

Experimental and numerical investigation of abnormal combustion phenomena in high-performance hydrogen direct-injection engine operated in stoichiometric conditions

Original

Experimental and numerical investigation of abnormal combustion phenomena in high-performance hydrogen direct-injection engine operated in stoichiometric conditions / Piano, Andrea; Rolando, Luciano; Roggio, Salvatore; Millo, Federico; Tonelli, Roberto; Gullino, Fabrizio; Mortellaro, Fabio Santi. - In: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ENGINE RESEARCH. - ISSN 1468-0874. - (2024). [10.1177/14680874241302562]

Availability:

This version is available at: 11583/2996553 since: 2025-01-14T14:53:04Z

Publisher:

SAGE Publications Ltd

Published

DOI:10.1177/14680874241302562

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1 **Experimental and Numerical Investigation of Abnormal Combustion Phenomena in High-**
2 **Performance Hydrogen Direct-Injection Engine Operated in Stoichiometric Conditions**

3

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10 **Abstract**

11 Nowadays the use of Hydrogen (H₂) within Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) represents a valuable solution
12 also for high-performance applications since it allows carbon free combustion process preserving, at the same
13 time, the driving experience of the engines fuelled with conventional fuels. On the other side, the low ignition
14 energy and the high flammability range may lead to a high probability of abnormal combustion events
15 especially at high engine loads. Therefore, this work aims at investigating the occurrence of knock and pre-
16 ignition phenomena in a high-performance Direct Injection (DI) single cylinder Spark Ignition (SI) engine
17 through the synergistic use of numerical simulations and experimental activities. A 3D-CFD model was
18 calibrated against a set of experimental measurements. The engine model showed satisfactory predictive
19 capabilities with a good matching with the experimental in-cylinder pressure traces. This virtual test rig was
20 then used to investigate the impact of a different coolant temperature and different injector recess in terms of
21 knock and pre-ignition tendency, and most of all, to define a robust simulation methodology to estimate the
22 risk of hydrogen abnormal combustion events.

23 **Keywords**

24 Internal combustion engine; Hydrogen; Computational Fluid Dynamics; Abnormal Combustion; Pre-ignition;
25 Knocking; Stoichiometric Conditions

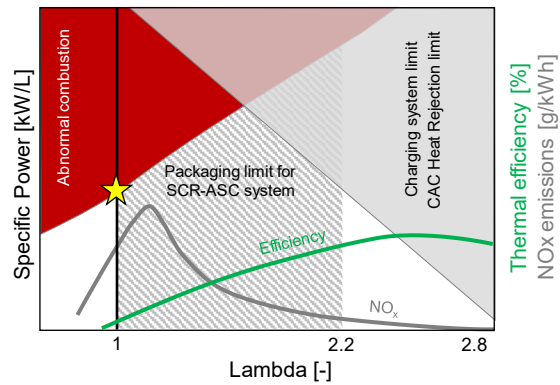
26 **1. Introduction**

27 The huge climate changes observed in the last decades because of Greenhouse Gases (GHG) emissions boosted
28 the efforts of the European Union (EU) to decarbonize its economy. Indeed, despite being responsible for less
29 than 15% of the total CO₂ emitted in the last 10 years, the EU, with the European Green Deal announced at
30 the end of 2019 [1], declared its aim to achieve the carbon neutrality by 2050. In such a framework, the main
31 goals concern the phase-out of the coal used for power generation and the reduction of methane emissions.
32 Particular attention is also devoted to the shift toward more sustainable mobility since the road transportation
33 sector is responsible for 18% of the total CO₂ emissions and, differently from other relevant sectors (i.e.
34 industry and buildings), has shown an increasing trend in the past 25 years [2]. Besides the fostering of
35 powertrain electrification, the most promising solution for transport system decarbonization, the European
36 Green Deal also supports the development and the production of sustainable alternative fuels capable to
37 achieve a zero carbon impact in their entire life cycle [3]. Among them, hydrogen has recently become a highly
38 attractive solution since it could be produced from renewable energy sources, and its combustion generates
39 almost zero GHG emissions. Although H₂ may be at first associated with Fuel Cell (FC) applications [4],
40 presently the more commercialized approach, its use as fuel in internal combustion engines represents a very
41 attractive option [5,6]. The advantages of hydrogen ICE compared to the FC technology include a higher
42 tolerance to fuel impurities, flexibility to switch between fuels, reduction of rare materials usage and a lower
43 thermal load to be managed. In addition, H₂-ICE technology benefits from the reduced cost of using the
44 existing manufacturing facilities and processes for conventional ICEs [7]. However, in order to successfully
45 achieve the targets of an on-road sport car, the H₂-ICE powertrain has to face demanding challenges: high
46 specific power and torque, high revving capabilities, excellent transient response, and high efficiency at part
47 load. The latter is usually not a high priority task for a sport car. However, due to its low density, H₂ needs to
48 be compressed for storage. Current standard storage pressure is 700 bar for passenger cars and light commercial
49 vehicle. Nevertheless, such a high pressure does not allow to reach the same volumetric energy density of
50 gasoline, which makes a reduced fuel consumption mandatory [8]. A further challenge for H₂-ICE powertrain
51 concerns the pollutant emissions management: although H₂ is a carbon-free fuel, hydrogen combustion is
52 characterized by emissions of nitrogen oxide (NO_x) and traces of other pollutants (i.e., carbon monoxide (CO),
53 carbon dioxide (CO₂), hydrocarbons (HC), particulate matter (PM)) originated from the combustion of

54 lubrication oil [9]. In case of on-road sport car, the Aftertreatment System (ATS) must guarantee high
55 conversion performance despite demanding boundaries conditions, such as high exhaust mass flow rate and a
56 long distance between engine and ATS, which make the cold-start phases more challenging [10].

57 **1.1 H2-ICE operating mode**

58 H2-ICE can be operated with lean mixture thanks to the wide flammability range and high laminar flame speed
59 of H2 [7]. Figure 1 shows qualitative trend of specific power, NO_x, and efficiency of a H2-ICE as a function
60 of lambda [8]. If ultra-lean mixtures are adopted (i.e., lambda > 2.8), the in-cylinder temperatures are
61 sufficiently low as to avoid NO_x formation and dedicated NO_x aftertreatment should be avoided. Moreover,
62 ultra-lean mixtures allow to significantly reduce the knock tendency, thus exploiting combustion anchor angles
63 close to the optimum, but make the power density very low, creating also huge challenges for the design of
64 charging system and Charge Air Cooler (CAC). By reducing the excess air, an increment of the specific power
65 can be obtained thanks to a less demanding boost request. However, as lambda reduces, NO_x emissions
66 increase exponentially, peaking between lambda values of 1.2 and 1.3. Aftertreatment systems, originally
67 designed for Diesel applications, can be adapted for use in H2-ICEs that operate under lean conditions (i.e.
68 lambda > 1). HC, CO, and unburnt hydrogen can be oxidized using an Oxidation Catalyst (OC), while NO_x
69 and PM emissions can be treated using a Selective Catalytic Reduction (SCR) technology, applied to a
70 particulate filter. Ammonia (NH₃) emissions, resulting from the presence of a Urea injection system required
71 by the SCR technology, can be treated by an Ammonia Slip Catalyst (ASC). However, the main constraint of
72 this solution relies on packaging, as its dimensions depend on the flow rate of engine-out NO_x. For a high-
73 performance engine operating with a moderate lean mixture, excessively large aftertreatment system would be
74 required due to very high engine-out NO_x. Based on preliminary considerations, a maximum lambda of 2.2 is
75 estimated for the utilization of this after-treatment system [8]. On the other hand, if stoichiometric mixture is
76 exploited, NO_x emission could be treated through a Gasoline like Three-way Catalyst (TWC), as demonstrated
77 in [8], and the required boost pressure would be significantly lower. For these reasons, an experimental
78 campaign was carried out to investigate lambda 1 operations on a high-performance 0.5L direct injection single
79 cylinder spark ignition engine. However, the experiments showed that the power density achievable with such
80 operating mode was significantly limited by abnormal combustion phenomena.



