

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE



# Influence of load and high temperature on the post-fire behaviour of high-strength structural steels

Andrés Lapuebla-Ferri<sup>1</sup> | David Pons<sup>1</sup> | Manuel L. Romero<sup>2</sup> | Leroy Gardner<sup>3</sup>

## Correspondence

Dr. Andrés Lapuebla-Ferri  
Universitat Politècnica de València  
Department of Continuum Me-  
chanics and Theory of Structures  
Camí de Vera, s/n  
46022 València, Spain  
Email: [anlafer0@mes.upv.es](mailto:anlafer0@mes.upv.es)

<sup>1</sup> Department of Continuum Me-  
chanics and Theory of Structures -  
Universitat Politècnica de Valèn-  
cia, Valencia, Spain

<sup>2</sup> ICITECH, Universitat Politècnica  
de València, Valencia, Spain

<sup>3</sup> Imperial College, London, United  
Kingdom

## Abstract

In this work, an experimental campaign was carried out to evaluate the post-fire mechanical performance of high-strength steel specimens (grade S700) when being subjected simultaneously to different combinations of tensile load and elevated temperature. To this end, transient-state tests were firstly carried out to obtain the 'critical temperature', i.e., the temperature at which a specimen failed while being simultaneously subjected to tensile load and heated at a constant temperature rate. Secondly, post-fire tests were performed on unloaded as well as loaded specimens. For that purpose, specimens were heated to temperatures below the critical temperature, cooled down in air and finally submitted to tensile testing. In order to investigate the influence of production route, specimens were extracted from cold-formed circular hollow sections and hot-rolled sheets. Moreover, coupons with five different thicknesses were tested to investigate the influence of section thickness on the post-fire behaviour. Residual values of yield strength, ultimate strength, elastic modulus and ductility were determined from the tests and discussed.

## Keywords

Post-fire behaviour, High-strength steel, Transient-state tests, Residual properties, Production route, Yield strength, Ultimate strength, Elastic modulus, Ductility

## 1 Introduction

Conventionally, steels whose yield strength is higher than 460 MPa are known as high-strength steels (HSS). In the last years, the structural use of HSS has become more and more frequent, especially in structural applications such as long-span buildings or pipelines. Structural engineers can take advantage of the increased strength-to-weight ratio of HSS, allowing for lighter elements compared to conventional steels. Consequently, reduced expenses in transport and erection of structures can be expected, so the use of HSS is interesting in terms of economic benefits and environmental protection.

Besides, steel performance is highly dependent on the working temperature, so fire hazards are a cause of special concern in the design of HSS structures [1-2]. Experimental studies have been performed in the past to study the variation of mechanical properties of HSS with the temperature (steady-state tests) and the combination of temperature and tensile load level (transient-state tests) such as [3-5]. Nevertheless, limited attention has been focused on the post-fire behaviour of structural HSS and its eventual reuse after cooling down. To the authors' knowledge, previous works and code and practical recommendations in this field are scarce for HSS [6].

In this work, an experimental campaign was carried out to evaluate the post-fire performance of HSS. To do this, different tests were performed. Firstly, transient-state tests allowed the 'critical temperature'  $\theta_{crit}$  at which a specimen failed under tensile load and increasing temperature to be obtained (described in Section 3). Secondly, post-fire tests were performed, as described in Section 4. In these tests, specimens were subjected to a tensile load and heated to a proportion of  $\theta_{crit}$  prior to being cooled back down to room temperature. Then, tensile tests were performed, so that residual properties of the material (yield and ultimate strength, elastic modulus and ductility) could be obtained; the results are discussed.

It has been reported in previous works [3-6] that the production route of HSS (i.e., the composition and the manufacturing process) has a significant influence in the response of the material at high temperatures. So, the influence of the production route (as well as the thickness) on post-fire response of HSS is also considered in this work by testing sets of specimens from different sources.

## 2 Materials and methods

The experimental setup used in this work is described in Sub-section 2.1. Sub-section 2.2 below describes the geometrical and mechanical features of the specimens.

## 2.1 Experimental setup

The experimental setup is depicted in Figure 1 and it was used in previous works of the authors [7-8]. It consisted of a hydraulic universal testing machine equipped with a 200 kN load cell, controlled by a closed-loop system. The upper and lower blocks of the machine incorporated hydraulic flat jaws, so the specimens could be laterally clamped to prevent slipping. In a tensile test, while the upper block remained fixed, the lower moved downwards. Specimens were heated by means of an attached electric furnace with three heating zones, each one with a thermocouple connected to a control unit. An extensometer located in the central section of a specimen was used to measure its modulus of elasticity.



