

Mode-Locked Femtosecond Titanium:Sapphire Laser

Version Trestles-50

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction
2. Laser safety
3. Laser description
4. List of accessories
5. Installation
6. Alignment
7. Day-to-day operation
8. Possible problems

1. INTRODUCTION

TI:SAPPHIRE

Titanium-doped sapphire (Ti:sapphire) is a solid state laser medium capable of tunable laser operation over broad range of near infrared (IR) wave lengths. Because of its broad absorption band in blue and green, energy for lasing process can be supplied by standard continuous wave (CW) argon ion laser or CW 532 nm, high-power, diode-pumped solid state laser as opposed to an electrical discharge or flash lamp that supplies broad band excitation.

With properly chosen optics, the Ti:sapphire laser delivers a range of wave lengths from 690 nm to 1080 nm, and pulse durations < 20 fs.

Solid-state mode-locked lasers produce femtosecond light pulses using Kerr lens mode-locking (KLM) principle of operation and continuous wave pumping sources. KLM principle combines self-focusing nonlinear optical effect and aperture effect together to reach the shortest optical pulses. This Kerr self-focusing effect leads to slight changes in the spatial intensity profile of the resonator mode in laser oscillators. As a consequence, by introducing an intracavity aperture, a power-dependent loss can be created. Owing to the quasi-instantaneous response of nonresonant Kerr nonlinearities, the amplitude modulation induced by self-focusing is able to simulate ultrafast saturable-absorber action and support pulse formation down to the femtosecond regime in solid-state lasers that have long gain-relaxation times. The gain bandwidth of solid state laser materials such as Ti:sapphire extends over >200 nm and has the potential for

supporting pulses of less than 10fs. The pulse duration from these lasers is determined by critical interplay between intracavity self-phase modulation in media, and negative group delay dispersion.

Trestles-50 femtosecond laser head contains the Ti:sapphire rod and the optics that form the resonator cavity.

DEL MAR PHOTONICS guarantees that provided laser was tested and it is suitable for the Kerr lens mode-locked operation. On the one hand, the laser installation without the help of the manufacturer requires some experience of the user in laser physics. But on the other hand, by working with our laser you will gain experience in ultrafast laser technology.

2. LASER SAFETY

Trestles-50 and its pump laser are Class IV –high-power lasers, whose beams are, by definition, safety and fire hazards. Take precautions to prevent exposure to direct and reflected beams. Diffuse as well as secular reflections cause severe skin or eye damage.

Trestles-50 laser emits CW and pulsed infrared radiation; it is extremely dangerous to the eye. Infrared radiation passes easily through the cornea, which focuses it on the retina, where it can cause instantaneous permanent damage.

SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

- Wear protective eyewear at all times; selection depends on the wavelength and intensity of the radiation, the conditions of use, and the visual function required. Protective eyewear vendors are listed in the *Laser Focus World*, *Laser Optronics*, and *Photonics Spectra* buyer's guides. Please use safety instructions of your pump laser and follow their recommendations in your work.
- Maintain a high ambient light level in the laser operation area. This keeps the pupil constricted, thus reducing the possibility of eye damage
- Keep the protective cover on the laser at all times.
- Avoid looking at the output beam; even diffuse reflections are hazardous. Keep all beams below eye level always. Never look in the plane of propagation of the beams.
- Avoid wearing jewelry or other objects that may reflect or scatter the beam while using the laser.

- Use an infrared detector or energy detector to verify that the laser beam is off before working in front of the laser.
- Operate the laser at lowest beam intensity possible, given the requirements of the application.
- Expand the beam whenever possible to reduce beam power density.
- Avoid blocking the output beams or its reflection with any part of the body.
- Establish a controlled access area for laser operation. Limit to those trained in the principles of laser safety.
- Post prominent warning signs near the laser operation area (Figure.1).



Figure 1. Standard safety warning sign

- Provide enclosures for beam paths whenever possible.
- Set up shields for secular reflections.
- Set up an energy absorbing target to capture the laser beam, preventing unnecessary reflections or scattering.

Be very careful while executing any step of the alignment. Avoid any exposure to the direct and reflected laser beams. Direct and reflected laser radiation from pump laser and Ti:sapphire laser can cause serious eye damage. Remember that Ti:sapphire radiation is invisible or looks like red laser radiation of low intensity. However, it is

dangerous even at lowest intensity. Intense incoherent luminescence is emitted from the Ti:sapphire rod also.

We recommend using protective boxes covering all elements outside of the Ti:sapphire laser.

Follow the instructions listed in this manual for safe operation of your laser.

3. Laser description

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The Trestles-50 laser head contains the Ti:sapphire rod and optics that form the oscillator cavity. Elements include pump beam mirrors, laser rod, focusing lens and mirrors, an output coupler (OC), high reflector (HR), beam folding mirrors, prisms as dispersion control elements and slit as spectral turning element.

The Trestles-50 femtosecond laser is a flexible system that gives you an opportunity to modify the laser cavity if desired. User can improve laser according to recent and future developments in the field with only minor changes of optical and mechanical components.

Connections to the laser include cooling water, power and control from "Electronics Module" and power and slit driver module (optionally).

Option:

The Electronics module enclosed with the laser consists of the pulse detection circuit and driver circuits for electromechanical starter. All indicators and controls are located on the front and upper panel. One cable connects it to laser head, the other pump cable and BNC cable may be connected to customer's oscilloscope.

Slit driver module enclosed with the laser consists of circuits for moving slit in side the laser head.

