INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING

# The Definitive Technical Guide to Atlas Copco GA Series Rotary Screw Compressors: Engineering, Operation, and Efficiency Optimization

Published: September 28, 2026 | Index ID: #257

In the landscape of modern industrial manufacturing, compressed air is frequently referred to as the **fourth utility**, following electricity, water, and gas. Among the various technologies developed to harness this utility, the **Atlas Copco GA series** of oil-injected rotary screw compressors has established itself as a benchmark for reliability and efficiency. This article provides an exhaustive technical analysis of the GA series, ranging from the GA15 and GA18 to the advanced VSD+ (Variable Speed Drive) variants, drawing from the foundational principles outlined in the **Compressed Air Manual (8th Edition)**.

## 1. Theoretical Framework: The Rotary Screw Compression Principle

The core of the Atlas Copco GA series is the **oil-injected rotary screw element**. This mechanism operates on the principle of displacement, where air is trapped between two interlocking helical rotors—known as the male and female rotors. As these rotors rotate, the volume between them decreases, effectively compressing the air.

In an oil-injected system, high-quality lubricant is injected into the compression chamber to perform three critical functions:

- Sealing: The oil creates a thin film between the rotors and the cylinder walls, minimizing internal leakage (slippage) and maximizing volumetric efficiency.
- Lubrication: Reducing mechanical friction between the moving parts to extend the lifecycle of the bearings and rotors.
- Cooling: The oil absorbs the heat generated during the polytropic compression process, ensuring that the discharge temperature remains within safe operational limits.

### 1.1. Thermodynamic Efficiency and the Isothermal Ideal

While theoretical compression aims for an **isothermal process** (constant temperature), real-world applications result in adiabatic heating. The GA series utilizes efficient heat exchangers and optimized oil injection rates to move the compression curve closer to the isothermal ideal, thereby reducing the **Specific Energy Requirement (SER)**, measured in kW/m³/min.

## 2. Technical Evolution: From GA Fixed Speed to VSD+ Technology

The transition from fixed-speed compressors to **Variable Speed Drive (VSD)**technology represents one of the most significant leaps in compressed air engineering. Standard models like the GA18 air-cooled variants are designed for continuous full-load operation. However, industrial air demand is rarely constant.

### 2.1. The VSD+ Advantage and the iPM Motor

The **GA 18 VSD+** through **GA 37 VSD+** models introduce the **Interior Permanent Magnet (iPM) motor**. Unlike traditional induction motors that suffer from efficiency losses at lower speeds, iPM motors maintain high efficiency across their entire speed range. These motors are typically **IE4 or IE5 class**, providing substantial energy savings by matching the motor speed precisely to the air demand.

Key advantages of the VSD+ architecture include:

- Elimination of Unload Cycles: Traditional compressors continue to run (unloaded) even when demand is zero, consuming up to 30% of their full-load power. VSD+ units simply slow down or stop.
- Lower Peak Current: VSD units avoid the massive current spikes associated with Star-Delta starters, reducing the strain on the electrical grid.
- Stable System Pressure: By adjusting speed in real-time, VSD+ units maintain a steady pressure within a range of ±0.1 bar, which reduces leak rates in the downstream piping.

## 3. Comparative Analysis: GA Series Specifications

To assist engineers in system sizing, the following table summarizes the technical specifications for the GA 15 through GA 26 range, focusing on the 8.5 bar variants commonly found in industrial environments.

| Model Specification | GA 15 | GA 18 | GA 22 | GA 26 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal Motor Power (kW) | 15 | 18.5 | 22 | 26 |
| Max Working Pressure (bar) | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8.5 | 8.5 |
| Capacity FAD (l/s) | 43.5 | 52.7 | 62.1 | 71.5 |
| Noise Level (dB(A)) | 63 | 64 | 66 | 67 |
| Cooling System | Air Cooled | Air Cooled | Air Cooled | Air Cooled |
| Drive Type | Gear Driven | Gear Driven | Gear Driven | Gear Driven |

*Note: FAD (Free Air Delivery) is measured according to ISO 1217, Annex C, latest edition.*

## 4. Component Deep-Dive: The GA18-30 VSD Architecture

The internal layout of the GA18 VSD+ is a masterclass in vertical engineering. By orienting the motor and screw element vertically, Atlas Copco has achieved a **compact footprint**while improving cooling airflow. The key components include:

### 3.1. The Elektronikon® Touch Controller

The **Elektronikon®** acts as the brain of the compressor. It monitors over 30 parameters, including element outlet temperature, oil pressure, and ambient conditions. Advanced features include **SMARTLINK**integration, allowing for remote monitoring and proactive maintenance scheduling. This prevents the most common cause of downtime: neglected service intervals.