**Figure 1** Experimental setup. 1: Upper block. 2: Lower block. 3: Electric furnace. 4: Extensometer.

## 2.2 Test specimens

Different sets of S700 grade specimens were considered, corresponding to various production routes. Two sets were obtained by cutting by laser 8 mm and 12 mm S700 MC sheets (hot-rolled structural steel for cold forming) and four cold-formed, circular hollow section (CHS) HSS tubes were cut longitudinally to obtain a set for each tube. Unlike the specimens cut from sheets, the specimens obtained from CHS tubes incorporated permanent strains induced by folding the original plate in the manufacturing process, which could be observed in the curved shape of the specimens. Each specimen had a length of 800 mm. Geometrical features of the specimens are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Geometrical features of specimens. CF: cold-formed. TR: thermomechanically rolled. HR: hot-rolled. w: width. t: thickness.

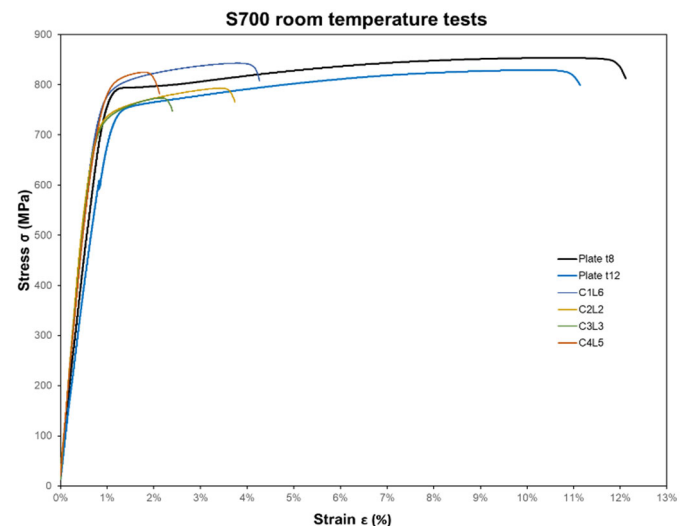
Production route	Shape	w (mm)	t (mm)	
<b>C1L6</b>	CF+TR	Rectangular	27	4
<b>C2L2</b>	CF+TR	Rectangular	20	4
<b>C3L3</b>	CF+TR	Rectangular	18	5
<b>C4L5</b>	CF+TR	Rectangular	18	6
<b>Steel sheet</b>	HR	Coupon	20	8
			15	12

A set of 3 specimens from each production route was subjected to tensile testing in order to obtain its mechanical properties at room temperature. These properties are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Mechanical properties of specimens at room temperature.  $f_y$ : yield strength;  $f_u$ : ultimate strength; E: modulus of elasticity;  $\epsilon_u$ : ultimate strain (strain at  $f_u$ );  $\epsilon_f$ : strain at fracture.

	Plate specimens		CHS specimens			
	t8	t12	C1L6	C2L2	C3L3	C4L5
$f_y$ (MPa)	777.3	721.5	754.8	707.6	714.1	769.3
$f_u$ (MPa)	853.5	829.1	842.9	793.3	773.6	824.8
E (MPa)	205000	201000	209070	218500	219500	221000
$\epsilon_u$ (%)	10.46	10.20	3.74	3.41	2.15	1.76
$\epsilon_f$ (%)	13.00	12.36	4.74	4.17	2.90	2.77

Stress-strain curves obtained from tensile tests at room temperature are depicted in Figure 2. Although the steel grade is the same for all sets, it is evident that ductility of the material from the CHS specimens is much less than that cut from plates. One of the ductility requirements given by Eurocode 3, part 1-12 [9] states that strain at fracture must not be less than 10%, which is not fulfilled by the specimens extracted from the CHS tubes. This is probably due to the manufacturing process of the CHS tubes, and it will have implications in the post-fire behaviour of specimens, as will be discussed later.



**Figure 2** Material properties of specimens at room temperature.

## 3 Transient-state tests

In the transient-state tests, specimens were placed in the testing machine and subjected to a tensile load, in such a way that the stress level  $\sigma_t$  was a proportion of the yield strength  $f_y$  of the material at room temperature. The tensile load was held constant while the specimen was heated at a constant temperature rate of 10 °C/min until its failure (or the machine stroke was reached without failing). In both cases, the temperature at the surface of the specimen (critical temperature  $\theta_{crit}$ ) was recorded. Figure 3 depicts the temperature and stress histories. These tests reflect a real situation, because a structure is loaded (not necessarily fully) during a fire event. In Eurocode 3, part 1-2 (EN 1993-1-2 [10]), the stress level carried by a steel member during a fire event can be computed through the 'degree of utilisation' parameter  $\mu_0$ :

$$\mu_0 = \frac{E_{fi,d}}{R_{fi,d,0}} \quad (1)$$

where  $E_{fi,d}$  is the design effect of the action in the fire situation and  $R_{fi,d,0}$  is the design value of the resistance in the fire situation at time  $t = 0$  (at the onset of fire). So, the ratio of the stress level to the yield strength at room temperature of a specimen will also be regarded as degree of utilisation  $\mu_0$ , assuming that failure is strength, rather than stability governed.