PUMPING OPTIMIZATION

For continuous-wave (CW) pumping, there is one basic requirement for lasing action: the unsaturated round-trip CW gain must exceed the round trip loss from all sources. The CW gain is obtained by having a high inversion density and an adequate length of Ti:sapphire material. The high inversion density comes from having a high pump intensity and high Ti^{3+} ion concentration. Losses in the Ti:sapphire laser come from losses in mirror coatings and polished surfaces, and what is more important, the residual loss in the Ti:sapphire material itself. This loss is proportional to the rod length and varies with the Ti^{3+} concentration, generally increasing as the Ti^{3+} concentration increases.

Unlike a dye laser, the pump illumination in Ti:sapphire laser must be collinear with the cavity mode over a relatively long length of laser rod. Continuous, high inversion density over the entire volume of a rod several millimeters in diameter is difficult to achieve. To circumvent this problem, the pump light is focused to a narrow line within the rod and the oscillating laser mode is similarly focused and overlapped within the same volume – a technique known as longitudinal pumping. The output beam is then collimated and expanded to normal size. The residual pump beam is dumped through the second cavity focus mirror.

TRESTLES-50 LASER DESCRIPTION

PUMP LASER

Because of its broad absorption band in blue and green, energy for lasing process can be supplied by standard continuous wave (CW) argon ion laser or CW 532 nm, high-power, diode-pumped solid state lasers. It is very important to note that pump laser should work in TEM₀₀ mode.

For pumping Trestles-50 laser a pump laser operating in TEM₀₀ transverse mode regime with output power between 3 - 5 Watts should be used. Performance values given in this manual are based on using a 3 W pump beam unless otherwise noted. When using other than a 3 W pump, the output mirror should be changed. Please remember that stable operation of pump laser is the key for reaching good femtosecond operation of Ti:sapphire laser. **TEM₀₀ mode is very important.**

We recommend Spectra-Physics BeamLok™ argon laser operating in power mode, Spectra-Physics Millennia i/s Series lasers, Coherent Verdi Series.

THE FOLDED CAVITY

Del Mar Photonics modeled, analyzed and optimized the cavity design for optimum performance in minimal space. The result was a five mirror folded cavity (Figures 2 and 3). This scheme incorporates 5-mirror cavity (M1, M2, M3, M4, OC), Ti:sapphire crystal (TiS), lens for focusing of pump radiation (F), two prisms (P1 and P2) and slit (S).

Note: In some versions of the Trestles-50 the slit and p2 prism translations stages are combined on one translation unit.

In folded cavities where astigmatism is not eliminated, output beams are elliptical and hard to focus. But by carefully choosing the angles of the cavity focus mirrors and rod length, astigmatism in Trestles-50 output beam is virtually eliminated.

