

MIRROR REFLECTIVE ELEMENT AND METHOD OF FORMING SAME  
CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] The present application is a division of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/709,434, filed May 5, 2004, now U.S. Pat. No. 7,420,756, which claims the benefit of U.S. provisional application, Ser. No. 60/471,872, filed May 20, 2003, which is hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to rearview mirror elements for a rearview mirror assembly of a vehicle and, more particularly, to exterior rearview mirror elements comprising multi-radius reflective elements.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Typically, mirror reflective elements are formed of glass and have a reflective coating deposited thereon, such as via vacuum deposition or wet chemical silvering or the like, such as on a silver line, such as described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,737,188, which is hereby incorporated herein by reference. Polymeric reflective elements are also known, such as are described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,601,960; 6,409,354; 4,944,581; 4,385,804; 4,193,668; 4,666,264; and 5,483,386, which are hereby incorporated herein by reference. For such polymeric mirror reflective elements, the need exists for a hard coat or surface on the first or outer or exterior surface of the element which is contacted by the exterior elements, such as rain, road debris, or the like, or contacted, for example, by a person scraping ice or wiping snow or condensation off the mirror element outer surface, such as during winter. A variety of hard coats have been proposed in the art, typically applied by dip coating or vacuum deposition techniques. However, a need exists for an automotive mirror reflective element which has the properties of plastic (i.e., a specific gravity roughly half that of glass), and which has a glass-like exterior surface.

[0004] Also, exterior rearview mirror reflective elements may be aspheric or multi-radius, and may typically have a less curved or substantially flat (around 2000 mm radius or thereabouts) inboard portion or surface at the inboard side of the reflective element (i.e., closer to the side body of the vehicle when the mirror assembly is mounted to the vehicle), and a more curved multi-radius portion or surface at the outboard side of the reflective element (i.e., further from

the side body of the vehicle when the mirror assembly is mounted to the vehicle), in order to provide an extended field of view. It is typically desirable to have the reflective elements or substrates of such exterior mirror elements to be formed of a glass material because glass material typically provides an enhanced scratch resistance over conventional optical resins and the like.

[0005] Therefore, there is a need in the art for a mirror reflective element that overcomes the shortcomings of the prior art elements and substrates.

#### SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The present invention provides a molded wide angle or multi-radius substrate for a reflective element. The molded substrate comprises a polymeric optical resin transparent material and has a curved exterior surface, which may have a less curved/flatter or substantially flat inboard portion or surface and a more curved outboard portion or surface. The molded substrate may have an anti-abrasion film or layer, such as an ultrathin glass film, applied over the exterior surface or first surface to provide substantial protection against scratches occurring to the molded substrate. The inner surface or second surface of the reflective element substrate may have a reflective coating or layer, such as a polymeric reflective film, laminated or adhered or otherwise applied thereto.

[0007] According to an aspect of the present invention, a wide angle reflective element for a mirror assembly for a vehicle includes a wide angle substrate having an exterior surface and a glass film disposed at the exterior surface. The exterior surface of the substrate has a less curved inboard portion or surface and a more curved outboard portion or surface. The substrate comprises a polymeric resin material. The glass film is adapted to substantially conform to the exterior surface of the wide angle substrate. The glass film comprises a glass material and has a thickness of less than approximately 0.8 mm.

[0008] According to another aspect of the present invention, a reflective element for a mirror assembly for a vehicle comprises a substrate having an exterior surface, and an anti-abrasion film applied to the exterior surface. The substrate comprises a polymeric resin material, such as a transparent optical polymeric resin material. The anti-abrasion film preferably comprises a glass material (such as a soda lime glass or a borosilicate or the like) and has a thickness of less than approximately 0.8 mm, and is flexible to conform to the exterior surface.

- [0009] The substrate may be cut from a strip or sheet of molded or extruded or cast substrate material (or less preferably, may be cut from an injected molded strip or sheet). The flexible glass film may be unrolled from a reel or roll and applied to the exterior surface of the elongated strip or sheet of substrate material. The substrate, including the glass film or layer, may then be cut or otherwise formed from the elongated strip or sheet.
- [0010] The substrate may comprise a wide angle substrate and/or may comprise a multi-radius exterior surface having a less curved inboard portion or surface and a more curved outboard portion or surface.
- [0011] A reflective film or layer may be applied to the inner surface or side of the substrate or strip opposite the exterior surface. The reflective film may comprise a polymeric reflective film laminated or otherwise adhered or applied to the inner side of the substrate or strip. The reflective film may comprise an all polymer-thin-film multilayer, high reflective mirror film comprising multiple coextrusion of many plastic layers to form a highly reflective mirror film.
- [0012] Optionally, a reflective film or layer may be applied to the exterior surface of the substrate or sheet or strip, and the glass film or layer or sheet may be applied over the reflective film layer. In such an application, the substrate acts as a support or backing plate for the reflective film or layer and the glass film or layer, whereby optical clarity / transparency of the substrate material is not necessary.
- [0013] According to another aspect of the present invention, a method for forming a reflective element substrate for a mirror assembly of a vehicle comprises generally continuously forming an elongated strip or sheet of substrate material and applying a substantially transparent functional film, such as an anti-abrasion film or a hydrophilic film or a hydrophobic film or the like, to a surface of the elongated strip sheet. The substrate material may comprise a transparent optical polymeric resin. The functional film is preferably unrolled from a reel or roll of film and applied to the surface of the elongated strip or sheet generally continuously as the strip or sheet is formed or extruded or cast or molded. Preferably, multiple mirror element shapes or mirror element substrates may be cut or otherwise formed from the elongated sheet after the functional film is applied to the surface of the strip or sheet.
- [0014] The functional or anti-abrasion film may comprise an ultrathin glass material which is sufficiently flexible to be provided in a reel or roll (or in a sheet that is flexible and conformable to a bent substrate). The substrates may be formed with a wide angle exterior surface or a multi-

