing power dissipation is shown in Fig. 1. In Fig. 1 a plot is made of the second breakdown burnout power; i.e., current and voltage the instant before second breakdown occurs as a function of applied collector voltage for a group of silicon triple diffused transistors (2N1506). It is noted that as the collector voltage increases the burnout power decreases. Between 50 and 90 volts there is almost a two to one reduction in burnout power.

While in Fig. 1 the burnout power is shown as a function of voltage, from other observations it is believed that there exists two second breakdown modes. These modes have been previously identified as the "high current" and "premature" modes.<sup>6</sup> From our recent work, these modes have been recharacterized as simply a "voltage" and "current" mode. This becomes more evident as further data is presented.

In either mode the predecessor to catastrophic failure is a reduction in the power handling capability of the transistor, or more precisely an increase in the thermal resistance of the device. Information on the variation of thermal resistance with applied voltage and current was previously reported by one of the authors.<sup>7</sup> The technique of measurement utilized the sampling of the current gain,  $h_{FE}$ , or forward voltage drop,  $V_{BEF}$ , on a continuous basis.<sup>6</sup> Utilizing the d.c., current gain,  $h_{FE}$ , as the temperature sensitive parameter it appears that the hottest spot in the transistor is sensed. When these techniques of measurement are applied a thermal resistance versus voltage plot is obtained as shown in Fig. 2 (device type 2N2037). While there is a difference in the magnitude of  $\theta$  and the slope between curves, both curves indicate that above approximately 30 volts the thermal resistance rises more rapidly with voltage. The variation of thermal resistance with voltage can be expressed as:

$$\theta = \theta_0 e^{C(V-V_0)} \quad (1)$$

$$\text{for } V > V_0$$

where  $\theta_0$  is the thermal resistance which remains relatively constant to some voltage,  $V_0$ ,  $C$  is the upper slope of the discontinuous  $\theta$  vs  $V$  curve, and  $V$  is the applied collector-base voltage.

In Fig. 2,  $V_0 \approx 30$  volts, and  $\theta_0 = 35^\circ \text{ C/W}$  ( $V_{BEF}$  method) and  $\theta_0 = 43^\circ \text{ C/W}$  ( $h_{FE}$  method). In Fig. 2,  $C = 0.026$  ( $V_{BEF}$  method) and  $C = 0.046$  ( $h_{FE}$  method). Equation (1) predicts that for the device shown in Fig. 2 the power derating above approximately 30V would be 1.3 - 1.5 for each 10 volts in excess of  $V_0$ .

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Assuming, at this time, that the applied voltage is the only contributing parameter causing the thermal resistance to rise an expression can be derived linking power dissipation to applied voltage. It is further assumed that the thermal resistance measured indicates the hottest spot in the device and when this spot reaches a critical temperature, second breakdown occurs.

Classically the thermal resistance and junction temperature rise are related by:

$$\Delta T = P\theta$$

where  $\Delta T$  is the rise in temperature between junction and case or ambient,  $\theta$  is the appropriate thermal resistance, and  $P$  is the applied power.

If now excess heating due to applied voltage is taken into account,

$$\Delta T = P\theta_0 e^{C(V-V_0)}$$

Assuming that the exponent  $C(V-V_0)$  is small so that  $e^{C(V-V_0)}$  can be expanded into a McLaurin series, then

$$\Delta T \approx P\theta_0 [ 1 + C(V-V_0) ]$$

At some critical localized temperature second breakdown occurs so that,

$$\Delta T_{crit} = VI_{sb}\theta_0 [ 1 + C(V-V_0) ]$$

$$I_{sb} \approx \frac{\Delta T_{crit}}{\theta_0 (V(1-CV_0) + CV^2)}$$

where:  $I_{sb}(I_m)$  = the current at which second breakdown occurs. (2)

If  $CV_0 = 1$ , then

$$I_{sb} = \frac{\Delta T_{crit}}{\theta_0 (CV^2)} \quad (3)$$

or that the second breakdown current is inversely proportional to the square of the applied voltage.

