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# The rotational spectrum of cyclohexyl formate, chemically prepared within a supersonic expansion

Weixing Li <sup>a, b</sup>, Lorenzo Spada <sup>a, c</sup>, Luca Evangelisti <sup>a</sup>, Lorena Di Silvio <sup>a</sup>, Walther Caminati <sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Dipartimento di Chimica "Giacomo Ciamician", University of Bologna, Via Selmi 2, I-40126, Bologna, Italy

<sup>b</sup> Present address: Deutsches Elektronen-Synchrotron DESY, Notkestraße 85, 22607, Hamburg, Germany

<sup>c</sup> Present address: Scuola Normale Superiore, Piazza dei Cavalieri 7, 56126, Pisa, Italy

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## ABSTRACT

The pulsed supersonic jet expansion microwave spectra of the parent and of the CD=O monodeuterated species of cyclohexylformate have been measured in the 6.5–18 GHz range. The samples have been obtained by direct esterification of HCOOH (or DCOOH) with cyclohexyl alcohol during a supersonic expansion in a microwave cavity. Most of the observed transitions are split into two component lines, due to the tunnelling motion connecting two equivalent *gauche* forms. The tunnelling barrier has been determined to be  $B_2 = 267(10) \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . Structural information has been obtained from the 6 available rotational constants.

## 1. Introduction

Many efforts have recently been dedicated to the investigation of the rotational spectra of esters [1–13], due either to their astrochemical interest or to their complex and intriguing internal dynamics.

The rotational features of methylformate [14], methylacetate and ethylformate [15] have been indeed observed in the interstellar space. In order to enable astronomical observations of the heavier homologues, the measurements of the rotational spectra of several esters have been systematically extended, including less abundant isotopologues, to the millimeter-wave region [16–18].

Also, from a physical chemistry point of view, esters are quite interesting, due to their internal dynamics, mainly related to the low barrier to internal rotation of one (or more) methyl groups. In addition, esters with aliphatic chains can generate complex conformational equilibria.

Recently, we went through the investigation of some relatively heavy esters almost accidentally: when trying to record the

rotational spectra of complexes between carboxylic acids and primary or secondary alcohols, we discovered that the partner molecules were reacting, thereby forming the ester [19–21]. This was the case as well when mixing formic acid and cyclohexanol at a low (few %) concentrations in a rare gas (carrier): only strong lines of the ester, HCOOC<sub>6</sub>H<sub>11</sub> (CHF) were observed. We report below the analysis of the rotational spectrum of CHF.

## 2. Experimental

The rotational spectra were measured in a pulsed jet Fourier transform microwave (FTMW) spectrometer [22] with a COBRA (Coaxial Oriented Beam and Resonator Axes) configuration [23] in the frequency range 6–18 GHz which has been described previously [24]. The rotational spectrum of CHF was observed as a reaction product of a mixture (300 kPa) of ~2% of HCOOH (or DCOOH) and ~2% of C<sub>6</sub>H<sub>11</sub>OH in He expanded through a pulse valve to create the supersonic jet. The coherent molecular emission was digitized in the time-domain and Fourier transformed in order to obtain the transition frequencies of the system under study. The coaxial arrangement of resonator and jet axes cavity causes a symmetric splitting of the molecular signals into two Doppler components. Transitions separated by more than 7 kHz are resolvable with an

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [walthercaminati@unibo.it](mailto:walthercaminati@unibo.it) (W. Caminati).

estimated accuracy of 3 kHz.

## 2.1. Theoretical calculations

According to the commonly reported shapes of organic six-membered rings, the most stable forms of CHF must have a chair arrangement of the ring, while the formyl group can be attached to the ring in an axial or in an equatorial position. In addition, the formyl group can rotate along the O-C=O bond generating a *gauche* (doubly degenerate) and a *trans* conformation. In order to calculate the relative energies of these conformations, and to have trial spectroscopic parameters needed for the investigation of the rotational spectra, we ran MP2/6-311++G(d,p) [25] and B3LYP-D3(BJ)/def2-tzvp [26] calculations using the GAUSSIAN 16 suite of programs [27]. The results are shown in Table 1.

One can see that the *Equatorial-Gauche* (*Eg*) species is considerably more stable than the other three ones. For this reason, we limited initially the search of the rotational spectrum of the *Eg* isomer, as described below.

