

AN-828 Increasing the High Speed Torque of Bipolar Stepper Motors

ABSTRACT

This application report shows that increasing the slew rates of the winding currents in a bipolar stepper motor pushes the motor to deliver more torque at high speeds. Simple voltage drives, L/R drives, and chopper drives are explained. L/R drives and chopper drives achieve slew rates higher than those achieved by simple voltage drives. Finally, an example chopper drive is presented.

Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Background	2
3	Simple Voltage Drives	5
4	L/R Drives	5
5	Chopper Drives	6
6	An LMD18200-Based Chopper Drive	8
7	References	14

List of Figures

1	Ideal Quadrature Currents Drive the Windings of a Bipolar Stepper Motor	2
2	Ideal Square Wave Winding Currents and Sinusoidal Torque Constants for Average Torque Calculation	3
3	Real Winding Current and Sinusoidal Torque Constant vs Step Rate at Low Step Rates	3
4	Real Winding Current and Sinusoidal Torque Constant vs Step Rate at High Step Rates	4
5	A Typical Torque vs Speed Characteristic of a Bipolar Stepper Motor	4
6	Real Winding Current vs Step Rate With $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$ at Low Step Rates	4
7	Real Winding Current vs Step Rate With $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$ at High Step Rates.....	5
8	Simple Voltage Drive of a Bipolar Stepper Motor.....	6
9	The Chopping States of a Single H-Bridge of a Chopper Drive: the Full V_{CC} is Applied Across the Winding.....	7
10	The Chopping States of a Single H-Bridge of a Chopper Drive: the Full V_{CC} is Applied Across the Winding is Shorted (the Current Recirculates)	7
11	The Chopping States of a Single H-Bridge of a Chopper Drive: the Full V_{CC} is Applied Across the Chopped Winding Current	7
12	The LMD18200 3A, 55V Full H-Bridge.....	9
13	An LMD18200-Based Chopper Drive	10
14	The Chopped Winding Current and the Logic Signal at PWM	11
15	The Chopped Winding Current and Feedback Voltage at 860 Steps/Second	12
16	The Winding Current for Simple Voltage Drive at 600 Steps/Second	13
17	The Winding Current for L/R Drive at 860 Steps/Second	14

1 Introduction

To successfully follow a velocity profile, a motor and drive combination must generate enough torque to: accelerate the load inertia at the desired rates, and drive the load torque at the desired speeds. While the size of a bipolar stepper motor generally dictates the low speed torque, the ability of the drive electronics to force current through the windings of the motor dictates the high speed torque.

2 Background

In standard full-step operation, quadrature (out of phase by 90°) bipolar currents (Figure 1) energize the windings of a bipolar stepper motor. One step occurs at each change of direction of either winding current, and the motor steps at four times the frequency of the currents. The ideal winding currents of Figure 1 exhibit infinite slew rates.

Ideally, each phase contributes a sinusoidal torque:

$$T_1 = -i_1 T \sin(N\theta) \text{ and} \quad (1)$$

$$T_2 = i_2 T \cos(N\theta), \quad (2)$$

with the winding currents, $i(t)$, in amps and the torque constants, $-T \sin(N\theta)$ and $T \cos(N\theta)$, in newton•centimeters per amp. θ represents the angular displacement of the rotor relative to a stable detent (zero torque) position. N represents the number of motor poles; that is, the number of electrical cycles per mechanical cycle or revolution. $N\theta$, therefore, represents the electrical equivalent of the mechanical rotor position. The torque contributions add directly to yield a total torque of:

$$T_t = T_1 + T_2 = T (i_2 \cos(N\theta) - i_1 \sin(N\theta)). \quad (3)$$

Integrating (3) over a full period of one of the torque constants and multiplying the result by the reciprocal of that period gives the average torque generated by the motor. Assuming ideal square wave winding currents and sinusoidal torque constants (Figure 2), the motor generates an average torque of:

$$T_{avg} = \frac{1}{2\pi} \left[\int_0^{2\pi} -i_1 T \sin(N\theta) dN\theta + \int_0^{2\pi} i_2 T \cos(N\theta) dN\theta \right] = \quad (4)$$

$$= \frac{2}{\pi} I_{rated} T \cos\phi. \quad (5)$$

In open loop applications, Φ adjusts automatically to match the average torque generated by the motor with that required to execute a motion task. When the winding currents and their respective torque constants are in phase (Φ is zero), the motor generates the maximum average torque or *pull-out torque*:

$$T_{pull-out} = T_{avg(max)} = \frac{2}{\pi} I_{rated} T. \quad (6)$$

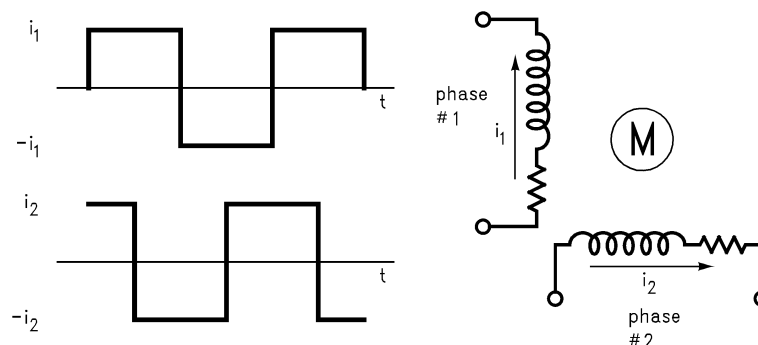


Figure 1. Ideal Quadrature Currents Drive the Windings of a Bipolar Stepper Motor

