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Author(s)	Farràs, Pau; Escudero-Adán, Eduardo C.; Viñas, Clara; Teixidor, Francesc
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# Controlling the Pirouetting Motion in Rotaxanes by Counterion Exchange.

*Pau Farràs,<sup>‡\*</sup> Eduardo C. Escudero-Adán,<sup>§</sup> Clara Viñas,<sup>†</sup> and Francesc Teixidor<sup>†\*</sup>*

<sup>‡</sup>School of Chemistry, Newcastle University of Edinburgh, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, UK.

<sup>§</sup>Institute of Chemical Research of Catalonia (ICIQ), Avda Països Catalans 16, 43007  
Tarragona, Spain.

<sup>†</sup>Institut de Ciència de Materials de Barcelona (ICMAB-CSIC), Campus de la U.A.B., E-08193  
Bellaterra, Spain.

## **KEYWORDS**

ROTAXANE • PIROUETTING • METALLACARBORANE • EXSY • MOLECULAR  
MACHINE

## ABSTRACT

A fine control of the pirouetting motion of rotaxanes has been achieved by using a series of metallabisdicarbollides. The latter have been used as anions in the protonated form of benzylic amide macrocycle-containing fumaramide rotaxanes. The present paper discusses the synthesis, structural and dynamic characterization of the first examples of anionic boron cluster-containing rotaxanes. In order to study the dynamic properties of such molecules, the pirouetting rate of the weakly coordinating boron cluster-containing rotaxanes with the more strongly coordinating trifluoroacetate anion ( $\text{TFA}^-$ ), which would form a close ion pair with the macrocycle, has been measured using the EXSY technique. Our hypothesis was that the stronger the ion pair the lower the rate of rotation due to the presence of a bigger volume of solvent to be moved. The anion would act as an anchor for the pirouetting motion. Indeed, the results show the expected trend: the rotaxane with the closely coordinating  $\text{TFA}^-$  anion pirouettes most slowly and the most weakly coordinating hexabromoderivative of cobaltabisdicarbollide the fastest.

## INTRODUCTION

Mechanically interlocked architectures such as rotaxanes have shown great potential for the construction of synthetic molecular machines<sup>1,2</sup> due to the ability of the mechanically bonded components to undergo controlled motion relative to one another, such as shuttling<sup>3</sup> (linear motion), pirouetting<sup>4</sup> (rotational motion) and rocking<sup>5</sup> (pendular motion). These simple systems exemplify several key principles of controlling molecular-level motion, which nature exploits to great effect in a variety of amazingly sophisticated motor proteins.<sup>6</sup> Large amplitude internal motion can be induced by different types of external stimuli: chemical,<sup>7</sup> photonic<sup>8</sup> or electronic.<sup>9</sup>

However, the control of directionality and velocity or frequency of these motions remains a challenge for the scientific community. While investigations have been carried out into many aspects of this stimulated internal motion, the pirouetting of a macrocycle relative to a thread remains an as yet relatively unexplored topic.<sup>10</sup> Establishing methods for controlling aspects of such movements is a requisite for the development of devices that function through rotary motion. It has already been reported that the rate of pirouetting of the interlocked components of benzylic amide macrocycle-containing nitron and fumaramide rotaxanes can be slowed down by 2–3 orders of magnitude by applying a modest external oscillating electric field.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, an acceleration of >6 orders of magnitude can also be obtained by electronic stimuli causing isomerization of the molecule.<sup>12</sup>

Boron clusters are a class of inorganic structures whose chemistry is remarkable as a result of the combination of their rigidity, hydrophobicity and chemical and thermal stability.<sup>13</sup> Anionic carboranes, boranes and metallabisdicarbollides are also known to be weakly coordinating anions (WCAs).<sup>14,15</sup> However, some of them exhibit remarkable non-covalent interactions with surrounding molecules and this is a promising subject of study for many applications, especially in biomedicine.<sup>16</sup> This combination of factors influences the reactivity of these clusters, their capacity to act as a hydrogen acceptor<sup>17,18</sup> and their efficiency to occupy a given space.<sup>19,20</sup> These properties govern the behavior of these WCAs with counterions,<sup>21,22</sup> however the exploitation of these interactions to control molecular machinery is inexistent. Some examples can be found based on neutral *p*-carborane being used as wheels of nanocars, nanoworms, nanodragsters, etc. that exploit the interaction of the boron cluster with the surface to promote the movement of such molecular machines.<sup>23,24</sup> Finally, Hawthorne et al. proposed the use of metallabisdicarbollides as molecular axis to control unidirectional rotary motion.<sup>25,26</sup>