radius exterior surface. The anti-abrasion film may be sufficiently flexible to conform to the wide angle or multi-radius or curved exterior surface.

[0015] A reflective film, such as a polymeric reflective film or the like, may be applied to the opposite surface of the substrate or sheet or strip. The reflective film may be sufficiently flexible to be provided in a reel or roll form (or in a sheet that is flexible and conformable to a bent substrate) for unrolling the reflective film as the film is generally continuously applied to the surface of the generally continuously formed sheet or strip.

[0016] Therefore, the present invention provides a molded wide angle or multi-radius single substrate for a rearview mirror assembly which has an anti-abrasion or anti-scratch film or layer applied to the curved, wide angle or multi-radius exterior surface of the substrate. The anti-abrasion film preferably comprises an ultrathin glass film or sheet to provide enhanced scratch resistance. The molded substrate may have a reflective film or layer laminated or applied to the inner surface opposite the exterior surface.

[0017] These and other objects, advantages, purposes and features of the present invention will become apparent upon review of the following specification in conjunction with the drawings.

#### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0018] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an exterior rearview mirror assembly in accordance with the present invention;

[0019] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of a wide angle or multi-radius reflective element in accordance with the present invention;

[0020] FIG. 3 is a sectional view of the wide angle or multi-radius reflective element taken along the line III-III in FIG. 2;

[0021] FIG. 4 is a sectional view similar to FIG. 3, showing a wide angle or multi-radius reflective element in accordance with the present invention with a reflective film or layer applied to the exterior surface of the element and an anti-abrasion film or layer applied over the reflective film or layer;

[0022] FIG. 5 is a diagram showing the extruding, coating and cutting processes for manufacturing a prismatic mirror reflective element in accordance with the present invention;

[0023] FIG. 5A is an elevation of the extruder of FIG. 5, showing the wedge shape of the extruded strip and reflective element substrate;

[0024] FIG. 6 is a plan view of the extruded strip showing the cut out shapes of the reflective element cut from the extruded strip;

[0025] FIG. 7 is a sectional view of the reflective element formed by the process shown in FIG. 5; and

[0026] FIG. 8 is a diagram showing an alternate process for manufacturing a prismatic mirror reflective element in accordance with the present invention, where a strip of substrate material is cast and formed via a caster and float section.

#### DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0027] Referring now to the drawings and the illustrative embodiments depicted therein, an exterior rearview mirror assembly 10 includes a reflective element 12 mounted at a casing 14, which is mounted at an exterior portion of a vehicle 16 (FIG. 1). Reflective element 12 may provide an enhanced field of view or wide angle field of view to a driver or occupant of the vehicle and may comprise a single reflective element substrate 18 having an inner surface 18a and an opposite exterior surface 18b (FIGS. 2 and 3). The exterior surface 18b comprises a less curved or substantially flat inboard portion or surface 18c and a more curved outboard portion or surface 18d, as discussed below. The substrate 18 may have an anti-abrasion coating or layer or film 20, such as an ultrathin glass coating or layer or film, laminated or deposited or otherwise applied to the exterior surface 18b, and may have a reflective coating or layer 22 laminated or applied to the inner surface 18a, as also discussed below. Aspects of the reflective element of the present invention may be suitable for use in a reflective element for an exterior rearview mirror assembly (as shown in FIG. 1) and/or a reflective element for an interior rearview mirror assembly (not shown).

[0028] Reflective element 12 may comprise an aspheric or multi-radius or wide angle single element reflective element substrate. The reflective element 12 may provide a field of view similar to the plano-auxiliary reflective element assembly disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,522,451 and 6,717,712, which are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

[0029] The substrate 18 of the reflective element 12 of the present invention may be formed (such as by casting, extrusion or injection molding) of a polymeric optical resin material, such as an acrylic or polycarbonate resin, a polyolefin, a cyclic olefin copolymer, such as a COC resin known as "TOPAS" and available from Ticona of Summit, NJ (such as a resin of the type described in U.S. pat. application, Ser. No. 09/946,228, filed Sep. 5, 2001 for IMPROVED

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