Square waves make good approximations for the winding currents at low speeds only, and (6), therefore, makes a good approximation of the pull-out torque at low speeds only. Real winding currents have an exponential shape dictated by the L/R-time constants of the windings, the voltage applied across the windings, and, to a lesser extent, the back emf generated by the motor as the rotor spins. For either winding:

$$i(t) = \left(I_o - \frac{V_{CC} - V_{emf}}{R} \right) e^{-\frac{R}{L}t} + \frac{V_{CC} - V_{emf}}{R} \quad (7)$$

describes the winding current at a change in the direction of that current, where I_o is the initial winding current, V_{CC} is the voltage applied across the winding, V_{emf} is the back emf, and R and L are the winding resistance and inductance. At low step rates, assuming $V_{CC} = V_{rated} \gg V_{emf}$, the current easily slews to the peak value of V_{rated}/R before a subsequent direction change (Figure 3). At higher step rates, because the time between direction changes is shorter, the current cannot reach the peak value (Figure 3). V_{rated} is the rated voltage of the windings.

Clearly from (4) and Figure 4, as the speed increases, decreases in the winding currents result in decreases in $T_{pull-out}$. The torque vs. speed characteristic of a typical bipolar stepper motor (Figure 5) reflects this phenomenon. Each pull-out torque curve bounds (on the right) a region of torque-speed combinations inside which the stepper motor runs and outside which the stepper motor stalls.

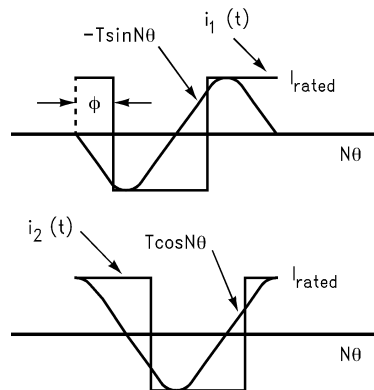


Figure 2. Ideal Square Wave Winding Currents and Sinusoidal Torque Constants for Average Torque Calculation

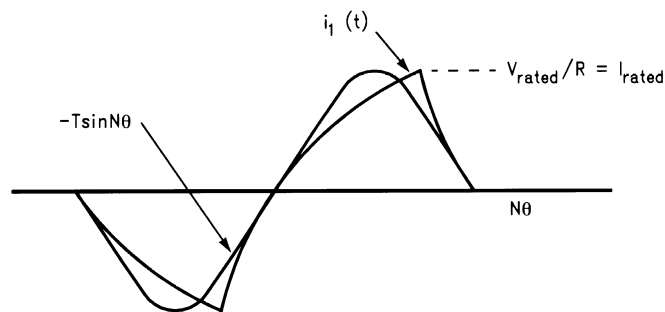


Figure 3. Real Winding Current and Sinusoidal Torque Constant vs Step Rate at Low Step Rates

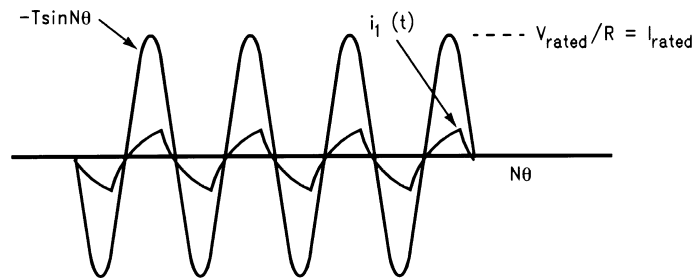


Figure 4. Real Winding Current and Sinusoidal Torque Constant vs Step Rate at High Step Rates

It follows then, that the goal of increasing the high speed torque is achieved by increasing the winding currents at high speeds. This, in turn, is achieved by increasing the slew rates of the winding currents; for example, with the increased slew rates realized by raising V_{CC} well above V_{rated} , the winding current easily slews to the peak value of V_{rated}/R at both low and high step rates (Figure 7). Winding currents realized with $V_{CC} = V_{rated}$ are represented with dashed lines, and, assuming a means for limiting at V_{rated}/R , winding currents realized with $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$ are represented with solid lines.

Both decreasing the L/R -time constants of the windings and increasing the voltage applied across the windings increases the slew rates of the winding currents. L/R drives and chopper drives take these tactics to raise the slew rates of the winding currents well above those realized by simply applying the rated voltage to the windings. The torque vs. speed characteristic of a typical bipolar stepper motor (Figure 5 again) reflects the resulting high speed torque gains.

It is important to note, however, that applying $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$ also results in excessive winding currents at low speeds. The winding currents must be held at or below the rated limit (usually V_{rated}/R per winding) to hold power dissipated inside the motor at or below the rated limit (usually $2 \times V_{rated} \times I_{rated}$).

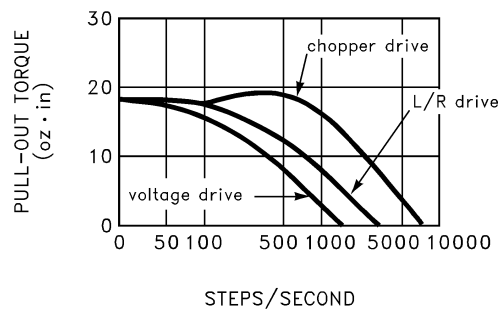


Figure 5. A Typical Torque vs Speed Characteristic of a Bipolar Stepper Motor

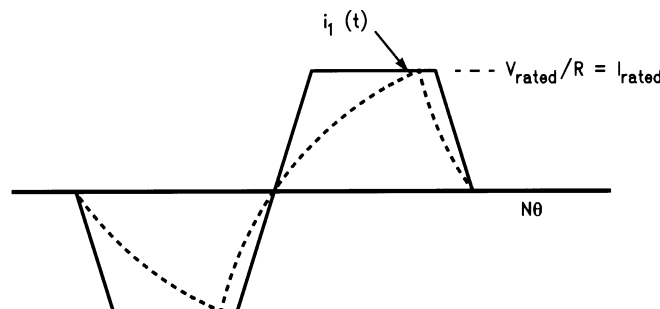


Figure 6. Real Winding Current vs Step Rate With $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$ at Low Step Rates