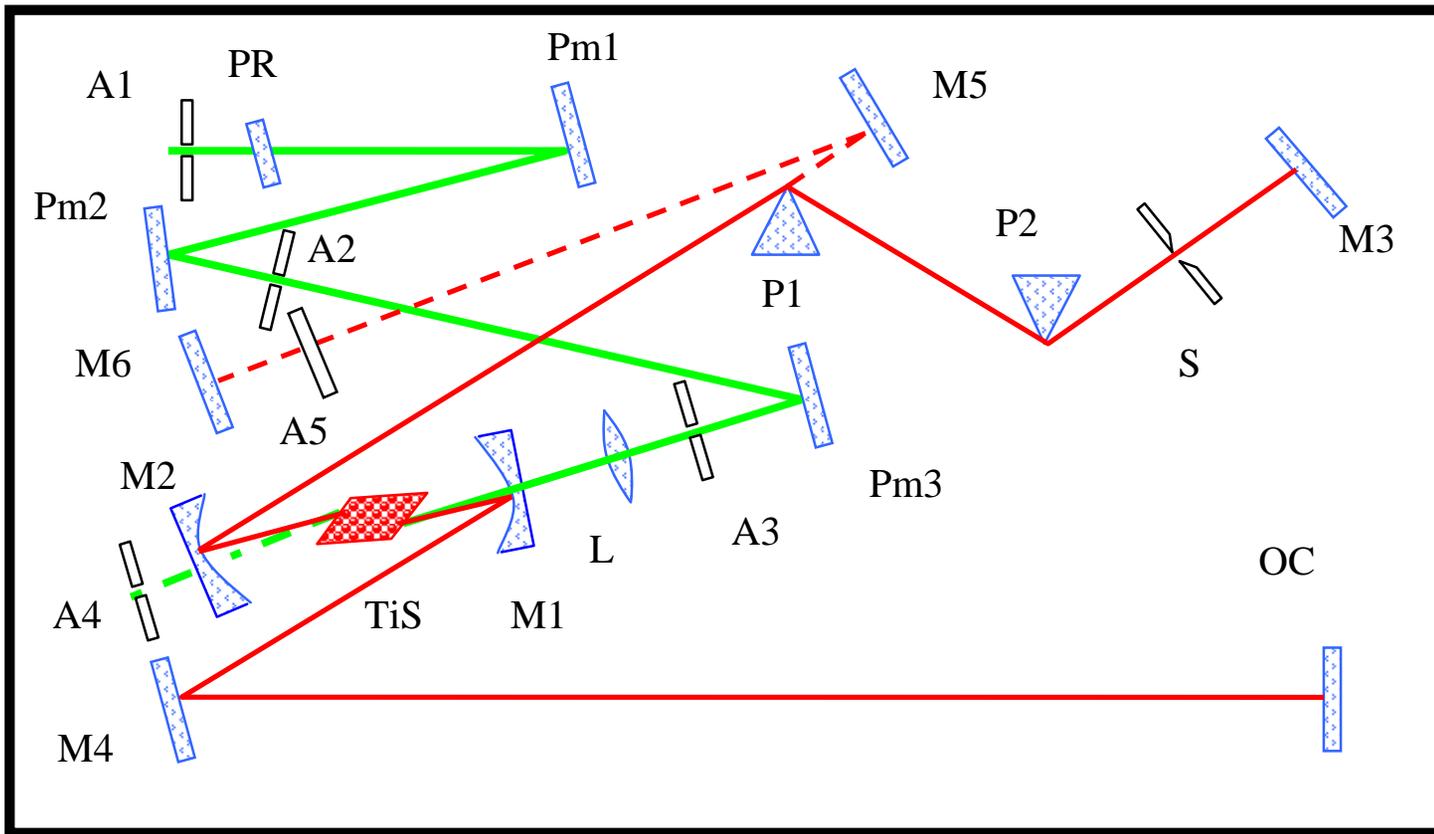


Figure 2. Basic Layout of Trestles-50.

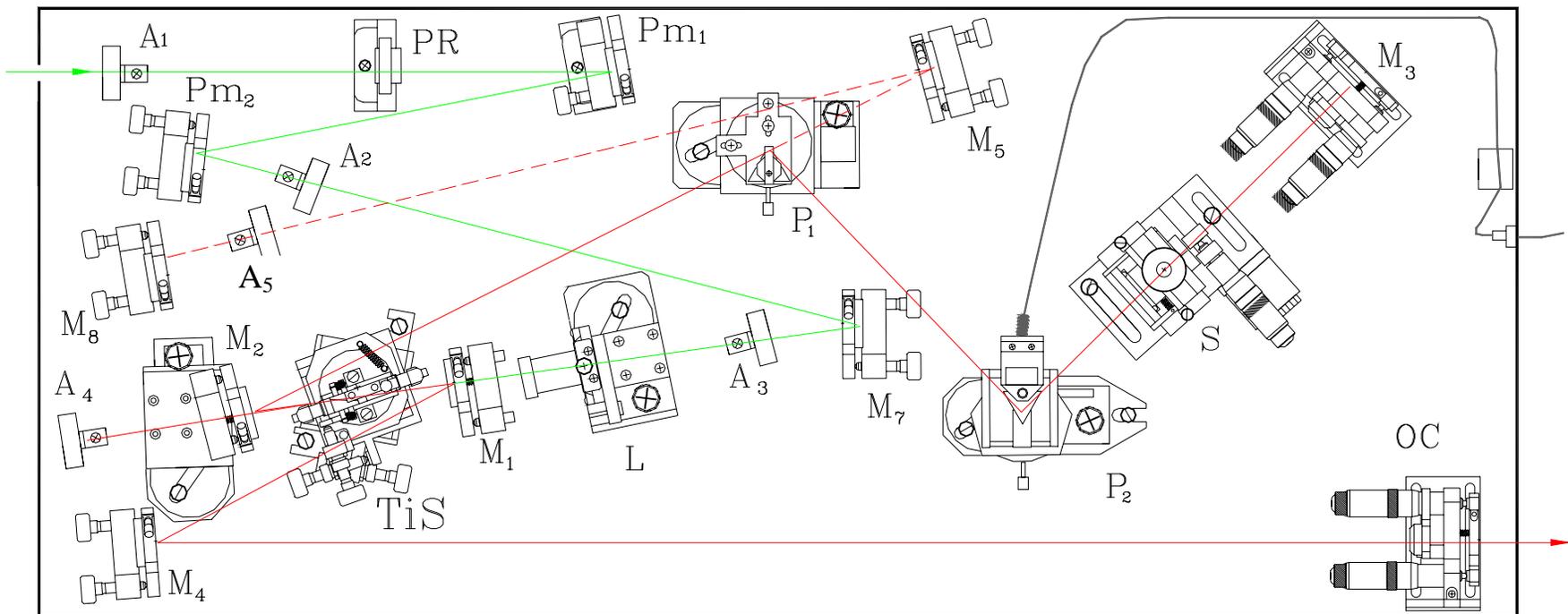


Figure 3. Schematic setup of Trestles-50.

WAVELENGTH TURNING CHARACTERISTICS

Due to the Ti:sapphire rod is birefringent, uninterrupted tuning is achieved when the c – axis of the rods is aligned coplanar with the polarization of the electric field within the cavity. Since the Ti:sapphire rod and prism surfaces represent a total of six Brewster's angle surfaces, the polarization within the cavity is largely determined by the orientation of these surfaces. Furthermore, cavity losses are minimized and tuning is optimized when all these surfaces are accurately aligned at Brewster's angle. The Trestles-50 laser uses a proprietary Ti:sapphire rod holder that orients the rod surfaces at Brewster's angle and allows the c axis of the rod to be aligned coplanar to the electric field vector. This technique compensates for unavoidable errors in rod orientation that occur when the rod is cut and polished. Wavelength tuning range of the Trestles-50 laser is 720 nm to 950 nm with two sets of optics (i.e. the rod and system are capable of continuous turning over this range). The laser comes with the optics set(s) you specified with your order.