81
82 **Figure 1.** Schematic of hydrogen engine performance limits
83

84 **1.2 Abnormal combustion**

85 H2-ICEs, due to the combination of the hydrogen low minimum ignition energy and wide ignition limits, may
86 face the following combustion anomalies:

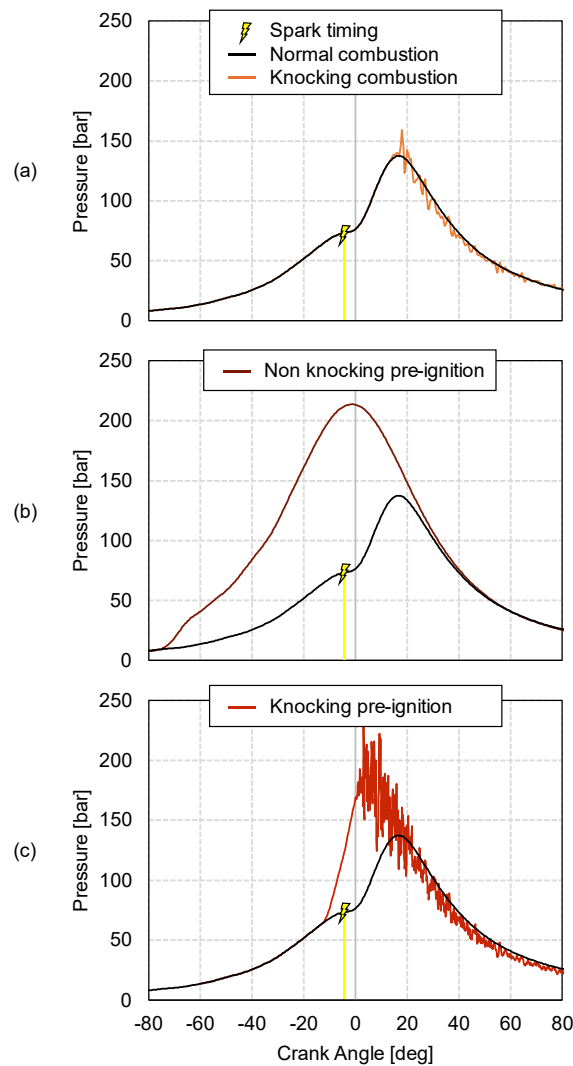
- 87
- Knocking combustion;
 - Pre-ignition.
- 88

89 Concerning knocking combustion, it refers to the self-ignition of the unburned mixture before it is reached by
90 the flame front that takes place during the normal combustion process. It results in an abrupt heat release which
91 produces a sudden increase of in-cylinder pressure, generating pressure oscillations inside the combustion
92 chamber. These high-frequency pressure waves can mechanically stress or even damage the engine, and causes
93 the engine structure to vibrate producing the familiar metallic knocking noise. This phenomenon is depicted
94 in Figure 2 – a.

95 On the other hand, pre-ignition refers to the ignition of the air/hydrogen mixture before the spark timing. The
96 starting points for pre-ignition are usually hot surfaces in the combustion chamber, the so-called "hot spots".
97 Examples of this can be the spark plug electrodes, hot exhaust valves, sharp edges protruding into the
98 combustion chamber, but also hot deposits or particles from lubricant. Mixture ignition can also occur because
99 of residual discharge of the ignition system, also known as "phantom spark".

102 Pre-ignition phenomena can be divided as follows:

- 103 • Backfire: it involves combustion of the air-fuel mixture during the intake process. Ignition can take
104 place either within the combustion chamber or by backflow of hot gases directly in the intake manifold.
105 In this work, backfiring has been completely ruled out by exploiting a direct injection system and by
106 performing the injection after inlet valve closure.
- 107 • Non knocking pre-ignition: as depicted in Figure 2 – b, the air-fuel mixture starts burning before spark
108 timing, but the sequence is comparable to normal combustion process;
- 109 • Knocking pre-ignition: as depicted in Figure 2 – c, the air-fuel mixture starts burning before spark
110 timing. The consequent combustion compresses and heats up the unburned charge which self-ignites.
111 This type of pre-ignition very often leads to engine damage.



112
113 **Figure 2.** Example of normal combustion compared with different combustion anomalies (Knocking, Non
114 knocking pre-ignition, Knocking pre-ignition). Engine operating condition: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH,
115 lambda 1.

116 Each type of pre-ignition can in turn be classified as a function of its occurrence frequency. Runaway pre-
117 ignition is characterized by a rapid acceleration of the ignition timing from cycle to cycle and a continuous
118 increase in the maximum in-cylinder temperature and pressure. On the other hand, when the presence or
119 absence of an ignition source is considered to change from cycle to cycle, pre-ignition is defined as sporadic
120 [11–13].

121 In this framework, the aim of this work concerns the investigation of abnormal combustion phenomena in a
122 high-performance Single Cylinder Engine (SCE) through the synergistic use of numerical simulations and
123 experimental activities. In particular, a 3D-CFD model developed in the commercially available software
124 CONVERGE was firstly calibrated against a preliminary set of experimental measurements. Afterwards, this
125 virtual test rig was used to investigate the impact of a different coolant temperature and different injector recess
126 in terms of knock and pre-ignition tendency, and most of all, to define a robust simulation methodology to
127 estimate the risk of hydrogen abnormal combustion events.

128 **2. Experimental analysis**

129 **2.1 Test engine**

130 A dedicated experimental measurement campaign was performed on a 0.5L direct injection spark ignition
131 SCE. The characteristics of engine under investigation, whose combustion chamber was derived from Ferrari
132 296GTB V6 Turbocharged engine, are presented in Table 1. The H₂ injector was mounted in central position
133 in the combustion chamber, while the spark plug was located in the region between the exhaust valves as in
134 the production engine. The injector was specially designed and manufactured for low-pressure (i.e., 5 bar – 40
135 bar) direct injection of H₂, with a mass flow equal to 10.5 g/s at 25 barA/85 °C. The injector includes a nozzle
136 that opens outwards to prevent the in-cylinder pressure during the combustion from blowing back into the
137 injector. Hydrogen was injected at a variable pressure through external pressure regulator connected directly
138 to high pressure vessel, keeping constant the temperature equal to 25°C. In addition, piston, spark plug, and
139 cylinder head were adapted for hydrogen combustion. A Variable Valve Timing (VVT) system was installed
140 both on intake and exhaust camshafts. The combustion chamber was instrumented with a piezoelectric pressure
141 transducer (Kistler 6045b) located between intake and exhaust valves on the side. During the experiments, 200

142 engine cycles were acquired for a reliable statistical analysis of the indicated data. More details about the test
143 case and experimental activity are available in previous works of the authors [8,14].

