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A strategy to improve the structural performance of non-crimp fabric thin-ply laminates

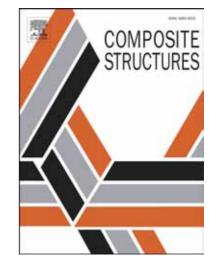
A. Arteiro, G. Catalanotti, J. Xavier, P. Linde, P.P. Camanho

 PII:
 S0263-8223(17)33909-0

 DOI:
 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compstruct.2017.11.072

 Reference:
 COST 9138

To appear in: *Composite Structures* 



Please cite this article as: Arteiro, A., Catalanotti, G., Xavier, J., Linde, P., Camanho, P.P., A strategy to improve the structural performance of non-crimp fabric thin-ply laminates, *Composite Structures* (2017), doi: https://doi.org/ 10.1016/j.compstruct.2017.11.072

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## ACCEPTED MANUSCRIPT

### A strategy to improve the structural performance of non-crimp fabric thin-ply laminates

A. Arteiro<sup>a,\*</sup>, G. Catalanotti<sup>b</sup>, J. Xavier<sup>c,d</sup>, P. Linde<sup>e</sup>, P.P. Camanho<sup>a,c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>DEMec, Faculdade de Engenharia, Universidade do Porto, Rua Dr. Roberto Frias, s/n, 4200-465 Porto, Portugal

<sup>b</sup>School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering, Queen's University Belfast, BT9 5AH, UK

<sup>c</sup>INEGI, Instituto de Ciência e Inovação em Engenharia Mecânica e Engenharia Industrial, Rua Dr. Roberto Frias, 400, 4200-465 Porto, Portugal

<sup>d</sup>CITAB, Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro, Engenharias I, Apartado 1013, 5001-801 Vila Real, Portugal

<sup>e</sup>AIRBUS Operations GmbH, Kreetslag 10, 21129 Hamburg, Germany

#### Abstract

The enhanced mechanical performance of thin-ply laminates results from their ability to delay the onset of damage typically observed in composite materials. However, in notched structures, subcritical damage growth causes beneficial stress redistributions in the vicinity of the notch, blunting the stress concentration. Precluding these damage mechanisms, as in thin-ply laminates, may potentially lead to inferior notched responses. To obviate this limitation of thin-ply laminates, a strategy based on the combination of standard grade  $0^{\circ}$ plies and thin transverse and off-axis plies is analysed in this paper. A detailed study of the effect of  $0^{\circ}$  ply blocking is carried out, with particular emphasis on the blunting mechanisms and notched response. Tests on scaled notched panels loaded in tension, with notch sizes between 6 mm and 30 mm, show that the combination of standard grade 0° ply blocks with thin transverse and off-axis plies promotes localised fibre-matrix splitting, which acts as an important notch blunting mechanism, while preventing matrix cracking and delamination. This results in an improved notched response and superior large damage capability. It is also shown that thicker  $0^{\circ}$  ply blocks provide higher stability in com-

\*Corresponding author. Tel.: +351 220414049.

Preprint submitted to Compos Struct

Email address: aarteiro@fe.up.pt (A. Arteiro)

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