WAVELENGTH SELECTION

The femtosecond Trestles-50 laser is wavelength tuned using a prism sequence and a slit. This sequence provides a region in the cavity where the wavelengths are spatially spread. A variable slit is located in this dispersed beam. The output wavelength is tuned by changing the position of the slit in the horizontal plane. The width of the slit can also be changed so that the bandwidth (and, hence, the temporal width) of the output pulse can be varied. This simple, straight-forward method covers the entire Ti:sapphire range for ultrashort pulses.

PULSE WIDTH SELECTION

The pulse width tuning characteristics of the Ti:sapphire laser are influenced by two factors: those inherent in the Ti: sapphire material itself and those from cavity parameters. While we cannot readily modify the Ti:sapphire material to change pulse width, we can modify the net group velocity dispersion (GVD). The optical components in the laser cavity introduce positive GVD and cause pulse spreading. Further pulse spreading causes self-Phase modulation (SPM) in the Ti:sapphire rod, which results from the interaction of the short optical pulse with the nonlinear refractive index. In order to obtain stable short output pulses, these effects must be compensated with negative GVD. Prism pairs are used to produce a net negative intracavity GVD in the femtosecond system. This allows the system to produce sub 100 fs near transform limited pulses over most of the wavelength regime.

DESCRIPTION OF COMPONENTS

The scheme of Trestles-50 depicted in Figures 2 and 3 consists of the following optical elements for the basic configuration:

1. 10 mm long Ti-doped sapphire crystal (TiS).
2. Dielectric mirrors M1, M2, M3, M4, M5, M6 with high reflection (>99,5%). M1, M2 – have high reflection for working wavelength and transparent for laser pumping radiation, radius of curvature is 100 mm; M3, M4, M5, M6 - high reflectors for working wavelength, flat mirrors; OC output coupler; Pm1, Pm2, Pm3 – pump routing flat mirrors.
3. L - lens for focusing of pumping radiation, focal length is $F=100$ mm.
4. P1, P2 - Brewster angle prisms at 800 nm.

5. PR – polarization rotator is used for changing the polarization of pump beam from vertical to horizontal.

6. A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 – aligning apertures. A1 is on the laser head wall, A2, A3, A4, A5 – are on aperture holder stages

Our laser is a flexible system which gives you a possibility to change laser cavity on your own will. You can improve your laser according to recent and future achievements in the field making only minor changes of optical and mechanical components. These instructions have been written for modified model where optical scheme incorporating 5 -mirror cavity in z-configuration (Figure 2) where slit(S) and P2 translation stage are combined in one module.

We use mirrors M5, M6 in the process of alignment (see alignment procedure).

4. LIST OF ACCESSORIES

You need the following for assembling, testing and operation of femtosecond Ti:sapphire laser :

1. A pump laser operating in TEM₀₀ transverse mode regime with output power 4-6 Watts. Please remember, that stable operation of the pump laser is the key point for achieving good femtosecond operation of Ti:sapphire laser. **TEM₀₀ mode is very important.**
2. Optical table. Ti:sapphire laser itself requires about 0.5 m x 1.3 m area of the optical table. We recommend placing the pump laser and Ti:sapphire laser on the same optical table for better stability.
3. Pumping laser radiation should be horizontally polarized. If you have vertically polarized pump laser radiation, please use polarization rotator (PR).
4. A photodiode with >10 mm² sensitive area or low-inertial power meter for fast control of relative output power in the process of alignment.
5. Power meter for control of output power value.

6. Fast photodiode with 400 MHz oscilloscope to display the temporal structure of output radiation.
7. During aligning full realigning of the laser you may need two polarizers, we recommend polarization cubs or Glan - laser prisms (PC1, PC2).
8. Interferometric autocorrelator for the measurement of pulse duration. Time resolution should be better than 10 fs. (We recommend using DEL MAR PHOTONICS femtosecond autocorrelator model Reef RT that is completely compatible with DEL MAR PHOTONICS Trestles-50 laser.)
9. Spectrometer or diffractive grating operating near 800 nm for spectrum control.
10. Infrared sensor card for observation of weak IR luminescence.
11. For most stable operation of laser use dry nitrogen gas to remove dust and water vapor from laser head.
12. We recommend using a chiller to keep the Ti:sapphire rod at a constant temperature for performance stability.

5. INSTALLATION

UNPACKING YOUR LASER

Your laser was packed with great care and all containers were inspected prior to shipment: the laser left DEL MAR PHOTONICS in good condition. Upon receipt of your laser, immediately inspect the outside of the shipping containers. If there is any visible damage to the container, make sure a representative of the carrier company is present when you unpack the laser.

Carefully inspect your laser as you unpack it. If you notice any damage, such as dents, scratches or broken knobs immediately notify the carrier and your DEL MAR PHOTONICS Sales representative.

Open the cover of the laser head and carefully remove bags covering the elements of laser and fixing elements which are used for transport. Carefully remove the bags, try not to misalign the laser, and damage mirrors during this procedure.

PLACEMENT OF TRESTLES-50 LASER HEAD

1. Turn on the pump laser according to its instruction manual and allow it to warm up.
2. Verify the output of the pump laser meets specifications for power and mode quality. (For pumping Trestles-50, the pump laser should be operating in TEM₀₀ transverse mode regime with output power of 3 - 5 Watts.)