If  $CV_0 \ll 1$ , then

$$I_{sb} \approx \frac{\Delta T_{crit}}{\theta_0 (V + CV^2)} \quad (4)$$

The ultimate in performance from a second breakdown point of view would be to have  $C = 0$  over the operating range of the devices. In the case of the homogeneous base devices the increase of thermal resistance does not appear to occur below  $BV_{CEO}$ , i. e.,  $C = 0$ , equation (4). If punch-through is incorporated into such a device then for all practical purposes  $C = 0$  over the operating voltage range of the transistor.

The above information is now compared to the results of Chang and Turner. Chang and Turner indicate that for single diffused devices,

$$I_{sb} = KV^{-1}$$

where  $K$  is a power constant.

From observed results at these Laboratories on single diffused devices (2N1479 & 2N1480), punch-through occurred prior to collector-base breakdown and following punch-through,  $C = 0$ , reducing equation (2) to:

$$I_{sb} = \frac{\Delta T_{crit}}{\theta_0 V} \quad . \quad (5)$$

For triple diffused devices Chang and Turner indicate that under d.c. conditions,

$$I_{sb} = KV^{-2.2}$$

which again is in good agreement with equations (3) and (4). Chang and Turner's results have been promulgated based on direct device measurements.

All of the above results have been presented assuming that the presence of current had no unusual effects on the second breakdown point. A similar analysis can be presented assuming that the current alone contributes to the onset of second breakdown. Therefore, it is assumed that the applied voltage is below  $V_0$ , equation (1). Consider the thermal characteristics of a device operated well below  $V_0$ , as in Fig. 3 in which a plot of thermal resistance versus current is shown. As was previously noted with voltage beyond some current level,  $I_0$ , the thermal resistance increases with current so that,

$$\theta = \theta_0 + k(I - I_0)$$

where  $k$  is the slope of the  $\theta$  vs  $I$  curve (beyond  $\theta = \theta_0$ ) and  $I_0$  is the threshold current.

From examination of many devices it has been found that:

$$I_0 \cong \left| \frac{1}{k} \right|$$

therefore,  $\theta = \theta_0 e^{(kI - 1)}$

and  $\Delta T = P\theta_0 e^{(kI - 1)}$  .

Assuming  $(kI - 1)$  to be small,

$$\Delta T = VI \theta_0 (kI) .$$

When  $\Delta T = \Delta T_{crit}$  second breakdown occurs and

$$I_{sb} \cong \sqrt{\frac{\Delta T_{crit}}{V\theta_0 k}} . \quad (6)$$

Equations (3) and (4) describe the transistor for second breakdown in the voltage mode and equation (6) for the current mode. From equation (6) it is clearly indicated that second breakdown in the "current" mode is dependent on the following factors as related to the terms of equation (6):

1. Materials and processing ( $\Delta T_{crit}$ )
2. Area, materials, and effectiveness in contacting for reduced thermal resistance ( $\theta_0$ )
3. Applied voltage (V)
4. Current crowding factor (k).

#### Exponential Coefficients "C" and "k"

It is evident from the foregoing discussions that the key parameters in equations (2) and (6) are the exponents "C" and "k". The authors have directed much effort in obtaining an understanding of the factor "k".<sup>9</sup> The factor "k" can be obtained on any given device by examining the current gain,  $h_{fe}$ , fall-off with collector current as follows:

$$\frac{h_{fe1}}{h_{fe2}} = \exp - k (I_2 - I_1) \quad (7)$$

where  $h_{fe1}$  is the small signal low frequency current gain at the lower current level,  $I_1$ , (amperes);  $h_{fe2}$  is the small signal low-frequency current gain at the higher current level,  $I_2$ , (amperes); and k is the slope of the  $h_{fe}$  vs  $I_c$  curve.<sup>9</sup>

It has been found that the factors which are necessary to reduce the variation of current gain with increasing collector current at high injection levels also assist in keeping the second breakdown current high. These factors are directed primarily to improving the emitter efficiency at high current levels and are summarized as follows:

- (a) Large ratios of emitter peripheral length to emitter area
- (b) Highest base conductivity in keeping with other device critical parameters
- (c) Minimum base width in keeping with other parameters.