144 **Table 1.** Single Cylinder H2 Engine Specifications.

Displaced volume	498.7 cc
Stroke	82 mm
Bore	88 mm
Compression ratio	10.5:1
Number of Valves	4
H2 injector	Direct – Central Mounted
H2 Pressure	5 – 40 bar
Ignition	Exhaust side spark plug
Intake Cam lift	10.5 mm
Exhaust Cam lift	10.5 mm

145

146 2.2 Results

147 The experimental campaign consisted in three different load sweeps at the engine speed of 6000 rpm. As
148 described in Table 2, the first test (i.e., “Test #1”) was carried out with a coolant temperature of 90°C and an
149 injector recess of $Z = -1$ mm. This test will be referred as the “baseline” configuration. In the second load
150 sweep, the coolant temperature was reduced up to 50°C without modifying the injector position (i.e., “Test
151 #2”); while the third test featured a coolant temperature of 90°C and an injector recess of $Z = -3$ mm (i.e., “Test
152 #3”).

153 **Table 2.** Experimental tests specifications

Test	Coolant Temperature [°C]	Injector Recess Z [mm]
#1	90	-1
#2	50	-1
#3	90	-3

154

155 To better clarify the notation adopted for the injector recess, Figure 3 qualitatively shows the position of the
156 injector for Test #1 and Test #3. In detail, injector recess $Z = 0$ mm corresponds to the injector tip aligned with
157 the cylinder head. In addition, negative values of the recess correspond to a position set back from the cylinder
158 head, as depicted in Figure 3.

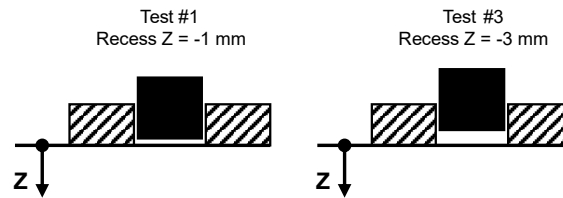


Figure 3. Injector recesses geometry.

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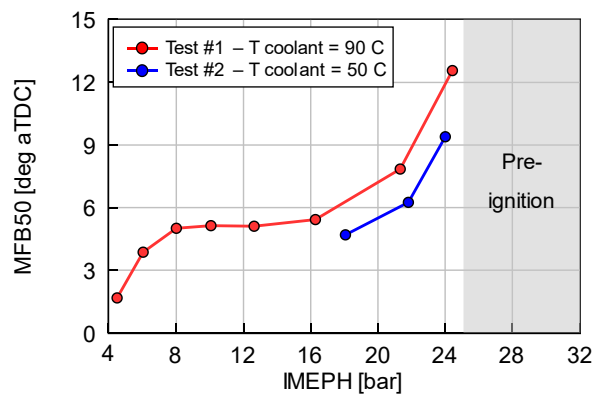
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176

In these experiments, the load was controlled through the intake pressure, while the mixture was kept in stoichiometric condition. H₂ injection pressure was regulated in such a way to obtain an injection duration of 2 ms, corresponding to approximately 70 deg. The Start of Injection (SOI) was set at 140 deg bTDCf in order to exploit the benefits of late injection strategy [8], and the positions of the VVTs were held fixed. Spark timing was regulated at knock limit condition: the so-called Knock Limited Spark Advance (KLSA) was identified when the 99.5th percentile of Maximum Amplitude Pressure Oscillation (MAPO) exceeded a certain threshold [14]. For all the three tests, the load increment was always limited by the appearance of pre-ignition phenomena, as shown in Figure 2 – c. It is worth to highlight that the load sweeps were stopped when 1% of engine cycles presented pre-ignition.

Firstly, the impact of coolant temperature on combustion parameters and its anomalies was evaluated by comparing Test #1 and #2. Gasoline SI engine experience showed that knock is a temperature driven phenomenon, and since the lower coolant temperature reduces the end-gas reaction rate, this modification has a positive impact on knock occurrence [15]. This is also confirmed for H₂ engines, as shown in Figure 4: Test #2 showed, indeed, more advanced crank angle at 50% of total Mass Fraction Burnt (MFB50) in comparison with Test #1 (~2.5 CAD on average). On the other hand, it is worth to point out that the tested coolant temperature reduction had negligible impact on pre-ignition occurrence.



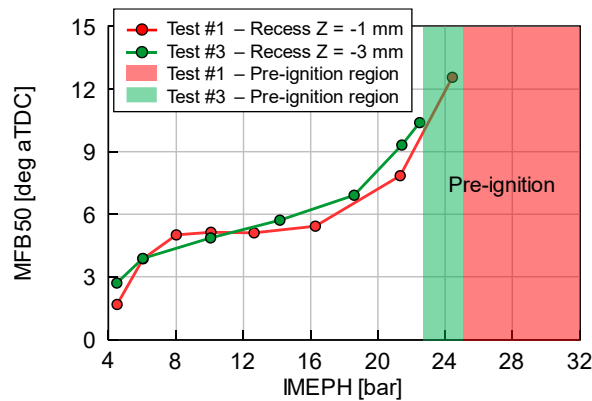
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179

Figure 4. Engine load sweep at 6000 rpm. MFB50 at KLSA for different coolant temperatures.

180 Once assessed the impact of the coolant temperature, Test #3 moved the focus to the assessment of injector
 181 recess impact on combustion process. As shown in a previous work [16], the H2 injector recess highly
 182 influences jet penetration and width, with a relevant impact on hydrogen-air mixing. Similarly, the injector
 183 recess showed a relevant influence on pre-ignition phenomena: in fact, moving from $Z = -1$ mm (Test #1) to Z
 184 $= -3$ mm (Test #3), the pre-ignition occurrence increased thus limiting the maximum IMEPH achievable (>2
 185 bar difference between the two different recesses). Contrarily to coolant temperature test, injector position
 186 showed negligible impact on knock tendency, as highlighted in Figure 5, where similar MFB50 is adopted at
 187 KLSA for both injector recesses.



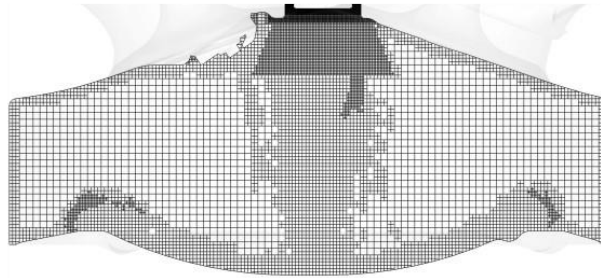
188 **Figure 5.** Engine load sweep at 6000 rpm. MFB50 at KLSA for different injector recesses.
 189
 190

191 3. Simulation analysis

192 3.1 Simulation setup and model validation

193 The commercially available software CONVERGE CFD v3.0.25 was used for the simulations. To properly
 194 initialize the computational domain, a 1D-CFD complete engine model was built in GT-SUITE, providing the
 195 time-dependent boundary conditions in terms of pressure, temperature, and species concentrations. A modified
 196 cut cell cartesian mesh with a base grid size of 4 mm was adopted. Then, fixed embeddings were included
 197 achieving 0.5 mm grid dimension close to the combustion chamber walls, 0.125 mm at spark location and up
 198 to 0.0625 mm at the H2 injector poppet valve. Further refinement has been achieved due to the Adaptive Mesh
 199 Refinement (AMR) technique [17], ensuring 0.25 mm-cell to capture not only the gas exchange through the
 200 intake/exhaust valves, but also the H2 mixing with fresh air, and subsequent combustion process. Figure 6

201 shows the mesh size distribution during the H₂ injection: as abovementioned, specific refinement close to the
202 injector and walls was coupled with the AMR activated by the velocity and temperature gradients.



