INTRODUCTION

There is a lot of interest in using Brushless DC (BLDC) motors. Among the many advantages to a BLDC motor over a brushed DC motor, we can enumerate the following:

- The absence of the mechanical commutator allows higher speeds
- Brush performance limits the transient response in the DC motor
- With the DC motor you have to add the voltage drop in the brushes among motor losses
- Brush restrictions on reactance voltage of the armature constrains the length of core reducing the speed response and increasing the inertia for a specific torque
- The source of heating in the BLDC motor is in the stator, while in the DC motor it is in the rotor, therefore it is easier to dissipate heat in the BLDC
- Reduced audible and electromagnetic noise

There are many different types of brushless motors, and the differences are:

- The number of phases in the stator
- The number of poles in the rotor
- The position of the rotor and stator relative to each other (rotor spinning inside the stator vs. rotor spinning outside the stator)

This application note will discuss the three-phase motors. Two-phase motors are discussed in AN1178, "Intelligent Fan Control" (DS01178) while one-phase motors are a degenerated form of two-phase motors.

BACKGROUND

For a full description of three-phase brushless motors, read the application note "Brushless DC Motor Control Made Easy" (DS00857). AN857 is an excellent description of brushless motors and how to drive them with sensor feedback for commutation. With more advanced comparator modes and some new software techniques, this application note demonstrates an improved sensorless commutation strategy that has a much higher performance.

MOTOR CONTROL

BLDC motor control consists of two parts. Part 1 is commutating the motor at the most efficient rate. Part 2 is regulating the speed of the motor within defined parameters. The purpose of this application note is to illustrate an elegant sensorless technique that can be implemented on low-cost microcontrollers. All demonstration software will operate within an open loop with no speed regulation.

HARDWARE

The hardware for a BLDC system can be decomposed into the following sections:

- Motor Power Drivers,
- Rotor position detection using back EMF sensing
- Current Monitoring
- Microcontroller
- Microcontroller Power Supply
- Speed Set-point Input

Motor Power Driver

All BLDC motors require three half-bridge driver stages. Each stage controls one phase of the motor, as illustrated in Table 1 below:
FIGURE 1: MOTOR POWER DRIVER
In this sample schematic, there are three P-Channel MOSFETS controlling the current flow from +Vcc into each phase. There are also three N-Channel MOSFETS controlling the current flow from each phase into ground. Between the N-Channel MOSFETS and ground there is a small resistor (R7) that allows the current through the motor to be sensed as a small voltage proportional to the current. Three BJT transistors are used to drive the P channel MOSFETS. The N channel MOSFETS are driven from the PIC® MCU I/O pins. For small MOSFETS and/or bipolar transistor output stages, MOSFET drivers are not required.

**Back EMF Sensing**

In order to learn the current position of the rotor, it is critical that some form of rotor position sensing is included. In a sensored design, the rotor position sensing is provided by a series of Hall effect sensors that react to the permanent magnetics in the rotor. For sensorless designs, the rotor position is provided through knowledge of when a magnetic pole crosses the non-driven phase. During each commutation cycle, one phase is left undriven so it can sense the passing of a magnet on the rotor. The following circuit is self-biased and uses one comparator to perform the back EMF position sensing.

**FIGURE 2: BACK EMF SYSTEM**

Notice that the back EMF system consists of four elements with three of them repeating. The purpose of these elements is to detect the zero-crossing event even when the VDD voltages are changing. There are two easy ways to detect the middle of a sine wave. The first method is to make an inverted copy and compare them. The point where the two waves cross is the midpoint. The second method is to make a reduced amplitude copy and compare them. Again, the point where the two waves cross is the midpoint. The simplest method is the second, because it only requires a single comparator and a few resistors. Because this motor is a three-phase system, there are six zero-crossings per electrical rotation, the rising edge crossings and three falling edge crossings. When the commutation takes place, one of the three phase inputs is selected by writing to the CMxCON0 SFR in the microcontroller. To save cost, there is not a hardware filter on the comparator input, therefore, a noisy motor can cause false zero-crossings. The solution is a software-based majority detector. To simplify this majority detector, the polarity bit in the CMxCON0 register is toggled with each commutation. Toggling the comparator output polarity with each commutation event, makes all zero-crossings look like a falling edge on the comparator output.

