The Smallest Non-Hamiltonian 3-Connected Cubic Planar Graphs Have 38 Vertices

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Communicated by the Managing Editors
Received September 17, 1986

We show that all 3-connected cubic planar graphs on 36 or fewer vertices are hamiltonian, thus extending results of Lederberg, Butler, Goodey, Wegner, Okamura, and Barnette. Furthermore, the only non-hamiltonian examples on 38 vertices which are not cyclically 4-connected are the six graphs which have been found by Lederberg, Barnette, and Bosák. © 1988 Academic Press, Inc.

1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout this paper, a C3CP is a cubic 3-connected planar graph, and $G$ is any non-hamiltonian C3CP of least order. Define $n = |V_G|$. Then, successively, Lederberg [12] ($n \geq 20$), Butler [5] and Goodey [8] ($n \geq 24$), Barnette and Wegner [2] ($n \geq 28$), and Okamura [15, 16] ($n \geq 34$) have established lower bounds on $n$. Various non-hamiltonian C3CPs on 38 vertices have been constructed by Lederberg, Barnette, and Bosák [4]. These are shown in Fig. 1.1.

In this paper we extend the method of Okamura to demonstrate that $n = 38$. Furthermore, the only non-hamiltonian C3CPs on 38 vertices with non-trivial 3-cuts are those shown in Fig. 1.1. We also discuss non-hamiltonian C3CPs satisfying stronger connectivity conditions, in particular those which are 4- or 5-cyclically connected.

Before proceeding we need some definitions. By a $k$-gon we mean a face of a planar graph bounded by $k$ edges. Note that a $k$-cycle is not...
necessarily a \( k \)-gon. By a \( k \)-cut we mean a set of \( k \) edges whose removal leaves the graph disconnected and of which no subset has that property. The two components formed by removal of a \( k \)-cut are called \( k \)-pieces. A \( k \)-cut is non-trivial if each of its \( k \)-pieces contains a cycle and essential if it is non-trivial and each of its \( k \)-pieces contains more than \( k \) vertices. It is non-essential if it is non-trivial and not essential. A cubic graph is cyclically \( k \)-connected if it has no non-trivial \( t \)-cuts for \( 0 \leq t \leq k - 1 \), and exactly cyclically \( k \)-connected if in addition it has at least one non-trivial \( k \)-cut.

We can now state our main results. The proofs can be found near the end of Section 3.

**Theorem 1.1.** Every C3CP with 36 or fewer vertices is hamiltonian.
FIGURE 1.2

Theorem 1.2. Let $H$ be a non-hamiltonian $C3CP$ with 38, 40, or 42 vertices. Then one of the following is true.

(a) $H$ is one of the six $C3CP$s on 38 vertices with 3-cuts shown in Fig. 1.1.

(b) $H$ has 40 or 42 vertices and has at least one 3-cut.

(c) $H$ has 42 vertices, is cyclically 4-connected, and has an essential 4-cut. Furthermore, for one such 4-cut, one of the 4-pieces is the first one shown in Fig. 1.2 and the other is obtainable from a cyclically 4-connected non-hamiltonian $C3CP$ on 38 vertices by the inverse of one of the operations shown in Fig. 1.3.

(d) $H$ is exactly cyclically 4-connected and has no essential 4-cuts.

Our method of proof is similar to that used by Okamura [16]. Faulkner and Younger [7] have established that $G$ is not cyclically 5-connected. In Section 2 we employ a variety of decomposition techniques, and some computation, to show that $G$ does not have 3-cuts or essential 4-cuts. In Section 3 we prove that any remaining possibilities for $G$ with $n \leq 36$ could be reduced to a smaller non-hamiltonian C3CP by applying one of Okamura's 15 reductions.

FIGURE 1.3
We will find the following lemmas very useful for the elimination of many subcases.

**Lemma 1.3.** Let the faces of a connected cubic planar graph be of size $k_1, k_2, ..., k_r$.

(a) It is not possible that exactly one of $k_1, k_2, ..., k_r$ be not divisible by 5.