203
204 **Figure 6.** Mesh size during hydrogen injection.

205 The compressible form of RANS equations using RNG $k-\epsilon$ turbulence model was used to simulate the turbulent
206 flow in the ICE [18]. The finite volume formulation of the equations was solved on the discretized domain,
207 using second order central differences for spatial terms and implicit Euler scheme for the temporal term. The
208 pressure-velocity coupling was done using PISO algorithm, and the Redlich-Kwong equation of state was used
209 to close the system of equations. The mixture-averaged diffusion model was used to consider the high
210 diffusivity of H₂ in air, compared to heavy hydrocarbons. An adaptive time stepping algorithm was adopted
211 where the solver determines the largest timestep that satisfy all the applicable limiters [17].

212 As far as combustion process is concerned, the Extended Coherent Flame Model (ECFM) was used to model
213 the spark ignited combustion of H₂ [17–19]. The advantage of using coherent flamelet models comes from the
214 separation of combustion from the turbulent field. Such models work with the assumption that the reactions
215 take place in a thin layer separating the burnt and unburnt gases [19]. The employment of this combustion
216 model is justified by the reduced computational cost, as the number of scalar equations is smaller than in other
217 models that make use of the detailed kinetic solver during the simulation. This is made possible by the short
218 characteristic chemical time of hydrogen, which makes the flamelet assumption realistic, also considering the
219 mixture composition condition (i.e., stoichiometric air-to-fuel ratio). This model solves a transport equation
220 for the Flame Surface Density (FSD) which, along with the laminar flame speed, determines the fuel
221 consumption rate. The interaction of the flame with the local turbulence is modelled using an addition source
222 term for the turbulent stretch in the FSD equation. In the present study, the Intermittent Turbulent Net Flame
223 Stretch (ITNFS) developed by [20] was used. The spark plug was modelled using the Imposed Stretch Spark
224 Ignition Model (ISSIM) [21]. The ISSIM model helps in simultaneously simulating the electrical circuit energy

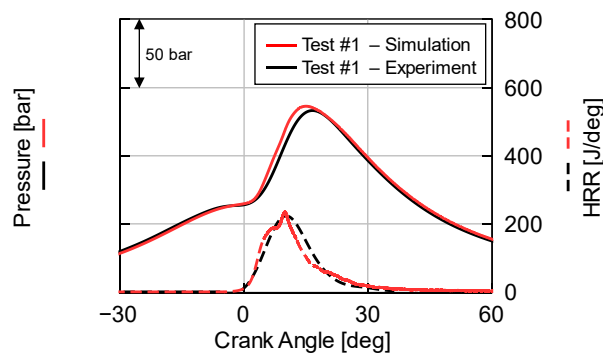
225 deposition and the flame surface and mass deposition [17]. The auto-ignition was modelled using an additional
 226 source term in the FSD equation adopting the Tabulated Kinetics of Ignition (TKI) model based on detailed
 227 chemistry scheme. To tabulate the ignition delay and the reaction rate due to autoignition, the TKI model is
 228 designed to solve the 0D constant pressure reactors over a wide range of initial conditions. Also Laminar Flame
 229 Speed (LFS) tables were obtained through the exploitation of detailed chemistry scheme. More specifically,
 230 TKI and laminar flame speed tables were generated adopting the GRI Mech 3.0 (53 species, 325 reactions)
 231 [22], testing the mechanism over a wide range of pressures, temperatures, equivalence ratios and residual gas
 232 fraction, as reported in Table 3.

233 **Table 3.** TKI and LFS tables ranges for air-H₂ mixture.

	Min	Max	Step
Pressure [bar]	10	150	10
Temperature [K]	500	1200	100
Equivalence ratio [-]	0.3	2	0.1
Residual gas fraction [-]	0	0.2	0.05

234

235 Since the numerical validation of the H₂ injection spray against experimental test on constant volume vessel
 236 has been already reported in [14], in this paper the validation is focused only on the combustion process.
 237 Starting from a previously validated model for low-speed/low-load engine operating conditions (2000 rpm x
 238 4.5 bar IMEPH) [14], the model was calibrated under high speed / high load engine operating conditions (6000
 239 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH), adopting a lower turbulent stretch constant (0.5) in the FSD equation. This modification
 240 is in line with the work presented in [18], where lower turbulent stretch constant is required by increasing the
 241 engine load. Figure 7 shows the comparison between the numerical and experimental in-cylinder pressure and
 242 Heat Release Rate (HRR). A high accuracy level has been achieved, well matching both the combustion
 243 phasing and intensity.



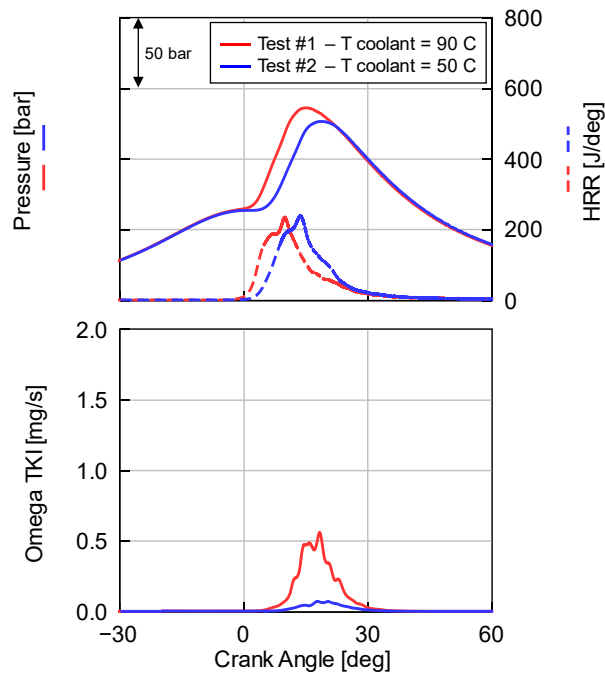
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245 **Figure 7.** Model validation. In-cylinder pressure and HRR. Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar
246 IMEPH.

247 The calibrated model was then used to investigate the impact of a different coolant temperature and different
248 injector recess in terms of pre-ignition tendency, and to define robust simulation methodology to estimate the
249 risk of hydrogen abnormal combustion events.