## 2.2. Rotational spectrum

According to the results of the *ab initio* calculations, the  $\mu_a$ -transitions were expected to be the strongest ones.  $\mu_a$ -type R-branch bands have been easily identified, indeed, with  $J$  ranging from 3 to 9. Later on, weaker  $\mu_b$ - and  $\mu_c$ -type transitions have been measured. Almost all of them are split into two component lines (up to a maximum splitting of a few tens of kHz), the splitting being larger for the  $\mu_b$ -type transitions. This splitting arises, as described in a following section, from the tunnelling motion connecting the two equivalent *Eg* minima. All transitions have been fitted with a coupled Hamiltonian:

$$H = H_0^R + H_1^R + H^{CD} + H^{int} \quad (1)$$

where  $H_0^R$  and  $H_1^R$  are the rigid-rotor Hamiltonians for  $v = 0$  and  $v = 1$ , respectively;  $H^{CD}$  accounts for the centrifugal distortion effects (common to both states), and  $H^{int}$  represents the interaction between  $v = 0$  and  $v = 1$  states, expressed as:

$$H^{int} = \Delta E_{01} \quad (2)$$

$\Delta E_{01}$  being the energy difference between the two states. Coriolis interaction terms are not determinable, as usual when  $\Delta E_{01}$  is very small as in the present case. All transitions were fitted using Pickett's SPFIT program [28], with asymmetric rotor Hamiltonian, including first order centrifugal distortion constants. The  $I^r$  representation and the  $S$  reduction were chosen [29]. The fitted spectroscopic constants are reported in the left part of Table 2.

Later on, the spectrum of the CD=O species has been analyzed. It shows the same features of the spectrum of the parent species, and the obtained spectroscopic constants are reported in the right part of Table 2. No evidences of the hyperfine structure due to the quadrupolar effects of the D nucleus ( $I = 1$ ) have been observed.

Fig. 1 shows the spectra of two transitions of CD=O species. One can note that the tunnelling splitting are larger for the  $\mu_b$ -transition (right), which is an interstates transition.

All measured transition frequencies are reported in the Supplementary material.

## 2.3. Tunnelling motion

The two determined splittings  $\Delta E_{01}$  are related to the barrier

**Table 2**  
Experimental spectroscopic parameters of CHF.

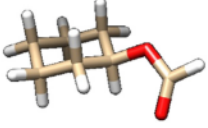
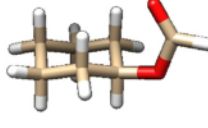
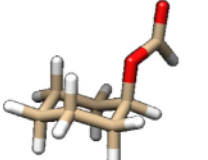
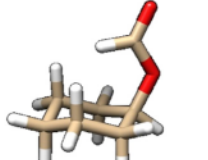
	Parent		DCOO-	
	0	1	0	1
$A/\text{MHz}$	3403.8636(4) <sup>a</sup>	3403.8563(4)	3384.7903(4)	3384.7857(4)
$B/\text{MHz}$	1020.7402(1)	1020.7406(1)	996.0458(1)	996.0453(1)
$C/\text{MHz}$	874.9685(1)	874.9682(1)	856.9817(1)	856.9816(1)
$D_J/\text{kHz}$		0.0749(7)		0.0679(7)
$D_{JK}/\text{kHz}$		0.232(9)		0.224(10)
$D_K/\text{kHz}$		0.55(3)		0.51(3)
$d_1/\text{Hz}$		-19.6(4)		-17.8(4)
$d_2/\text{Hz}$		-3.9(5)		-4.0(5)
$\Delta E_{01}/\text{kHz}$		38(1)		40(1)
$\sigma/\text{kHz}^b$		2.5		4.5
$N^c$		154		160

<sup>a</sup> Standard error in parentheses in units of the last digit.

<sup>b</sup> Root-mean-square deviation of the fit.

<sup>c</sup> Number of lines in the fit.

