# Pressure Tank Report

This report provides an explanation of the calculations and measurements related to the range performance of the pressure tank gun currently under development.

# Prerequisite to the report

We are developing a water gun designed to achieve a minimum range of six meters. To meet this requirement, a commercial pump has been acquired and is currently being tested by Tolga and Nikita. In parallel, we are exploring alternative propulsion methods, including a reverse bottle rocket concept, where the bottle remains stationary while the water is expelled.

Our target is to pressurize the bottles to 50 PSI, which, based on Radu’s calculations, would result in an estimated exit velocity of 22 m/s. These calculations can be found below:

Et billede, der indeholder tekst, håndskrift, blæk/sværte, papir

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

# First and second try

In our initial attempt, we constructed the system similarly to a conventional bottle rocket, where components such as the valve and the one-way pressurization valve were glued directly to the bottle.

Below are images of the setup, along with a brief explanation of why this approach was unsuccessful:

Et billede, der indeholder maskine, Metalarbejde, bore/bor, Maskinværktøj

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

Et billede, der indeholder værktøj, person, Maskinværktøj, jord

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The concept was sound, but the execution revealed some issues. The assembly was able to withstand pressure up to approximately 10 PSI; however, beyond that point, the glue securing the release valve failed, causing it to detach from the cap.

This failure occurred because the adhesive does not bond effectively to "fatty plastics" such as polypropylene (PP), which was used for the valve components. In contrast, polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which makes up the main body of the bottle, is not considered a fatty plastic and allowed for a stronger adhesive bond. As a result, the one-way valve held securely, while the release valve did not.

To address this issue, we redesigned the system so that all glued components were attached only to the PET bottle material. The revised design is shown below:



Et billede, der indeholder person, indendørs, blender, Laboratorieudstyr

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

This revised approach showed slight improvement, managing to withstand up to 12 PSI before the glue once again failed, resulting in a sudden release of water. While this was a step forward, it remained far from a reliable solution.

To explore more robust alternatives, we began brainstorming unconventional solutions. One idea involved fabricating a custom steel pressure tank through welding. However, commercially available steel tanks were generally too heavy—often exceeding our 11 kg weight limit—and featured unnecessarily large capacities for our intended use.

As a result, we began investigating alternative types of pressure tanks:

# Pressure tanks made from PVC pipe.

We drew inspiration from a variety of sources, focusing in particular on projects where others had successfully stored between 80 and 120 PSI in air cannons—systems with designs conceptually similar to our own. These examples provided valuable insights into feasible construction methods and material choices.

The primary reference we followed was a YouTube video that served as a practical guide for our design approach, which can be found here:

Et billede, der indeholder cylinder, indendørs, lampe, gulv

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvH9WHNxvj8>

Unfortunately, we were unable to construct this type of pressure tank before identifying new and potentially more effective design alternatives. Additionally, due to the university’s strict safety regulations—particularly those concerning the use of pressurized components—we were not permitted to glue end caps onto the pressure tubes, as this posed a risk of failure and potential injury.

As a result, we decided to continue exploring alternative solutions that align with both our performance requirements and safety constraints.

# 3D printed tank

Initially, we did not believe a 3D-printed pressure tank would be a viable option. In general, 3D-printed components are not considered watertight—or gas-tight—due to the presence of small gaps and layer imperfections inherent in the printing process. As a result, we dismissed this solution early on.

However, our perspective changed after discovering the following video, which demonstrated a successful implementation of a functional 3D-printed pressure vessel:

Et billede, der indeholder tekst, skærmbillede, software, Multimediesoftware

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZB6VbkeYrkw>

The video demonstrated that there is indeed significant potential for a 3D-printed pressure vessel to function effectively. However, one of the key limitations highlighted in the project was the inability to achieve a fully leak-proof design.

Based on these findings, we began investigating alternative methods and materials that could address this issue while still allowing us to pursue the 3D-printed tank concept.

Et billede, der indeholder apparat/anordning, Måleinstrument, måler, jord

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

The video showcased a similar pressure tank design that achieved a leak-free seal and was fabricated using ABS plastic rather than PLA. The tank was also vapor-smoothed with acetone to improve surface integrity and sealing. While vapor smoothing using a controlled acetone chamber is not feasible within school facilities, a more practical approach—brushing acetone directly onto the surface—appears to be a workable alternative.

