Top-Entry Ball Valve Design for Power Generation Severe Service

How seat loading, trim retention and sealing choices separate the TE4 from conventional cartridge-style top-entry designs

Cornerstone Valve Engineering | October 2026

1. Introduction

In power generation, valve leakage translates directly into lost energy and lost revenue. For boiler vents and drains, main steam isolation and other high-temperature, high-pressure services, the cost of cutting out and replacing a valve (welding, post-weld heat treatment, technician time and outage time) often exceeds the cost of the valve itself. Top-entry, in-line repairable floating ball valves address this by allowing the internals to be serviced while the body remains welded in the line.

Not all top-entry designs perform alike, however. How the seat is loaded, how the trim is retained, and how the bonnet and stem are sealed determine whether a valve holds zero leakage through years of thermal cycling or begins to weep after a few seasons. This article compares the second-generation Cornerstone TE4 with a conventional cartridge-style top-entry design commonly offered in the market, feature by feature.



Figure 1. *Cornerstone TE4 top-entry ball valves with T-handle levers and live-loaded packing.*

2. The TE4 at a Glance

The TE4 is a one-piece, top-entry, in-line repairable floating ball valve engineered for severe utility service. Its rigid one-piece body minimizes leak paths under pipe stresses and flexing in service, and a proprietary metal-to-metal, pressure-energized bonnet seal provides bubble-tight body/bonnet sealing. A modular trim kit allows a factory replacement to be installed in approximately 15 minutes using a basic tool set, without moving the pipe.

TE4 Standard Features

- **Sizes:** 1/2" to 4", full and reduced bore (larger sizes on request)
- **Pressure class:** ASME Class 150 to 4500 (B16.34)
- **Temperature:** -50°F to +1,200°F (higher on request)
- **Leakage:** Zero leakage, type-tested to zero bubbles
- **End connections:** Socket weld, butt weld, RF and RTJ (ASME B16.5 / B16.11)
- **Operation:** Lever, gear operator, pneumatic, hydraulic or electric actuation
- **Guarantee:** 60-month (5-year) zero-leakage guarantee for standard vent and drain service

3. Key Design Differences

3.1 Seat Loading: Wave Spring vs. Single-Piece Belleville Washer

The seat spring keeps the ball and seat in sealing contact as the valve heats, cools and cycles. A conventional cartridge-style design typically uses a single-piece Belleville washer, also known as a stamped spring. Belleville springs offer limited travel, and under continuous deflection through thermal cycles they can lose mechanical load and flatten. As preload drops, seat and ball wear appears prematurely.

The TE4 uses a seat wave spring made of ASTM A638 Grade 660 superalloy. The wave spring provides greater travel and more consistent loading, keeping seat load uniform across large thermal transients and eliminating the flattening associated with single-piece Belleville washers.

3.2 Trim Retention and In-Line Repair

In a conventional cartridge-style design, the internal sealing components form a cartridge that is cam-locked into the body by two bolts; a 90-degree turn locks or unlocks the cartridge. This arrangement has been revised from earlier versions, and field experience has shown that the locking bolts can back off in service, releasing the tight fit on the sealing parts. Relying on small bolts for seat loading is a particular concern in higher-cycle applications.

The TE4 does not use a cam to load the seat, and its seat load does not depend on small locking bolts. For maintenance, socket head cap screws are used to retract the wave spring and pusher seat so the trim can be replaced, giving a simple repair approach without a load path that can loosen in service. The TE4 also implements large seat sealing faces, which improve both the seal itself and the longevity of the valve.

3.3 Body/Bonnet Seal

Conventional cartridge-style designs have moved from a brass or silver C-seal to a graphite gasket with a stainless steel laminate at the bonnet joint. The TE4 uses the C-LOC seal, a metal seal made of Inconel 718 with a molybdenum disulfide (MoS_2) powder coating for lubricity. The seal is pressure energized with self-alignment and seal memory, making it well suited to this high-temperature, high-pressure joint.

3.4 Stem Packing

A conventional cartridge-style design typically does not include live loading as standard. Packing is adjusted with an integral gland wrench, so load has to be restored manually as the packing relaxes. The TE4 comes standard with live-loaded packing, which keeps a constant load on the packing through thermal cycles and reduces the need for field adjustment.

3.5 Manual Operator

On conventional designs the lever is fixed to one side and may only be repositioned to the 180-degree position. The TE4 lever is fully adjustable without removing it from the stem. It can be set to either side or used in a "T" position for easy manual operation, and flow direction is etched on every valve.

3.6 Warranty

The TE4 carries a 5-year warranty for standard vent and drain valves, compared with the 2-year warranty typical of conventional cartridge-style designs. High-cycle applications should be reviewed with Cornerstone Valve to confirm details and terms.

4. Side-by-Side Summary

Feature	Cornerstone TE4	Conventional cartridge-style design
Seat spring	Wave spring, A638 Gr. 660 superalloy; consistent load across thermal transients	Single-piece Belleville (stamped) washer; limited travel, can lose load and flatten

Feature	Cornerstone TE4	Conventional cartridge-style design
Seat loading / trim retention	No cam; seat load not dependent on small bolts; socket head cap screws retract spring and pusher seat for repair	Cam-locked cartridge held by two bolts (90-degree turn); bolts can loosen and release sealing preload
Seat sealing faces	Large seat sealing faces for seal integrity and longevity	Standard design
Body/bonnet seal	C-LOC metal seal, Inconel 718 with MoS2 coating; pressure energized	Graphite gasket with stainless steel laminate
Stem packing	Live loading standard	No live loading as standard; integral gland wrench for manual adjustment
Manual lever	Fully adjustable without removal; either side or "T" position	Fixed to one side; may be repositioned 180 degrees
In-line repair	Modular trim kit, approx. 15 minute replacement; body stays welded in line	Cartridge replacement; body stays in line
Warranty	5 years (standard vent and drain service)	2 years typical

5. Typical Power Generation Applications

The TE4 has an installed base across boiler vents and drains, boiler feedwater and pump isolation, main steam supply and stop/isolation, control valve isolation, turbine inlet and outlet, superheated and saturated steam, high-temperature reheat spray and desuperheater spray, sootblower headers, booster pump isolation, and PORV/ERV isolation. Its quick quarter-turn operation also limits damage from high velocities across the seating surfaces compared with slow-opening linear valves.



Figure 2. *TE4 valves completed and ready for shipment, each with a flow-direction tag and nameplate.*

6. Conclusion

Both designs allow repair with the body left in line, but the TE4 is engineered so that sealing load is maintained by the valve itself rather than by periodic manual adjustment or small fasteners. A superalloy wave spring, cam-free trim retention, large seat sealing faces, an Inconel 718 metal bonnet seal, standard live loading and a 5-year warranty combine to give plant operators longer maintenance intervals and a lower total cost of ownership in cycling, high-temperature service.

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Comparisons describe typical conventional cartridge-style top-entry designs based on information available to Cornerstone Valve at the time of writing. Specifications are subject to change; contact Cornerstone Valve for application-specific details.