The present paper discusses the synthesis, structural and dynamic characterization of the first examples of anionic boron cluster-containing rotaxanes. We will focus on the metallabisdicarbollide cobaltabisdicarbollide  $[3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_{11})_2]^-$  [**1**]<sup>-</sup> and its hexabromoderivative  $[8,8',9,9',12,12'\text{-Br}_6\text{-}3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_8)_2]^-$  [**2**]<sup>-</sup>, the latter being a weaker WCA due to the presence of B-Br groups on the more reactive boron vertices limiting its capacity on B-H hydrogen bonding.<sup>27</sup> As discussed above, the pirouetting rate of rotaxanes has previously been altered over several orders of magnitude; however the ability to make smaller, more graduated changes has so far not been possible. We reasoned that incorporation of anionic metallabisdicarbollides in a positively charged macrocycle could be useful for fine tuning the frequency of pirouetting through weak intermolecular interactions (Figure 1). We have previously studied the rate of pirouetting in rotaxanes assembled using a hydrogen bond template<sup>28</sup> and decided to modify the macrocycle so that it could be protonated and use different counteranions to study their effect on the pirouetting rate. Stoddart et al. demonstrated that counterion exchange could modify the dynamics in rotaxanes in a shuttling motion.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, we chose to compare the pirouetting rate of the weakly coordinating boron cluster-containing rotaxanes with the more strongly coordinating trifluoroacetate anion ( $\text{TFA}^-$ ) which would form a close ion pair with the macrocycle. Our hypothesis was that the stronger the ion pair the lower the rate of rotation due to the presence of a bigger volume of solvent to be moved. The anion would act as an anchor for the pirouetting motion. Indeed, the results show the expected trend: the rotaxane with the closely coordinating  $\text{TFA}^-$  anion pirouettes most slowly and the most weakly coordinating hexabromoderivative of cobaltabisdicarbollide the fastest.

## EXPERIMENTAL SECTION

**Instrumentation.** UV-visible spectroscopy was carried out with a Shimadzu UV-Vis 1700 spectrophotometer, at 22 °C temperature, using 1 cm quartz cuvettes.  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra were recorded on Bruker AV 400 instruments. The  $^{11}\text{B}$ ,  $^{11}\text{B}\{^1\text{H}\}$  NMR (128.39 MHz) and  $^{13}\text{C}\{^1\text{H}\}$  NMR (100.59 MHz) spectra were recorded on a Bruker Avance 400 Ultrashield spectrometer equipped with the appropriate decoupling accessories at room temperature. Chemical shift values for  $^{11}\text{B}$  NMR and  $^{11}\text{B}\{^1\text{H}\}$  spectra were referenced to external  $\text{BF}_3\cdot\text{O}(\text{C}_2\text{H}_5)_2$ , and those for  $^1\text{H}$  and  $^{13}\text{C}\{^1\text{H}\}$  NMR spectra were referenced to  $\text{Si}(\text{CH}_3)_4$ . Chemical shifts are reported in units of parts per million downfield from reference, and all coupling constants are reported in Hertz. Standard abbreviations indicating multiplicity were used as follows: s = singlet, d = doublet, t = triplet, m = multiplet, b = broad. FAB mass spectrometry was carried out by the services at the University of Edinburgh. The Electrospray-Ionization mass spectra (ESI-MS) were recorded on a Bruker Esquire 3000 spectrometer using a source of ionization and an ions trap analyzer. For voltammetric determinations, an electrochemical system, VoltaLab (Universal Electrochemical Laboratory System) interfaced with a PGZ100 potentiostat (Radiometer Analytical) and controlled by the VoltaMaster 4 software, was used. The electrochemical cell contained glassy carbon electrode as working electrode, a reference  $\text{Ag}/\text{AgCl}/[n(\text{C}_4\text{H}_9)_4\text{N}]\text{Cl}$  (0.1 M in  $\text{CH}_3\text{CN}$ ) electrode and platinum wire as auxiliary electrode. The solutions were deaerated with analytical grade nitrogen at the start of each experiment to prevent oxygen interference. All experiments were performed in acetonitrile with 0.1 M tetrabutylammonium hexafluorophosphate as supporting electrolyte at room temperature.

