Abstract

The theoretical basis for applying piston theory to a slender wing-body combination is considered and a numerical example is given with comparison to experimental data and other prediction methods.

1 Introduction

Piston theory [1] has long been used to predict surface pressures on wings and on panels in supersonic flows. Classical piston theory (CPT) is defined by modelling perturbations relative to the freestream flow. It has been extended to account for upstream influence in the case of airfoils and flat panels [2], and to account for curvature in the case of shells with no crossflow [3]. CPT has also been used to add nonlinear thickness effects to otherwise linear panel methods [4] and to estimate the effective airfoil shape in hypersonic flows due to the boundary layer displacement thickness [5]. Local piston theory [6] (LPT) is defined by modelling perturbations relative to an existing mean steady-state solution. LPT applied relative to Euler solutions has seen increased use due to its associated reduction of computational cost relative to full unsteady Euler solution, and has recently seen increased application to vehicles [7] rather than isolated surfaces. The accuracy of the Euler-based LPT results has seen to be lower [7] when applied to vehicles with aerodynamically interfering components than when applied to isolated surfaces. This, along with the recent application of LPT relative to Navier-Stokes solutions [8], has motivated the present investigation into the basis for the application of piston theory to interference flows.

2 Theoretical basis

Piston theory is a special case of the unsteady analogy, which relates the steady (or unsteady) flow in \( N \) dimensions to the unsteady flow in \( N - 1 \) dimensions – in particular, at hypersonic speeds, this is known as the hypersonic equivalence principle. Various milestones in the reduction of the order of the equations for slender bodies have been achieved, with notable contributions due to Ilyushin [9] at low incidences and due to Sychev [10] at high incidences. A summary of the various similitudes and their relation to each other is given in [11]. It has been found [12] that in certain cases, the similitudes (such as Sychev’s [10]) correlate well with experimental data well outside of the limiting assumptions imposed in their theoretical derivation.

Piston theory may be derived from the Euler equations when the ratios of certain lengths or gradients and velocities in the flow become small parameters and the associated terms are discarded. In particular, piston theory requires that gradients in two orthogonal directions be neglected, as illustrated in Fig. 1, where as the unsteady analogy and other related methods typically only require gradients along the body axis to be neglected. A mathematical treatment of these considerations and the conditions under which they break down is given in [13]; here, the ideas will be illustrated by considering only one component of the momentum equation and considering typical crossflow-plane flowfields.
Consider the third component of the momentum equation, with terms nondimensionalized with respect to reference values such that the terms and their derivatives are $O(1)$. The velocities $u_i$ are referenced to values $U_i$, coordinates $\xi_i$ are nondimensionalized with respect to lengths $L_i$, and the dimensionless pressure $p$ and density $\rho$ have reference values $p_R$ and $\rho_R$ respectively:

$$
\left( \frac{L_3 U_1}{L_1 U_3} \right) u_1 \frac{\partial u_3}{\partial \xi_1} + \left( \frac{L_2 U_1 L_3 U_2}{L_2 U_3} \right) u_2 \frac{\partial u_3}{\partial \xi_2} + u_3 \frac{\partial u_3}{\partial \xi_3} = - \left( \frac{U_1^2}{U_3^2 \rho U_1} \right) \frac{1}{\rho} \frac{\partial p}{\partial \xi_3}
$$

The bracketed terms are dimensionless parameters of the local flow problem; for given magnitudes of these parameters, the order of magnitude of perturbations to $u_i$ may be considered and a truncation up to a certain order of smallness may be made, potentially removing a variable $u_i$ from the equation. The various methods that result from the unsteady analogy differ in the particulars of the order of the various dimensionless parameters and the order of the perturbations. Piston theory, as a point-function relation between pressure and velocity, requires the gradients in the $\xi_1$ and $\xi_2$-directions to be neglected. This effectively precludes its application in regions where the crossflow velocity or acceleration tangential to the surface is of the order of the piston velocity – this may occur in various regions in the flowfield as illustrated in Fig. 2, typically where significant surface curvature exists: the wing-body junction, the wing-tips, and potentially on the body surface in crossflow.

$$M_\infty \sin \alpha$$

Nose shock

Regions of large flow gradients due to wing-body geometry

Wing vortex

$M_\infty$ sin $\alpha$

Fig. 2 : Typical flow in the crossflow plane at small incidence.