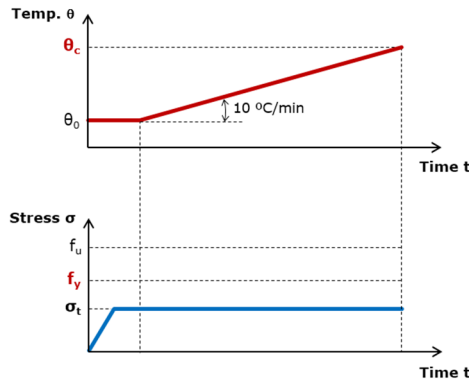


Figure 3 Transient-state tests; temperature and stress histories.

Figure 4 shows the variation of critical temperature with the degree of utilisation for each specimen set. For the plate specimens, logarithmic curves were fitted to the experimental values of  $\theta_{crit,t}$ , as can be seen in the figure.

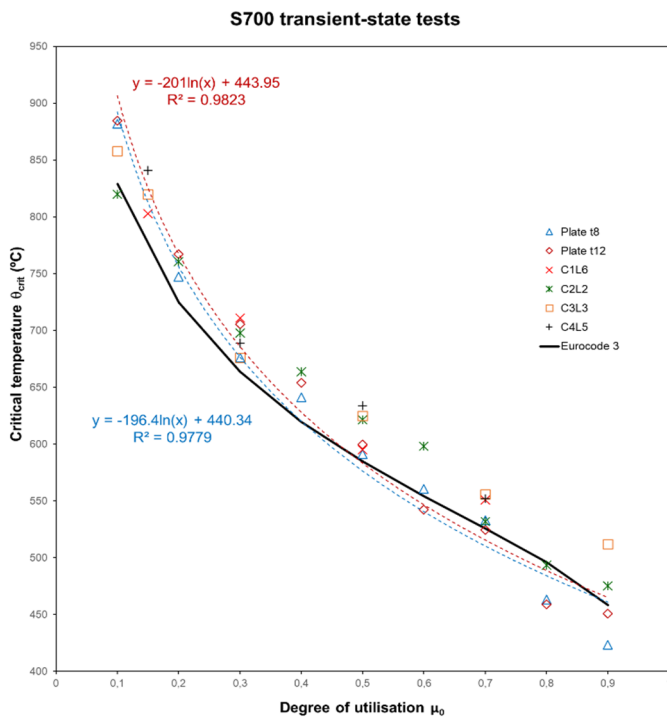


Figure 4 Transient-state tests;  $\theta_{crit} - \mu_0$  relationships.

In Figure 4, the curve found in EN 1993-1-2 that relates  $\theta_{crit}$  with  $\mu_0$  for carbon structural steels is also presented. The transient-state tests performed on the HSS specimens provide results that generally follow but do not fully correspond to the code expression. The curves fitted to the plate tests results intersect the EN 1993-1-2 curve at approximately  $\mu_0 = 0.4$  ( $t = 8$  mm) and  $\mu_0 = 0.47$  ( $t = 12$  mm). At higher degrees of utilisation, critical temperature values obtained from EN 1993-1-2 curve are unconservative. Besides, the specimen thickness appears to have

some influence. Regarding the CHS tubes, the curve of EN 1993-1-2 is conservative in almost the entire range of degrees of utilisation.

#### 4 Post-fire tests

Post-fire tests are intended to obtain the residual mechanical properties of steel members heated to high temperatures and subsequently cooled down.

The test procedure is depicted in Figure 5. Steel specimens were preloaded at room temperature to a stress level  $\sigma_t = \mu_0 \cdot f_y$ . The same degrees of utilisation  $\mu_0$  used for transient-state tests were considered. Then, the specimen was heated to a target temperature  $\theta_t < \theta_{crit}$  at a heating rate of 10 °C/min. When reaching  $\theta_t$ , it was held for a soaking time  $t_s = 30$  min until the entire specimen was evenly heated. Following this, the furnace was turned down and gradually opened, so the specimen cooled 'naturally' down in air back to room temperature. During the heating and cooling cycle, the stress  $\sigma_t$  remained constant. Finally, when the specimen attained room temperature  $\theta_0$ , the tensile load was increased until the failure of the specimen.