To evaluate this approach, we began by printing a small-scale prototype. Tobias 3D printed the initial model using his personal printer and mounted the necessary components, including a one-way valve and a release valve. Despite noticeable leakage, the design was able to hold pressure up to 100 PSI. Further testing beyond this point was avoided for safety reasons.

Following this initial success, we chose to print an improved version with increased structural integrity. The original print featured only two outer walls, a 30% infill, and two inner walls, which left us with limited confidence in its durability during higher-pressure testing. To address this, we reprinted the tank with a total of twelve perimeters (walls), greatly enhancing its ability to withstand internal pressure and improving its watertightness.

Although we do not believe twelve walls will be necessary for the final design—based on references from YouTube demonstrations showing sufficient performance with as few as four to six walls—we opted for a highly reinforced version during the testing phase. The rationale behind this decision was to prevent premature leaks or structural failures before implementing a proper safety valve system. This safety valve will be essential for releasing pressure in case it exceeds the design threshold. Until such a system is integrated, it is important to maintain a conservative design with a sufficient number of walls to ensure safe and reliable pressure testing

Introduction of Barometer

For the final product, our goal is to reproduce a consistent internal pressure without relying on visual inspection of the compressor’s built-in barometer, as this would require manual intervention. To automate and monitor the system more effectively, we aim to integrate a pressure sensor (barometer) directly into the tank.

Incorporating electronics into a sealed pressure vessel presents a significant challenge, particularly in maintaining structural integrity while allowing for electrical wiring. Wireless solutions were considered, but due to concerns regarding their reliability—especially in critical testing or demonstration scenarios—we opted for a wired approach to ensure consistent performance.

To accommodate this, we have designed a small square access port in the tank wall, which can be sealed using a removable end cap. The cap is secured with eight M3 bolts, each providing a theoretical pullout strength of 1304 N per thread. This configuration is intended to maintain a tight seal under pressure while still allowing for sensor installation and wire routing in a controlled and serviceable manner.

Et billede, der indeholder tekst, skærmbillede, Font/skrifttype, nummer/tal

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

Based on the calculated pullout strength of the threaded inserts, the lid assembly is theoretically capable of withstanding internal pressures exceeding 1600 PSI. This high pressure capacity is due to the use of threaded heat-set inserts in the PLA body, which offer significantly better thread strength and reusability compared to directly 3D printed threads. These inserts allow the cap to be securely mounted and removed repeatedly without degrading the structural integrity of the connection.

However, it is important to note that while the calculated values suggest high mechanical resilience, the actual performance is limited by the material properties of the lid itself. Since the lid is printed in plastic, it is likely to deform or fail well before reaching the theoretical pressure limit. Nonetheless, these calculations provide a useful theoretical baseline, indicating that the overall design is likely sufficient for our target operating range.

To achieve a proper seal between the cap and the pressure vessel, we plan to manufacture a custom 3D-printed gasket using TPU (thermoplastic polyurethane). Fortunately, TPU filament is available for in-house use, allowing immediate production without reliance on the university’s 3D printing lab schedule.

This "lid gasket," as we will refer to it moving forward, will initially be printed using standard 80A TPU, which is one of the softest commercially available grades. In parallel, we have also requested assistance from Olga—who specializes in advanced 3D printing workflows—to fabricate a version using a silicone-like pellet-based material available in the university’s lab, which may offer improved sealing properties.

For the lid material, we intend to transition from PLA to PETG reinforced with carbon fiber. This material offers increased stiffness, which is essential to prevent bending or deformation in areas not supported by bolts. However, we will continue initial tests using PLA, particularly in fully dense (100% infill) configurations, before making final material decisions based on actual performance data.

Ultimately, this design iteration proved unsuccessful. The following section provides a detailed breakdown of its shortcomings:

Barometer

Initially, the pressure sensor appeared suitable for our application, as the specification sheet listed a pressure range from 0 to 1100 MPa. This would have far exceeded our operational requirements. However, upon closer inspection, it became clear that the unit was in fact specified in hectopascals (hPa), not megapascals (MPa). This meant the sensor's actual maximum measurable pressure was approximately 1100 hPa, or roughly 15.9 PSI.

Given that this value falls well below the pressures we intend to operate with, the sensor was deemed unsuitable for our design. As a result, we decided to abandon the use of an electronic pressure sensor altogether and instead rely on a mechanical pressure relief valve to regulate internal pressure.