3 Application

The application of classical piston theory to a body with a monoplane wing is illustrated in this section. The geometry considered is described in Fig. 3, corresponding to the model geometry of a series of experimental work by Fellows & Carter [14]. The results presented in [14] are limited to the normal-force coefficient for the various model components across the spectrum of angle-of-attack ($\alpha$) and freestream Mach number ($M_\infty$); the pressure distribution at a given combination of $M_\infty$ and $\alpha$ for all the components was not given. A systematic comparison to experiment of the pressure distribution predicted by piston theory was thus not possible. However, for the portion of the wing-body combination aft
of the wing root, a comparison of the normal-coefficients could be made for the combination \(C_N\), the interference of the wing on the body \(C_{N_{B(W)}}\), and for the wing including the interference from the body \(C_{N_{W(B)}}\). The values are related by:

\[
C_N = C_{N_b} + C_{N_{B(W)}} + C_{N_{W(B)}}
\]

where \(C_{N_b}\) is the normal-force coefficient of the isolated body. The additional terms are related to the normal-force coefficient of the isolated wing \(C_{N_w}\) through carry-over factors \(K_{B(W)}\) and \(K_{W(B)}\):

\[
C_{N_{B(W)}} = K_{B(W)}C_{N_w}, \quad C_{N_{W(B)}} = K_{W(B)}C_{N_w}
\]

It is important to note that in the following sections, \(C_N\) and \(C_{N_{W(B)}}\) refer to the portion of the body aft of the root of the wing, and not to the entire body. The results from applying classical piston theory to the geometry are compared to those obtained from a public-domain version of the NASA-AMES WingBody panel code, as well as to experiment and approximate methods to model interference.

\[
\left(\frac{R}{D}\right) = 0.30984\left(\frac{R}{D}\right) - 0.03989\left(\frac{R}{D}\right)^2 - 0.00261\left(\frac{R}{D}\right)^3
\]

\(L = 19.5''\), \(D = 1.5''\), \(L_N = 3D\)

Common: \(L_W = 14.384''\), \(L_c = 0.75''\), \(t = 0.202''\)

Wing 1: \(\Lambda_{LE} = 78.2''\), \(s_W = 3''\)

Wing 8: \(\Lambda_{LE} = 85.5''\), \(s_W = 1.125''\)

Fig. 3: Geometry definition.

### 3.1 Reference Data and Methods

The experimental values of the normal-force coefficient were obtained in [14] by integration of the pressure distribution over the surfaces of the various model components – this allowed for the experimental \(C_{N_{W(B)}}\) to be obtained directly; the value of \(C_{N_{B(W)}}\) was deduced from the measured value of \(C_{N_b} + C_{N_{B(W)}}\) and from tests of the isolated body \(C_{N_b}\). These results, along with values from various prediction methods, are shown in Figs. 5–10. The normal-force coefficient of the isolated wing \(C_{N_w}\) was also determined by experiment.

Fellows & Carter [14] applied the carry-over factors \(K_{B(W)}\) and \(K_{W(B)}\) to the experimentally-measured \(C_{N_w}\) to obtain predictions for the normal-force coefficient of the portion of the wing-body combination subject to interference. The values used for the carry-over factors were taken from slender body theory [15] (SBT), upwash theory [15] (UT), and the P-N-K method [15] (PNK), and are summarized in Table 1 and Table 2.

