AN1324

A Simple Sensor Interface Amplifier

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INTRODUCTION

Compensated semiconductor pressure sensors such as the MPX2000 family are relatively easy to interface with digital systems. With these sensors and the circuitry that is described here, pressure is translated into a 0.5 to 4.5 V output range that is directly compatible with Microcomputer A/D inputs. A description of an Evaluation Board and design considerations are presented as follows.

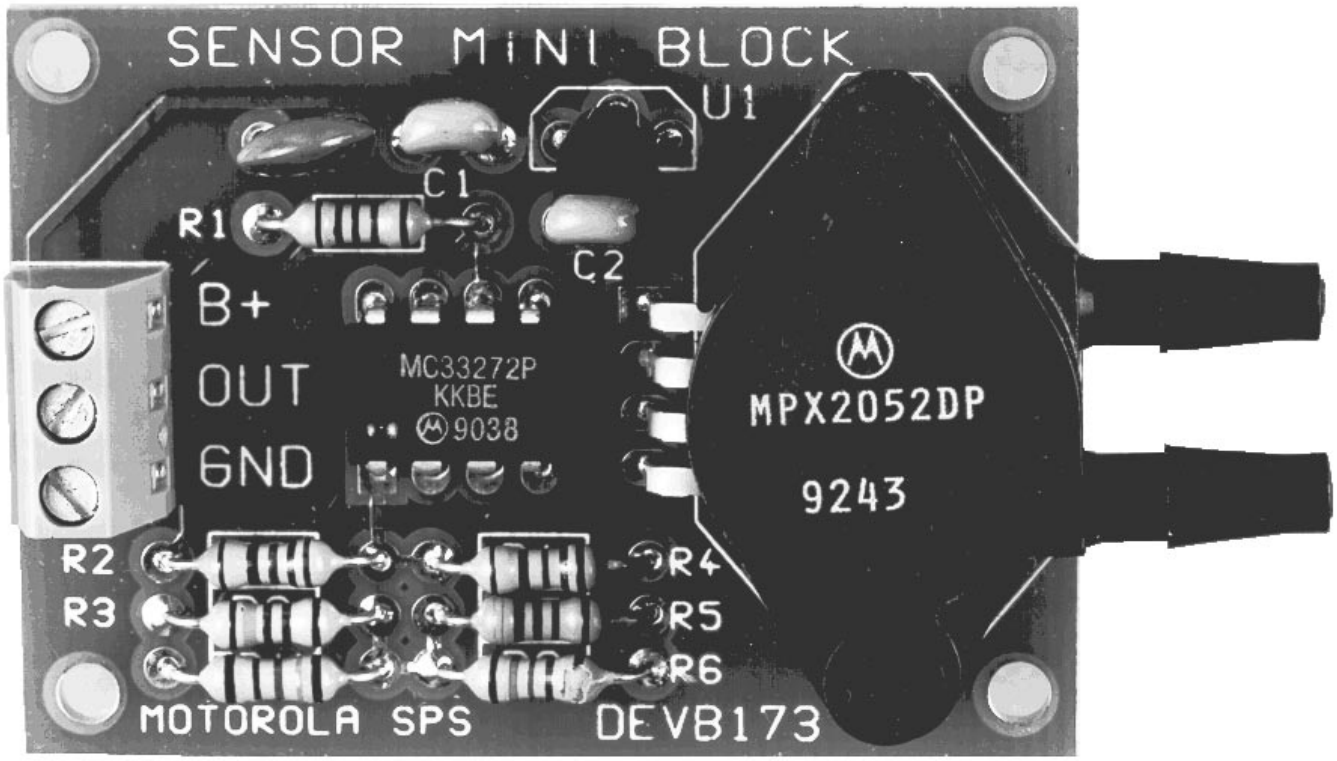

Figure 1. DEVB173 Sensor Building Block Evaluation Board

REV 1

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EVALUATION BOARD DESCRIPTION

A summary of the information required to use the Sensor Mini Block evaluation board, part number DEVB173, is presented as follows. A discussion of the design appears under the heading Design Considerations.

FUNCTION

The evaluation board shown in Figure 1 is designed to translate pressure, vacuum, or differential pressure into a single–ended, ground referenced voltage that is suitable for direct input to microcomputer A/D ports. It has two input ports. P1, the pressure port, is on the top side of the sensor and P2, a vacuum port, is on the bottom side. These ports can be supplied pressure on P1 or vacuum on P2, or a differential pressure between P1 and P2. Any of these sources will produce equivalent outputs.

