



Positronic Industries
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POSITRONIC INDUSTRIES' DEMISTIFYING CURRENT RATINGS

Connector current ratings seem to be shrouded in mystery at times. The user wonders how a listed current rating is relevant to a particular application. Perhaps more mysterious is how similar connectors from various manufacturers list different current rating values. While it is true that material choices and design can enhance a connector's current rating, the test method by which the rating was developed must be understood when evaluations are made.

Users of connectors for power applications are entitled to current rating test details in order to make an informed choice. Ideally, a connector's current rating should be developed within the application for which it is being considered. Although ideal, this approach is not always practical given the many differing applications. In order for connector manufacturers to give potential product users an idea of what can be expected, connectors are given current ratings based on a specific test method.

A wide variety of test methods are employed in order to develop current ratings for connectors. Some of these methods come from standards that are recognized industry-wide, while others are unique to the manufacturer or user. These various test methods can produce different results for the same product. It is no wonder confusion sometimes results.

There are key factors that, when understood, can help in choosing the right power connector. All test methods used to rate current have similarities; however, there are variables in applying the test methods which explain differing results.

Current ratings are usually established by first developing a temperature rise curve. This curve plots temperature rise against increasing current levels. The curve is a reliable tool in understanding heat generation of the connector at various currents. When a defined failure is reached, the test ends. The highest current level achieved is usually listed as the current rating.

The temperature rise curve, and therefore the current rating, will change when certain key factors are varied. These are:

- **Where is the temperature sensing probe placed?** *If placed on the contact in the mating area (the hottest spot), the results will be quite different than if placed on the outside of the connector body.*
- **Are the contacts being tested and rated in free air or are they contained within the connector housing?** *Contacts will obviously be cooler in free air.*
- **Are all of the contacts in the connector under load?** *If only part of the contacts are under load, the temperature rise could be less.*
- **What is the defined failure?** *Does the test end when the temperature rise reaches 30°C, 40°C, or some other number? Does it end when the temperature rise plus ambient temperature equal the operating limit of the connector housing? The current rating will be fixed by the defined failure point.*
- **How were the test samples prepared?** *Were the samples energized through a P.C. board? How many layers? How large were the traces? What was the weight of the copper? Were the samples energized through wire? What size was the wire? How long was the wire? Was the sample tested in static or forced air conditions? All of these factors can affect cooling characteristics.*

Clearly a current rating value alone is not enough, and must be viewed in the context of the test used to develop the rating. When the test method is understood, evaluating and comparing power connectors for specific applications becomes much less of a mystery.