### Table 1: Wing-on-body carry-over factor, \(K_{B(W)}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>(M_{\infty} = 2.0)</th>
<th>(M_{\infty} = 2.8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wing 1</td>
<td>SBT 0.278</td>
<td>SBT 0.278</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PNK 0.246</td>
<td>PNK 0.232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wing 8</td>
<td>SBT 0.611</td>
<td>SBT 0.611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PNK 0.581</td>
<td>PNK 0.565</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2: Body-on-wing carry-over factor, \(K_{W(B)}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Wing 1</th>
<th>Wing 8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SBT</td>
<td>1.162</td>
<td>1.349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UT</td>
<td>1.300</td>
<td>1.522</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.2 Piston Theory

Classical piston theory was used to obtain predictions for the isolated body \(C_{N_b}\) and the isolated wing \(C_{N_w}\); no attempt was made to model the interference, i.e., \(C_{N_{B(W)}} = 0\) and \(C_{N_{W(B)}} = C_{N_w}\). For reference, the normal-force coefficient of the nose alone was also computed for comparison to experiment; the results are
shown in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6. The coordinate system used in defining the downwash equations is shown in Fig. 4. The pressure coefficient as

\[ \hat{C}_p = \frac{2}{M_\infty} \left( c_1 \hat{w} + c_2 M_\infty \hat{w}^2 + c_3 M_\infty^2 \hat{w}^3 \right) \]  

(4)

in which \( \hat{w} \) is the downwash nondimensionalized with respect to the freestream velocity, and for which the coefficients \( c_1, c_2, \) and \( c_3 \) are dependent on the pressure equation used. In the case of expansion, the limiting value of \( C_p \) corresponds to that at vacuum. The general expressions for the coefficients are given in [16]; for the present case the coefficients are listed in Table 3, and are seen to be close to those due to Lighthill [17].

**Table 3**: Piston theory pressure coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>( M_\infty )</th>
<th>2.0</th>
<th>2.8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( c_1 )</td>
<td>1.155</td>
<td>1.071</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( c_2 )</td>
<td>0.733</td>
<td>0.642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( c_3, \hat{w} &gt; 0 )</td>
<td>0.254</td>
<td>0.181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( c_3, \hat{w} \leq 0 )</td>
<td>0.234</td>
<td>0.185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The dimensionless downwash \( \hat{w} \) is defined as:

\[ \hat{w} = -\hat{V}_\infty \cdot \hat{n} \]  

(5)

where \( \hat{V}_\infty \) is the unit vector of the freestream velocity and \( \hat{n} \) is the unit normal vector of the body or wing surface. The dimensionless downwash may be split into a component (\( \hat{w}_a \)) associated with surface gradients relative to the component of \( V_\infty \) directed along the axis of the body (\( \hat{x} \)-direction) and into a component (\( \hat{w}_c \)) associated with surface gradients relative to the component of \( V_\infty \) lying in the crossflow plane:

\[ \hat{w} = \hat{w}_a + \hat{w}_c \]  

(6)

The unit normal vector of the surface for the body is given as:

\[ \hat{n} = -\sin \phi \hat{x} + \cos \phi \sin \phi \hat{r} + \cos \phi \cos \theta \hat{\theta} \]  

(7)

In this formulation, the following relations hold:

- **Body**: \( \hat{w}_a = \cos \alpha \sin \phi \) (8)
- \( \hat{w}_c = -\sin \alpha \cos \phi \cos \theta \) (9)
- **Wing**: \( \hat{w}_a \approx 0 \) (10)
- \( \hat{w}_c \approx \begin{cases} -\sin \alpha, & \text{upper} \\ +\sin \alpha, & \text{lower} \end{cases} \) (11)

The normal-force coefficient is then obtained by integrating the pressure over the surface:

\[ C_{N_B} = -\frac{1}{S_W} \int_0^L \int_{-L_w}^L C_P R \cos \phi \cos \theta \, d\theta \, dx \]  

(12)

\[ C_{N_W} = -\frac{1}{S_W} \int_{\text{wing}} C_P R \, dS \]  

(13)

In each case, the normal-force coefficient is referenced to the wing area (\( S_W \)) of the wing considered. The results obtained using 1st-order and 3rd-order piston theory with no interference modelling are shown in Figs. 5–10. It is noted that classical piston theory with the downwash equation as defined here produces a lifting pressure-distribution around the cylindrical portion of the body for all \( \alpha \neq 0 \).