250 **3.2 Sensitivity analysis on coolant temperature**

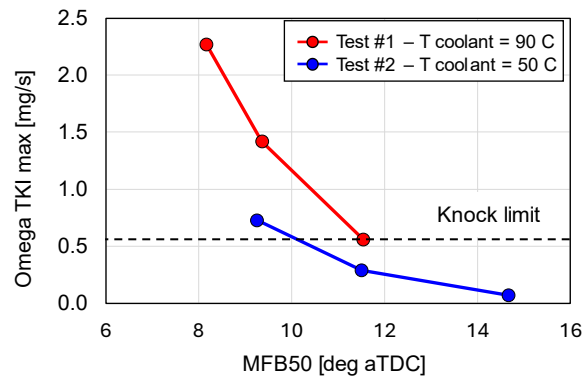
251 To investigate the abnormal combustion likelihood and the impact of the operating conditions on the abnormal
252 propagation of the flame, experimental Tests #1 and #2 were considered (see Figure 4). As already discussed,
253 no remarkable benefit was achieved in terms of pre-ignition resistance by reducing the coolant temperature,
254 while the lower in-cylinder temperature led to an increment of the knock margin thus allowing a further
255 advance of the combustion (~2.5 deg) at 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH. To investigate this phenomenon in the
256 3D-CFD environment, the previously validated model was modified, reducing the walls temperature in the
257 combustion chamber accordingly with the experiments. The results in terms of in-cylinder pressure and HRR
258 are reported in Figure 8 – top. At fixed spark timing, reducing the wall temperatures leads to a retarded
259 combustion due to the lower in-cylinder temperature distribution that affects the flame speed. Once assessed
260 the effect on the combustion phenomenon, the auto-ignition tendency was investigated selecting the fuel
261 reaction rate due to autoignition (i.e., omega TKI) as the most informative output variable. More in details, the
262 omega TKI is computed starting from the reaction rate due to autoignition of the TKI table, thus being a
263 function of pressure, unburned temperature, mixture composition and dilution of each cell within the fluid
264 domain [23]. The omega TKI is computed for each computational cell with the unit (1/s). Then the global
265 omega TKI within the combustion chamber is weighted for the mass of each cell, resulting in the global fuel
266 reaction rate due to autoignition (mg/s). The omega TKI evolution is shown in Figure 8 – bottom for both
267 coolant temperatures under investigation: pre-ignition was not observed for both the investigated coolant
268 temperature as highlighted by the omega TKI values close to zero before the start of combustion. Moreover, it
269 is worth to point out that the lower wall temperature case shows a reduced auto-ignition tendency (lower omega
270 TKI), being in line with experimental data, in which the reduced temperature allowed an advanced combustion
271 phasing thanks to a higher knock margin.



272

273 **Figure 8.** Sensitivity analysis on coolant temperature. Top: In-cylinder pressure and HRR; bottom: omega
 274 TKI. Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

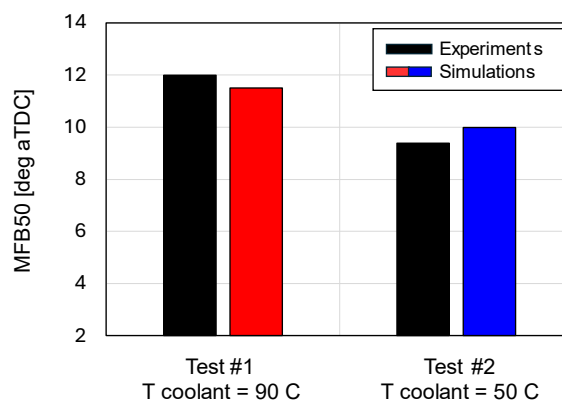
275 To further understand the impact of coolant temperature on the knock likelihood, the approach proposed by
 276 Ando et al. in [24] was implemented. This approach selects the maximum of the omega TKI profile as a
 277 variable to quantify the knock tendency. More specifically, once defined the maximum of omega TKI at Knock
 278 Limited Spark Advance, each operating condition highlighting a higher value of omega TKI can be considered
 279 as knocking condition. Therefore, a spark advance sweep was simulated for both the operating conditions, and
 280 the results are presented in Figure 9, in which the maximum value of omega TKI is reported as a function of
 281 combustion anchor angle (i.e., MFB50). In addition, the “knock limit” dashed line represents the omega TKI
 282 value at the experimental KLSA. As expected, advancing the combustion phasing, a higher auto-ignition
 283 tendency was obtained, thus increasing the risk of abnormal combustion for both the cases under investigation.
 284 Interestingly, the lower coolant temperature shows reduced auto-ignition tendency as highlighted not only
 285 from the reduced omega TKI values, but also from the different trend slope. This confirms the experimental
 286 findings where reduced coolant temperature gave further margin on knock, thus allowing a more advanced
 287 combustion phasing.



288

289 **Figure 9.** Sensitivity analysis on coolant temperature. MFB50 vs maximum of omega TKI over a spark
 290 timing sweep. Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

291 To quantify this effect, a further step in the model validation is presented in Figure 10, in which the MFB50 at
 292 KLSA obtained from simulations was compared with the experimental data for both the coolant temperatures
 293 under investigation. It is worth noting that the comparison between the numerical and experimental data shows
 294 a very good agreement, confirming that the numerical model is able to capture the reduced auto-ignition
 295 tendency induced by the lower coolant temperature. More in details, at KLSA the 3D-CFD model predicts a
 296 slightly lower combustion phasing advance than the one observed during the experiments ($\Delta MFB50_{exp} =$
 297 $2.5\ deg; \Delta MFB50_{sim} = 1.5\ deg$).



298

299 **Figure 10.** Model validation. MFB50 over different coolant temperatures. Engine operating conditions: 6000
 300 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

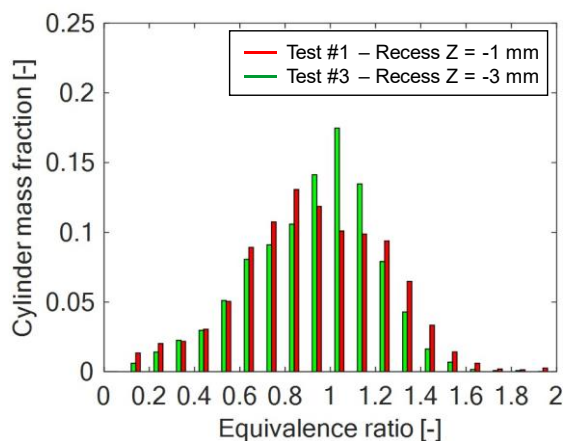
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302 3.3 Sensitivity analysis on injector recess

303 Not only the impact of coolant temperature, but also the one derived from different hydrogen injector recesses
 304 on pre-ignition likelihood has been investigated. Specifically, two different injector recesses were analysed in
 305 3D-CFD environment (the reference $Z = -1\ mm$ and higher injector recess $Z = -3\ mm$), with the aim of

306 developing a robust numerical methodology to investigate the risk of pre-ignition. As previously described,
307 the experimental campaign highlighted a higher pre-ignition tendency by increasing the injector recess, thus
308 limiting the maximum engine load up to 22 bar IMEPH at 6000 rpm. Instead, the reference $Z = -1$ mm reached
309 24 bar IMEPH without showing abnormal start of combustion. Therefore, both the injector recesses were
310 analysed in 3D-CFD at the same engine operating conditions (6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH), where the pre-
311 ignition was experimentally observed only for $Z = -3$ mm.