**Materials.** Unless stated otherwise, all reagents and solvents were purchased from Aldrich Chemicals and used without further purification. Dichloromethane, chloroform and *N,N*-dimethylformamide were dried using a solvent purification system manufactured by Innovative Technology, Newburyport, MA, USA. All reactions were carried out under an atmosphere of nitrogen. Column chromatography was carried out using Silica 60A (particle size 35-70  $\mu\text{m}$ , Fisher, UK) as the stationary phase, and TLC was performed on pre-coated silica gel plates (0.25 mm thick, 60 F254, Merck, Germany) and observed under UV light.  $\text{Cs}[3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_{11})_2]$ ,  $\text{Cs}[1]$ , was obtained from Katchem and protonated using 3x 25 mL of an aqueous 1M HCl solution.  $\text{Cs}[8,8',9,9',12,12'\text{-Br}_6\text{-}3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_8)_2]$ ,  $\text{Cs}[2]$ , was synthesized according to the literature<sup>30</sup> and protonated using 3 x HCl (1 M).  $[8\text{-(OCH}_2\text{CH}_2)_2\text{-}3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_{10})(1',2'\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_{11})]$ ,  $[9]$ , was prepared according to the literature.<sup>31</sup>

**Synthesis of *N,N,N,N*-tetraisoctylfumaramide, [3]:** Fumaryl chloride (0.52 mL, 4.85 mmol in  $\text{CHCl}_3$ , 5 mL) was added dropwise to a stirred solution of diisoctylamine (3.2 mL, 10.6 mmol) and  $\text{Et}_3\text{N}$  (1.48 mL, 10.6 mmol) in  $\text{CHCl}_3$  (50 mL) at  $0^\circ\text{C}$  under an atmosphere of nitrogen. The reaction was stirred at  $0^\circ\text{C}$  for a further 2 h. The solution was then washed twice with 10 mL of a 1M aqueous HCl solution, twice with 10 mL saturated aqueous  $\text{NaHCO}_3$  solution and twice with a saturated aqueous NaCl solution, dried ( $\text{MgSO}_4$ ) and concentrated under reduced pressure. This material was purified by flash chromatography ( $\text{SiO}_2$ : methanol/chloroform, 0:100 to 3:97) to provide thread [3] as a yellowish oil. Yield: 2.05 g (75%).  $^1\text{H}$  NMR (400 MHz,  $\text{CDCl}_3$ ):  $\delta = 7.42$  (s, 2H,  $\text{H}_e$ ), 3.35 (m, 8H,  $\text{H}_d$  and  $\text{H}_d'$ ), 1.73 (q, 2H,  $J = 5.6$ ,  $\text{H}_c$ ), 1.60 (q, 2H,  $J = 7.2$ ,  $\text{H}_c'$ ), 1.28 (m, 32H,  $\text{H}_b$ ), 0.89 (m, 24H,  $\text{H}_a$ ).

**Synthesis of rotaxane, *E*-[4]:** Thread [3] (281 mg, 0.50 mmol) was dissolved in anhydrous  $\text{CHCl}_3$  (50 mL) and stirred vigorously whilst solutions of *p*-xylylene diamine (539 mg, 3.96

mmol) and Et<sub>3</sub>N (1.2 mL, 3.96 mmol) in anhydrous CHCl<sub>3</sub> (20 mL) and pyridine-3,5-dicarbonyl dichloride (810 mg, 3.96 mmol) in anhydrous CHCl<sub>3</sub> (20 mL) were simultaneously added over a period of 4 h using motor-driven syringe pumps. After a further 16 h the resulting suspension was filtered and concentrated under reduced pressure. This material was purified by flash chromatography (SiO<sub>2</sub>: methanol/dichloromethane, 4:96) to provide rotaxane [4] as a colourless solid. Yield: 43 mg (8%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 9.41 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 9.04 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 7.46 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.00 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 5.94 (s, 2H, H<sub>E</sub>), 5.09 (m, 4H, H<sub>E1</sub>), 3.81 (m, 4H, H<sub>E2</sub>), 3.14 (m, 4H, H<sub>d</sub>), 2.91 (m, 4H, H<sub>d'</sub>), 1.57 (m, 4H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.19 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.77 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>); <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR (100 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 166.3, 164.0, 153.2, 137.6, 130.4, 129.3, 127.8, 54.2, 52.6, 43.9, 39.0, 38.6, 28.7, 27.7, 22.9, 13.9, 10.2; HRESI-MS-pos: *m/z* = 1097.7496 (calc. for C<sub>66</sub>H<sub>96</sub>O<sub>6</sub>N<sub>8</sub> 1097.7526).