### 4 Discussion

For a discussion on the results of slender body theory (SBT), the P-N-K method (PNK), and of
upwash theory (UT) and their correlation to the experimental results, the reader is referred to the report of Fellows & Carter [14]; here, it is only remarked that the departure of these results from the experimental data highlights the fact that the interference is not linear with $\alpha$. The correlation of the WingBody panel code and of piston theory to the experimental results is discussed here, with reference to Figs. 5–10.

4.1 WingBody Code
Firstly, it is noted that all the results from the WingBody code are linear with $\alpha$, as is expected for the linearized potential flow code. Fairly good correlation with experiment is obtained for $\alpha < 5^\circ$ for all the coefficients in the case of Wing 1; thereafter, the nonlinear force of the body leads to significant differences, as seen in Fig. 5. In the case of the smaller-span Wing 8, very poor agreement is obtained for the wing normal-force at both Mach numbers, as seen in Fig. 8, with a significant over-prediction in the normal-force slope at $\alpha = 0^\circ$. Considering the good agreement of the SBT prediction of $C_{N_{W(B)}}$ at low $\alpha$, which is obtained from the experimental $C_{N_{W}}$, and considering the significantly better agreement of the WingBody results for Wing 1, it is suggested that the large difference may be attributed to either numerical issues in the code arising from poorly conditioned panels over the majority of the highly swept (85.5°) wing. Similar over-prediction in the body normal-force is obtained, as seen in Fig. 6. The results from the WingBody panel code suggest that a simple linear-potential-flow method may be suitable to predict the interference and overall loads for $\alpha < 5^\circ$ in the Mach range considered, provided that the leading-edge sweep is not extreme ($\Lambda_{LE} < 80^\circ$). Improved prediction is expected from codes in which the vortex sheet from the wing leading-edge is modelled. The WingBody code provides a significantly better prediction of the body normal-force slope at $\alpha = 0^\circ$ compared to piston theory in both cases and Mach numbers. This is not surprising, as the downwash equation, Eq. (5), is a poor representation of the flow for the low-subsonic crossflow Mach number $M_{\infty} \sin \alpha$.

4.2 Piston Theory
The aforementioned issue of the downwash equation for the body in piston theory at low-subsonic crossflow Mach numbers is evident in the results for the body normal-force slope at $\alpha = 0^\circ$ in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6. Eq. (5) results in a non-zero lifting pressure on the cylindrical portion of the body for all $\alpha$; this is inconsistent with the concept of established flow over a cylinder in the crossflow plane at low $\alpha$, which suggests that only the nose contributes to the normal-force. Isolating the normal-force from the nose alone in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 shows that good correlation with the nose normal-force from experiment is obtained by 1st-order piston theory for the available data range of $0^\circ \leq \alpha \leq 25^\circ$, with improved agreement at the higher Mach number. Comparison of the slope of the nose-alone normal-force in Fig. 6 from piston theory to the experimental slope for the body in the presence of the wing suggests that for $\alpha < 5^\circ$ the nose-alone prediction serves as an approximation to the overall lift on the body for Wing 8.

Investigation of the results in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6 at high $\alpha$ shows that the impact-like downwash equation, Eq. (9), becomes more appropriate at higher crossflow Mach numbers, as $M_{\infty} \sin \alpha$ approaches and exceeds unity and the Sychev-regime is approached. The sudden change in slope of the body normal-force noted for 1st-order piston theory arises due to the leeside flow reaching vacuum in the 1st-order model; it is noted that this is delayed when the 3rd-order model is used. It is noted that the normal-force slope from 3rd-order piston theory and from experiment both appear to asymptote to a near-constant value for $\alpha > 15^\circ$, with better agreement at $M_{\infty} = 2$. From Eq. (4) and Eq. (9) it is seen that for the cylindrical portion of the body, $C_{N_{B}} \propto c_{3}M_{\infty} \sin^{3} \alpha$, which differs from the Sychev similarity parameter of $M_{\infty} \sin \alpha$; thus, the correlation in slopes over the range of $\alpha$ shown at $M_{\infty} = 2$, as noted for both wing-body combinations, may be a happy coincidence.
Fig. 5 : Body normal-force coefficient in the presence of Wing-1: (a) $M_{\infty} = 2.0$, (b) $M_{\infty} = 2.8$.