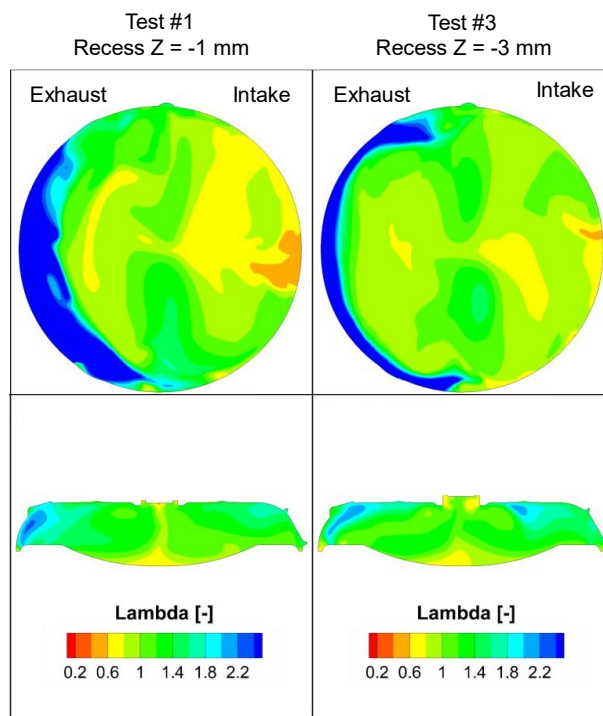
312 Firstly, the impact of the injector recess on the mixing process was investigated. To globally characterize the
313 hydrogen-air mixing process within the combustion chamber, the equivalence ratio distribution at spark timing
314 was analysed, as depicted in Figure 11. The total cylinder mass was binned by equivalence ratio into twenty
315 intervals, starting from $0 \div 0.2$ bin that corresponds to pure ambient gas and going up to 2 representing the rich
316 mixture. As can be noted from Figure 11, the higher injector recess (i.e., $Z = -3$ mm) shows a higher peak of
317 the distribution, thus suggesting a faster air/fuel mixing thanks to the faster jet penetration, as also highlighted
318 in [16]. In addition, the mode of the distribution is closer to the target equivalence ratio (i.e., stoichiometric),
319 while a reduced cylinder mass fraction can be observed in the tails of the distribution, thus confirming the
320 enhanced mixing process induced by the higher injector recess.



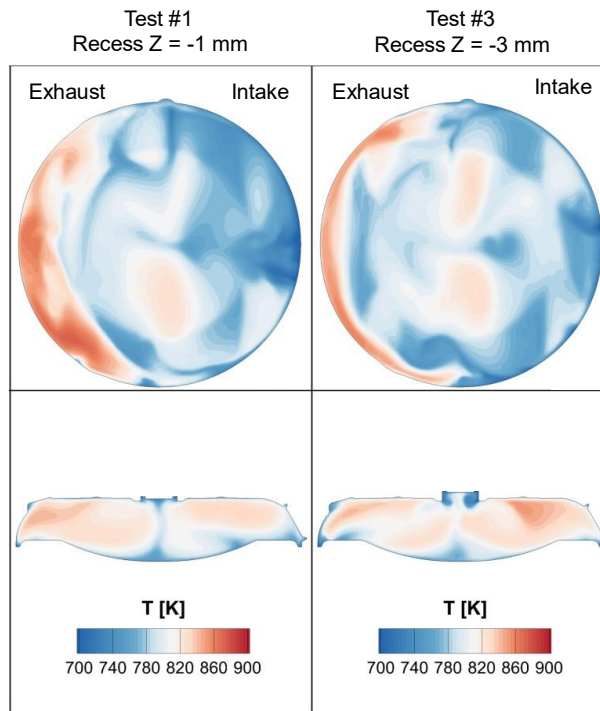
321
322 **Figure 11.** Equivalence ratio bins distribution over different injector recess at spark timing. Engine operating
323 conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

324 To further investigate the mixing process for both the injector recesses, the lambda and temperature local
325 distribution at spark timing are depicted in Figure 12 and Figure 13, respectively. Two different cutting planes
326 were considered for the scope: “Plane a” is perpendicular to the cylinder axis, while “Plane b” cuts the
327 combustion chamber along the cylinder axis. Considering the lambda distribution in the Plane a of Figure 12

328 – top, the two injector recesses lead to different mixing processes: the $Z = -3$ mm injector recess shows a more
 329 homogeneous lambda distribution, and the leaner zone highlighted by the blue region is confined to the liner
 330 region. On the other hand, the local temperature distribution in Figure 13 – top, clearly shows that the hotter
 331 areas correspond to the leaner zones in the exhaust valves region of Figure 12 – top. In other words, where the
 332 hydrogen is less mixed with air, a higher temperature of the mixture can be observed within the combustion
 333 chamber. This is due the under-expanded hydrogen jet that reaches lower temperatures than the surrounding
 334 air during the injection event [25], thus providing a cooling effect of the overall mixture. In particular, the
 335 more the mixing process is enhanced, the lower the mixture temperature. Same conclusions can be made by
 336 observing the Plane b distributions in Figure 12 – bottom and Figure 13 – bottom. In addition, this
 337 representation shows that high temperature lean zones are mainly localized under the exhaust valves, especially
 338 for $Z = -3$ mm injector recess.



339
 340 **Figure 12.** Lambda distribution over different injector recess at spark timing. Top: Plane a; bottom: Plane b.
 341 Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

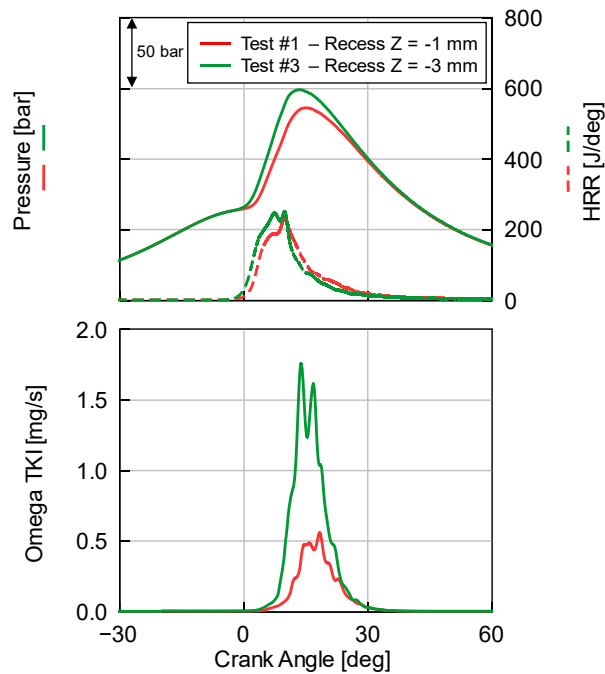


342

343 **Figure 13.** Temperature distribution over different injector recess at spark timing. Top: Plane a; bottom:
 344 Plane b. Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

345 Once investigated the effect of different injector recesses on the mixing process, the combustion simulations
 346 were carried out and the results in terms of in-cylinder pressure and HRR are reported in Figure 14 – top. At
 347 constant spark timing, increasing the injector recess results in faster combustion, mainly due to the enhanced
 348 mixing process that leads to a more homogeneous mixture and reduced lean regions which hinder the hydrogen
 349 flame propagation.