**Protonation of rotaxane [4] with CF<sub>3</sub>COOH, E-[5]:** Rotaxane [4] (10 mg, 9.1 μmol) was dissolved in dichloromethane (2 mL) and trifluoroacetic acid (3 μL, 30 μmol) was added. After stirring for 10 min it was concentrated under reduced pressure. Yield: 12 mg (99%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 9.83 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 9.36 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 7.85 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.12 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 5.96 (s, 2H, H<sub>E</sub>), 4.99 (m, 4H, H<sub>E1</sub>), 4.13 (m, 4H, H<sub>E2</sub>), 3.40-3.02 (m, 8H, H<sub>d</sub> and H<sub>d'</sub>), 1.64 (br s, 2H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.43 (br s, 2H, H<sub>c'</sub>), 1.22 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.84 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>); <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR (100 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 166.7, 164.0, 153.6, 137.4, 129.3, 118.7, 49.5, 38.7, 29.5, 27.8, 23.1, 14.0, 10.6; HRESI-MS-pos: *m/z* = 1119.7342 (calc. for C<sub>66</sub>H<sub>96</sub>O<sub>6</sub>N<sub>8</sub>Na 1119.7345); HRESI-MS-neg: *m/z* = 248.9605 (calc. for C<sub>4</sub>F<sub>6</sub>O<sub>4</sub>Na 248.9604).

**Protonation of rotaxane [4] with H[3,3'-Co(1,2-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>11</sub>)<sub>2</sub>], E-[6]:** Rotaxane [4] (10 mg, 9.9 μmol) was dissolved in dichloromethane (2 mL) and a solution H[1] (9.6 mg, 30 μmol) in dichloromethane (2 mL) was added slowly. The orange solution is concentrated under reduced

pressure. The remaining solid was washed with Et<sub>2</sub>O to remove the excess of H[1]. Yield: 16 mg (99%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 9.73 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 9.17 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 7.55 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.00 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 5.82 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.74 (br s, 4H, H<sub>E1</sub>), 4.03, 4.00 (br s, 2H, H<sub>f</sub>), 3.90 (m, 4H, H<sub>E2</sub>), 3.66 (br s, 6H, H<sub>f</sub>), 3.10 (m, 4H, H<sub>d</sub>), 2.90 (m, 4H, H<sub>d'</sub>), 1.43 (m, 2H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.20 (m, 2H, H<sub>c'</sub>), 1.12-0.83 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.63-0.48 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>); <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR (100 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 166.2, 162.7, 149.9, 136.6, 133.4, 129.2, 128.9, 53.8, 52.4, 51.1, 49.3, 43.7, 38.4, 30.4, 29.4, 28.4, 27.3, 23.8, 22.6, 13.5, 9.9, 9.6; <sup>11</sup>B NMR (128 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 6.08 (d, 2B, *J* = 164), 1.02 (d, 2B, *J* = 140), -5.80 (d, 4B, *J* = 109), -6.54 (d, 4B, *J* = 141), -17.68 (d, 4B, *J* = 164), -23.13 (d, 2B, *J* = 164); HRESI-MS-pos: *m/z* = 1119.7331 (calc. for C<sub>66</sub>H<sub>96</sub>O<sub>6</sub>N<sub>8</sub>Na 1119.7345); HRESI-MS-neg: *m/z* = 324.2851 (calc. for C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>22</sub>B<sub>18</sub>Co 324.2846).

**Protonation of rotaxane [4] with H[8,8',9,9',12,12'-Br<sub>6</sub>-3,3'-Co(1,2-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>8</sub>)<sub>2</sub>], E-[7]:**

Rotaxane [4] (10 mg, 9.9 μmol) was dissolved in dichloromethane (2 mL) and an excess of a H[2] solution in dichloromethane was added. The orange solution is concentrated under reduced pressure. The remaining solid was washed with Et<sub>2</sub>O to remove the excess of H[2]. Yield: 24 mg (99%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 9.76 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 9.20 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 7.58 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.03 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 5.85 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.89 (br s, 1H, H<sub>f</sub>), 4.77 (m, 4H, H<sub>E1</sub>), 4.63 (br s, 1H, H<sub>f</sub>), 4.49 (br s, 6H, H<sub>f</sub>), 3.93 (m, 4H, H<sub>E2</sub>), 3.15-2.82 (m, 8H, H<sub>d/d'</sub>), 1.46 (br s, 2H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.23 (br s, 2H, H<sub>c'</sub>), 1.04-0.98 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.66-0.51 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>); <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR (100 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 167.2, 163.7, 148.9, 137.9, 130.4, 55.2, 53.2, 44.8, 39.9, 31.3, 30.4, 29.2, 28.3, 23.5, 14.2, 10.3; <sup>11</sup>B NMR (128 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 5.21 (s, 2B, B8, B8'), 3.20 (d, 2B, *J* = 178), -2.33 (s, 4B, B9, B9', B12, B12'), -5.11 (d, 4B, *J* = 150), -17.65 (d, 4B, *J* = 159), -24.02 (d, 2B, *J* = 173); HRESI-MS-pos: *m/z* = 1097.7540 (calc. for C<sub>66</sub>H<sub>97</sub>O<sub>6</sub>N<sub>8</sub> 1097.7526); HRESI-MS-neg: *m/z* = 796.7424 (calc. for C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>16</sub>B<sub>18</sub>Br<sub>6</sub>Co 796.7448).