3. Reduce pump laser power to the minimum.
4. Close the pump shutter.
5. Place the Trestles-50 laser head on the table near the pump laser.
6. Hook up the water hoses to the laser head and Switch on cooling water (moderate water flow ≥ 0.5 liter/min).
7. Adjust the heights of the pump laser and/or Trestles-50 laser head so the output beam of pump laser is parallel to the table top surface and at the same height as the middle of the "pump window" on the Trestles-50 laser head.
 - a) Adjust the height of pump laser according it users manual.
 - b) Adjust the height of Trestles-50 laser head
 - Loosen the locking nut on each foot.
The nuts are threaded onto each leg and jam against the bottom of the base plate to lock the foot in place and to add stiffness to the foot.
 - Wrench the foot to adjust the height so the center of input window is on the same height as the center of output window of pump laser above the table and parallel to the table top.
 - Tighten the locking nuts.
8. Secure the Trestles-50 laser head to the table with the four foot clamps provided.
The clamps slide over the lower portion of each foot.
9. Verify the height adjust locking nuts on the feet are tight.
10. Connect the Starter button to the laser head.
Tap power supply into power line.
11. Remove the pump window and screw in input aperture A1.

12. Use external routing mirrors to route the pump beam to the Trestles-50 laser head. *Please, pay attention to polarization changing during routing the pump laser beam.*

- Open pump shutter.
- Adjust the external routing mirrors only until the pump beam passes through the input aperture A1 and internal apertures A2 A3. Please, don't align the pump routing mirrors Pm1 Pm2 Pm3 during this procedure.
- Close the pump shutter.

13. *Optional motorized slit:*

- *Connect the slit control buttons to the laser head. Tap power supply into power line.*
- *Connect the Electronic module to the laser head. Tap power supply in to power line.*

6. ALIGNMENT

This part of our instructions describes installation and alignment procedure for the Ti:sapphire oscillator. Researchers use slightly different approaches to constructing a mode-locking Ti:sapphire laser. If you have good experience in laser technology, you can use your own approach to the alignment of our femtosecond laser. Nevertheless, we hope that our instructions will help you in your work. Alignment procedure consists of two stages. The first stage is an alignment of continuous wave (CW) Ti:sapphire laser. The second stage is a transformation of standard CW configuration to a configuration suitable for mode-locking operation.

ALIGNMENT OF CONTINUOUS WAVE TI:SAPPHIRE LASER

The laser was factory aligned and under careful transportation conditions you can try to achieve the lasing without full laser realignment. It is not necessary to follow the italicized instructions. You should only carry out these procedures in case of complete laser misalignment under severe transportation conditions. Please, follow the bold-typed instructions.

1. Turn on the pump laser according to its instruction manual and allow it to warm up.
2. Reduce pump laser power to the minimum.
3. Remove the pump window and screw in the input aperture A1.

4. Using external routing mirrors direct the pump beam so that it passes through the input aperture A1 and passes through the apertures A2, A3, and A4 inside the Trestles-50 laser (for this aligning procedure do not align Pm1, Pm2, Pm3 mirrors, adjust only external routings mirrors)

If routing mirrors are insufficient to align on the apertures use small adjustments of Pm1, Pm2, and Pm3 so that the pump beam passes through the apertures. Verify that beam pass through the centers of all 4 apertures.

5. Switch on cooling water (moderate water flow ≥ 0.5 liter/min).
6. If your pump laser is working in a horizontal polarization then remove the polarization rotator (PR).

If your pump laser is working in a vertical polarization then adjust PR:

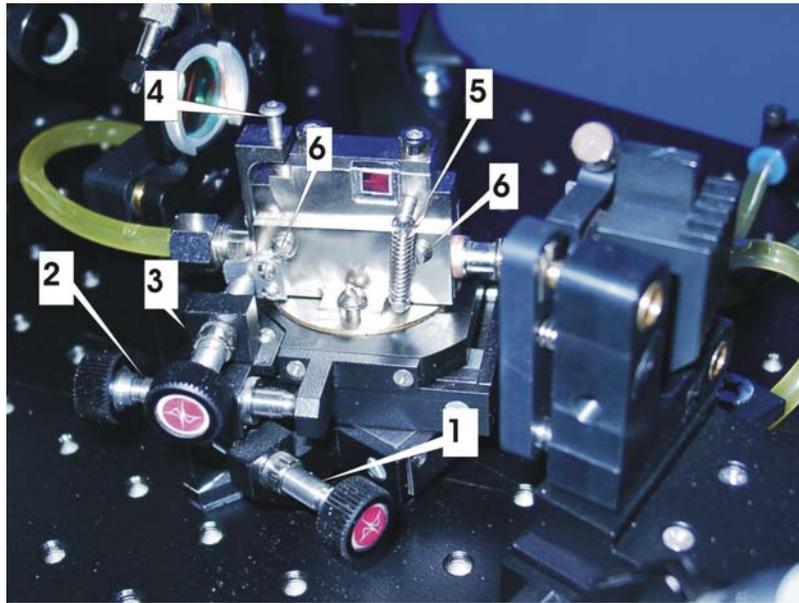
- Loose the screw that clamps the PR mount to the tabletop.
- Place the target to block the reflected beam from the first surface of the Ti:sapphire crystal.
- Rotate the PR mount around its vertical axis at small angle and find the position when the spot on the target has minimal brightness.
- Verify that the pump beam is still passing through the center of PR. And passing through apertures A1- A4.
- Tighten the screw that clamps the PR holder to the tabletop.

Again the italicized instructions are only necessary if laser is completely misaligned. Follow non italicized instructions **ONLY** the first time through.