**Current Monitoring**

Current monitoring is a nice feature for any motor control, but can be especially nice for BLDC motors. The benefits of current monitoring are:
- High current, No zero-crossings indicate a stuck rotor
- Over-current limiting
- Torque control

Adding current monitoring is a simple task of inserting a small sense resistor in the ground return path of the half-bridge switching elements. An op amp may be necessary if the sense resistor is very small.

The simplest possible over-current monitor is to simply reset the microcontroller and restart commutation. This method is shown in Figure 1. The current sense resistor is used to drive the base of Q7. This transistor will cause a Reset of the microcontroller, if external MCLR is enabled. If external MCLR is not enabled, then the software can be extended to poll this input and take corrective action if an over current condition is detected.

**SOFTWARE**

The software accomplishes the following tasks:
- Start the motor
- Detect zero-crossing
- Commutate the stator
- Adjust commutation rate to match motor speed

**Starting the motor**

Starting the motor is the trickiest part of sensorless drives. The simplest method to start the motor is to simply start commutating at a slow rate and low duty cycle. The commutating should "catch" the rotor and, at some point, the zero-crossing detector will begin to see crossings. Once zero-crossings can be measured, the rotor has begun rotating in sync with the commutation, and normal operation can begin. This method is very simple, but there are a few problems:
- The motor can spin erratically until sync is achieved.
- The motor can sync at a harmonic of the actual speed
- It can take a long time for the motor to start-up
To resolve these drawbacks, there are other methods that can be used to map the stalled position of the rotor and immediately start commutating from that point.

For many motors, the simple method of a time out on the zero-crossing forcing a commutation will result in satisfactory performance; therefore, this is the method for this application note.

**Zero-Crossing Detector**

The zero-crossing system consists of switching the inputs to a comparator synchronously with the commutation and monitoring the output of the comparator. The comparator output is filtered with a majority detector. This filter is table-driven and looks for a transition from mostly 1’s to mostly 0’s. Once the transition is detected, the commutation can take place.

**Zero-Crossing Majority Detector**

In a noiseless system, zero-crossing events can be determined by observing when the output of a comparator sensing the back EMF voltage transitions from one to zero. Switching high currents at high voltages introduces a tremendous amount of noise into the system (see Figure 3). Determining when a zero-crossing event occurs in such an environment requires some sort of filtering to mitigate the noise. Filtering with discrete components adds too much delay to be useful, especially at high motor speeds. Discrete filters also vary with temperature, which adds to the complexity of delay management. A better filter is one that has a predictable delay that does not vary with the environment.

A majority filter is one that can be implemented in software. Software filters have a predictable and fixed delay that is not affected by the environment. The filter uses a series of comparator output samples to detect a zero-crossing event. Zero-crossing is said to have occurred when most of the first half of the samples are ones and most of the last half of the samples are zeros. For a six-sample window, a zero-crossing event is detected when two or three of the first three samples are ones and two or three of the last three samples are zeros. Table 1 illustrates all the possible combinations that satisfy these criteria.
The Most Significant bit of each bit pattern is the first sample of the series. As each new sample is taken, it occupies the Least Significant bit after all other bits are shifted left to make room. The Most Significant bit is dropped as a result of the shift. In effect, the bit pattern moves left through the six-sample window.

The majority filter is implemented in software by the following bits as they move through the window. Consider a sample window that starts with all zeros. When a logic high sample is taken, it is shifted left into the filter sample window. The resulting total value in the window becomes 1. As new samples are taken, they are shifted into the window, moving the existing samples left. If the first sample is one, and all subsequent samples are zeros, the value in the window starts out as 1, then progresses to 2, 4, 8, 16, and finally 32, before it is shifted out and the window value returns to zero. The window value remains at zero until another logic high sample is taken. For each sample taken, the window value is first doubled and the logic level of the new sample is then added. For example, a window value that is 4 when a logic high sample is taken, becomes 8 plus 1 or 9. On the next sample, the 9 is then doubled by a left shift and the new sample is added, so that the result is either 18 or 19, depending on whether or not the new sample is a logic high.