From a group of units of the same geometry, it has been found by this study that the second breakdown current is related to the figure of merit derived in reference 6

$$FM \approx \left( \frac{J_0}{A} \right)^3 (\mu\alpha)^{-1/2} . \quad (8)$$

The above figure of merit was developed for silicon planar epitaxial transistors but would appear to hold for other diffused devices. It should be clearly pointed out that the above discussion with respect to the factor "k" held only if no unusual voltage effects were present.

The factor "C" in equation (2) relates to the voltage contribution second breakdown. The design considerations related to "C" have been examined, but a simple parametric expression for it has not been developed. Therefore, at present we must rely on the thermal resistance versus voltage measurements to obtain its absolute value. However, it has been found that "C" is related to the build-up of the electric field across the depletion region in the collector junction. Along with the absolute value of "C" it is necessary to obtain an indication of when the voltage  $V_0$  is exceeded. The voltage  $V_0$  is the maximum voltage which may be applied before the thermal resistance begins to increase. To correlate the voltage at which  $\theta$  rises with the physical properties of the transistor several areas were investigated.

In the past, many manufacturers of power transistors have assumed by more or less rule of thumb that the maximum "safe" voltage that could be applied to a transistor was  $BV_{CEO}$ . From this study, the rule of thumb appears valid for homogeneous base transistors. However, for the more advanced devices, such as triple diffused or epitaxial devices, this rule of thumb does not hold in all instances. Observations on the maximum applied voltage prior to the increase in thermal resistance have been correlated with another parametric measurement.

In Fig. 4 a plot is made of the output capacitance,  $C_{ob}$ , as a function of collector-base voltage for a silicon triple diffused and a planar transistor. From Fig. 4 it is noted that the variation of capacitance with voltage is constant up to a particular voltage. Beyond