7. Close the shutter of the pump laser.

8. Remove M1 and M2 mirrors with holders from their mounts.

9. Remove focusing lens L with the draw-tube from mount.



1. Screw for aligning crystal position on optical axis. 2. Screw for transverse aligning. 3. Screw for aligning Brewster angle. 4. Screw for aligning crystallographic axis orientation. 5. Spring
6. Fixing screw

Figure 4. Crystal Mount

10. *Remove the crystal with the crystal holder (Figure 4).*
 - *Remove the two vertical springs from the holder using a metallic hook (metallic hook may be easily made from paper clip) or thin-flat-nose pliers.*
 - *Loose but not remove four clamping screws, two on each side of the crystal mount.*
 - *Remove the crystal with crystal holder.*
11. *Open pump shutter.*
12. *Verify that the pump beam passes through the centers of A1, A2 and A3.*
13. *There is an etched line passing under the elements from Pm3 to M2. Move the A4 so the mark on the lower part of the aperture coincides with etched mark on the table top.*
14. *Direct the pump beam so that it passes through the centers of all 4 apertures.*
15. *Install the focusing lens with draw-tube back to the lens mount.*
16. *Verify that the center of the beam spot on aperture A4 is still on the center of A4.*
 - *If the centers do not coincide in vertical plane then use the vertical lens adjusting screw to align the lens. (Some laser systems have lens holders without vertical aligning screw. If so then loosen, but do not remove, fixing screws. Align the position of the lens and then fix the screws.)*
 - *If the centers are not coinciding in horizontal plane then loose the screws that clamp the lens holding stage to the table top and move the translation stage in perpendicular to pump beam direction to align the lens.*
 - *Verify that the center of the spot is not moving while you are moving the lens forwards and backwards holding in place the base of translation stage by hand. If the*

center of the spot is moving then rotate the stage (for example, if the center of the spot moved to the left side while the lens was moved closer to M1 then rotate the lens stage clockwise for a small angle), then align the centers by moving stage in perpendicular to pump beam direction to align the lens. Repeat this step until the center of the spot will not move and will coincide with center of A4 during lens translations along pump beam. Tighten the clamping screw.

17. *Close the pump beam shutter.*
18. *Install M1 mirror with the holder to its mount.*
19. *Insert the PC1 in the pump beam between the rotator and Pm3. align it to transmit the horizontal polarization. (For polarizer cube follow this procedure. Open pump shutter. Adjust the PC1 so that the back reflected beam comes almost back to the pump laser (but not exactly), and side reflected beam is passing through the additional aperture (AA). AA is used to set the side reflected beam in resonator plane. Thus the polarization of the beam passing through is linearly polarized and polarization is horizontal.)*
20. *Remove A4.*
21. *Insert the second polarizer PC2 in the pump beam beyond the M2 mirror mount. Place the target (piece of paper) beyond PC2. Align the PC2 for a dark "field".*
22. *Install and align the crystal*
 - *Close pump shutter.*
 - *Mount the crystal holder to its mount.*
 - *Tighten two vertical springs.*
 - *Open pump shutter.*
 - *Verify that the beam is passing through the center of the crystal.*
 - *Set up approximately Brewster angle by the angle control of crystal, observing green beam*

reflected from the Ti:sapphire crystal entrance surface. Find position of crystal with minimum reflection.

- *Align the crystal for a dark field on a target, rotating the crystal holder around the optical axis using the screw for aligning crystallographic axis orientation. (see Figure 4)*
- *Close pump shutter.*
- *Tighten four fixing screws, two on each side of the mount.*
- *Set up distance between M2 surface and entrance surface of the crystal to 48 mm by adjusting the longitudinal control screw on the crystal stage. Remove PC1 and PC2 with their mounts*

23. *Install M2 mirror with the holder to its mount. Set the distance between M1 and M2 surfaces to approximately 110 mm.*

24. *Place aperture A4 on the breadboard so that the pump beam passes through the center of the aperture.*

25. Place a beam stopper beyond M2 mirror and remove the blocker from aperture A5.

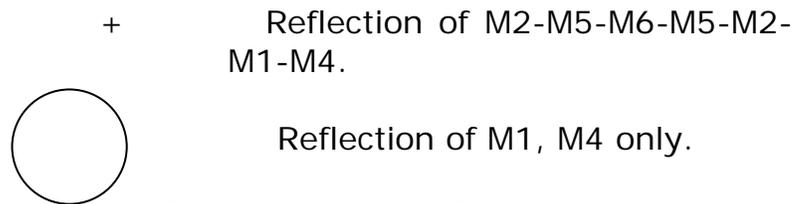
26. *Open the pump shutter. Using insertion adjusting screw of the P1 prism, back the prism out of the beam path. Aligning M2 mirror, direct the residual part of pump beam to the center of the M5 mirror. Verify the height of the beam.*

27. *Aligning M5 mirror direct pump beam to the center of M6 mirror. Aligning M6 direct beam back to the M5, M2 mirror.*

28. Unscrew apertures A1, A2 and A3 leaving at place the aperture holders.

29. Increase the pump power up to 3-5 W. Use protective goggles for pump laser radiation.

30. *Aligning the positioning of the lens. Use protective goggles for pump laser radiation during this procedure. Remove beam blocker, beyond M2. Translating the lens find the position when round shape of the pump beam will abruptly change to the oval shape. Replace the beam blocker.*
31. Use IR card to see the luminescence near OC mirror.



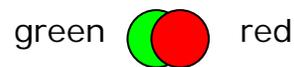
32. *Aligning M1 mirror, direct luminescence reflected only from the M1 to the center of the M4.*
33. *Aligning M4 mirror, direct luminescence reflected only from the M1 and M4 to the center of the OC. Verify the height of the beam with help of AA.*

Again the italicized instructions are only necessary if laser is completely misaligned. If this is our first time through the alignment be sure to follow the non italicized steps above (25, 29, 31).