### 3.2. Integrated Air Treatment

Many GA models are "Full Feature" (FF), meaning they include an integrated **refrigerant dryer**. This system uses R134a or R410A refrigerant to cool the compressed air and remove moisture, achieving a **Pressure Dew Point (PDP)** of approximately +3°C. This is critical for protecting pneumatic tools and preventing corrosion in piping.

## 5. Installation and Field Commissioning

Proper installation is paramount to ensuring the longevity of the GA series. The **Atlas Copco GA Manual** emphasizes several critical environmental factors:

1. Ventilation: A GA18 compressor generates significant heat. Inadequate ventilation leads to high discharge temperatures and eventual thermal shutdown. The cooling air requirement for a GA18 is approximately 1.5 $m^3/s$.
2. Piping Design: Use large-diameter headers to minimize pressure drops. A pressure drop of 1 bar increases energy consumption by approximately 7%.
3. Foundation: While the GA series is designed for low vibration, it must be installed on a level, solid floor capable of supporting its weight (approx. 400-600kg depending on the model).

## 6. Performance Measurement and Efficiency Audits

To ensure that an air system is operating at peak efficiency, regular audits are necessary. This involves measuring

the **Specific Power** of the installation.

**Formula for Specific Power:**Specific Power (kW/m³/min) = Total Power Consumption (kW) / Delivered Flow (m³/min)

A well-maintained GA18 VSD+ should exhibit a specific power significantly lower than a comparable fixed-speed unit, especially during partial load conditions. If the measured specific power increases over time, it usually indicates fouled filters, internal air leaks, or a degrading screw element.

## 7. Maintenance and Troubleshooting Guide

Adhering to the service intervals specified in the **Atlas Copco Instruction Books**is the only way to maintain the 100% duty cycle rating of the GA series.

### 7.1. Preventive Maintenance Checklist

- Every 500 Hours: Inspect air filters and clean the coolers. High dust environments require more frequent cleaning to prevent overheating.
- Every 4,000 Hours: Replace oil filters and air filters. Conduct an oil analysis to check for metal particles or oxidation.
- Every 8,000 Hours: Complete oil change using Roto-Inject Fluid. Replace the oil separator element to ensure oil carryover remains below 2mg/m³.

### 7.2. Troubleshooting Common Operational Failures

| Symptom | Probable Cause | Technical Solution |
|---|---|---|
| High Discharge Temp | Low oil level or fouled cooler | Check oil level; use compressed air to blow out cooler fins. |
| Excessive Oil Carryover | Saturated oil separator | Replace separator element and check scavenge line for blockages. |
| Compressor Won't Start | Phase failure or E-stop active | Verify electrical supply and reset emergency stop button. |
| Pressure Drop at Tool | Clogged line filters | Check and replace DD/PD/QD filters in the air line. |

## 8. Environmental Impact and Economic Viability

The total cost of ownership (TCO) of a compressor is dominated by **energy costs**, which typically account for 70-80% of the lifecycle cost. By implementing GA VSD+ technology, facilities can reduce their carbon footprint and energy expenditure by up to 50%. Furthermore, Atlas Copco's **Energy Recovery**systems can capture up to 90% of the heat generated during compression, repurposing it for space heating or industrial water heating, effectively turning a waste product into a valuable resource.

The **Atlas Copco GA series**, particularly when guided by the principles of the 8th Edition Compressed Air Manual, represents more than just a piece of machinery; it is an integrated solution for industrial productivity. Through rigorous attention to thermodynamic efficiency, advanced motor technology like the iPM, and proactive digital monitoring via Elektronikon®, the GA series ensures that the "fourth utility" remains reliable, cost-effective, and sustainable for the modern enterprise. As industrial standards shift toward Industry 4.0, the connectivity and efficiency of these systems will remain the cornerstone of technical excellence in compressed air management.

### Baca Juga (Artikel Terkait)

- **Comprehensive Engineering Guide to Industrial Oil Burner Nozzles: Precision Atomization, Mathematical Modeling, and Maintenance Protocols**
  URL: http://www.abdulhye.com/industrial-oil-burner-nozzle-engineering-guide.pdf
- **Comprehensive Guide to Industrial Pneumatic Fittings: Technical Engineering and the Nordair Ecosystem**
  URL: http://www.abdulhye.com/industrial-pneumatic-fittings-nordair-technical-guide.pdf
- **Industrial Ecology and Sustainable Engineering: A Comprehensive Technical Framework for Modern Manufacturing**
  URL: http://www.abdulhye.com/industrial-ecology-sustainable-engineering-technical-guide.pdf
- **The Engineering Handbook to Rotary Screw Compressors: A Technical Deep Dive into Industrial Air Systems**
  URL: http://www.abdulhye.com/rotary-screw-compressor-engineering-handbook.pdf

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