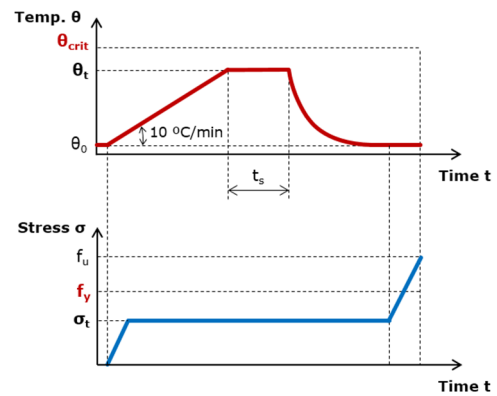


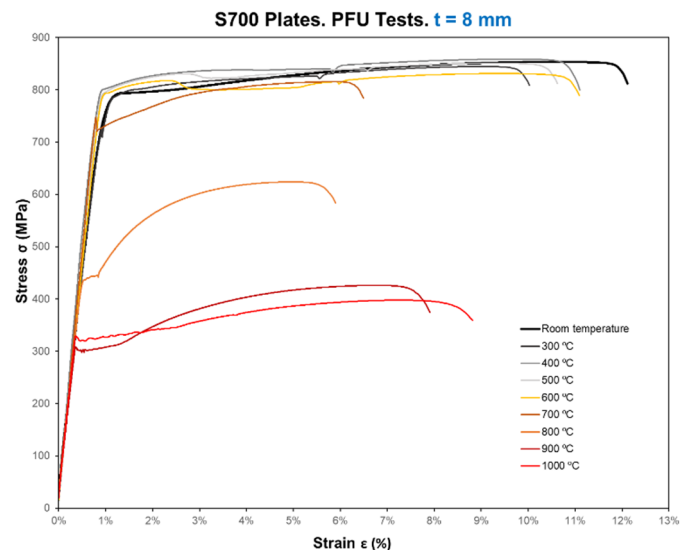
Figure 5 Post-fire tests; temperature and stress histories.

In order to study the influence of the target temperature  $\theta_t$  and the degree of utilisation  $\mu_0$  on the post-fire behaviour of HSS, two types of post-fire tests were performed. In the first one,  $\mu_0 = 0$  (post-fire, unloaded tests, PFU, Sub-section 4.1). In the second one,  $\mu_0 > 0$  (post-fire, loaded tests, PFL, Sub-section 4.2).

##### 4.1 Post-fire, unloaded tests (PFU)

PFU are the traditional post-fire tests used in the literature [11] since they are easy to perform, but they are unable to capture the combined influence of load and peak temperature in the post-fire behaviour of steels.

Figure 6 shows the residual stress-strain curves of the specimens from the 8-mm plate when heated to  $\theta_t \in [300, 1000]$  °C at intervals of 100 °C and cooled back down to  $\theta_0$ . Similar curves were obtained for  $t = 12$  mm. Qualitatively speaking, the mechanical properties seem to be unaltered when specimens were heated up to  $\theta_t = 600$  °C. Only the ductility was marginally affected. When heated to 700 °C and above, the deterioration of the material is evident. At 900 °C, even the yield strength and ultimate strength decline dramatically, and ductility increases but without recovering the value at room temperature. The elastic modulus remains essentially constant for all cases.



**Figure 6** PFU tests on S700 plate ( $t = 8$  mm); residual stress-strain curves (similar curves and trends were obtained for  $t = 12$  mm).

### 4.2 Post-fire, loaded tests (PFL)

The combined influence of load and temperature in the post-fire behaviour of steel has been studied in a few works on mild steel [7-8] but there are no works concerning HSS.

#### 4.2.1 Results of PFL test on plates

The PFL tests carried out are summarized in Table 3. The first two rows show the degree of utilisation  $\mu_0$  and the corresponding critical temperature  $\theta_{crit}$ . The same range of target temperatures used in the PFU tests was chosen to perform the PFL tests:  $\theta_t \in [300, 1000]$  °C. Given a target temperature  $\theta_t$ , the intersection of the respective row with a column for a given  $\mu_0$  provides a percentage value, which is the amount of  $\theta_{crit}$  that is  $\theta_t$  for that  $\mu_0$ . For example, if a specimen is loaded ( $\mu_0 = 0.5$ ) and heated up to 500 °C, this is 85% of the critical temperature (591 °C).

Not all combinations  $\theta_t - \mu_0$  given in Table 3 were tested, corresponding to the shaded cells. There are three arguments for this. The first one is obvious: a test could not be performed if  $\theta_t > \theta_{crit}$  (blank cells). The second is that the PFU tests revealed that a target temperature  $\theta_t = 300$  °C barely influenced the post-fire behaviour of HSS (a similar reason applies with respect to a degree of utilisation  $\mu_0 = 0.1$ ). Finally, the red values indicated tests that could not be finished because the specimen failed during the soaking time, most probably due to thermo-mechanical creep.