At a first glance, one may think a majority filter can be constructed by using the sample window to address a look-up table. Addresses that match the majority criteria would return a zero-crossing indication flag from the table. This could work, except that some bit patterns will return multiple zero-crossing events as the pattern moves through the window. This could be solved by clearing the sample window after detecting an event. This has two problems: first, some patterns could never be reached and second, it takes time to clear the sample window.

For the first case, consider that pattern 60 will become either a pattern 56 or pattern 57 on the next sample, all of which will return the event flag. This suggests that there is a problem with the majority criteria table, and there is. Pattern 56 is actually a noiseless zero-crossing event and pattern 57 is a close second. With pattern 60 in the table, the real event pattern 56 cannot be reached. The simple solution is to remove pattern 60 from the table. This isn’t the only pattern with a problem. Pattern 28 will also become either pattern 56 or pattern 57 on the next sample. Pattern 28 also prevents pattern 56 from being reached. In fact, there are many other similar cases.

Table 2 illustrates all the event values with values that precede and follow the event. Event values that are either preceded or followed by another event value should be considered for removal. The removal decision is based on which value best represents the actual zero-crossing event. Removing redundant values from the table also prevents skewing the zero-crossing by inadvertent early detection of events. Events denoted by parentheses are covered by the preceding or following values denoted by an asterisk and, therefore, should be removed from the event table.
It may not be apparent why some event patterns are removed when one of the preceding values to that even is also removed. For example, event 50 has been removed because it is covered by the previous value 57. However, event 50 is not covered by the previous value 25, because that, too, has been removed. Event 25 was removed because it was covered by the previous event value 44 and non-event value 12. If event 25 remains in the table, it will trigger a false event after the previous value 12, therefore it must go. Consequently, non-event 12 will propagate through value 25 and trigger event 50, if value 50 remains in the table. For that reason, event 50 must go. Similar arguments apply for the removal of values 49, 48, 41, and 40.

The look-up table is constructed by placing an event flag indicator at each address corresponding to a zero-crossing event. The flag is a special table value which will be discussed later. By filling all other locations of the table with double the relative address of the location truncated to six bits, a simple algorithm can be generated to work through the table as each bit is sampled. The algorithm adds the sample bit to the contents, at the previous table address, to create the new table address. If that new location contains the special flag, then the zero-crossing has been detected and commutation action is taken.

The table contains 64 entries (addresses 0 through 63), since only six bits are used. The zero-crossing event flag is a value of 1. Table entries with the value 1 then signal a zero-crossing event and temporarily set the next look-up address to 1. This temporary address is cleared by the commutation routine so the sample window can start fresh looking for the next zero-crossing event. Table 3 illustrates the final majority filter table.

<table>
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<th>Table Contents</th>
<th>Table Address</th>
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<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Commutation Phase Angle

The ideal commutation time is when the rotor magnets are 30 degrees away from the last zero-crossing point (see Figure 4). Since it takes a bit of time to energize the coils, a better commutation angle is often slightly early. To keep the system very simple, this application note uses 50% of the time between zero-crossings as the commutation point. This time corresponds to 30 degrees. It works well with many small motors.

The phase angle is computed as follows:

- Compute the 16 element rolling average of the commutation time.
- Divide the rolling average by 2.

The average acts as a low pass filter and reduces jitter in the commutation timing. Excess jitter will increase current consumption and reduce the maximum speed.

Commutating

Commutating the motor is the simple task of writing values from the following tables into the comparator, CCP and PORT registers. The 8 entries in each table protect the system from a bad table index.

FIGURE 4: BLDC MOTOR WAVEFORM

Table 4 to 6 show the commutation sequence:
The use of the commutation tables dramatically simplifies the commutation task. Porting to different hardware requires that these tables be updated to reflect the hardware.