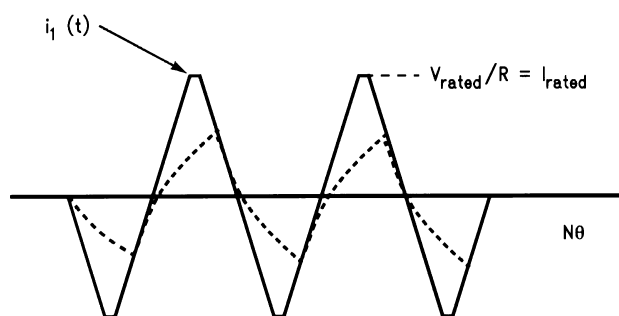


Figure 7. Real Winding Current vs Step Rate With $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$ at High Step Rates

3 Simple Voltage Drives

Simple drives employ two H-bridge power amplifiers to drive bipolar currents through the phase windings (Figure 8). For either amplifier, closing switches S1 and S4 forces the rated voltage (less two switch drops) across the winding, and current flows from supply to ground via S1, the winding, and S4. After opening S1 and S4, closing S2 and S3 reverses the direction of current in the winding. This drive scheme is commonly referred to as simple voltage drive. Because only the winding resistances limit the winding currents, V_{CC} cannot exceed V_{rated} .

4 L/R Drives

L/R drives employ two series power resistors to decrease the L/R-time constants of the windings; for example, a 45Ω power resistor in series with each of two 15Ω winding resistances divides the L/R-time constants by four and allows the rated supply voltage to be increased by a factor of four. Both the crispness of the response and the high speed torque are increased. While the rotor holds position or moves at low step rates, the series power resistors protect the motor by holding the winding currents to the rated limit. Since both the L/R-time constants of the phase windings and the rated supply voltage were increased by a factor of four, the example drive would commonly be referred to as an L/4R drive.

The maximum operating supply voltage of the power amplifiers can limit the factor by which the supply voltage is increased above the rated voltage of the windings, but power losses in the series resistors more likely limit this factor. If, for example, 60V is applied across two 0.5A, 15Ω phase windings, two 105Ω series resistors are required to hold the winding currents to the 0.5A/phase limit. This is an L/8R drive. Power dissipated in the series resistors while the rotor holds position is $105 \times 0.5 \times 0.5 \times 2 = 52.5W$, while power dissipated in the entire drive is $60 \times 0.5 \times 2 = 60W$. The drive efficiency approaches 12.5%. After looking at these numbers, the drive designer may opt to cut losses by using the 30V power supply/45Ω series resistor combination of an L/4R drive. Unfortunately, while the rotor holds position, total power dissipated in the series resistors remains high at 22.5W and drive efficiency remains low at 25%.

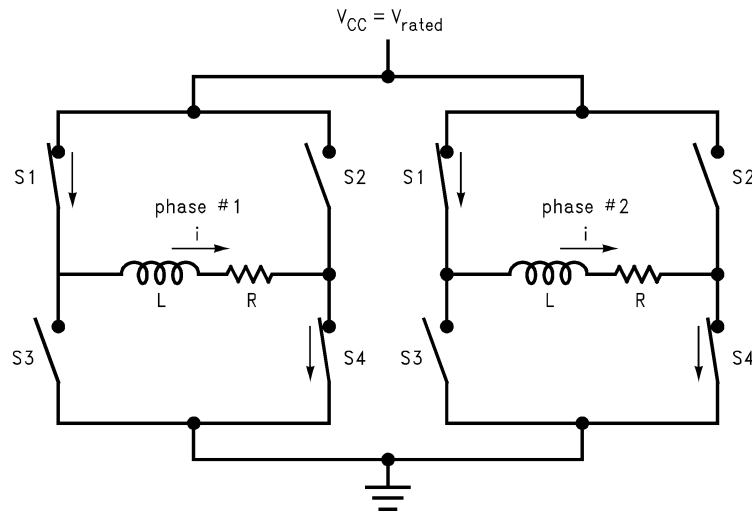


Figure 8. Simple Voltage Drive of a Bipolar Stepper Motor

5 Chopper Drives

Chopper drives increase the slew rates of the winding currents by applying $V_{CC} \gg V_{rated}$. Feedback-driven switching of the H-bridges holds the winding currents to the rated limit. Figure 11 shows the chopping states of a single H-bridge of a chopper drive. A low value resistor in the ground lead of the H-Bridge converts the winding current into a proportional feedback voltage, and the feedback voltage is compared to a reference voltage (not shown). While the feedback voltage is less than the reference voltage, switches S1 and S4 apply the full supply voltage across the winding (Figure 9), and the winding current increases rapidly. When the feedback voltage is equal to the reference voltage; that is, when the winding current reaches the desired limit, S1 and S2 short the winding for a fixed period or *off-time* (Figure 10). During the off-time, the winding current *recirculates* and decays slowly. At the end of the off-time, S1 and S4 reapply the full supply voltage across the winding, and the winding current again increases. Repetition of this sequence results in a *current chopping action* that limits the peak winding current to a level determined by the reference voltage and the resistor in the ground lead of the amplifier (Figure 11), $\text{limit} = V_{\text{reference}}/R_S$. Chopping of the current only occurs when the current reaches the desired limit (usually the rated current of the winding). When the winding current changes direction to step the motor, the general operation remains the same except S2 is held closed and S1 and S3 are switched to limit the winding current. Because the H-bridge shorts the winding for a fixed period, this type of chopper drive is commonly referred to as a *fixed off-time* drive. By eliminating the series resistors required by L/R drives, chopper drives increase dramatically the drive efficiency. Typical efficiencies of chopper drives range from 75% to 90%.