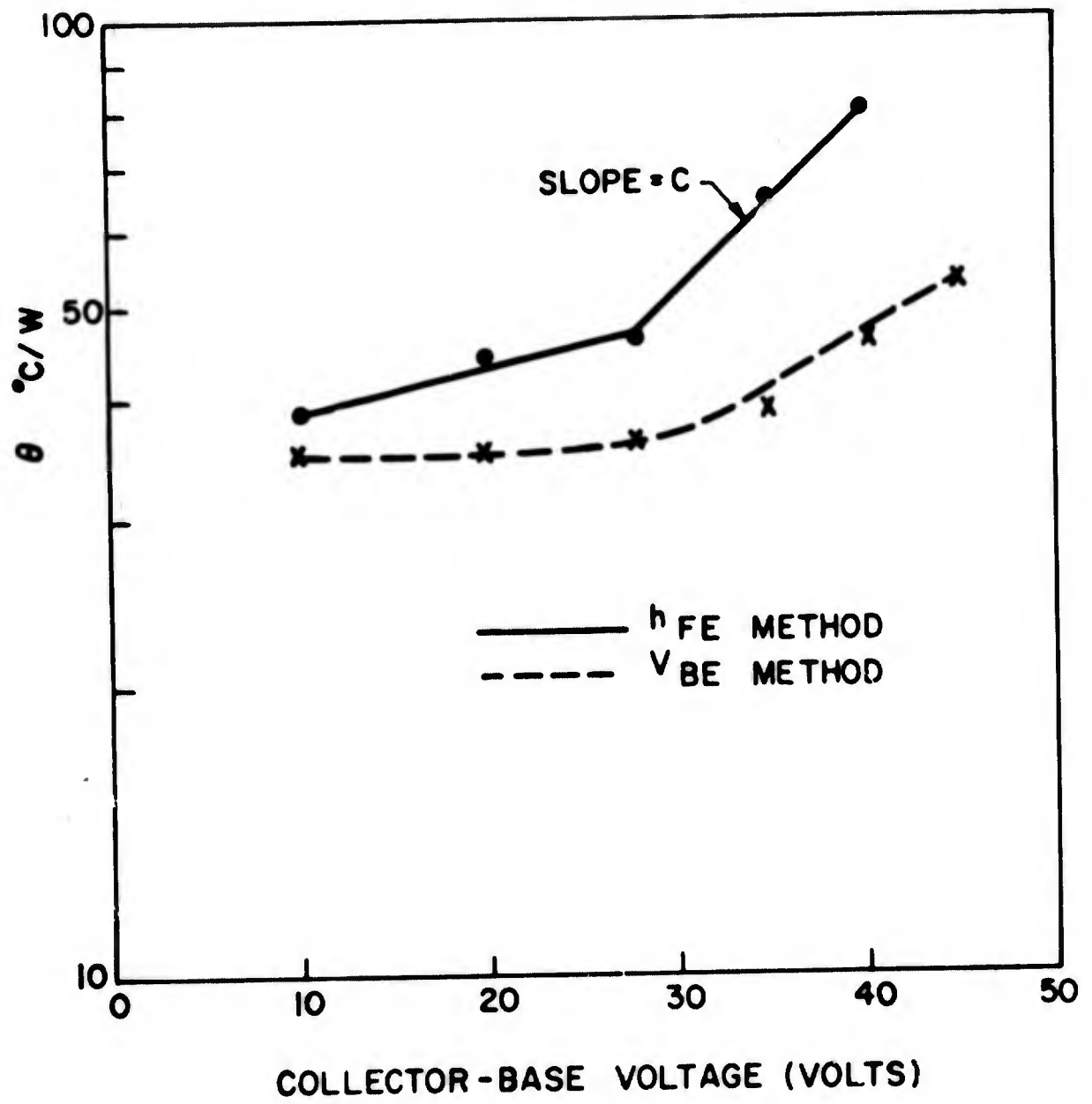


FIG.2 - VARIATION OF THERMAL RESISTANCE WITH COLLECTOR - BASE VOLTAGE (2N2037)