The configurable PWM and comparator are key elements to successful BLDC control with low-cost microcontrollers.
CONCLUSION

The combination of flexible microcontroller features and majority filtering in software enables a sensorless 3-phase BLDC control system to be realized on a low-cost microcontroller. This implementation is ideal for cost sensitive applications.
Appendix 1. Software

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MAIN.C

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/* */
/*====================================================================================*/
/* 16F690 BLDC Electronic Speed Control */
/* */
/* Author : Dieter Peter */
/* Company : Microchip Technology Inc. */
/* Version : 1.0 */
/* Date : 11/08/2007 */
/* */
/*====================================================================================*/

#include <htc.h>
#include "main.h"
define _690

#if define _690
__CONFIG (FCMDIS & IESODIS & BORDIS & UNPROTECT & MCLREN & PWRTEN & WDTDIS & INTIO);
#endif
```c
#ifdef _616
__CONFIG (OSC_SMHz & BORDIS & UNPROTECT & MCLREN & PWRTEN & WDTDIS & INTIO);
#endif

const unsigned char cCM2CON0[8]={0x00,0x93,0x81,0x90,0x83,0x91,0x80,0x00};
// !V_W V_V !V_U V_W !V_V V_U

const unsigned char cPORTA[8]={0x00,0x04,0x04,0x10,0x10,0x20,0x20,0x00};
// U_H U_H V_H V_H W_H W_H

// the low-side PWM-signal can be switched to the different I/O's either using PSTRCON, if available,
// or changing between single, full-bridge forward and full bridge reverse mode

const unsigned char cCCP1CON[8]={0x00,0xCC,0x4E,0x4E,0x0C,0x0C,0xCC,0x00};
// V_L W_L W_L U_L U_L V_L

const unsigned char cPSTRCON[8]={0x00,0x02,0x08,0x08,0x01,0x01,0x02,0x00};
// V_L W_L W_L U_L U_L V_L

// this is a simple majority filter for the BEMF-detection
const unsigned char cBEMF_FILTER[64]={ 00,02,04,06,08,10,12,14,16,18,20,22,24,26,28,30,
                                     32,34,36,38,40,42,44,46,48,50,52,54,56,58,60,62,
                                     00,02,04,06,08,10,12,14,16,18,01,22,01,26,28,30,
                                     32,34,36,38,01,42,44,46,01,01,01,54,56,58,60,62};

// general purpose variables
unsigned int adc_result;

// commutation parameters
signed char comm_state;
unsigned int comm_time;                     comm_done,comm_dir;
bit comm_done,comm_dir;

unsigned int pwm_demand;
unsigned char bemf_filter;

// COMMUTATION variables
unsigned int comm_time,comm_time_max,comm_timer;
signed int phase_delay_counter;
unsigned int phase_delay;
unsigned int phase_delay_filter=COMM_TIME_MAX<<3;
bit zc_detected;
bit rotor_locked;

void commutate(void);
static void interrupt interrupt_handler(void);
char read_adc(void);
char read_adc(void);

void main(void)
{
    OSCCON=INT8MHz; // configure for maximum speed.
    OPTION=OPTION_INIT;
    TRISA=TRISA_INIT;
    PORTA=PORTA_INIT; // PORTA used for Speed input
    // and high side commutation transis-
```
TRISC=TRISC_INIT;  // PORTC used for low side commutation
PORTC=PORTC_INIT;

comm_dir=0;    // spin direction control
CM2CON0=0x80;  // initial comparator settings

ANSEL=ANSEL_INIT;  // configure RA0 as analog input
ANSELH=ANSELH_INIT;  // configure PORTB analog inputs (off)

ADCON1 = ADCON1_INIT;  // Make ready the ADC
ADCON0 = ADCON0_INIT;  // point at AN0 (RA0), right justified, Clock / 16

comm_time_max=COMM_TIME_MAX;  // initialise maximum commutation time.
PR2=PR2_INIT;  // configure Timer 2
T2CON= T2CON_INIT;
pwm_demand=100;  // configure CCP module for PWM
CCP1CON=CCP1CON_INIT;

comm_state=1;  // ready to start commutating at state 1
TMR2IE=1;  // activate the Timer 2 interrupts
PEIE=1;
GIE=1;

while(1)
{
    if (comm_done&read_adc())  // if we have commutated & the ADC has finished.
    {
        pwm_demand = adc_result;// update the pwm demand value
        comm_done=0;  // clear the comm_done flag to wait for a commutation event.
    }
}