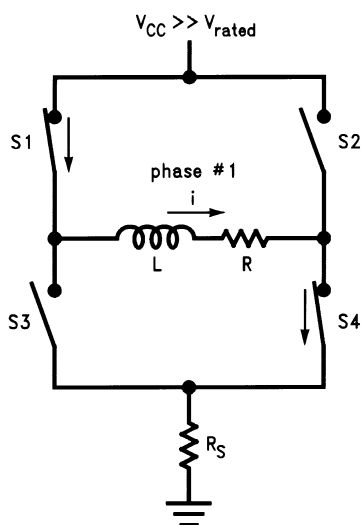


Figure 9. The Chopping States of a Single H-Bridge of a Chopper Drive: the Full V_{CC} is Applied Across the Winding

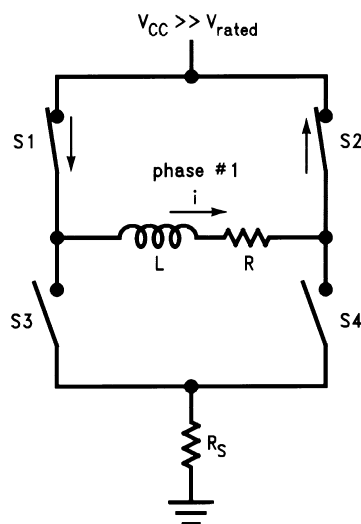


Figure 10. The Chopping States of a Single H-Bridge of a Chopper Drive: the Full V_{CC} is Applied Across the Winding is Shorted (the Current Recirculates)

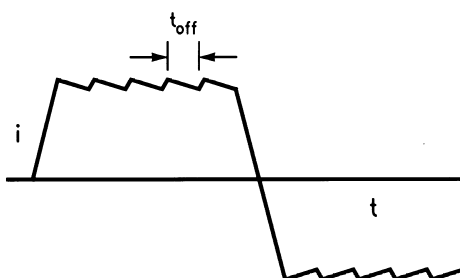


Figure 11. The Chopping States of a Single H-Bridge of a Chopper Drive: the Full V_{CC} is Applied Across the Chopped Winding Current

6 An LMD18200-Based Chopper Drive

The LMD18200 is a 3A, 55V H-bridge ([Figure 12](#)). It is built using a multi-technology process that combines bipolar and CMOS control (logic) and protection circuitry with DMOS power switches on the same monolithic structure. The LMD18200 data sheet and AN-694([SNOA170](#)) contain more information about the operation of the LMD18200.

Two LMD18200 H-bridges form the core of an example chopper drive ([Figure 13](#)). The PWM input (pin #5) of each LMD18200 accepts a logic signal that controls the state of that device. While the signal at PWM is logic-high, the H-bridge applies the full supply voltage across the winding, and while the signal at PWM is logic-low, the upper two switches of the H-bridge short the winding. The feedback voltage associated with either H-bridge is directly proportional to the current in the winding driven by that device. One half of an LM319 dual comparator compares the feedback voltage to the reference voltage. While the feedback voltage is less than the reference voltage, the signal at PWM is logic-high, the LMD18200 applies the full supply voltage across the winding, and the winding current increases. When the winding current increases to the point the feedback voltage and the reference voltage are equal, the LM319 triggers the LMC555-based one-shot. For the duration of the one-shot timing pulse, the signal at PWM is logic-low, the LMD18200 shorts the winding, and the winding current *recirculates* and decays. After the timing pulse, the signal, a PWM returns to logic-high, the LMD18200 reapplies the full supply voltage across the winding, and the winding current again increases. Repetition of this sequence results in a current chopping action ([Figure 14](#)) that limits the winding current to the 0.5A rating while allowing the 12V, 24 Ω winding to be driven with 36V.

NOTE: The RC components associated with the LMC555 set the one-shot timing pulse. To best illustrate the current chopping action, the one-shot timing pulse or off-time was set at approximately 100 μ s. Shorter off-times yield smoother winding currents.

The Dir input (pin #3) of each LMD18200 accepts a logic signal that controls the direction of the current in the winding driven by that device; in other words, changing the logic level of the signal at Dir commands the motor to take a step.

This chopper drive takes advantage of the current sense amplifier on board the LMD18200. The current sense amplifier sources a signal level current that is proportional to the total forward current conducted by the two upper switches of the LMD18200. This *sense* current has a typical value of 377 μ A per Amp of load current. A standard $\frac{1}{4}$ W resistor connected between the output of the current sense amplifier (pin #8) and ground converts the sense current into a voltage that is proportional to the load current. This proportional voltage is useful as a feedback signal for control and/or overcurrent protection purposes. The 18 k Ω resistors ([Figure 13](#)) set the gain of the drive at approximately 0.15A per volt of reference voltage (simply the reciprocal of the product of 377 μ A/A and 18 k Ω).