(b) If exactly two of $k_1, k_2, ..., k_r$ are not divisible by 5 then those two faces are not adjacent.

**Proof.** See page 272 of Grünbaum [9].

**Lemma 1.4.** Let $H$ be a cyclically 4-connected C3CP with no essential 4-cut. Suppose that $F$ is a $k$-gon of $H$, and let $f_1, f_2, ..., f_k$ be the faces other than $F$ adjacent to each of the edges of $F$, in cyclic order. If no other face of $H$ is a 4-gon, then

$$|VH| \geq \sum_{i=1}^{k} (2f_i + \max(f_i - 5, 0)) - 6k.$$

**Proof.** Note that in the statement of the lemma we use $f_i$ to denote both a face and the size of that face. We will adopt this convention throughout the paper.

The faces $f_1, f_2, ..., f_k$ are distinct since otherwise $H$ is not 3-connected. Since $H$ is cyclically 4-connected, it has no 3-gons.

Define $l = \sum_{i=1}^{k} f_i - 4k$. Let $g_1, g_2, ..., g_i$ be the faces adjacent to the outside boundary of $f_1, f_2, ..., f_k$, in cyclic order. These faces are distinct, since $H$ has no essential 4-cuts.

For $f_i \geq 6$, let $g_{j_i}, g_{j_i+1}, ..., g_{j_i+m_i}$, where $m_i = f_i - 5$, be the faces adjacent to $f_i$ and to no other $f_j$. By assumption, $g_j \geq 5$ for $j_i \leq j \leq j_i + m_i$ so, by the connectivity of $H$, there is at least one vertex in $g_j$ which is no other $g_{j'}$. Hence

$$|VH| \geq 2k + 2l + \sum_{i=1}^{k} \max(m_i, 0)$$

$$= \sum_{i=1}^{k} (2f_i + \max(f_i - 5, 0)) - 6k.$$

2. **Computational Results**

In this section we describe the computations which form the initial foundations of our investigation. Essentially, they enable us to restrict our
TABLE I
Counts of Subclasses of TFC3CPs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>$n$</th>
<th>$n_3$</th>
<th>$n_{e4}$</th>
<th>$n_4$</th>
<th>$n_5$</th>
<th>$n_a$</th>
<th>$n_b$</th>
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Note. $n_3$, with 3-cuts; $n_{e4}$, with essential 4-cuts but no 3-cuts; $n_4$, with no essential 4-cuts or 3-cuts; $n_5$, cyclically 5-connected; $n_a$, with at least one a-edge; $n_b$, with at least one b-edge; $n_A$, with at least one $A$-edge.

attention to C3CPs without 3-cuts or essential 4-cuts and provide us with a complete list of small C3CPs with certain exceptional edges. We also take the opportunity to investigate non-hamiltonian C3CPs with essential 4-cuts, but no 3-cuts, for $n \leq 42$.

A TFC3CP is a C3CP without 3-gons. Our major computation was the generation of all TFC3CPs with up to 30 vertices and a certain subset of those on 32 vertices. The method used was that of Mohar [14], in conjunction with the graph isomorphism system described by McKay [13]. The numbers of TFC3CPs found, under isomorphism as abstract graphs, are summarized in Table I.

Following Bosák [3], an $a$-edge is an edge which is present in every hamiltonian cycle, while a $b$-edge is absent from every hamiltonian cycle. We further define an $A$-edge to be an $a$-edge $x$ in C3CP $H$ whose image $x$ is an $a$-edge in Flip($x$, $H$). The latter is defined in Fig. 2.1.

![Figure 2.1](image-url)
Figure 2.2

Figure 2.3
The unique TFC3CP on 16 vertices with $a$-edges is shown in Fig. 2.2. The eight TFC3CPs on 24 or 26 vertices with $b$-edges are shown in Fig. 2.3. One of the six TFC3CPs on 24 vertices with an $A$-edge is shown in Fig. 2.4. In each case the edges with the required property are those drawn bold.