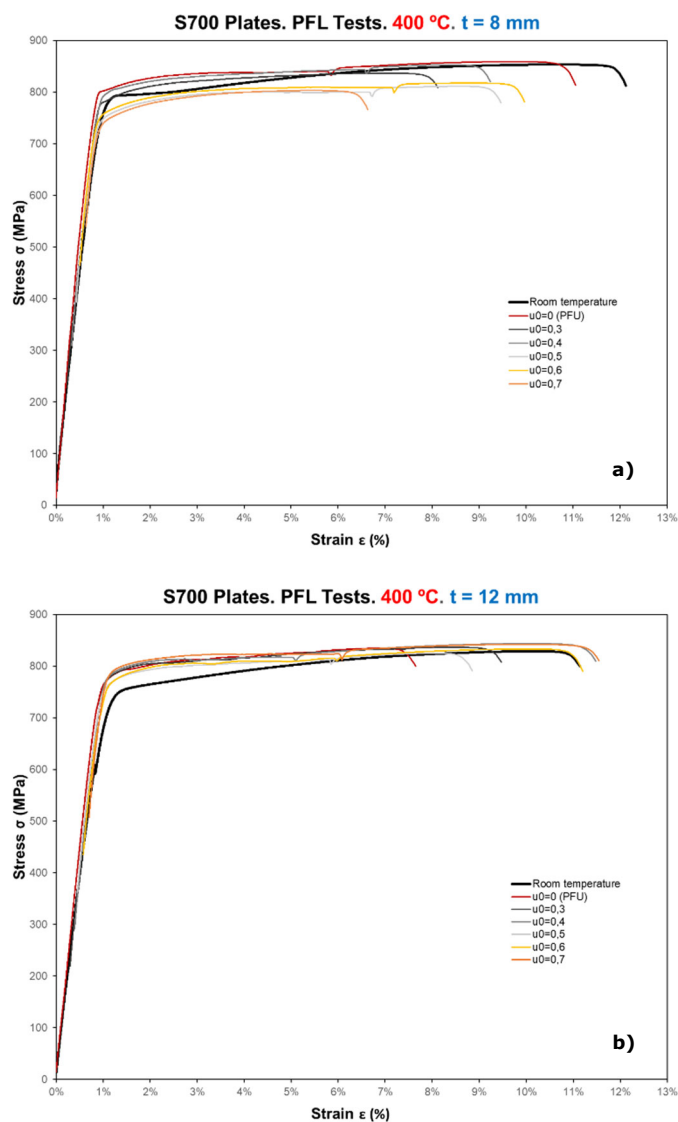
**Table 3** PFL Tests. Different combinations of degrees of utilisation and target temperatures for S700 plates ( $t = 8$  mm). This table is also used for 12-mm specimens, because the shaded cells are the same and the difference between values is less than  $\pm 2\%$ .

$\mu_0$	0.1	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.5	0.6	0.7	0.8
$\theta_{crit}$ (°C)	882	747	676	641	591	561	533	463
$\theta_t$ (°C)	% $\theta_{crit}$ (°C)							
300	34%	40%	44%	47%	51%	53%	56%	65%
400	45%	54%	59%	62%	68%	71%	75%	86%
500	57%	67%	74%	78%	85%	89%	94%	
600	68%	80%	89%	94%				
700	79%	94%						
800	91%							