**Table 1**  
Theoretical spectroscopic parameters and relative energies of the four conformers of CHF.

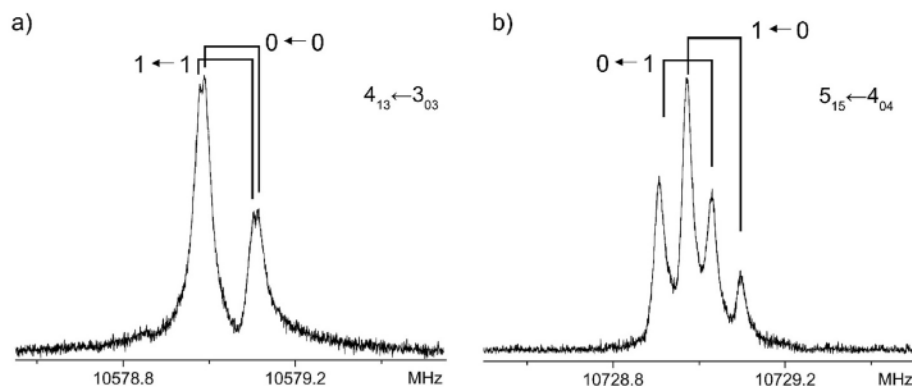
<i>Eg</i>		MP2 <sup>a</sup>	B3LYP-D3(BJ) <sup>b</sup>	<i>Et</i>		MP2	B3LYP-D3(BJ)
	$A, B, C/\text{MHz}$	3392.7	3424.5			3027.6	3038.5
		1022.9	1009.9			1119.4	1108.4
		878.9	869.8			1032.8	1022.2
	$\mu_a, \mu_b, \mu_c/\text{D}$	1.8	2.0			1.3	1.4
		0.8	0.9			0.0	0.0
<i>Ag</i> 		0.8	0.9	<i>At</i> 		1.3	1.5
	$\Delta E/\text{kJ} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1}$	0 <sup>c</sup>	0 <sup>d</sup>			11.1	9.5
	$A, B, C/\text{MHz}$	3022.8	3068.3			2553.3	2559.7
		1039.1	1015.7			1126.4	1122.0
		957.4	935.9			1102.7	1097.6
	$\mu_a, \mu_b, \mu_c/\text{D}$	3.1	3.3			5.0	4.9
		0.1	0.1			0.0	0.0
		2.9	2.8			0.6	0.7
	$\Delta E/\text{kJ} \cdot \text{mol}^{-1}$	18.9	17.3			48.3	40.6

<sup>a</sup> Performed with 6-311++g\*\* basis set.

<sup>b</sup> Performed with def2-tzvp basis set.

<sup>c</sup> Absolute energy = -423.346592 E<sub>h</sub>.

<sup>d</sup> Absolute energy = -424.380788 E<sub>h</sub>.



**Fig. 1.** Rotational electric-dipole transitions of the CD=O species: a) the  $4_{13} \leftarrow 3_{03}$  c-type (intrastate) transition; b) the  $5_{15} \leftarrow 4_{04}$  b-type (interstate) transition, displaying a split larger than c-type (intrastate) transition.

**Table 3**  
Potential energy curve by varying  $\tau$  at MP2/6-311++g(d,p) level.

$\tau(\text{COCH})/^\circ$	-180	-119.3	-35.7	0.0	35.7	119.3	180
$\Delta E/\text{cm}^{-1}$	926	2551	0	224	0.0	2551	926

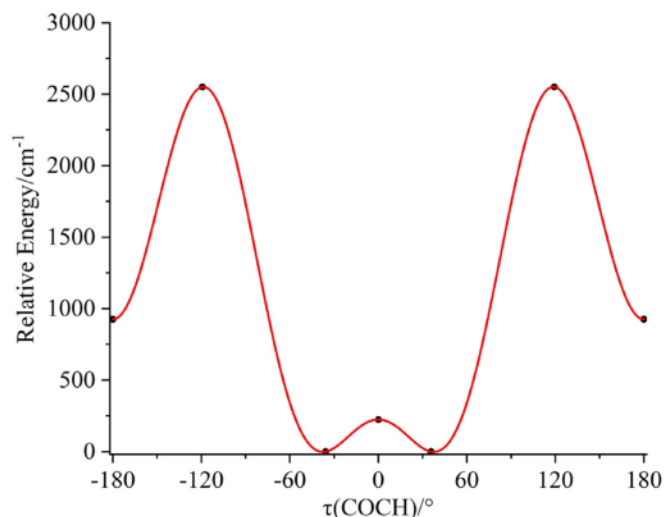
height  $B_2$  of the potential barrier connecting the two equivalent  $E_g$  minima and to the specific pathway and reduced mass of the tunnelling motion.

We calculated - at MP2/6-311++g(d,p) level - first the energies of the stationary point encountered along the  $2\pi$  internal rotation of the HC-OC<sub>2</sub>=O dihedral angle ( $\tau$ ). The results are given - graphically and numerically - in Table 3.

From the data of Table 3, it has been possible to depict the potential energy function as a function of  $\tau$  given in Fig. 2.

As expected, the  $\Delta E_{01}$  values of the parent and DCOO- species are very similar to each other (ca. 40 kHz), since the reduced mass of the motion is about the same.

For this reason, we used the two  $\Delta E_{01}$  values to calculate the



**Fig. 2.** Potential energy function of equatorial cyclohexylformate as function of  $\tau(\text{COCH})$  at MP2/6-311++g(d,p) level.

potential energy barrier ( $B_2$ ) of the intermolecular motion connecting the two equivalent minima.