The output is a ground referenced analog signal. It nominally supplies 0.5 V at zero pressure and 4.5 V at full scale. A zero adjustment has been made at the factory with trim resistor R7. Full scale output is approximately 4 V above the zero setting.

ELECTRICAL CHARACTERISTICS

The following electrical characteristics are included as a guide to operation.

Characteristic	Symbol	Min	Typ	Max	Units
Power Supply Voltage	B+	10	—	30	Volts
Full Scale Pressure	P_{FS}				kPa
MPX2010		—	—	10	
MPX2050		—	—	50	
MPX2100		—	—	100	
MPX2200		—	—	200	
MPX2700		—	—	700	
Overpressure	P_{MAX}	—	—	700	kPa
Full Scale Output	V_{FS}	—	4.5	—	Volts
Zero Pressure Offset	V_{OFF}	—	0.5	—	Volts
Sensitivity	S_{AOUT}	—	$4V/P_{FS}$	—	V/kPa
Quiescent Current	I_{CC}	—	25	—	mA

CONTENT

Board contents are described in the following parts list and schematic. A pin–by–pin circuit description follows in the next section.

Table 1. Parts List

Designator	Qty.	Description	Value	Vendor	Part
C1	1	Ceramic Capacitor	0.2 µF		
C2	1	Ceramic Capacitor	0.2 µF		
C3	1	Ceramic Capacitor	0.001 µF		
R1*	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	93.1 k 1%		
R2	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	750 1%		
R3	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	39.2 k 1%		
R4*	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	100 1%		
R5	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	1.33 k 1%		
R6	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	11 k 1%		
R7	1	1/4 Watt Film Resistor	Trim		
U1	1	Op Amp		Motorola	MC33272P
U2	1	8 V Regulator		Motorola	MC78L08ACP
XDCR1	1	Pressure Sensor		Motorola	MPX2100DP

* For MPX2010 Sensors R1 = 150 k & R4 = 61.9 ohms

PIN–BY–PIN DESCRIPTION

B+:

Input power is supplied at the B+ terminal. Minimum input voltage is 6.8 V and maximum is 30 V.

OUT:

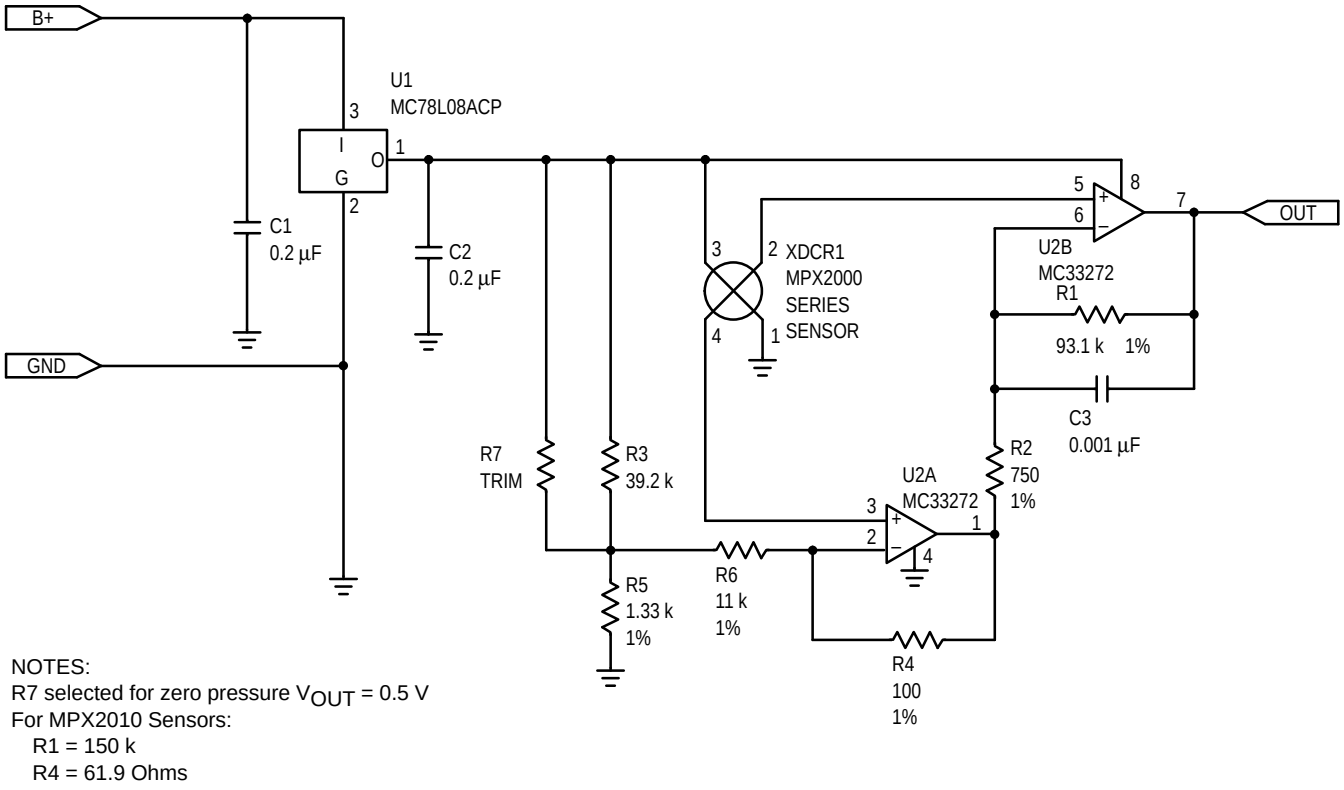
An analog output is supplied at the OUT terminal. The signal it provides is nominally 0.5 V at zero pressure and 4.5 V at full scale. This output is designed to be directly connected to a microcomputer A/D channel, such as one of the E ports on an MC68HC11.