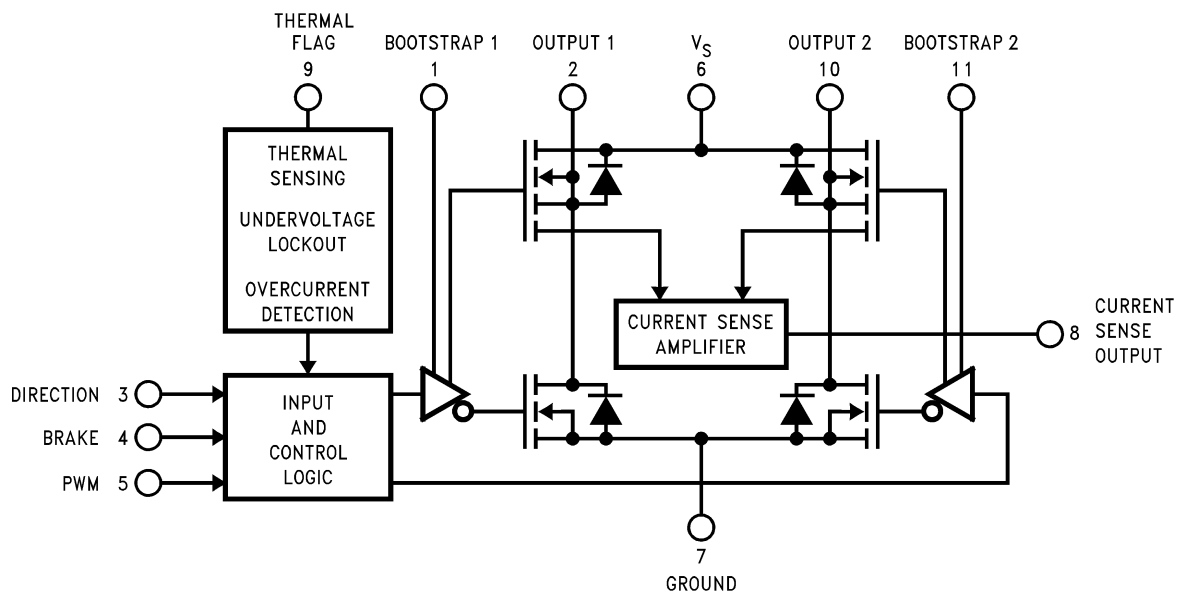
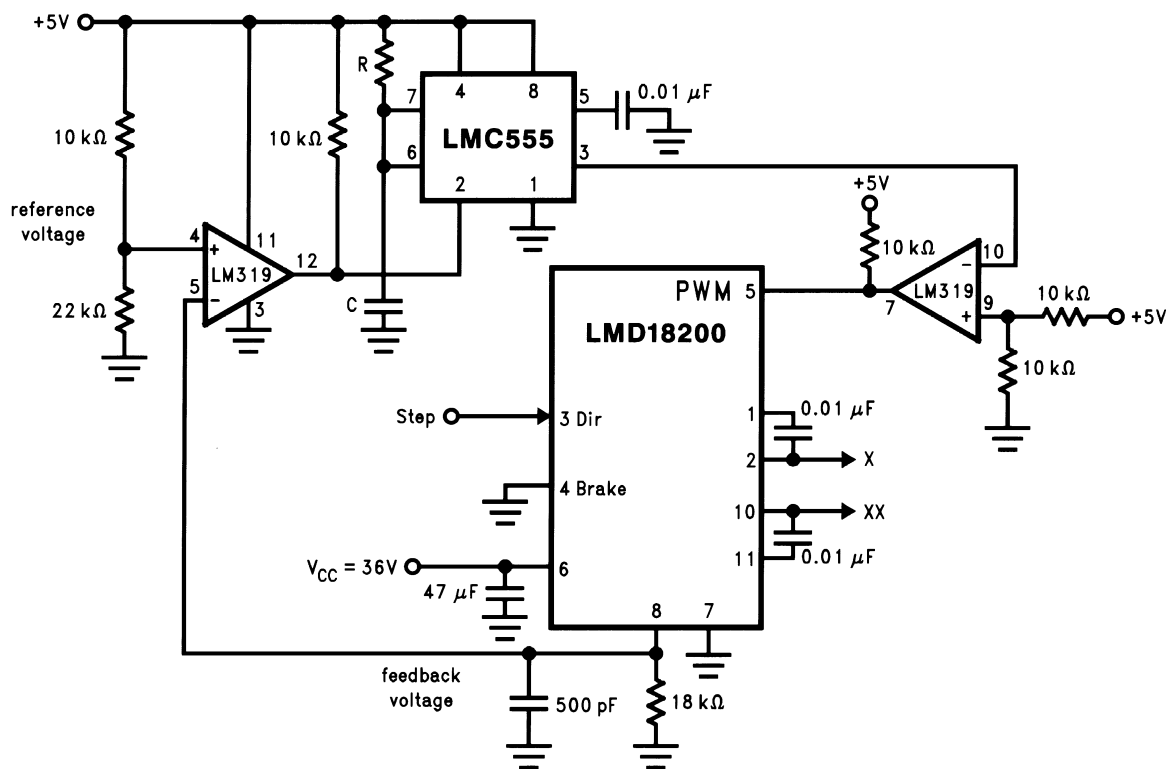