**Synthesis of *N,N*-diisooctylfumaramide, *E*-[8]:** Fumaryl chloride (0.52 mL, 4.85 mmol in CHCl<sub>3</sub>, 5 mL) was added dropwise to a stirred solution of 2-ethylhexylamine (1.8 mL, 10.6 mmol) and Et<sub>3</sub>N (1.48 mL, 10.6 mmol) in CHCl<sub>3</sub> (50 mL) at 0°C under an atmosphere of nitrogen. The reaction was stirred at 0°C for a further 2 h. The solution was then washed twice with 10 mL of a 1M aqueous HCl solution, twice with 10 mL of a saturated aqueous NaHCO<sub>3</sub> solution and twice with 10 mL of a saturated aqueous NaCl solution, dried (MgSO<sub>4</sub>) and concentrated under reduced pressure. This material was purified by flash chromatography (SiO<sub>2</sub>: methanol/chloroform, 3:97) to provide thread [8] as a yellowish oil. Yield: 0.69 g (42%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 6.90 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 6.16 (br s, 2H, NH), 3.23 (m, 4H, H<sub>d</sub>), 1.44 (m, 2H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.21 (m, 16H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.83 (m, 12H, H<sub>a</sub>).

**Synthesis of potassium *N,N*-{8-(1,3-dioxohexane)-3,3'-Co(1,2-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>10</sub>)(1',2'-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>11</sub>)}-*N,N*-diisooctylfumaramide, *E*-[10]:** A solution of thread [8] (0.31 g, 0.90 mmol) in toluene (10 mL) was added at 0°C to a stirred solution of sodium hydride (0.15 g, 3.6 mmol) in tetrahydrofuran (20 mL). The reaction was stirred at 0°C for a further 2 h. Then, a solution of [9] (0.73 g, 1.8 mmol) was slowly added at 0°C and left overnight. The solution was concentrated under reduced pressure. The residue was then washed three times with 20 mL of a 1M aqueous HCl solution and three times with 20 mL of a saturated aqueous KHCO<sub>3</sub> solution, dried (MgSO<sub>4</sub>) and concentrated under reduced pressure. This material was purified by flash chromatography (SiO<sub>2</sub>: acetonitrile/dichloromethane, 30:70) to provide thread [10] as an orange solid. Yield: 1.00 g (90%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 7.25 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.23, 4.18, 4.16, 4.11 (br s, 8H, H<sub>i</sub>), 3.64 (t, 4H, *J* = 5, H<sub>h</sub>), 3.59 (m, 8H, H<sub>g</sub> and H<sub>f</sub>), 3.49 (t, 4H, *J* = 5, H<sub>d</sub>'), 3.38 (d, 4H, *J* = 7, H<sub>d</sub>), 1.66 (br s, 2H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.30 (m, 16H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.91 (m, 12H, H<sub>a</sub>); <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR (100 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 166.0, 131.4, 72.0, 69.4, 68.7, 53.3, 52.3, 49.5, 46.8, 38.9, 37.2, 30.3, 28.4, 23.6, 22.8, 17.5,

13.4, 10.2;  $^{11}\text{B}$  NMR (128 MHz,  $\text{CD}_3\text{CN}$ ):  $\delta = 23.32$  (s, 2B, B8), 4.32 (d, 2B,  $J = 128$ ), 0.03 (d, 2B,  $J = 134$ ), -2.71 (d, 2B,  $J = 134$ ), -4.74 (d, 2B,  $J = 140$ ), -7.73 (d, 16B), -17.53 (d, 4B,  $J = 145$ ), -20.39 (d, 4B,  $J = 150$ ), -22.16 (d, 2B,  $J = 184$ ), -28.90 (d, 2B,  $J = 150$ ); FAB-MS:  $m/z$  (%): 428.6 (M- $\text{C}_{32}\text{H}_{73}\text{B}_{18}\text{N}_2\text{O}_6\text{Co}$ , 100), 579.8 (M, 58).