GND:

The terminal labeled GND is intended for use as the power supply return. It is generally advisable to leave enough bare wire going into this terminal to conveniently provide a connection for instrumentation ground clips.

P1, P2:

Pressure and Vacuum ports P1 and P2 protrude from the sensor on the right side of the board. Pressure port P1 is on the top and vacuum port P2 is on the bottom. Neither port is labeled. Maximum safe pressure is 700 kPa.



NOTES:
R7 selected for zero pressure V_{OUT} = 0.5 V
For MPX2010 Sensors:
R1 = 150 k
R4 = 61.9 Ohms

Figure 2. Sensor Mini Block

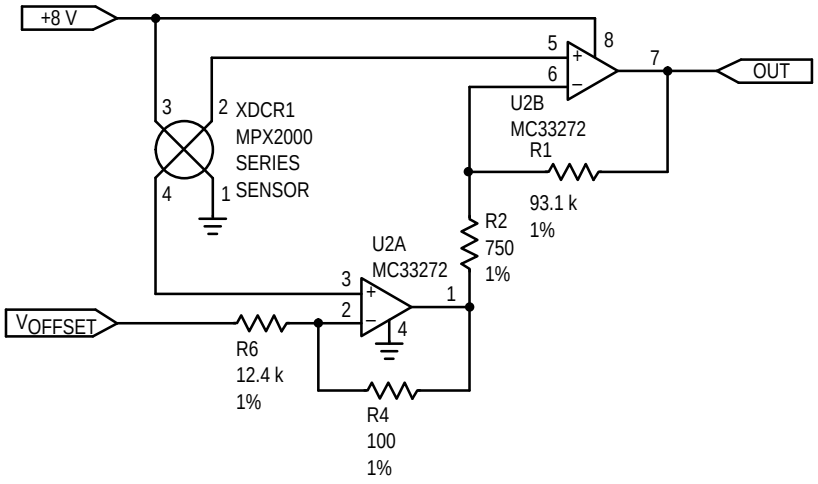


Figure 3. Simplified Schematic

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

When interfacing semiconductor pressure sensors to microcomputers, the design challenge is how to take a relatively small DC coupled differential signal and produce a ground referenced output that is suitable for driving A/D inputs. A very simple interface circuit that will do this job is shown in Figure 2. It uses one dual op amp and several resistors to amplify and level shift the sensor's output. To see how this amplifier works, let's simplify it in Figure 3, and assume V_{OFFSET} is zero. If the common mode voltage at pins 2 and 4 of the sensor is 4.0 V, then pin 2 of U2A and pin 6 of U2B are also at 4.0 V. This puts 4.0 V across R6. Assuming that the current in R4 is equal to the current in R6, 323 μA x 100 ohms produces a 32 mV drop across R4 which adds to the 4.0 V at pin 2. The output voltage at pin 1 of U2A is, therefore, 4.032 V. This puts 4.032 – 4.0 V across R2, producing 43 μA. The same current flowing through R1 again produces a voltage drop of 4.0 V, which sets the output at zero. Substituting a value for V_{OFFSET} other than zero into this calculation reveals that the zero pressure output voltage equals V_{OFFSET}. For this DC output voltage to be independent of the sensor's common mode voltage it is necessary to satisfy the condition that R1/R2 = R6/R4.