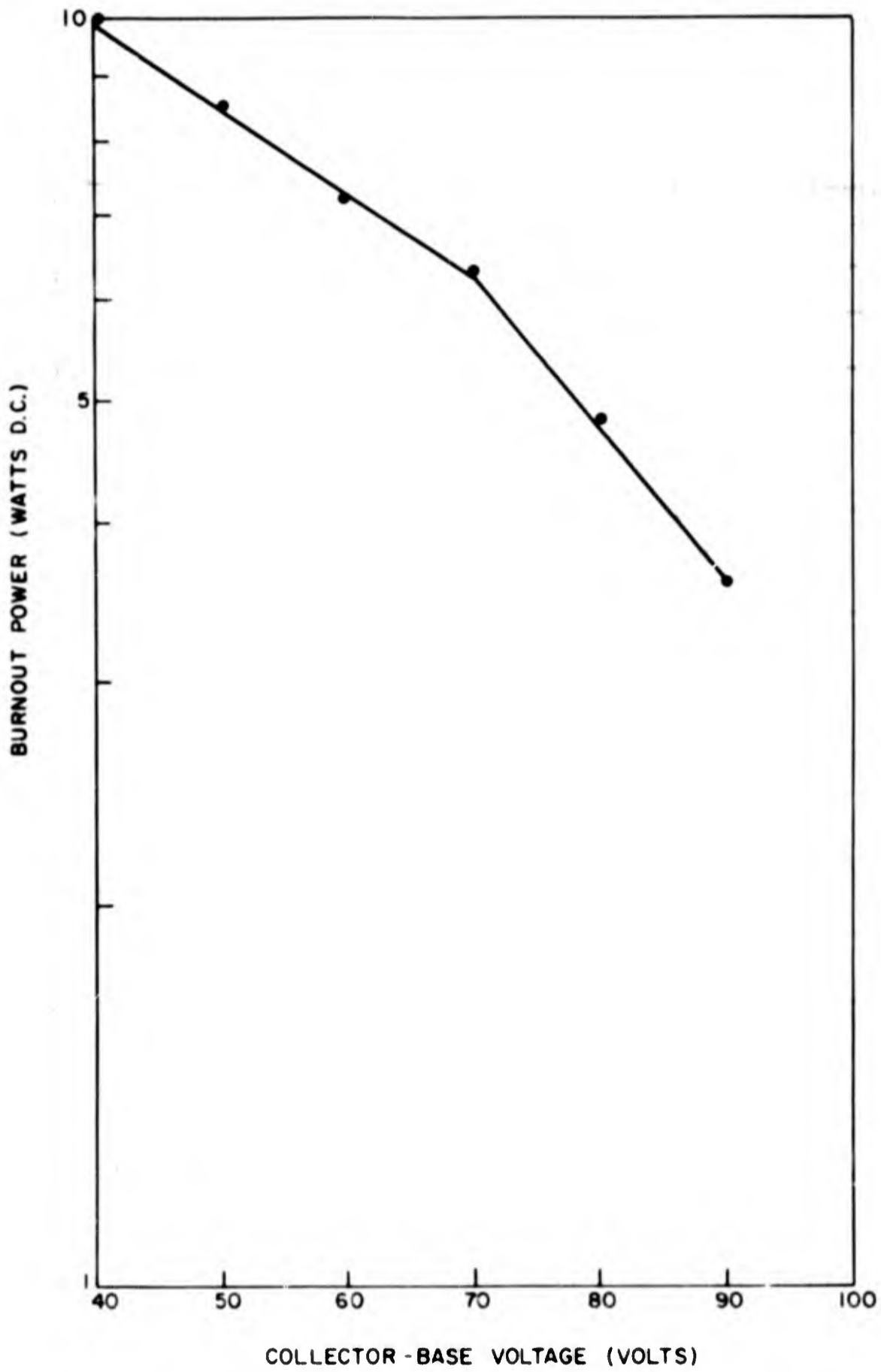


FIG. 1 - BURNOUT POWER VS COLLECTOR-BASE VOLTAGE  
(2N1506)

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occur at the emitter edge. In the voltage mode it is conceivable that above the voltage,  $V_0$ , that

$$\alpha = \gamma \beta \alpha^* M$$

exceeds unity and that there is base current reversal. The concentration process would then occur toward the center of the emitter rather than the edges which would cause this mode of failure and burnout.

#### CONCLUSIONS

1. There appears to be two modes causing secondary breakdown--the current and voltage mode. The current mode being the contributing factor for the fall-off of current gain with current, while the voltage mode is related to the voltage  $V_0$ .
2. Secondary breakdown in either mode is preceded by an exponential rise in thermal resistance in the device due to current constriction at localized spots.
3. The maximum secondary breakdown power is a function of the device design and should be considered in light of other device performance requirements.
4. The maximum "safe" operating voltage does not necessarily have to be  $BV_{CEO}$ .
5. Secondary breakdown spot temperatures are calculated to be between  $900^\circ - 1100^\circ\text{C}$  in silicon.
6. Two parametric measurements which can be used for determining device capabilities are the plots of  $C_{ob}$  vs  $V_{cb}$ , and  $h_{fe}$  vs  $I_c$ .