**Synthesis of rotaxane, E-[11]:** Thread [10] (612 mg, 0.50 mmol) was dissolved in anhydrous  $\text{CHCl}_3$  (50 mL) and stirred vigorously whilst solutions of *p*-xylylene diamine (540 mg, 3.96 mmol) and  $\text{Et}_3\text{N}$  (1.1 mL, 3.96 mmol) in anhydrous  $\text{CHCl}_3$  (20 mL) and pyridine-3,5-dicarbonyl dichloride (810 mg, 3.96 mmol) in anhydrous  $\text{CHCl}_3$  (20 mL) were simultaneously added over a period of 4 h using a motor-driven syringe pumps. After a further 16 h the resulting suspension was filtered and concentrated under reduced pressure. The residue was then washed three times with 20 mL of a 1M aqueous HCl solution, dried ( $\text{MgSO}_4$ ) and concentrated under reduced pressure. This material was purified by flash chromatography ( $\text{SiO}_2$ : ethyl acetate/acetonitrile, 90:10 to 70:30) to provide rotaxane [11] as an orange solid. Yield: 148 mg (18%).  $^1\text{H}$  NMR (400 MHz,  $\text{CD}_3\text{CN}$ ):  $\delta = 9.32$  (s, 4H,  $\text{H}_A$ ), 9.20 (s, 2H,  $\text{H}_B$ ), 7.65 (m, 4H,  $\text{H}_C$ ), 7.15 (s, 8H,  $\text{H}_D$ ), 6.00 (d, 2H,  $J = 22$ ,  $\text{H}_E$ ), 5.10 (m, 4H,  $\text{H}_{E1}$ ), 4.20, 4.13 (br s, 8H,  $\text{H}_I$ ), 3.64 (t, 4H,  $J = 5$ ,  $\text{H}_H$ ), 3.59 (m, 8H,  $\text{H}_G$  and  $\text{H}_F$ ), 3.54 (m, 4H,  $\text{H}_{D'}$ ), 3.38 (d, 4H,  $J = 5$ ,  $\text{H}_D$ ), 1.69, 1.45 (br s, 2H,  $\text{H}_C$ ), 1.24 (m, 16H,  $\text{H}_B$ ), 0.85 (m, 12H,  $\text{H}_A$ ).  $^{13}\text{C}\{^1\text{H}\}$  NMR (100 MHz,  $\text{CD}_3\text{CN}$ ):  $\delta = 166.1$ , 164.9, 151.9, 144.1, 130.9, 129.4, 128.9, 72.0, 68.4, 67.9, 53.9, 46.7, 43.1, 37.9, 29.7, 29.0, 28.5, 27.8, 22.8, 22.6, 13.4, 13.3, 9.8;  $^{11}\text{B}$  NMR (128 MHz,  $\text{CD}_3\text{CN}$ ):  $\delta = 23.40$  (s, 2B, B8), 4.32 (d, 2B,  $J = 137$ ), 0.03 (d, 2B,  $J = 132$ ), -2.79 (d, 2B,  $J = 146$ ), -4.83 (d, 2B,  $J = 128$ ), -7.73 (d, 16B), -17.56 (d, 4B,  $J = 175$ ), -20.56 (d, 4B,  $J = 151$ ), -22.31 (d, 2B,  $J = 190$ ), -28.75 (d, 2B,  $J = 130$ ); FAB-MS:  $m/z$  (%): 846.6 (M, 100%), 578.9 (M-  $\text{C}_{30}\text{H}_{28}\text{O}_4\text{N}_6$ , 25%); HRESI-MS-neg:  $m/z = 1716.1298$  (calc. for  $\text{C}_{66}\text{H}_{120}\text{B}_{36}\text{Co}_2\text{N}_8\text{O}_{10}\text{Na}$  1716.1270).

**Synthesis of rotaxane, Z-[4]:** Rotaxane *E*-[4] (80 mg, 0.07 mmol) was dissolved in dichloromethane and irradiated for 15 min in a 312 nm photoreactor. The solution was concentrated under reduced pressure. This material was purified by flash chromatography (SiO<sub>2</sub>: methanol/dichloromethane, 5:95) to provide rotaxane *Z*-[4] as a colourless solid. The remaining *trans* isomer was irradiated again for 15 min and the material was purified with the same column. Yield: 44.9 mg (56%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 9.18 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 8.19 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 7.50 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.18 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 4.82 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.47 (m, 8H, H<sub>E</sub>), 2.82-2.56 (m, 8H, H<sub>d</sub>), 1.51 (m, 4H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.04 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.78-0.68 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>).

**Protonation of rotaxane Z-[4] with CF<sub>3</sub>COOH, Z-[5]:** Rotaxane *Z*-[4] (11 mg, 10 μmol) was dissolved in dichloromethane (2 mL) and trifluoroacetic acid (3 μL, 30 μmol) was added. After stirring for 10 min it was concentrated under reduced pressure. Yield: 11 mg (98%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CDCl<sub>3</sub>): δ = 9.30 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 8.73 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 8.19 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.22 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 4.85 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.46 (m, 8H, H<sub>E</sub>), 2.91-2.76 (m, 8H, H<sub>d</sub>), 1.53 (m, 4H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.06 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.84-0.67 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>).