Meyer's flexible model [30] is particularly suitable to determine potential energy surfaces from rotational and vibrational experimental data. However, with the  $\Delta E_{01}$  splittings being related to the motion across the barrier separating the two  $E_g$  forms, we took into account a limited portion of the torsional space  $\tau$  ( $\pm 65^\circ$ ). The double minimum potential can then be locally described by the following function:

$$V(\tau) = B_2 \left[ 1 - (\tau/\tau_0)^2 \right]^2 \quad (3)$$

where the barrier  $B_2$  at  $\tau = 0^\circ$  and the equilibrium value of the inversion angle  $\tau_0$  (see figures in Table 3) are the two parameters required. Being the formyl group quite heavy, we did not take into account the structural relaxations of other parts of the molecule (mainly changes of the dihedral angles of the light ring hydrogens) upon the  $\tau$  motion. We fixed  $\tau_0$  at its MP2/6-311++G\*\* estimate ( $35.7^\circ$ ). The two experimental splittings were satisfactorily reproduced at a barrier  $B_2 \sim 267 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ . The results of the flexible model calculations are summarized in Table 4.

In the flexible model calculations, the  $\tau$  coordinate has been probed in the  $\pm 65^\circ$  range and solved into 61 mesh points [30].

## 2.4. Structural information

Structural information has been obtained from the 6 available

**Table 4**  
Results of the flexible model calculations.

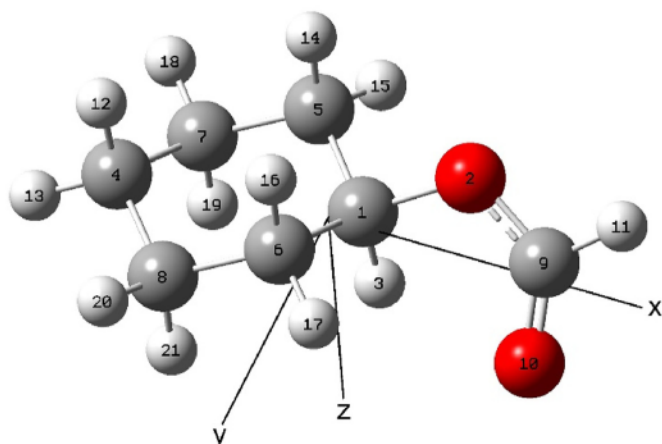
Tunneling splittings	Obs.	Calc.
$\Delta E_{01}(\text{parent})/\text{kHz}$	38	39
$\Delta E_{01}(\text{DCOO-})/\text{kHz}$	40	39
Potential energy parameters		
$B_2 = 267(10) \text{ cm}^{-1}$ $\tau_0 = 35.7^\circ$		



**Table 5**

Cartesian coordinate of the hydrogen atom H11 (see Fig. 3).

	$r_s$	$r_e^a$ (specie Eg)
$ a /\text{\AA}$	3.4313(1) <sup>b</sup>	3.4072
$ b /\text{\AA}$	0.5937(3)	0.5825
$ c /\text{\AA}$	0.7147(2)	0.7542

<sup>a</sup> *Ab initio* values.<sup>b</sup> Error in parenthesis are in units of the last digits.**Fig. 3.** Observed conformation of CHF, with atom numbering and principal axes system.

rotational constants. First, the Kraitchman [31] coordinates of the formyl hydrogen were calculated in the principal axes system of the parent species. The obtained values are reported in Table 5, where they are compared to the *ab initio* ones. The labelling of the atoms is given in Fig. 3. The *ab initio* values correspond to the localized minimum of the vibrational potential energy surface and are indicated by the notation  $r_e$  (equilibrium structure).

Since the experimental rotational constants have intermediate values between those of the MP2/6–311++G(d,p) and B3LYP-D3(BJ)/def2-tzvp methods (see Tables 1 and 2), we did not face up any attempt of structural improvement. The MP2/6–311++G(d,p) geometry is given in the Supplementary Material.

### 3. Conclusions

We assigned the rotational spectrum of the most stable conformer (*Eg*) of CHF and gave an accurate description of its of the formyl group internal rotation.

We would like to emphasize that the rotational spectrum of CHF was observed accidentally, when trying to assign the spectrum of the molecular adduct cyclohexanol-formic acid. This is in line with the discovery that within pulsed jet FTMW spectroscopy, carboxylic acids react to give the esters with primary and secondary alcohols, while they form the adducts with tertiary alcohols [19].

### Author contributions

The manuscript was written through contributions of all authors. All authors have given approval to the final version of the manuscript. All authors contributed equally.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

The authors declare the following financial interests/personal relationships which may be considered as potential competing interests: Nothing to declare.

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### Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.molstruc.2020.127952>.

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