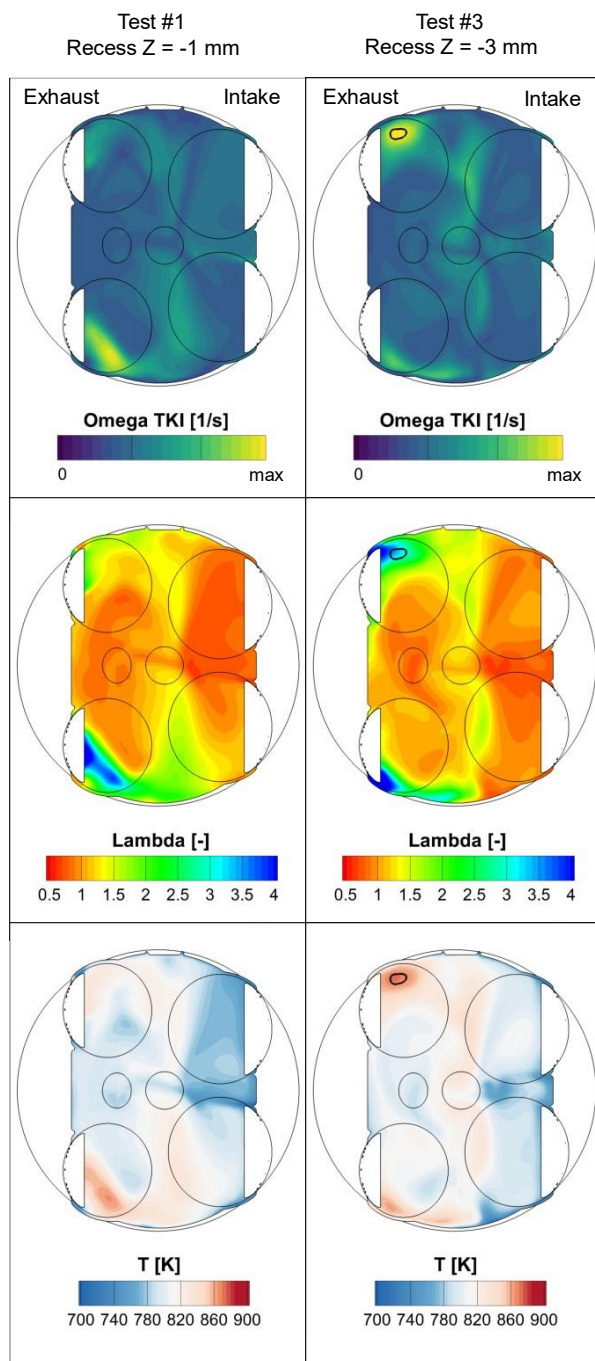
350 As already done for coolant temperature sensitivity analysis, the omega TKI evolution was selected as index
 351 for the auto-ignition tendency. Figure 14 – bottom shows a higher auto-ignition tendency for the increased
 352 injector recess in comparison with the baseline $Z = -1$ mm. This result suggests that increasing the mixture
 353 homogeneity does not necessarily lead to a normal flame propagation, that instead can be characterized by
 354 higher risk of auto-ignition of the end-gas. Nevertheless, both the omega TKI profiles show values close to
 355 zero before start of combustion, thus highlighting potential risk of knock without any pre-ignition events,
 356 differently from the experimental data.



357

358 **Figure 14.** Sensitivity analysis on injector recess. Top: In-cylinder pressure and HRR; bottom: omega TKI.
 359 Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH.

360 Since the aim of this research activity was to define robust methodology to evaluate the pre-ignition tendency
 361 by means of numerical tools, the local distribution of the omega TKI within the combustion chamber was
 362 evaluated for both the injector recesses under investigation. The omega TKI, indeed, is the auto-ignition
 363 reaction rate from the TKI table and can be considered as index of the local chemical reaction rate. Figure 15
 364 shows the omega TKI (top), lambda (center) and temperature (bottom) distributions at +1 Crank Angle Degree
 365 (CAD) after spark timing in the “Plane c” cutting plane, parallel to previously mentioned Plane a, but closer
 366 to the valves. In addition, the black line in the contour plots is representative of the iso-line at maximum omega
 367 TKI between the two cases under investigation. Considering the omega TKI in Figure 15 – top, the Z = -3 mm
 368 injector recess highlights a higher chemical reaction rate distribution.



369

370 **Figure 15.** Sensitivity analysis on injector recess, at +1 CAD after spark timing. In-cylinder distribution over
 371 Plane c in terms of (top) omega TKI, (center) lambda and (bottom) temperature. The black line is
 372 representative of the iso-line at maximum omega TKI. Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24 bar
 373 IMEPH.

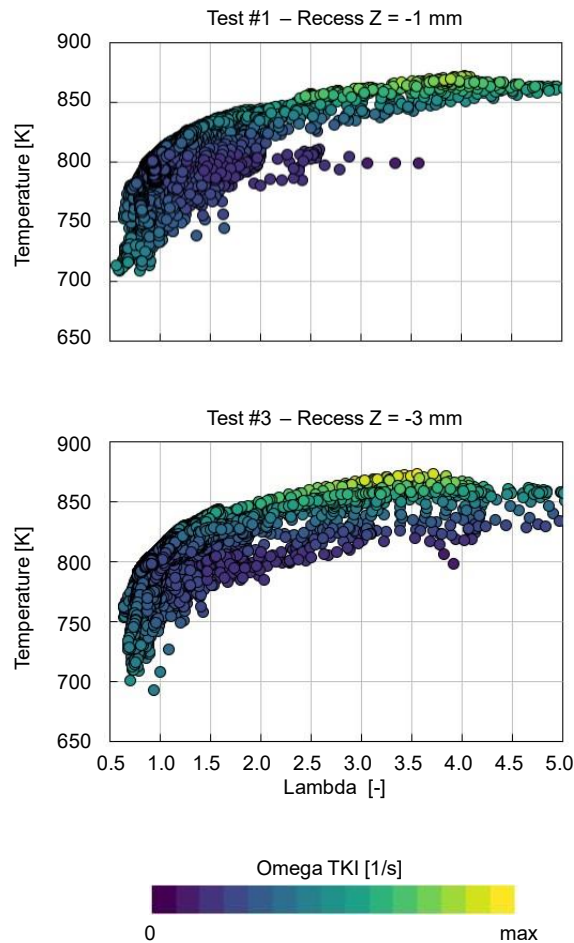
374 In particular, the top-left region below the exhaust valve is characterized by higher omega TKI values in
 375 comparison with the reference injector recess ($Z = -1$ mm). In this region, the maximum omega TKI is reached
 376 as highlighted by the black iso-line, that encloses a region in which the auto-ignition is prone to happen before
 377 the start of combustion. This can be due to a combined effect of the leaner mixture condition in the vicinity of
 378 the exhaust valve, where the wall temperature is high. In this region, indeed, the leaner lambda (Figure 15 –

379 center) leads to higher mixture temperature distribution (Figure 15 – bottom), thus promoting faster chemical
380 reaction rate and higher risk of auto-ignition if compared with the baseline $Z = -1$ mm case.