34. Position of (+) spot is adjusted by M6 controls. The spot should be approximately on the center of spot reflected from M1, M4 only.
35. Align OC mirror so the reflected beam returns back to the center of M4 and M1.
36. If a correct alignment has been done, laser radiation should appear after small adjustments of M6 and OC. If not then place the additional photodiode with large aperture beyond the M3 mirror. The luminescence spot should be in the active area of photodiode. Adjust M6, OC and

position of M2 mirrors for a maximum signal until generation will appear. Remove the photodiode.

37. Place the power meter in the beam.
38. Adjust the M6 and OC for maximum output power. For optimization of Ti:sapphire output power adjust OC and M6 by horizontal controls together and vertical controls together also. Output power should be close to the maximum when the spots on M1 look as in the picture below:



39. By small steps move M2 along the optical axis, try to find maximum output power. Make additional small adjustments using OC and M6 controls after each step.
40. Move Ti:sapphire crystal along the optical axis, try to find maximum output power. Make additional small adjustments using OC and M6 controls after each step.
41. *Adjust Brewster angle using Ti:sapphire crystal angle control in small steps. Try to reach maximum output power. Make additional horizontal adjustments using OC and M6 controls after each step.*
42. Adjust focusing lens position and Ti:sapphire crystal along the optical axis in small steps. Try to reach maximum output power. Make additional small adjustments using M6 and OC controls after each step.
43. Clean all mirrors in the cavity.
 - Close the pump shutter.
 - Clean one mirror by alcohol or acetone.
 - Open the pump shutter.
 - Verify the output power the value should be bigger or the same.

- Make small adjustments of M6 and OC to maximize output power.
 - Repeat this procedure for mirrors in the cavity M1, M2, M4, M5, M6, OC, Pm1, Pm2, Pm3 and crystal surfaces.
44. Verify that Ti:sapphire output power is not less than 10% - 15% of pumping power. If not, repeat steps 38-44. Sometimes, you should repeat this steps several times during the first alignment of the CW Ti:sapphire laser. It requires patience.
45. Write down maximum output power and position of M2 micrometric screw. Move M2 forward and back and find positions of micrometric screw where Ti:sapphire laser oscillation disappeared. Write down these positions. This is a range of stability.

Note. There are two ranges of stability in the asymmetric cavity (see G.Cerulla et. al., Opt.Lett. 19 (1994) 807).

ALIGNMENT OF MODE LOCKED TI:SAPPIRE LASER

46. Flip the slit aside.
47. Using adjusting screw of the P1 prism insert prism in the beam path. Slowly moving the prism into the beam you can find the position of the prism when laser oscillation begins between mirrors M6 – OC and small fraction of this generation is deviated by P1 prism.
48. *Verify the correct aligning of the prism*
- *Loosen but don't remove the rotation fixation screw R (Figure 5).*
 - *Rotating the prism's base plate adjust prism for minimal deviation of the beam.*
 - *The heights of the beams should be also 70 mm above the laser head table top. If it is necessary use the adjusting screws to align the prism (see Figure 5).*

49. Verify that the beam from deviated by P1 strikes prism P2. Verify the height of the beam near P2.

50. Using the adjusting screw of the P2 prism insert prism in the beam path. Verify correct aligning of the prism in same manner as in 48.

Note. *If your laser was provided with electro-mechanical starter, then P2 holder mounting is replaced by electro-mechanical starter. Verify correct aligning of the prism in same manner as in 48.*

51. Align M3 to return the beam deviated by P2. beam back through P2 and P1

52. Insert P1 in the beam, by small adjustments of M3 mirror reach laser generation through the prisms. **Block M6 mirror by blocker (aperture A5)**