We now consider non-hamiltonian C3CPs with 3-cuts. It was shown by Butler [6] that, if any minimal non-hamiltonian C3CP $H$ has a 3-cut, then it has 38 vertices. The principal technique used by Butler was to separate $H$ into two smaller C3CPs at the 3-cut, as shown in Fig. 2.5.

Our computations enable us to prove the following somewhat stronger theorem.

**Theorem 2.1.** Let $H$ be a non-hamiltonian C3CP with a 3-cut and at most 38 vertices. Separate $H$ into two parts as in Fig. 2.5. Then either $H_1$ or $H_2$ is non-hamiltonian, or $H$ is one of the six non-hamiltonian C3CPs on 38 vertices shown in Fig. 1.1.

**Proof.** Suppose that $H_1$ and $H_2$ are hamiltonian. Then, as in [6], one of the pairs $\{x', x''\}$, $\{y', y''\}$, and $\{z', z''\}$ consists of an $a$-edge and a
b-edge. It is clear that a minimal C3CP with an a-edge cannot contain a 3-gon, since otherwise the reduction shown in Fig. 2.6 would produce a smaller C3CP with an a-edge.

Similarly, a minimal C3CP with a b-edge cannot contain a 3-gon. It follows from Table I that in each case the minimal C3CPs are unique and are those shown in Figs. 2.2 and 2.3. Joining them together in every possible manner, we find the six non-isomorphic C3CPs of Fig. 1.1. We note that these examples were first found by Lederberg, Barnette, and Bosák, and that the representation shown in Fig. 1.1 is due to Bosák [4].

We now turn to cyclically 4-connected C3CPs with essential 4-cuts. Following Butler [6], we can separate such a graph at an essential 4-cut into two 4-pieces and reassemble these into cubic graphs as in Fig. 2.7. The following lemma is proved in [6].

**Lemma 2.1.** Suppose $L$, $L'$, $R$, and $R'$ are hamiltonian but $H$ is not hamiltonian. Then

**Figure 2.7**
(a) at least one of \( l \) and \( r' \), and one of \( l' \) and \( r \), is an \( a \)-edge, and
(b) at least one of \( L \) and \( L' \), and one of \( R \) and \( R' \), is cyclically 4-connected.

Lemma 2.1 enables us to greatly simplify the search for a non-hamiltonian cyclically 4-connected C3CP \( H \) with an essential 4-cut. Choose the essential 4-cut to minimize \( |VL| \). Then, if \( |VG| \leq 44 \), there are three possibilities:

1. Either \( R \) or \( R' \) is non-hamiltonian.
2. One of \( l \) and \( l' \) is an \( a \)-edge and one of \( L \) and \( L' \) is cyclically 4-connected. Similarly one of \( r \) and \( r' \) is an \( a \)-edge and one of \( R \) and \( R' \) is cyclically 4-connected.
3. \( r \) and \( r' \) are \( A \)-edges and one of \( R \) and \( R' \) is cyclically 4-connected.

As stated earlier, we have generated all TFC3CPs with at most 30 vertices. By removing appropriate edges from them, we have found all possible 4-pieces of the form required for possibility (2) to 28 vertices and all of the possible right 4-pieces required for possibility (3) to 28 vertices. All of the latter possible 4-pieces on 30 vertices were also found, by generating just those 32-vertex TFC3CPs which were needed. By joining together 4-pieces in the manner required for possibilities (2) and (3), we obtained the following theorem.

**Theorem 2.2.** Let \( H \) be a non-hamiltonian C3CP which is cyclically 4-connected but has an essential 4-cut. Separate \( H \) into two 4-pieces \( P_1 \) and \( P_2 \) at an essential 4-cut so that \( |VP_1| \) is minimized. If \( |VH| \leq 42 \) then one of the following is true.