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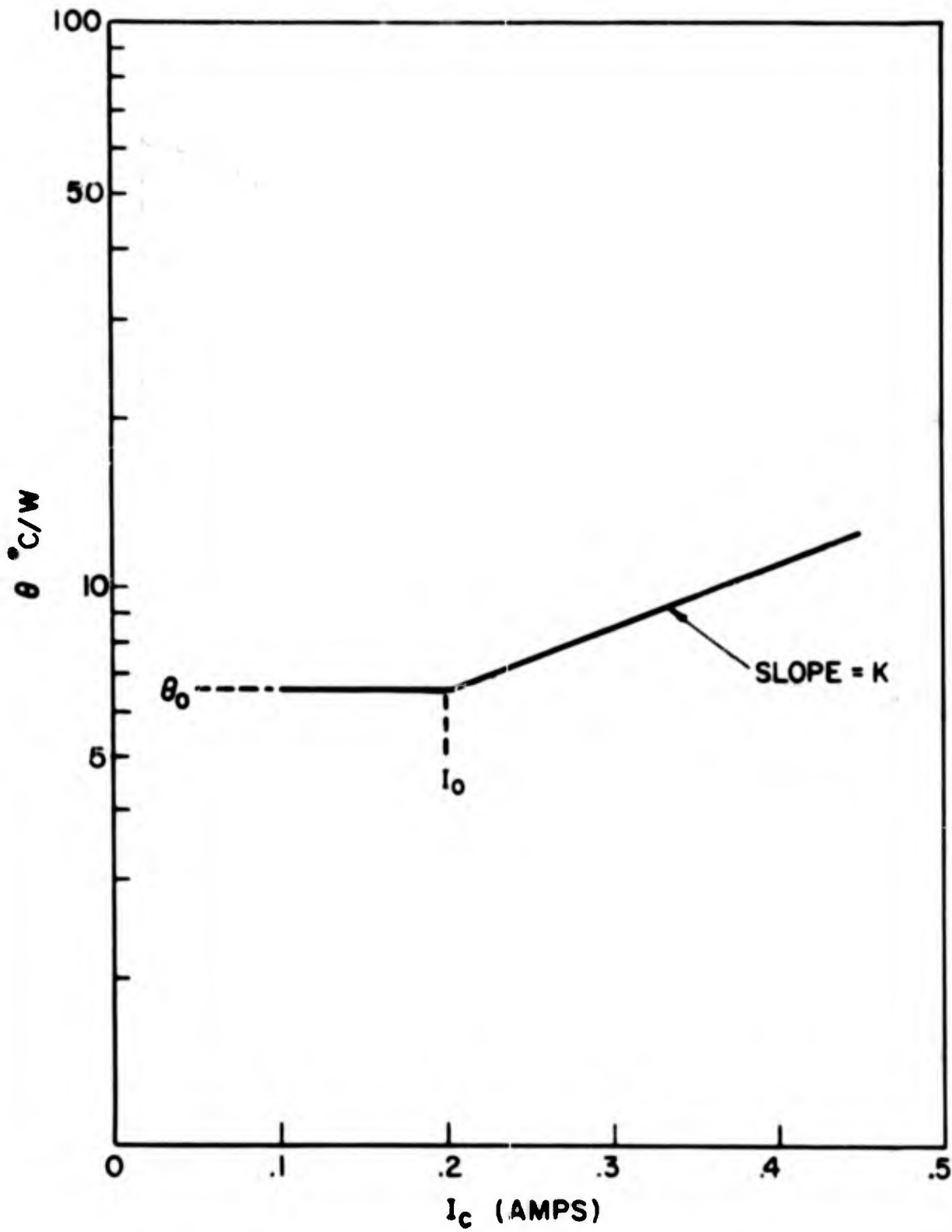


FIG. 3 - THERMAL RESISTANCE VS COLLECTOR CURRENT

this voltage the rate of change varies from the original curve and indeed becomes quite small. From observed data the break in the capacitance-voltage curve is the voltage beyond which the thermal resistance will rise with further increases in voltage and beyond which power is necessary.