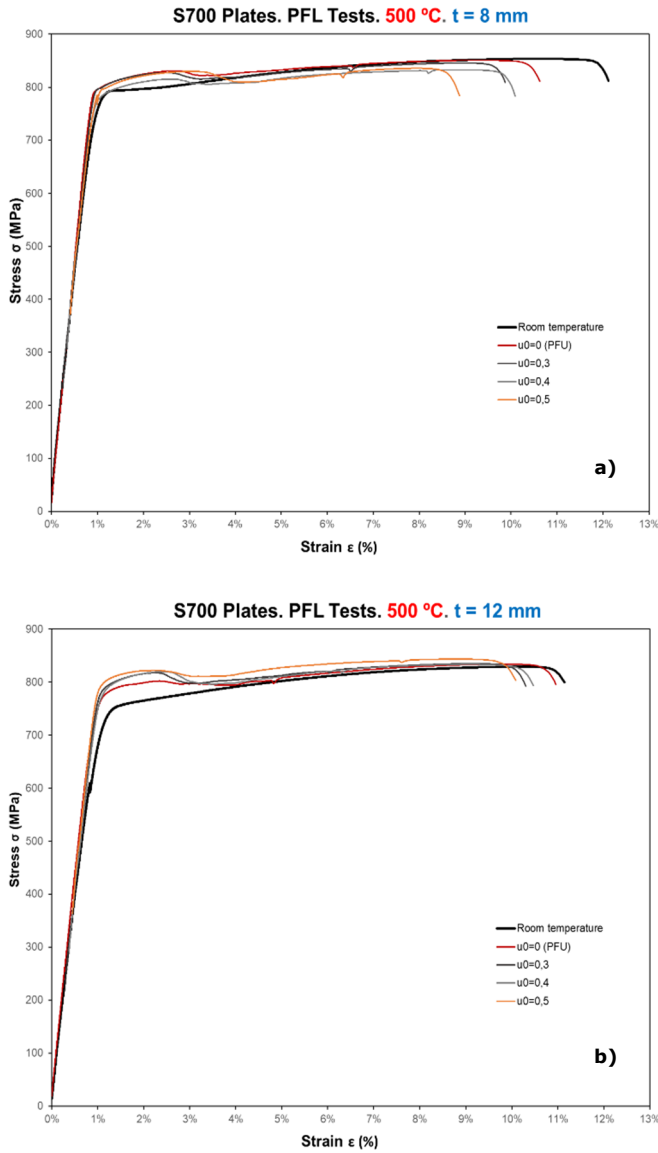
Figures 7 and 8 show the stress-strain residual curves from the PFL tests ( $\theta_t = 400$  °C and  $\theta_t = 500$  °C, respectively) for both thicknesses. Stress-strain curves at room temperature and from the PFU test at that  $\theta_t$  are also plotted as references.

For  $\theta_t = 400$  °C and  $t = 8$  mm (Figure 7a) the residual stress-strain curve at  $\mu_0 = 0$  (PFU test) exhibits lower ductility than the curve at room temperature. Increasing  $\mu_0$  up to 0.4, the specimen ductility continues to reduce, but its yield and ultimate strengths remain essentially constant. For  $\mu_0 = 0.5$  and  $\mu_0 = 0.6$  the strength reduces. For  $\mu_0 = 0.7$  the curve exhibits even lower ductility. In the case of  $t = 12$  mm specimens (Figure 7b) the trend is less evident. In all the range of  $\mu_0$ , stress-strain curves maintain similar strengths as the room temperature curve, but ductility slightly increases for  $\mu_0 = 0.6$  and  $\mu_0 = 0.7$ .

For  $\theta_t = 500$  °C and  $t = 8$  mm (Figure 8a) a similar trend as for  $\theta_t = 400$  °C is observed, but the yield and ultimate strengths seem to slightly reduce up to  $\mu_0 = 0.5$ . In the case of  $t = 12$  mm, however (Figure 8b) the yield and ultimate strengths, as well as the ductility, seems to keep unaltered for all the range of  $\mu_0$ .



**Figure 7** PFL tests on S700 plate; residual stress-strain curves for 400 °C and different degrees of utilisation. a)  $t = 8$  mm. b)  $t = 12$  mm.



**Figure 8** PFL tests on S700 plate; residual stress-strain curves for 500 °C and different degrees of utilisation. a) t = 8 mm. b) t = 12 mm.

From Figure 8a the residual values of mechanical properties can be obtained, as well as the residual factors (R.F.) for each one (Table 6). A residual factor is the ratio between the value of a property measured in the PFL test to the value of the same property at room temperature. The values corresponding to heating up to 400 °C (t = 12 mm) and 500 °C (t = 8 mm and t = 12 mm) are not displayed.

**Table 6** PFL tests on S700 plate (t = 8 mm, 400 °C). Residual values and residual factors (R.F.) of yield strength  $f_y$ , ultimate strength  $f_u$  and modulus of elasticity E.

$\mu_0$	$f_y$ (MPa)	R.F.	$f_u$ (MPa)	R.F.	E (MPa)	R.F.
0	801.3	1.03	859.16	1.01	217000	1.06
0.3	783.1	1.01	837.0	0.98	207000	1.01
0.4	799.5	1.03	853.0	1.00	209600	1.02
0.5	751.0	0.97	811.4	0.95	216000	1.05
0.6	758.6	0.98	817.7	0.96	208000	1.01
0.7	743.0	0.96	803.2	0.94	198000	0.97