(a) \( P_1 \) is one of the two 4-pieces of Fig. 1.2, and one of the C3CPs formed from \( P_2 \) as shown in Fig. 1.3 is non-hamiltonian.
(b) \( H \) is one of the two non-hamiltonian C3CPs on 42 vertices shown in Fig. 2.8.
Proof. The only possibilities for $P_1$ which have 10 or fewer vertices are those shown in Fig. 1.2. All other small 4-pieces are either not minimal or have 3-cuts which necessarily are also 3-cuts in any C3CP formed from them by joining with another 4-piece. Furthermore, if $P_1$ is one of these two, and each of the two C3CPs formable from $P_2$ as in Fig. 1.3 have hamiltonian cycles, then at least one of those cycles can be extended to a hamiltonian cycle in $H$.

If $|VP_1| \geq 12$, then $|VP_2| \leq 30$. All the possibilities are then within the limits of our computations. The only non-hamiltonian C3CPs found either had 3-cuts or were isomorphic to one of those shown in Fig. 2.8.

The first graph in Fig. 2.8 was found by Faulkner and Younger [7]. The second is new. We should note here that [7] appears to describe a computer search which should have found both the graphs in Fig. 2.8. However, a more careful reading of [7] indicates that the search on 42 vertices was not intended to be complete.

The only other known non-hamiltonian cyclically 4-connected C3CP on 42 or fewer vertices was found by Grünbaum [9] and appears in Fig. 2.9. It has 42 vertices and only non-essential 4-cuts.

The smallest known non-hamiltonian cyclically 5-connected C3CP has 44 vertices and appears in Fig. 2.10. It is due to Tutte [10]. The minimality has been established by Faulkner and Younger [7], but the uniqueness remains open.
3. PROOFS OF THE MAIN RESULTS

We give a sequence of lemmas to facilitate the proofs of Theorems 1.1 and 1.2. Many details of the proofs have been omitted in the interests of space. A reader interested in the whole story can find it in [11].

Throughout this section $G$ is a minimal non-hamiltonian C3CP with 36 or fewer vertices. From Theorems 2.1 and 2.2, we know that $G$ has no 3-cuts or essential 4-cuts, and from [7] we know that $G$ is not cyclically 5-connected.

**Lemma 3.1.** $G$ cannot contain adjacent 4-gons.

![Figure 3.1](image-url)
**Lemma 3.2.** $G$ cannot contain a $k$-piece as illustrated in Fig. 3.1.

**Proof.** The proof is essentially that of Okamura [16] except where the asterisked edges correspond to $b$-edges of the reduced graph $G'$, and $G'$ is either one of the graphs of Fig. 2.3 or the graph B24.1 with one vertex expanded to a 3-gon. This gives a few hundred exceptional cases which can be examined separately. 

**Corollary 3.3.** Each 7-gon or 8-gon of $G$ is adjacent to at most two 4-gons.

**Corollary 3.4.** Each 4-gon of $G$ is adjacent to at least two $k$-gons with $k \geq 7$.

**Lemma 3.5.** Let $G$ be a minimal non-hamiltonian 3-connected cubic planar graph. Let $R$ be a cycle in $G$ which contains at least five faces in its interior. Then if there is a 4-gon in the interior of $R$ there is at least one $k$-gon, for $k \geq 6$, in the interior of $R$.

**Proof.** Suppose the interior of $R$ contains no $k$-gon for $k \geq 6$. By Corollary 3.4 we have the three configurations of Fig. 3.2. By Lemma 3.2(k), $a$, $b$, $c$, and $c'$ must all be 4-gons. Then Fig. 3.2(iii) contradicts Lemma 3.2(m).

If $a = 4$, then the interior of $R$ contains only four faces, in contradiction to the hypothesis of the lemma. If $b = 4$, then it must be adjacent to a 4-gon or a 5-gon, but this contradicts Lemma 3.1 and Lemma 3.2(m). Hence the lemma follows.

**Lemma 3.6.** Let $G$ be a minimal non-hamiltonian 3-connected cubic planar graph. Let $R$ be a cycle in $G$ which contains at least five faces in its interior. If $R$ contains at least one 4-gon and exactly one $k$-gon, for $k \geq 6$, in its interior, then $G$ contains one of the configurations of Fig. 3.3.