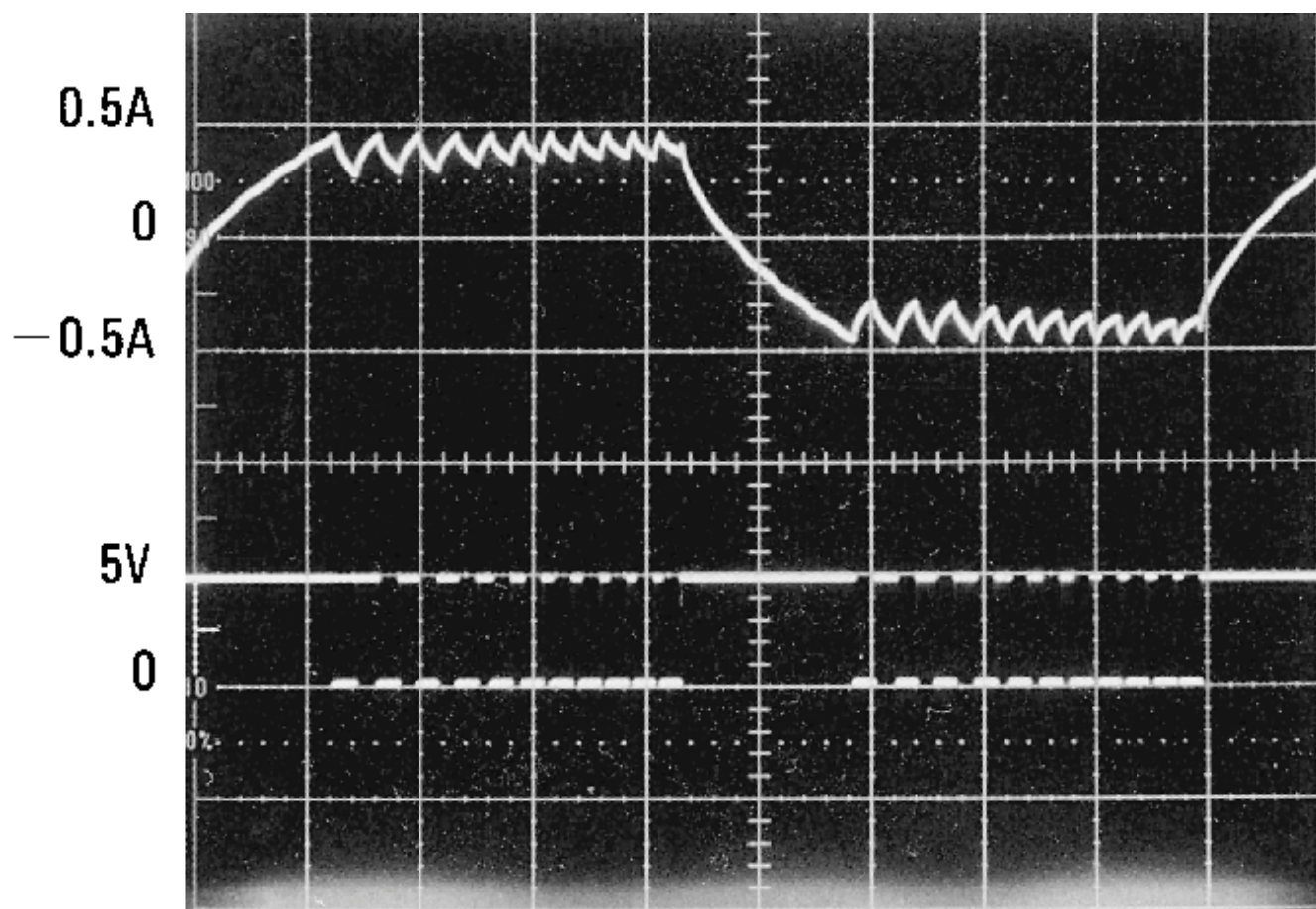
Figure 12. The LMD18200 3A, 55V Full H-Bridge



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During the current chopping action, the feedback voltage tracks the winding current (Figure 15). When the signal at Dir initiates a change in the direction of the winding current, the feedback voltage ceases tracking the winding current until the winding current passes through zero. This phenomenon occurs because the current sense amplifier only sources a current proportional to the total *forward* current conducted by the two upper switches of the LMD18200. During the period the feedback voltage does not track the winding current, the winding current actually flows from ground to supply as reverse current through a lower and an upper switch of the H-bridge. Only after the winding current passes through zero does it once again become forward current in one of the upper switches (see AN-694 *A DMOS 3A, 55V, H-Bridge: The LMD18200* (SNOA170)). The feedback voltage is ground referenced; thus, it appears the same regardless of the direction of the winding current.

The same 200 step/revolution hybrid stepper (Figure 13) was used to generate Figure 14, Figure 15, Figure 16, and Figure 17. Figure 16 shows the winding current for simple voltage drive with $V_{CC} = V_{rated} = 12V$. Figure 17 shows the winding current for L/4R drive with added series resistance of $72\Omega/\text{phase}$ and $V_{CC} = 4V_{rated} = 48V$.