According to the residual factors in Table 6, yield strength, ultimate strength and modulus elasticity seem to recover after being submitted to tensile load along with high tem-

perature and subsequent cooling. Nevertheless, some aspects should be addressed regarding ductility. Current structural codes, such as Eurocode 3 (EN 1993-1-1, [11]) prescribe a minimum ductility for steels. For HSS, extended rules apply (EN 1993-1-12, [13]) so these conditions must be simultaneously fulfilled: 1)  $f_u/f_y \geq 1.05$ ; 2)  $\epsilon_f \geq 10\%$  ( $\epsilon_f$ , strain at fracture) and 3)  $\epsilon_u/\epsilon_y \geq 15$  ( $\epsilon_y$ , strain at  $f_y$ ). From Figures 7-8, the values shown in Tables 7-8 can be determined:

**Table 7** PFL tests on S700 plate (400 °C). Ductility conditions.

$\mu_0$	t = 8 mm			t = 12 mm		
	$f_u / f_y$	$\epsilon_f$ (%)	$\epsilon_u / \epsilon_y$	$f_u / f_y$	$\epsilon_f$ (%)	$\epsilon_u / \epsilon_y$
0	1.07	12.00	26.08	1.08	8.84	19.38
0.3	1.07	9.04	18.42	1.07	10.62	21.98
0.4	1.07	10.07	21.60	1.08	12.71	26.44
0.5	1.08	10.31	24.42	1.08	9.97	23.23
0.6	1.08	10.83	23.63	1.09	12.26	29.04
0.7	1.08	7.44	13.98	1.07	12.63	24.46

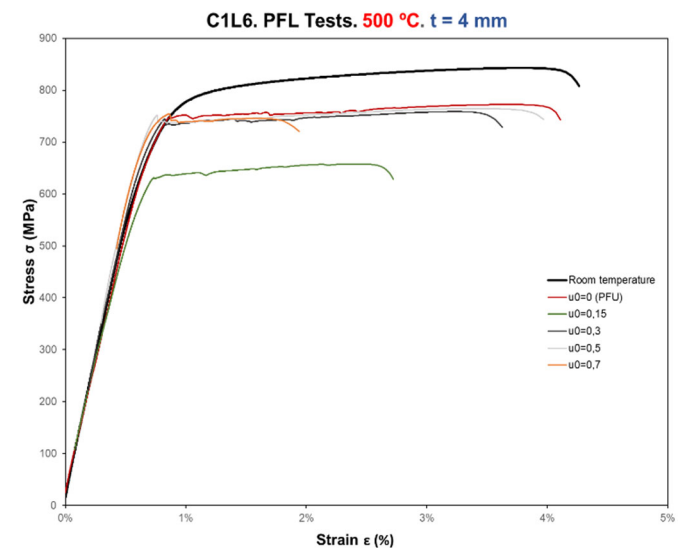
**Table 8** PFL tests on S700 plate (500 °C). Ductility conditions.

$\mu_0$	t = 8 mm			t = 12 mm		
	$f_u / f_y$	$\epsilon_f$ (%)	$\epsilon_u / \epsilon_y$	$f_u / f_y$	$\epsilon_f$ (%)	$\epsilon_u / \epsilon_y$
0	1.07	11.50	24.36	1.08	12.11	18.26
0.3	1.06	10.73	23.71	1.06	11.59	23.42
0.4	1.06	10.96	22.48	1.06	11.71	23.02
0.5	1.05	9.72	21.59	1.05	11.21	22.30

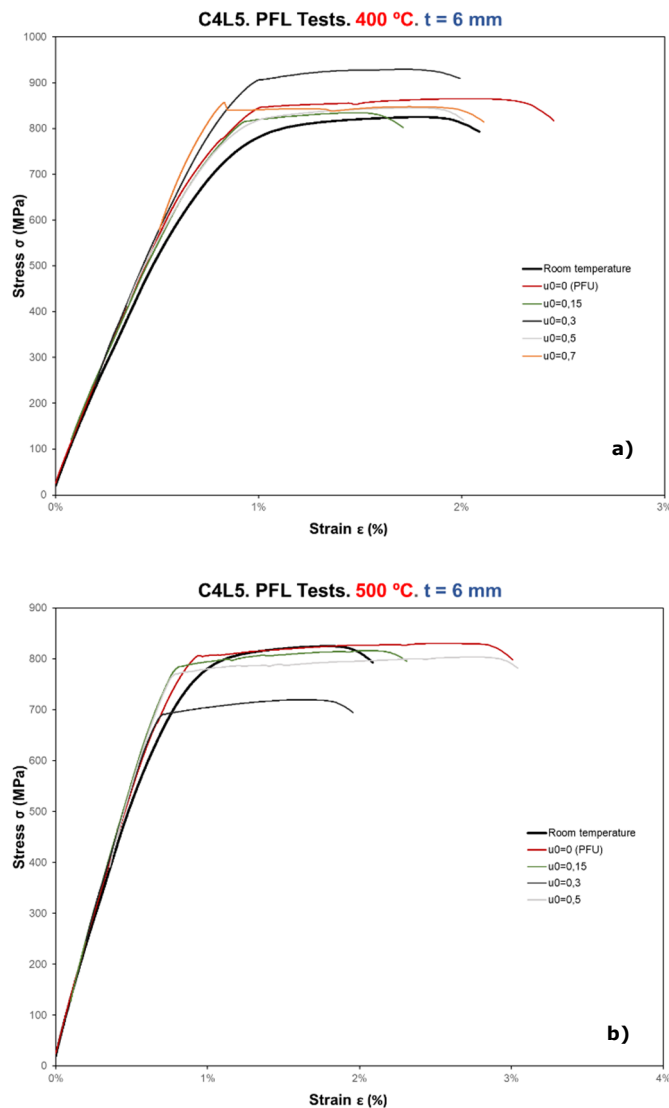
There are some combinations of target temperature and degree of utilisation in which the ductility requirement (mainly that on  $\epsilon_f$ ) is not fulfilled after cooling down. This result was also found in previous works on mild steels [7-8].