Gain can be determined by assuming a differential output at the sensor and going through the same calculation. To do this assume 100 mV of differential output, which puts pin 3 of U2A at 3.95 V, and pin 5 of U2B at 4.05 V. Therefore, 3.95 V is applied to R6, generating 319 μA. This current flowing through R4 produces 31.9 mV, placing pin 1 of U2A at 3950 mV + 31.9 mV = 3982 mV. The voltage across R2 is then 4050 mV – 3982 mV = 68 mV, which produces a current of 91 μA that flows into R1. The output voltage is then 4.05 V + (91 μA • 93.1 k) = 12.5 V. Dividing 12.5 V by the 100 mV input yields a gain of 125, which provides a 4 V span for 32 mV of full scale sensor output.

Returning to Figure 2, a 0.5 V V_{OFFSET} is generated by the divider consisting of R3, R5, and R7. To keep the input impedance looking into pin 2 of U2A at 12.4 k, R6 is chosen as 11 k. The divider impedance is then chosen to nominally be 1.4 k, providing a total of 12.4 k. For purposes of analysis, the complete circuit in Figure 2 is then equivalent to Figure 3 with a V_{OFFSET} input of 0.5 V.

The resulting 0.5 V to 4.5 V output from pin 7 of U2B is directly compatible with microprocessor A/D inputs. Over a zero to 50°C temperature range combined accuracy for the sensor and interface is ±5%.

APPLICATION

Using the Sensor Mini Block's analog output to provide pressure information to a microcomputer is very straightforward. The output voltage range which goes from 0.5 V at zero pressure to 4.5 V at full scale is designed to make optimum use of microcomputer A/D inputs. A direct connection from the evaluation board output to an A/D input is all that is required. Using the MC68HC11 as an example, the output is connected to any of the E ports, such as port E0.

CHANGING SENSORS

In order to change pressure ranges, MPX2050, MPX2100, MPX2200, and MPX2700 pressure sensors can be substituted directly for each other. When one of these sensors is substituted for another, the 4.5 V full scale output will remain the same and correspond to the new sensor's full scale pressure specification. For example, substituting an MPX2200 200 kPa sensor for an MPX2100 100 kPa unit will change the full scale output from 4.5 V at 100 kPa to 4.5 V at 200 kPa. To make this translation with an MPX2010 requires changing R1 from 93.1 k to 150 k and R4 from 100 ohms to 61.9 ohms. With R1 at 93.1 k and R4 at 100 ohms, full scale span for an MPX2010 is only 2.5 V, producing a nominal full scale output voltage of 3.0 V.

FURTHER SIMPLIFICATION

In non–demanding applications the 7 resistor topology that is shown in Figure 2 can be reduced to 5, by eliminating R6 and R7. Without R7 the zero pressure offset is untrimmed. However, in microprocessor based systems it is relatively easy to read the zero pressure offset voltage, store it, and calibrate in software. This can be done automatically when the unit powers up, or as a calibration procedure. R6 can be eliminated (reduced to zero ohms) by directly connecting the R3, R5 divider to pin 2. The output impedance of this divider then needs to be choosen such that its ratio with R4 = R1/R2, in other words [R3•R5/(R3+R5)]/R4 = R1/R2. Given the values in Figure 2, this would mean R3 = 200 k, R5 = 13.3 k, R6 = 0, and R7 is open. In an untrimmed system, there is no real disadvantage to doing this, provided that the ratios can be sufficiently matched with standard resistor values.

The other option is to eliminate R6 and trim R3 with R7. This situation is somewhat different. The trimming operation will throw the ratio off, and reduce common mode rejection. Typically several percent of any change in the sensor's common mode voltage will show up as an output error when this configuration is used.

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect to the sensor amplifier described here is its simplicity. The interface between an MPX2000 series sensor and a microcomputer A/D consists of one dual op amp and a few resistors. The result is a simple and inexpensive circuit that is capable of measuring pressure, vacuum or differential pressure.

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