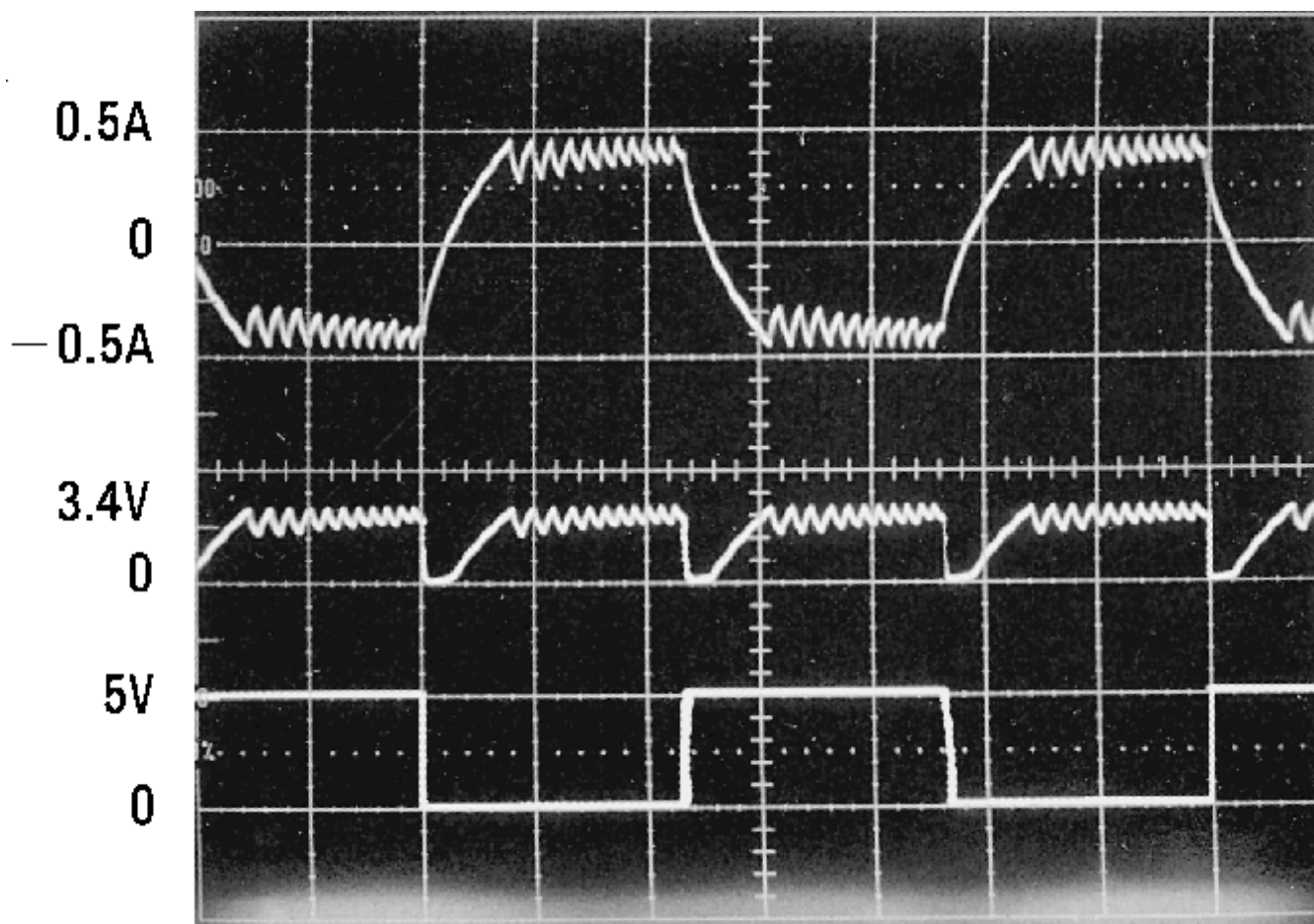


Top Trace:— Winding Current at 0.5A/div

Bottom Trace:— PWM Signal at 5V/div

Horizontal:— 0.5 ms/div

Figure 14. The Chopped Winding Current and the Logic Signal at PWM



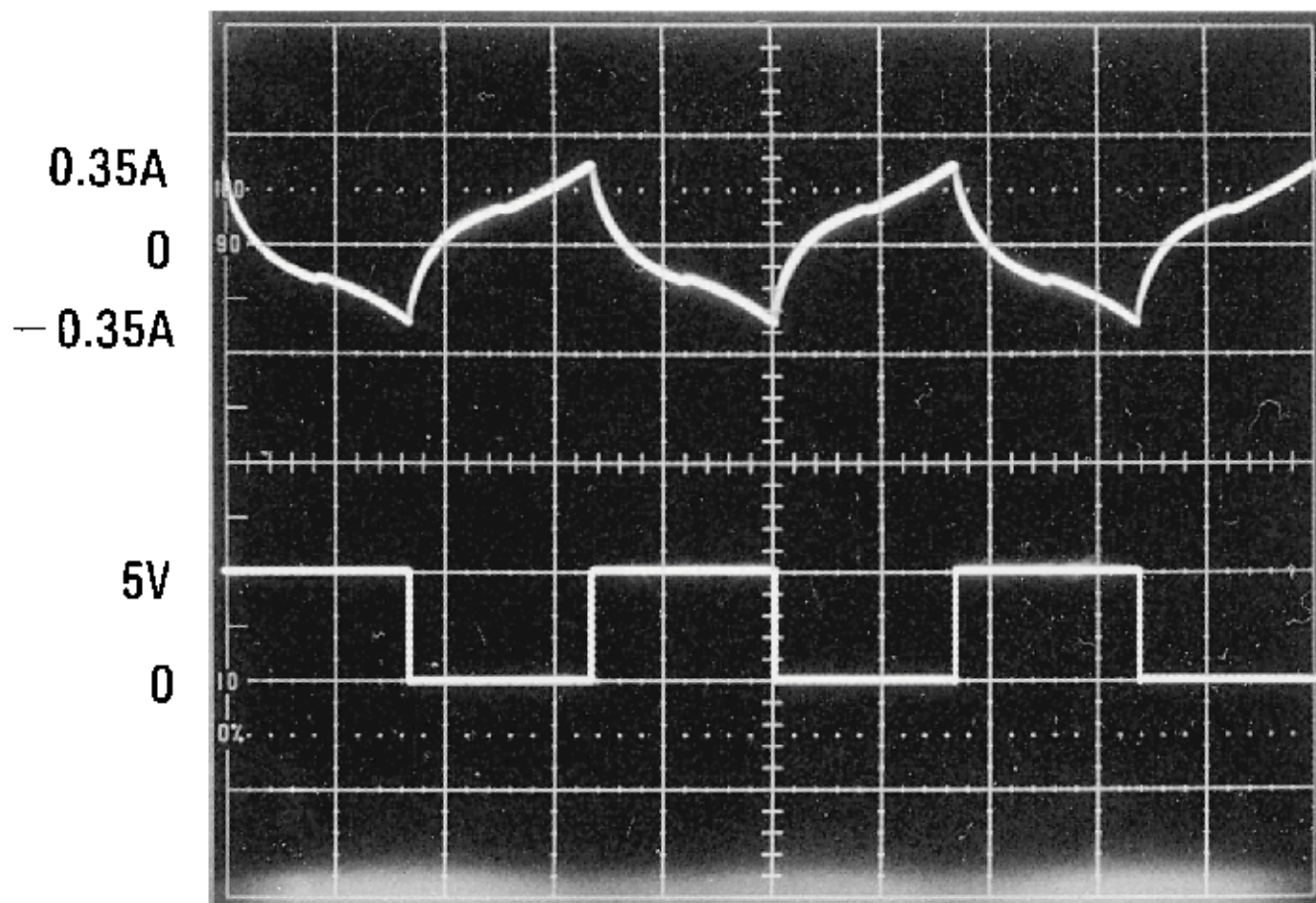
Top Trace:— Winding Current at 0.5A/div

Middle Trace:— Feedback Voltage at 5V/div

Bottom Trace:— Step Logic Signal at 5V/div

Horizontal:— 1 ms/div

Figure 15. The Chopped Winding Current and Feedback Voltage at 860 Steps/Second

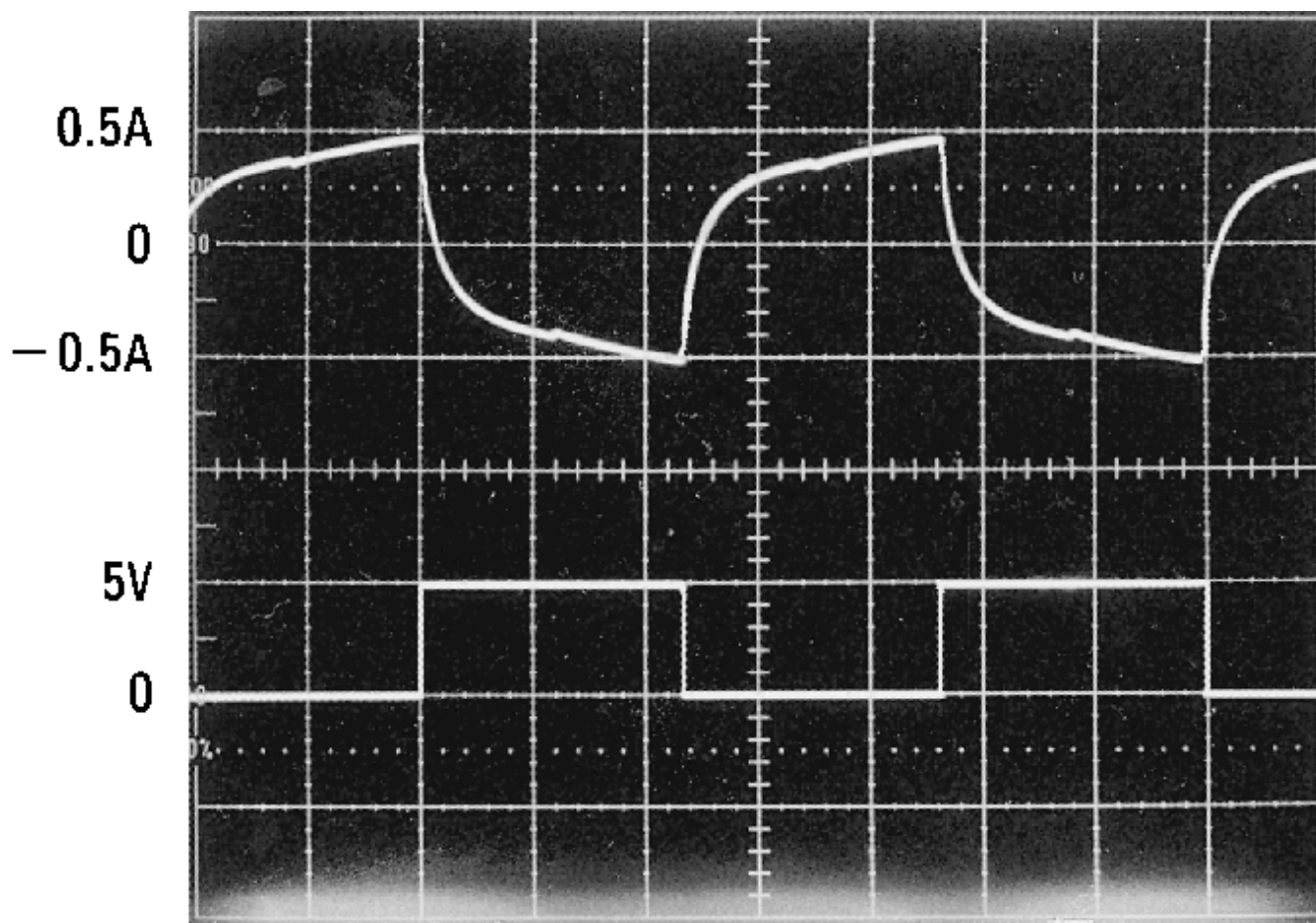


Top Trace:— Winding Current at 0.5A/div

Bottom Trace:— Step Logic Signal at 5V/div

Horizontal:— 2 ms/div

Figure 16. The Winding Current for Simple Voltage Drive at 600 Steps/Second



Top Trace:— Winding Current at 0.5A/div

Bottom Trace:— Step Logic Signal at 5V/div

Horizontal:— 1 ms/div

Figure 17. The Winding Current for L/4R Drive at 860 Steps/Second

7 References

AN-694 A DMOS 3A, 55V, H-Bridge: The LMD18200 ([SNOA170](#))

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