**Proof.** This result follows via a similar argument.
We now do some elementary counting. If $p_k$ is the number of $k$-gons of $G$, then the Euler polyhedral formula yields

$$2p_4 + p_5 = 12 + \sum_{k \geq 7} (k - 6) p_k. \quad (1)$$

Further,

$$\sum_{k \geq 4} = \begin{cases} 19, & \text{for } n = 34, \\ 20, & \text{for } n = 36. \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

Combining (1) and (2) gives

$$p_4 = p_6 + \sum_{k \geq 7} (k - 5) p_k - \begin{cases} 7, & \text{for } n = 34, \\ 8, & \text{for } n = 36. \end{cases} \quad (3)$$
By Lemma 3.1, every $k$-gon for $k \geq 9$ is adjacent to at most $\lfloor k/2 \rfloor$ 4-gons. Corollary 3.3 and 3.4 then give

$$2p_4 \leq 2p_7 + 2p_8 + \sum_{k \geq 9} \lfloor k/2 \rfloor p_k.$$  \hspace{1cm} (4)

Combining (3) and (4) gives

$$p_6 + p_7 + \sum_{k \geq 8} 2p_k \leq \begin{cases} 7, & \text{for } n = 34, \\ 8, & \text{for } n = 36. \end{cases}$$  \hspace{1cm} (5)

**Lemma 3.7.** $G$ contains no 4-gon adjacent to a 6-gon.

**Proof.** The techniques are again those of the corresponding result in [16]. There are many more cases to consider here and it is often useful to employ Lemma 3.5 or 3.6.  

**Lemma 3.8.** $G$ contains a 4-gon adjacent to a 5-gon.

**Theorem 3.9.** All 3-connected cubic planar graphs of order 34 or 36 are hamiltonian.

**Proof.** The proof here corresponds to that of Theorem 1 in [16] but there are many more cases to be dealt with. Those cases which are not straightforward are dealt with by Lemmas 1.3, 1.4, 3.5, or 3.6.

**Proof of Theorem 1.1.** Suppose $G$ is a minimal non-hamiltonian C3CP with 36 or fewer vertices. By Okamura [16], $|V| \geq 34$. $G$ is cyclically 4-connected by Theorem 2.1 and has no essential 4-cuts by Theorem 2.2. It is not cyclically 5-connected by Faulkner and Younger [7]. The nonexistence of $G$ now follows from Theorem 3.9.

**Proof of Theorem 1.2.** This follows from Theorems 2.1, 2.2, and 1.1. In part (c), the use of the C3CPs of Fig. 2.6 is excluded by the fact that they each have two disjoint 3-cuts, one of which must remain in $H$.

Finally, we note some problems which this paper does not solve.

(a) What is the smallest size of a cyclically 4-connected non-hamiltonian C3CP? Three examples are known on 42 vertices (Figs. 2.8 and 2.9) but the possibilities 38 and 40 remain open.

(b) Is the minimal (44 vertex) non-hamiltonian cyclically 5-connected C3CP of Fig. 2.10 unique? This question can probably be answered by direct computation.
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We thank Joan McKay for the considerable effort required to compose the more than 50 figures required for this paper and the technical report version [11].

Note Added in Proof. A recent paper of Barnette [1] demonstrates that there is no non-Hamiltonian C3CP on 34 vertices. The methods used are not dissimilar to our own.

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Printed by Catherine Press, Ltd., Tempelhof 41, B-8000 Brugge, Belgium
Erratum

Volume 45, Number 3 (1988), in the article “The Smallest Non-Hamiltonian 3-Connected Cubic Planar Graphs Have 38 Vertices,” by D. A. Holton and B. D. McKay, pages 305–319: On page 307, Theorem 1.2, which classifies the non-hamiltonian 3-connected cubic planar graphs on 38, 40 or 42 vertices, is missing one case. In accordance with Theorem 2.2(b), it is necessary to add the possibility

(e) $H$ is one of the two graphs drawn in Fig. 2.8.

We also believe that we have answers to the two open problems stated on page 318. These will be published in due course.