Abstract Submitted
for the DPP12 Meeting of
The American Physical Society

Turbulence, selective decay, and merging in the SSX plasma wind tunnel[1] TIM GRAY, MICHAEL BROWN, KEN FLANAGAN, ALEXANDRA WERTH, Swarthmore College, V. LUKIN, NRL — A helical, relaxed plasma state has been observed in a long cylindrical volume. The cylinder has dimensions $L = 1$ m and $R = 0.08$ m. The cylinder is long enough so that the predicted minimum energy state is a close approximation to the infinite cylinder solution. The plasma is injected at $v \geq 50$ km/s by a coaxial magnetized plasma gun located at one end of the cylindrical volume. Typical plasma parameters are $T_i = 25$ eV, $n_e \geq 10^{15}$ cm^{-3}, and $B = 0.25$ T. The relaxed state is rapidly attained in 1–2 axial Alfvén times after initiation of the plasma. Magnetic data is favorably compared with an analytical model. Magnetic data exhibits broadband fluctuations of the measured axial modes during the formation period. The broadband activity rapidly decays as the energy condenses into the lowest energy mode, which is in agreement to the minimum energy eigenstate of $\nabla \times \vec{B} = \lambda \vec{B}$. While the global structure roughly corresponds to the minimum energy eigenstate for the wind tunnel geometry, the plasma is high beta ($\beta = 0.5$) and does not have a flat λ profile. Merging of two plasmoids in this configuration results in noticeably more dynamic activity compared to a single plasmoid. These episodes of activity exhibit s

[1]Supported by US DOE and NSF.

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Date submitted: 19 Jul 2012 Electronic form version 1.4