**Protonation of rotaxane Z-[4] with H[3,3'-Co(1,2-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>11</sub>)<sub>2</sub>], Z-[6]:** Rotaxane *Z*-[4] (11 mg, 10 μmol) was dissolved in dichloromethane (2 mL) and an excess of a H[1] solution in dichloromethane was added. The orange solution is concentrated under reduced pressure. The remaining solid was washed with Et<sub>2</sub>O to remove the excess of H[1]. Yield: 15 mg (98%). <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN): δ = 9.12 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 8.13 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 7.90 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.44 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 5.31 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.51 (m, 8H, H<sub>E</sub>), 4.45, 4.35 (br s, 2H, H<sub>f</sub>), 4.25, 4.22 (br s, 6H, H<sub>f</sub>), 3.10 (m, 8H, H<sub>d</sub>), 1.49 (m, 4H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.24 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.95-0.69 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>).

**Protonation of rotaxane Z-[4] with H[8,8',9,9',12,12'-Br<sub>6</sub>-3,3'-Co(1,2-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>8</sub>)<sub>2</sub>], Z-[7]:**

Rotaxane Z-[4] (11 mg, 10  $\mu$ mol) was dissolved in dichloromethane (2 mL) and an excess of a H[2] solution in dichloromethane was added. The orange solution is concentrated under reduced pressure. The remaining solid was washed with Et<sub>2</sub>O to remove the excess of H[2]. **Yield: 24 mg (99%).** <sup>1</sup>H NMR (400 MHz, CD<sub>3</sub>CN):  $\delta$  = 9.20 (s, 2H, H<sub>B</sub>), 9.06 (s, 4H, H<sub>A</sub>), 8.54 (m, 4H, H<sub>C</sub>), 7.28 (s, 8H, H<sub>D</sub>), 4.86 (s, 2H, H<sub>e</sub>), 4.98, 4.72 (br s, 2H, H<sub>f</sub>), 4.58 (br s, 6H, H<sub>f</sub>), 4.38 (m, 8H, H<sub>E</sub>), 3.10 (m, 8H, H<sub>d</sub>), 1.50 (m, 4H, H<sub>c</sub>), 1.30-1.10 (m, 32H, H<sub>b</sub>), 0.80-0.60 (m, 24H, H<sub>a</sub>).

**X-ray crystal structure determination:** Crystals complex E-[4] was obtained by slow diffusion of hexane in a dimethylsulfoxide solution. The measured crystals were prepared under inert conditions immersed in perfluoropolyether as a protecting oil for manipulation.

**Data collection:** Crystal structure determinations were carried out by using a Bruker-Nonius diffractometer equipped with an APEX 2 4K CCD area detector, a FR591 rotating anode with MoK $\alpha$  radiation, Montel mirrors as the monochromator, and an Oxford Cryosystem plus low-temperature device (T=-173°C). Full-sphere data collection was used with  $\omega$  and  $\phi$  scans. Programs used: Data collection APEX-2,<sup>32</sup> data reduction Bruker Saint<sup>33</sup> V/.60A, and absorption correction SADABS.<sup>34</sup>

**Structure solution and refinement:** Crystal structure solution was achieved by using direct methods as implemented in SHELXTL<sup>35</sup> and visualized by using the program XP. Missing atoms were subsequently located from difference Fourier synthesis and added to the atom list. Least-squares refinement on  $F^2$  by using all measured intensities was carried out with the program SHELXTL. All non-hydrogen atoms were refined, including anisotropic displacement parameters. The structure has been deposited at the CCDC with reference number 1004411.

This sample was measured using Cu-radiation, and the sample turned out to be a combination of two crystals with a 56: 44 occupancy ratio. For the absorption correction TWINABS was used.<sup>36</sup> For the resolution SIR 2011 was used.<sup>37</sup>

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Synthesis of rotaxanes:** Fumaramide *E*-[3], the axle precursor of rotaxane *E*-[4], was obtained by reaction of diisooctylamine and fumaryl chloride as shown in Scheme 1. Subsequent formation of rotaxane *E*-[4] was accomplished via a five-component hydrogen bond templated clipping reaction<sup>38</sup> in which the fumaramide template guides the reaction between isophthaloyl dichloride and *para*-xylylenediamine. Bulky amide substituents are required to prevent dissociation of the macrocycle from the thread by slipping, we found that a previously reported<sup>39</sup> branched alkyl chain stopper served this purpose while also imparting good solubility.<sup>40</sup> The protonation of the two pyridine groups on the macrocycle of rotaxane *E*-[4] with trifluoroacetic acid led to *E*-[5], reaction with H[1] yielded *E*-[6] whereas reaction with H[2] led to *E*-[7].