This shift in approach later proved to be beneficial, particularly when working with compressed air systems, where pressure control and fail-safety are critical.

New Barometer

During the development of the pressure tank system, we originally intended to use the MS5837-07BA pressure sensor from TE Connectivity. This sensor was a strong candidate for our project due to its small physical footprint, high precision, and ability to operate reliably in wet environments. It supports digital communication via I2C and offers a pressure range from 0 to 7 bar, making it suitable for the expected operating conditions of our system.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The MS5837-07BA also features a 24-bit ADC, internal temperature compensation, and comes factory calibrated, which would have made integration straightforward and saved valuable development time. Its construction includes a gel-filled stainless steel cap, giving it water resistance and improved durability in demanding environments. For our application, it would have provided a compact and accurate solution for continuous pressure monitoring without relying on manual readings.[[2]](#footnote-2)

However, due to delays in shipping, we did not receive the sensor in time to include it in the current build. As a result, we chose to proceed with a mechanical pressure relief valve to regulate system pressure. While this approach is less advanced in terms of measurement capability, it allowed us to continue development without risking overpressure during testing. The MS5837-07BA remains a strong option for future iterations of the project, where better timing and availability could allow for more advanced sensing and control features.

Tank lid design

In the end, introducing a hole into the pressure tank presents a significant compromise in both safety and long-term reliability. While certain commercial pressure vessels are designed with lids or integrated sealing mechanisms, maintaining a completely sealed structure is generally preferable for sustained performance and structural integrity.

For this reason, we concluded that embedding a pressure sensor directly inside the tank is not the optimal solution. Instead, a more reliable and modular approach involves integrating the pressure reading system into the outlet assembly, specifically within the 1/2-inch tube fitting system. This configuration eliminates the need to modify or reprint the pressure vessel for each revision and allows for greater adaptability across different testing scenarios and use cases.

This modular strategy not only simplifies the overall design and reduces failure points but also enables easier maintenance and customization without compromising the structural integrity of the tank itself.

# Redesign to be better to 3D print.

To improve reliability and reduce the risk of failed prints, we decided to redesign the 3D-printed pressure tank. In earlier versions, print interruptions or instability in vertical walls led to structural weaknesses and incomplete parts. To address this, the new design features inward-facing walls slanted at a 45-degree angle. This angled geometry provides better support during the printing process and helps prevent the upper layers from collapsing or shifting, especially when printing without additional support material.

Et billede, der indeholder design

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.As a result of the new slanted wall design, the pressure tank naturally developed slightly thicker sections near the internal corners. While this does reduce the internal volume of the vessel to a small degree, it does not significantly affect the structural strength or integrity of the tank. Given that our primary focus was on achieving a reliable and repeatable print, this trade-off was considered acceptable.

We did not anticipate any negative impact from this change and proceeded with the revised design. The updated version was successfully printed without any major issues or failures. Following the successful fabrication, we moved on to calculating the maximum internal pressure the vessel could safely withstand.

# Calculating Maximum pressure

**4.1 Maximum Internal Pressure Estimation Based on Material Strength**

To determine the safe working pressure of the cylindrical vessel, we apply classical thin-walled pressure vessel theory. The objective is to identify the maximum internal pressure the structure can withstand without exceeding the material's tensile strength, accounting for anisotropic mechanical properties introduced by the 3D printing process.

**Geometrical Parameters:**

- Inner radius: r = 90 mm = 0.09 m

- Wall thickness: t = 5 mm = 0.005 m

**4.1.1 Hoop Stress (Circumferential Direction – XY Plane)**

The hoop stress represents the stress experienced along the circumference of the cylindrical wall due to internal pressure. For a thin-walled vessel, it is given by:

***σₕ = (P × r) / t → P = (σₕ × t) / r***

Assuming the printed material achieves a tensile strength of approximately 50 MPa in the XY (hoop) direction:

P = (50 × 10⁶ × 0.005) / 0.09 = 2.78 × 10⁶ Pa = 2.78 MPa

This corresponds to an approximate internal pressure of 2.78 MPa, or 403 PSI. This value represents the theoretical maximum pressure before failure due to hoop stress.

**4.1.2 Longitudinal Stress (Z Axis – Layer Direction)**

Due to the layer-by-layer nature of additive manufacturing, tensile strength in the Z direction is significantly reduced compared to the XY plane. For safety and based on empirical estimates, the tensile strength along the Z axis is assumed to be approximately 15 MPa.