A good explanation for what is believed to be occurring in an NPIN or epitaxial device is given by Phillips.<sup>10</sup> In essence, the assumption is made that all of the collector depletion layer goes into the epitaxial or I material for the epitaxial or triple diffused structure. It is assumed that the epitaxial or I thickness is represented by  $W_e$  and depletion layer thickness by  $X_{mb}$ . When the voltage is such that  $W_e = X_{mb}$ , this would represent  $V_0$  in our previously presented second breakdown analysis. Beyond this voltage, the electric field across the depletion region builds up at a more rapid rate causing the unusual observed thermal characteristics as previously shown in Fig. 2. It is apparent, therefore, that the optimum voltage design for epitaxial or triple diffused structures would be to have  $BV_{CEO}$  equal to the voltage at which the epitaxial or I region is completely depleted.

#### Critical Temperatures for Second Breakdown Occurrence

In equations (2) and (6) reference is made to  $\Delta T_{crit}$  which is the temperature at which second breakdown occurs, usually localized. Utilizing equation (1) and knowing the burnout power, voltage and case or ambient temperature, the temperature at which burnout occurred was calculated. For the silicon triple diffused transistors examined, calculated junction temperatures were between 800-900°C; and for the Si planar epitaxial devices, 1000-1100°C was the critical junction temperature. In germanium, where much less data was taken, the critical temperature was calculated to be 250-400°C for alloy types. The critical temperatures appear to be a function of the basic and ancillary materials necessary to fabricate the transistor, and of course the processing temperatures the devices experience in manufacture. The above calculation of junction temperatures is based on the curves of thermal resistance versus voltage as obtained by the continuous methods.<sup>8</sup>

#### Second Breakdown, Maximum Power and Voltage Derating

Utilizing equation (6) a comparison can be made of the maximum power handling capability from a second breakdown viewpoint to what is normally specified on a classical basis. Multiplying equation (6) by the applied maximum voltage,  $V_0$ , the maximum second breakdown power becomes:

$$P_{MS} = I_{sb} \times V_0 \approx \sqrt{\frac{\Delta T_{crit} V_0}{k \theta_0}} \quad (9)$$

If  $V > V_0$  the power the device can handle is reduced to:

$$P_V = \frac{P_{MS}}{\exp C (V - V_0)} \quad (10)$$

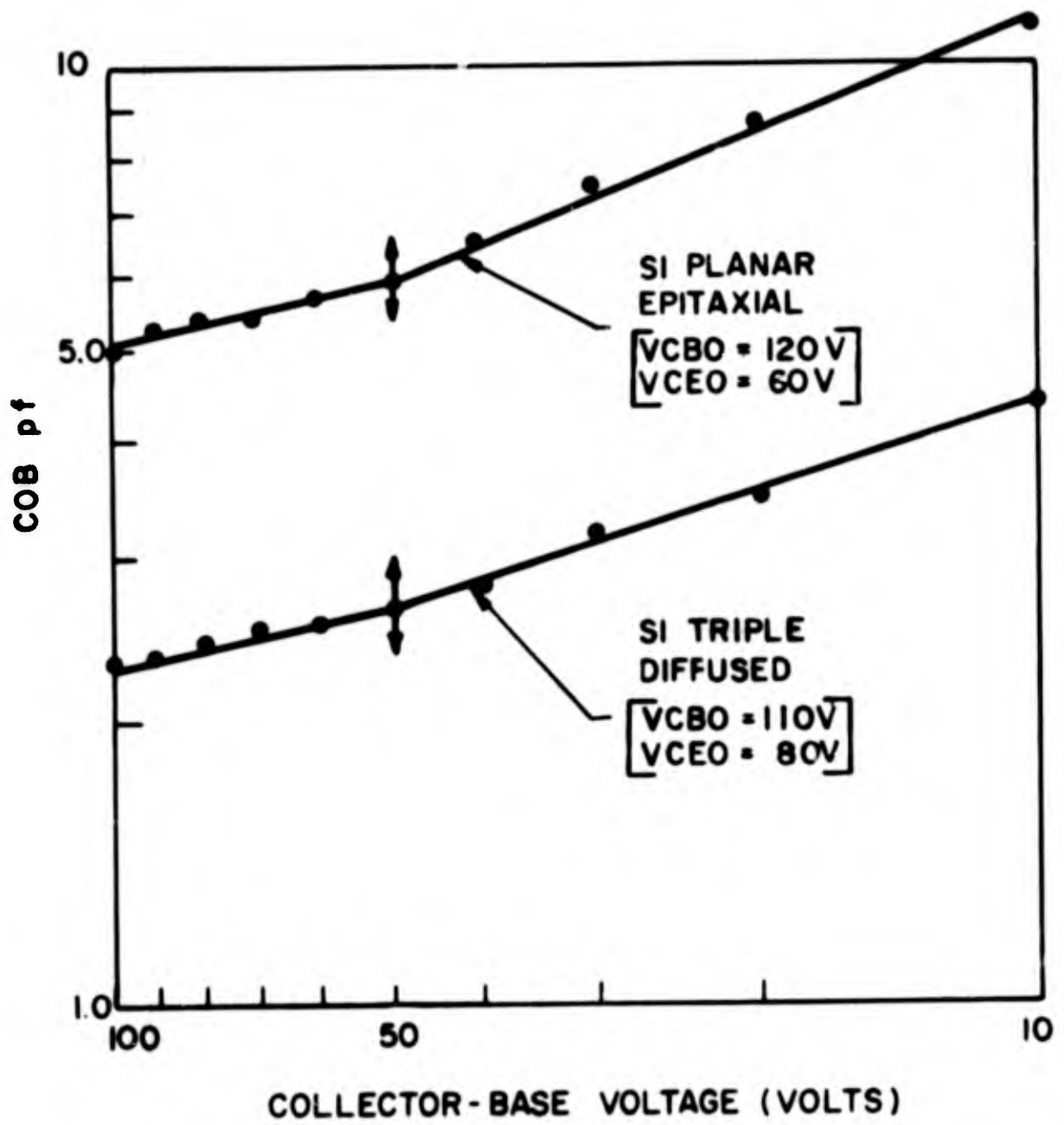


FIG.4 -  $C_{ob}$  VS COLLECTOR - BASE VOLTAGE

For example, let us examine a triple diffused transistor with the following characteristics:

$$\begin{aligned} \Delta T_{crit} &= 900^{\circ}\text{C} \\ V_0 &= 35 \text{ V} \\ k &= 2/\text{amp} \\ C &= .024/\text{volt} \\ \theta_{o,j-c} &= 5^{\circ}\text{C/W} \\ T_j \text{ max} &= 200^{\circ}\text{C} \\ BV_{CEO} &= 80 \text{ V.} \end{aligned}$$

The first point to be noted from the above characteristics is that  $V_0$  is approximately  $1/2 BV_{CEO}$ . From classical methods of analysis, the power dissipation for this device at a  $25^{\circ}\text{C}$  case temperature is

$$P_{max} \approx \frac{\Delta T}{\theta_o} = \frac{175}{5} = 35 \text{ watts.}$$

From a second breakdown viewpoint the maximum power that can be dissipated would be using equation (9)

$$P_{MS} \approx \sqrt{\frac{900 \times 35}{2 \times 5}} \approx 56 \text{ watts.}$$

Utilizing equation (10) the voltage at which the second breakdown power is equal to the classical power is given by:

$$\exp C (V - V_0) = \frac{56}{35} = 1.6$$

$$V - V_0 = 20 \text{ V}$$

$$V = 20 + 35 = 55 \text{ V.}$$

At 55 volts the device would fail from second breakdown if enough current were applied to bring the power product to 35 watts.

#### Second Breakdown and Types of Burnout

It has been previously stated that two secondary breakdown modes are possible (current and voltage modes). In a transistor, if the current mode is considered, i.e., no unusual voltage occurrences, the effects of lateral base current would be such that at high injection levels the center of the emitter would not function and all the current would concentrate at the edges. Therefore, in this mode of failure burnout should

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