Fig. 6 : Body normal-force coefficient in the presence of Wing-8: (a) $M_{\infty} = 2.0$, (b) $M_{\infty} = 2.8$. 
\[ \Lambda_{LE} = 78.2^\circ, \; M_\infty = 2.0 \]

![Graph showing Wing-1 normal-force coefficient in the presence of the body: (a) \( M_\infty = 2.0 \), (b) \( M_\infty = 2.8 \).](image)

\[ \Lambda_{LE} = 85.5^\circ, \; M_\infty = 2.0 \]

![Graph showing Wing-8 normal-force coefficient in the presence of the body: (a) \( M_\infty = 2.0 \), (b) \( M_\infty = 2.8 \).](image)
Λ_{LE} = 78.2°, M_{\infty} = 2.0

(a)

Λ_{LE} = 78.2°, M_{\infty} = 2.8

(b)

* Wing with nose alone

Fig. 9: Overall normal-force coefficient for the Wing-1-body configuration: (a) $M_{\infty} = 2.0$, (b) $M_{\infty} = 2.8$.

Λ_{LE} = 85.5°, M_{\infty} = 2.8

(a)

Λ_{LE} = 85.5°, M_{\infty} = 2.8

(b)

* Wing with nose alone

Fig. 10: Overall normal-force coefficient for the Wing-8-body configuration: (a) $M_{\infty} = 2.0$, (b) $M_{\infty} = 2.8$. 
Consideration of Figs. 9–10 shows that piston theory consistently over-predicts the wing normal-force slope, with degradation in performance as $\alpha$ increases. The best agreement is obtained at low incidence for the less-swept Wing 1 at the higher Mach number of $M_\infty = 2.8$: this is expected, as this represents the closest combination of parameters to the domain for which piston theory is theoretically valid. Once again, the rapid change in the normal-force slope for 1st-order piston theory is due to vacuum being reached in the 1st-order model. In considering the results for $C_{NW}$ as predicted by piston theory, it is noted that for the given geometries, thickness effects are negligible and nonlinearities are due to the proportionality $C_{NW} \propto c_2 M_\infty \sin^3 \alpha$. The worse prediction of $\frac{dC_{NW(B)}}{d\alpha}$ at $\alpha = 0^\circ$ noted for Wing 8 relative to Wing 1 is consistent with the smaller portions of the flowfield in which both spanwise and axial gradients may be neglected, as assumed in piston theory.

The preceding comments regarding $C_{NB} + C_{NB(W)}$ and $C_{NW}$ as predicted by piston theory are reflected in the results for the overall normal-force ($C_N$) of the wing-body section, as shown in Fig. 5 and Fig. 6. The prediction by 3rd-order piston theory for the wing-alone and the nose-alone is included to provide an estimate of the improvement to $\frac{dC_N}{d\alpha}$ at $\alpha = 0^\circ$ that might be achieved through more appropriate modelling of the pressure on the cylindrical body at low-subsonic crossflow Mach numbers.

## 5 Conclusions

The theoretical basis for applying piston theory requires that velocity gradients in two orthogonal directions (one being the axis for the unsteady analogy) be negligible relative to gradients in a third direction (the orientation of the cylinder). Theoretical considerations for the validity of these assumptions suggest that classical piston theory may be applied for $\alpha \approx 0^\circ$ in regions sufficiently far from the wing-body junction and from the wing-tips and at sufficiently high Mach numbers. Outside of these parameters, the flowfield is 2D unsteady in the cross-flow plane and interference must be accounted for. Comparison of piston theory predictions to experimental results for highly swept wing-body combinations suggest that classical piston theory may not be applied without modification; results for the body at high-subsonic to supersonic crossflow Mach numbers suggest preliminary prediction of $\frac{dC_N}{d\alpha}$ may be possible using classical piston theory.

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## References


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