} // end main

static void interrupt
{
    interrupt_handler(void)
    {
        TMR2IF=0;  // clear the timer 2 interrupt
        T2CON=0x04;  // initialize the T2 control to turn off the postscaler (turned on by the commutation function)

        ++comm_time;  // update the commutation timer
        if(C2OUT) bemf_filter|=0b00000001;  // copy the C2 output to the bemf_filter index LSB
        bemf_filter=cBEMF_FILTER[bemf_filter];  // perform the filter table lookup
        if (bemf_filter&0b00000001) zc_detected=1;  // check for an ODD result
        if (zc_detected)  // zero cross has been detected so...
        {
            rotor_locked = 0;  // indicate that the rotor is free, and...
            if (!phase_delay_counter--)  // count down the phase to commutation.
            {
                commutate();  // commutate
            }
        }
    }
} // end interrupt_handler

Software

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if (comm_time>comm_time_max) // if the comm_timer reaches the maximum, then we have taken too long
    { // and we must commutate anyway..
        commutate();
        rotor_locked = 1; // the rotor could be locked (or at least we lost it)
    }

void commutate(void)
{
    T2CON=0x34; // blank filtering during commutation
    CCP1CON=CCP1CON[comm_state]; // lookup the CCP1CON state
    PORTA=PORTA[comm_state]; // lookup the PORTA state
    CM2CON0=CM2CON0[comm_state]; // lookup the CM2CON0 state
    phase_delay_filter+=comm_time; // perform a 32 point rolling average of comm_time
    phase_delay=phase_delay_filter>>5; // and set the phase_delay to the average
    phase_delay_filter-=phase_delay; // the phase_delay counter is the phase_delay/2
    phase_delay_counter=phase_delay>1; // this sets the commutation time to midway between zero crossings
    zc_detected=0; // clear our state variables
    bemf_filter=0;
    comm_time=0;
    comm_done=1;
    CCP1L=pwm_demand>>1; // update the PWM duty cycle
    if (comm_dir) // update the comm_state variable
    {
        if (++comm_state>6) // use comm_dir to specify the direction to
        {
            comm_state=1;
        }
    }
    else
    {
        CM2CON0^=0x10; // invert the polarity of the comparator if in reverse
        if (--comm_state==0)
        {
            comm_state=6;
        }
    }
} // end commutate

char read_adc(void)
{
    char result = 0;
    if(GODONE == 0)
    {
        result = 1;
        adc_result = ADRESH * 256 + ADRESL;
        GODONE = 1;
    }
    return result;
}
Main.h

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 *
 ******************************************************************************/

/*
 * 16F690 BLDC Electronic Speed Control
 *
 * Author : Dieter Peter
 * Company : Microchip Technology Inc.
 * Version : 1.0
 * Date : 11/08/2007
 *
 ******************************************************************************/

//OSCILLATOR
#define INT8MHz 0b01110000
#define OPTION_INIT 0b10001000

// PORTA (PORT)
#define TRISA_INIT 0b00000011
#define PORTA_INIT 0b00000000
#define TRISA_ERROR 0b11111111
#define PORTA_ERROR 0b11111111

// PORTB (PORT)
#define TRISB_INIT 0b00000000
#define PORTB_INIT 0b00000000
#define TRISB_ERROR 0b11111111
#define PORTB_ERROR 0b11111111

// PORTC (PORT)
#define TRISC_INIT 0b00001011
#define PORTC_INIT 0b00000000
#define TRISC_ERROR 0b11111111
#define PORTC_ERROR 0b11111111

// A/D AND COMPARATOR
#define CM1CON0_INIT 0b10000000
#define ANSEL_INIT 0b10110011
#define ANSELH_INIT 0b00000010
#define ADCON0_INIT 0b10000001
#define ADCON1_INIT 0b01010000
Appendix A

// PWM
#define CCP1CON_INIT 0b00001100
#define T2CON_INIT 0b00000100
#define PR2_INIT 0x7F // 64μS PWM period
// Maximum Commutation time for startup
#define COMM_TIME_MAX0x400
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