The longitudinal stress for a cylindrical pressure vessel is given by:

***σₗ = (P × r) / (2 × t) → P = (2 × σₗ × t) / r***

P = (2 × 15 × 10⁶ × 0.005) / 0.09 = 1.67 × 10⁶ Pa = 1.67 MPa

This corresponds to approximately 1.67 MPa, or 242 PSI.

**Conclusion**

While the circumferential (hoop) stress limit suggests a maximum pressure of 2.78 MPa, the more critical failure mode lies along the longitudinal axis due to reduced tensile strength in the Z direction. Therefore, the safe maximum internal pressure for this vessel should be considered as 1.67 MPa, unless post-processing or reinforcement is used to improve layer adhesion strength.

As we will not go over the safety limit of 9Bar or 0.9MPa, this would be okay, and we can now go ahead with more testing.

# Setting up a test bench

After successfully producing a functional and reliable pressure vessel, the next step was to design a method for introducing and releasing pressure from the system. Introducing pressure proved to be relatively straightforward. We selected a standard one-way valve commonly used for car tires due to its affordability, simple design, and relatively high pressure tolerance—typically up to 8 bar when using higher-quality variants. Its installation is also simple, requiring only a 12.5 mm hole in the vessel wall, making it an obvious and efficient choice for pressurization.

For the outlet side, we integrated a 1/2-inch threaded insert into the pressure vessel. This allowed compatibility with standard plumbing fittings, significantly reducing the cost of testing components and enabling a modular setup. This standardization was especially beneficial in terms of integrating an electrically operated magnetic solenoid valve, which replaced the need for a manual ball valve. The solenoid valve provides better control and enables remote activation of the system.

The threaded outlet connects directly to a T-fitting, which serves as the central hub for three key components: the pressure tank, the pressure relief (safety) valve, and the exhaust solenoid valve. This setup allows for pressure to be safely regulated, contained, and released in a controlled manner, supporting both safe operation and efficient testing.

The safety valve proved to be one of the more challenging components to integrate into the system. Most off-the-shelf safety valves are designed to vent pressure directly to the surrounding environment when triggered. While this is functionally acceptable, it presented a specific issue in our setup: the valve includes an O-ring for water sealing, and we did not want pressurized air or fluid to forcefully eject the O-ring during venting. This could not only damage the valve but also pose a safety risk.

To mitigate this, we temporarily connected a manual ball valve to the outlet side of the safety valve. This allows controlled venting when necessary and prevents unwanted ejection of components. However, this approach introduces a serious limitation: **if the ball valve remains closed at the moment venting is required, the safety valve will not be able to perform its function. This could lead to dangerous pressure buildup inside the vessel. As such, this design is not safe to rely on in long-term use or in situations where consistent operator awareness cannot be guaranteed.**

If this prototype were to be developed into a final product, the safety system would need to be redesigned to ensure fully automatic and fail-safe pressure release. **Relying on manual operation** **introduces unnecessary risk and is not appropriate for repeated or unsupervised use.**

For now, as this remains an early-stage prototype, the current setup is considered sufficient. It allows us to perform necessary tests while staying within our project’s time and resource constraints. The safety valve and ball valve have not been included in the final CAD model due to time limitations, but the rest of the system has been modeled, and the overall assembly layout is shown in the figure below.

Et billede, der indeholder cylinder, fløjte/pibe/rør, måler

Indhold genereret af kunstig intelligens kan være forkert.

Using simple plumbing fittings and pipe will decrease the fluid flow through the pressure tank assembly, but just using more pressure would eliminate this issue.

Using this assembly, we managed to get some very good results, more than what was expected from the calculations.

Shooting over 11meters at just 4.5 Bar

And over 15meters at 7bar. This shows a huge improvement over the bought pump that we have.

There is going to be more about this in the later stage of this report.

# Compressor attachment

To fill up the pressure chamber with air we decided to use a standard 12V compressor for

1. <https://www.mouser.dk/ProductDetail/Measurement-Specialties/20005303-00?qs=TiOZkKH1s2SLHg%2FmYB3xKw%3D%3D&srsltid=AfmBOoreWA-uy3jpXGyAwQ5W7rw83dwxolGVxAsPU6jETuTnj9hm4m9J> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.mouser.dk/datasheet/2/418/5/ENG_DS_MS5837_07BA_A-1955840.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)