381 To further investigate the pre-ignition likelihood, the values of lambda, temperature and omega TKI for each
382 computational cell over the Plane c, at +1 CAD after spark timing, were analysed and depicted in Figure 16.
383 Specifically, a scatter plot was defined considering the lambda value in the x-axis, and the gas temperature in
384 the y-axis temperature. Each computational cell is represented by a single circle coloured by the value of the
385 omega TKI, considering the same scale value adopted in Figure 15 – top. Moreover, both $Z = -1$ mm and $Z =$
386 -3 mm cases are reported in Figure 16, top and bottom respectively. Starting from the results obtained
387 considering the reference injector recess ($Z = -1$ mm) in Figure 16 – top, a higher omega TKI is observed for
388 two regions. On one side, the richer lambda within the lambda 0.5-1 range provides an increment of omega
389 TKI, and the richer the mixture the higher the omega TKI. However, the mixture temperature for those cells is
390 low (i.e., <800 K) due to the limited air-hydrogen mixing, thus reducing the chemical reaction rate. On the
391 other hand, for leaner lambda values (i.e., >2) the temperature is significantly increased due to the lower impact
392 of the under-expanded hydrogen jet to the overall mixture temperature, thus increasing the value of omega
393 TKI, reaching a maximum close to lambda 4. Then, moving to lambda values higher than 4, the reduced
394 hydrogen content limits the chemical reaction rate and the omega TKI drops down. It is worth to point out that
395 the mixture temperature does not increase as the mixture composition becomes more and more lean. This is
396 mainly due to the impact of the heat transfer from the walls. As abovementioned, the resulting omega TKI
397 distribution is a combination of two effects: on one side, the air-hydrogen mixing has a strong impact on the
398 local temperature distribution due to the temperature difference between hot compressed air and under-
399 expanded hydrogen jet; but, on the other side, the local temperature distribution is also affected by the wall
400 temperature, either enhancing or slowing down the chemical reactivity of the mixture.

401 Moving to the results for the injector recess $Z = -3$ mm in Figure 16 – bottom, a similar behaviour can be
402 observed. Even for this injector recess, two regions show the higher omega TKI: the area with lambda 0.5-1
403 and temperature <800 K and the area with lambda >2 . Also in this case, the maximum intensity of the omega
404 TKI distribution is observed for lambda >2 due to the increased temperature. As expected, in this area the $Z =$
405 -3 mm injector recess highlights a higher omega TKI intensity with respect to the reference injector recess and
406 the maximum omega TKI value is located at lower lambda (i.e., equal to 3.5) in comparison with $Z = -1$ mm

407 case, as also shown in the top-left side of Figure 15. Conversely, the maximum omega TKI for the reference
408 injector recess is shifted toward higher lambda (close to 4), that corresponds to the bottom-left side of Figure
409 15. In this zone, the high temperature level contributes to enhance the omega TKI, but the reduced hydrogen
410 content (lambda equal to 4) limits this increment resulting in lower maximum omega TKI with respect to
411 injector recess $Z = -3$ mm.



412
413 **Figure 16.** Lambda, temperature and omega TKI for each computational cell over Plane c, at +1 CAD after
414 spark timing. Top: Recess = -1 mm; bottom: Recess = -3 mm. Engine operating conditions: 6000 rpm x 24
415 bar IMEPH.

416 In conclusion, even if the in-cylinder pressure predicted by 3D-CFD model did not highlight pre-ignition as
417 observed in the experiments, a methodology to investigate the abnormal combustion risk has been developed
418 and validated against the experimental data. The methodology relies on the outcomes of the numerical
419 simulations and exploits the informative content of the omega TKI index, both in terms of average and local
420 values, to predict pre-ignition risk, its location and knock likelihood.

421 It is worth to point out that a more refined solution of the boundary layer coupled with the Conjugate Heat
422 Transfer (CHT) simulation can potentially make the methodology more reliable leading to more accurate
423 temperature prediction close the walls; however this could remarkably increase the computational time
424 required for the simulation activity.

425

426 **4. Conclusions**

427 This article presented a comprehensive methodology based on the synergistic use of numerical simulations
428 and experimental activities to assess the occurrence of knock and pre-ignition phenomena in a 0.5L high-
429 performance direct injection spark ignition single cylinder engine fuelled with hydrogen. At first, a dedicated
430 experimental activity was carried out at 6000 rpm in stoichiometric mixture condition, during which the impact
431 of injector recess and coolant temperature on abnormal combustion phenomena was assessed over different
432 load levels. Afterwards, a 3D-CFD model developed in the commercially available software CONVERGE was
433 calibrated under a high speed / high load engine operating conditions (6000 rpm x 24 bar IMEPH). This virtual
434 test rig was then used to investigate the impact of a different coolant temperature on knock likelihood, showing
435 a very good agreement with the experimental tests: indeed, the 3D-CFD model was able to capture the reduced
436 auto-ignition tendency induced by the lower coolant temperature, predicting a combustion anchor angle
437 advance of 1.5 deg rather than the 2.5 deg experimentally obtained. Successively, the engine model was
438 exploited to assess the impact of a different H₂ injector recess on pre-ignition propensity. In this case, even if
439 the in-cylinder pressure predicted by the virtual engine featuring a higher injector recess did not highlight pre-
440 ignition as observed in the experiments, the numerical tool was able to identify in-cylinder regions in which
441 the auto-ignition is prone to happen before spark timing. To do so, a robust simulation methodology, which
442 exploits the informative content of the average and local omega TKI index, was defined to estimate the risk of
443 hydrogen abnormal combustion events.

444 **Abbreviations**

AMR	Adaptive Mesh Refinement
ASC	Ammonia Slip Catalyst
ATS	Aftertreatment System

bTCDF	before Top Dead Center firing
CAC	Charge Air Cooler
CAD	Crank Angle Degree
CFD	Computational Fluid Dynamics
CHT	Conjugate Heat Transfer
CO	Carbon Monoxide
CO2	Carbon Dioxide
DI	Direct Injection
ECFM	Extended Coherent Flame Model
EU	European Union
FC	Fuel Cell
FSD	Flame Surface Density
GHG	Greenhouse Gases
GRI	Gas Research Institute
H2	Hydrogen
HC	Hydrocarbon
HRR	Apparent gross Heat Release Rate
ICE	Internal Combustion Engine
IMEPH	Indicated Mean Effective Pressure - High
ISSIM	Imposed Stretch Spark Ignition Model
ITNFS	Intermittent Turbulent Net Flame Stretch
KLSA	Knock Limited Spark Advance
Lambda	Relative air-to-fuel ratio
LFS	Laminar Flame Speed
MAPO	Maximum Amplitude Pressure Oscillation
MFB50	50% Mass Fuel Burned angle
NH3	Ammonia
NOx	Nitrogen Oxide
OC	Oxidation Catalyst
PISO	Pressure-Implicit with Splitting of Operators
PM	Particulate Matter
RANS	Reynolds-Averaged Navier-Stokes
RNG	Re-Normalisation Group
SCE	Single Cylinder Engine
SCR	Selective Catalytic Reduction

SI	Spark Ignition
SOI	Start Of Injection
TKI	Tabulated Kinetics for Ignition
TWC	Three-way Catalyst
VVT	Variable Valve Timing
Z	Injector Recess

445

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