**4.2.2 Results of PFL tests on CHS specimens**

In the case of CHS specimens, the same number of tests as on plates could not be performed due to the limited number of coupons. The following figures depict the residual stress-strain curves at different values of  $\theta$ : C1L6 (Figure 9) and C4L5 (Figure 10). Curves at room temperature and from the PFU tests are also shown for reference.



**Figure 9** PFL tests on specimens from CHS C1L6 (t = 4 mm); residual stress-strain curves for 500 °C and different degrees of utilisation.



**Figure 10** PFL tests on specimens from CHS C4L5 ( $t = 6 \text{ mm}$ ); residual stress-strain curves for different degrees of utilisation. a)  $400 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . b)  $500 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ .

Residual values and residual factors of mechanical properties are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9** PFL tests on specimens cut from CHS tubes. Residual values and residual factors (R.F.) of yield strength  $f_y$ , ultimate strength  $f_u$  and modulus of elasticity  $E$ . N/A: data not available (measurement errors).

CHS, temp.	$\mu_0$	$f_y$ (MPa)	R.F.	$f_u$ (MPa)	R.F.	$E$ (MPa)	R.F.
C1L6 500 °C	0	749.5	0.99	772.4	0.92	200800	0.96
	0.15	629.9	0.83	657.5	0.78	185800	0.89
	0.3	734.7	0.97	758.8	0.90	N/A	N/A
	0.5	734.4	0.97	764.6	0.91	216700	1.04
	0.7	754.1	1.00	754.3	0.89	N/A	N/A
C4L5 400 °C	0	838.2	1.09	865.0	1.05	234600	1.06
	0.15	818.3	1.06	834.3	1.01	199000	0.90
	0.3	906.9	1.18	929.2	1.13	202200	0.91
	0.5	818.6	1.06	844.9	1.02	N/A	N/A
	0.7	839.9	1.09	856.8	1.04	N/A	N/A
C4L5 500 °C	0	804.7	1.05	830.4	1.01	233900	1.06
	0.15	791.3	1.03	816.3	0.99	214600	0.97
	0.3	697.9	0.91	719.9	0.87	160800	0.73
	0.5	775.3	1.01	803.4	0.97	N/A	N/A

In specimens cut from the CHS tubes, the stress-strain curves have a different shape than those obtained for the

specimens cut from the plates. In any case, the post-fire behaviour is similar regarding the residual mechanical properties, because the residual factors are close to 1.00. Nevertheless, such factors are less than those computed for the specimens cut from plates. Regarding residual ductility, the values of  $\epsilon_r$  remain very low as for room temperature due to the influence of cold working during production [12-13].

### 5 Conclusions

In the present work, an experimental campaign was performed to evaluate the residual mechanical properties (yield strength, ultimate strength and modulus of elasticity and ductility) of HSS specimens from different production routes. Specimens were exposed simultaneously to tensile load and a heating and cooling cycle. From the results, some conclusions are drawn.

The first one is that the post-fire behaviour of HSS is dependent on the production route and to some extent the thickness of the specimen. This can be seen in the critical temperatures of steels, as well as in the shape of the residual stress-strain curves. According to these findings, structural codes should incorporate residual factors related to the post-fire behaviour of different steel types. The second one is that the combination of tensile load, heating to high temperatures and cooling down seems to not seriously affect the mechanical properties of the specimens. The loaded specimens regain a considerable amount of their initial mechanical properties after cooling down from temperatures up to  $500 \text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ . Nevertheless, it is observed that some combinations of degree of utilisation and high temperature can strongly reduce the initial ductility of the material. Ductility is a key feature to take into account in steel structures, particularly in zones with high seismic risk, so fire design of HSS structures should take into account the stress level.

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