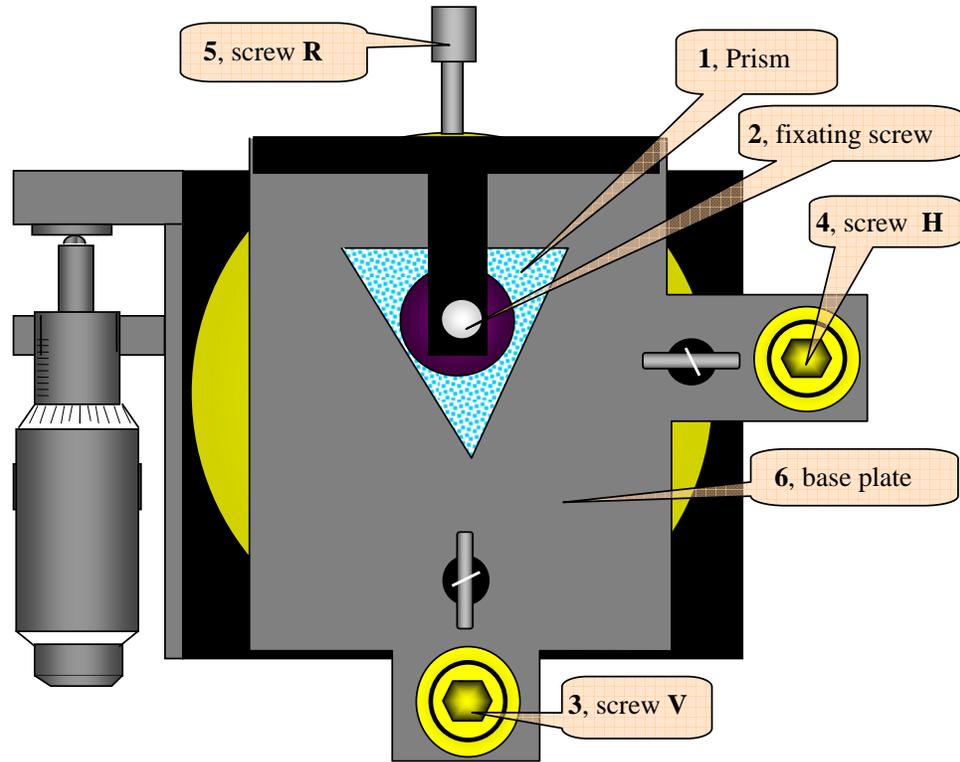


Fig.5. Schematic picture of prisms fixation and service

- 1 - prism
- 2 - fixating screw, ! don't tight it with force to prevent birefringence of prism !
- 3 - screw **V** to align deviated beam in vertical plane,
- 4 - screw **H** to align reflected beams in vertical plane,
- 5 - screw **R** to fix rotation of base plate **6**,
- 6 - prism's base plate rotating by hand.

53. Aligning OC and M3 find maximum output power in same manner as in CW operation.

54. Verify that output power decreases not more than 15-20 percent lower then output power without prisms. If not, repeat procedure from step 47. Sometimes, you should repeat it several times during the first alignment of the CW Ti:sapphire laser. It requires patience.

Note. After finishing this procedures there are some check points:

1. The spot on the M1 mirror should be look like described in 38. If not align M3 and M5.
 2. There are beams reflected from the apex of each prism. The beams should be almost parallel to each and must be in resonator plane (plane at 70 mm above table top of the laser head). If not then align the prisms and M3, M5 to fix it.
55. Align P1 so that generation is passing almost through the apex of prism. But generation should not be lost. (About 1-2 mm from apex)
56. Test the output beam using fast photodiode and oscilloscope.
57. Using the position aligning screw remove P2 from the pump beam. The generation will be lost.
58. Moving the P2 prism by your finger (thus you change the depth of insertion of the prism) look to the result on the oscilloscope. Then moving M2 by small steps find the place where the pulses appear. Femtosecond pulses should appear near the end of the region of stability. Continuous pulse train should be observed on the oscilloscope screen in femtosecond operation.

Note: We remind you that two regions of stability exist in asymmetric cavity. You are moving through the stability region having less distance between M1 and M2.

59. Find the position where pulse train is observed while you hold the prism in place. Then align the prism position screw to hold the prism in place.
60. Measure the spectrum of Ti:sapphire laser radiation with help of spectrometer or diffractive grating.

61. Measure the spectrum and try to find its optimum using control of P2 mount. You will obtain shorter pulses with broader spectrum. Spectral bandwidth should be not less than 14 nm at FWHM (full width half maximum) with central wave length 800 nm. This corresponds to 50 femtosecond pulse length.
62. Femtosecond operation starts from moving of optical elements. Once started, femtosecond operation should last for hours at good pump laser stability and in stable room conditions. When femtosecond operation disappears, start it again with mechanical movement of P2. (Press the Starter button.)
63. Measure pulse duration with autocorrelator.
64. To get a tuning of output wavelength and to control spectral bandwidth, flip the slit back into place. Align the width and position of the slit so that the pulses easily appear at the same spectral position where they appeared without the slit. Write down the position of the prism and the slit. Then watching the spectrum and "pulse train" move the slit to shift the pulse spectrum to the desired region. (In versions with combined prism and slit unit move the prism position only the position of the slit will change also). Verify that laser easily starts at new position. Repeat this steps until you reach the desired central wave length.

If you failed to achieve the lasing after several attempts, please repeat all the steps, including the italicized ones.

7. DAY-TO-DAY OPERATION

1. Switch on cooling water for Ti:sapphire laser (moderate flow).
2. Switch on the pump laser (3-5 W output).
3. Ti:sapphire will give proper characteristics after 30 minutes if you use standard pump laser or after 20 min. with "Beam-Lock" Ar-ion lasers. Pump power should be stable from day to day.
4. Small adjustments of M3 and M5 might be necessary in day-to-day operation
5. To turn off the system repeat the procedure in reverse order.

Note: Occasionally, it may be necessary to clean the optics and surfaces of the Ti:sapphire crystal. The best method for cleaning surfaces is to first block the pump laser beam and then blow excess particles from the surface. Then fold a piece of lens tissue into a pad and clamp with a hemostat (usually provided with the pump laser). Soak this pad with spectroscopic grade acetone or methanol, and shake off the excess liquid. Then make one cleaning stroke only across the surface (particles on the surface can become imbedded in the tissue and act as an abrasive if a second stroke is made across the surface).

8. POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

1. Pump laser output is not TEM₀₀ mode.
2. Pump laser is not stable enough.
3. Optical surfaces of laser elements are dirty.
4. Alignment steps where not performed correctly to reach good femtosecond pulses. Repeat alignment. Proper alignment of the Ti:sapphire femtosecond laser can seem more like an art than science. Stick with it. After a few hours of work you will start to get a feel for the configuration preferred by your laser.

NOTE: Pulses shorter than 50 fs were obtained with this laser. However, optimization of femtosecond operation takes time and requires patience. This laser is optimized at 3W and maximum distance between P1 and P2. However, you can change these parameters and probably reach better results. Adjustments of the distance from M1 to the crystal with micrometric screw and positions of P2 (P1) are important in this case.