In addition to the rotaxanes with varying discrete counterions, zwitterionic rotaxane *E*-[11] with bulky cobaltabisdicarbollide stoppering groups was synthesized (Scheme 2) to allow investigations into the effect of a ‘tethered’ intramolecular counterion. Firstly, secondary amide thread *E*-[8] was prepared and subsequent nucleophilic attack by the *in situ* prepared anion on cyclic oxonium [9] yielded dianionic thread *E*-[10] with ‘tethered’ cobaltacarborane units. A hydrogen bond templated clipping rotaxane forming reaction followed by protonation of the pyridine moieties furnished rotaxane *E*-[11]. There are many examples of ionic templated rotaxanes where either thread or macrocycle are positively charged and the counteranion is not

covalently bonded to neither of them.<sup>41,42</sup> On the other hand, there are fewer examples where an anionic stopper is used to compensate the positive charge on the axle as it is advantageous if they want to be incorporated into solid state devices.<sup>43,44</sup> Finally, zwitterionic rotaxanes where the positive charge is located on the macrocycle and the negative on the thread (without being on the stoppers) can also be found. There, the charged moiety is used to template the formation or locking of the macrocycle inside the thread.<sup>45,46</sup> Remarkably, rotaxane *E*-[11] in its protonated form represents a rare example of zwitterionic rotaxane in which charges are located on different components; the negative charges are located on the bulky stoppers at the thread and the positive charges on the macrocycle. We were interested on the influence of the distance between charges on the dynamics of pirouetting rate.

**NMR spectra considerations:** The formation of rotaxanes *E*-[5]-[7] and *E*-[11] was established unambiguously by <sup>1</sup>H NMR, <sup>11</sup>B NMR, <sup>13</sup>C{<sup>1</sup>H} NMR and HRESI-MS, characteristic upfield shifts of the fumaramide double bond proton resonances in comparison with the thread precursors as a result of interlocking were observed in the <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra. Comparison of the <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectra of rotaxanes *E*-[5]-[7] indicates that the chemical environment experienced by thread and macrocycle protons is essentially the same in the presence of a closely coordinating counterion (Figure 2a) or a WCA (Figures 2b and 2c). Unexpectedly, the eight C<sub>C</sub>-H (C<sub>C</sub> = cage carbon) resonances of the C<sub>2v</sub> symmetric cobaltabisdicarbollide counterions of rotaxane *E*-[6] do not appear as a singlet, instead appearing as three resonances with intensities 1:1:6 (Figure 2d). Our hypothesis is that even though metallabisdicarbollides are considered to be weakly coordinating anions they still can interact through the carbon cluster C<sub>c</sub>-H groups,<sup>47</sup> one hydrogen atom of each cobaltacarborane fragment interacts with an atom with a lone electron

pair, most probably from the macrocycle. However, this interaction is weak as can be seen by the low-field shift in the  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectrum. In contrast, *E*-[7] has a singlet corresponding to eight  $\text{C}_c\text{-H}$  resonances. The low-field shift in this molecule is higher than the previous due to a stronger interaction of the  $\text{C}_c\text{-H}$  vertices in each  $\text{C}_2\text{B}_3$  unit with the bromine atom of the B(8)-Br at the other dicarbollide cage. The strong interaction, also observed in the solid state, is responsible for the *trans* conformation of [2], which prevails in solution.<sup>48</sup>

**Structures of the Salts in the Solid State:** Single crystals suitable for investigation by X-ray crystallography were obtained by slow diffusion of hexane in a dimethylsulfoxide solution of rotaxane *E*-[4]. The solid-state structure shows two sets of bifurcated hydrogen bonds between the amide groups of the macrocycle and the carbonyl groups of the fumaramide system. The crystal structure of *E*-[4] is typical (Figure 3) and shows the macrocycle in a chair conformation forming short, close-to-linear, hydrogen bonds orthogonal to the lone pairs of the fumaramide carbonyl groups. The O-HN distances are indicative of the strong H-bonding of the structure. Attempts to crystallize any of the protonated rotaxanes were unfruitful and only *E*-[4] was obtained in some of the tests.

**Dynamic processes:** The intramolecular dynamics have been studied using the bidimensional nuclear magnetic resonance technique 2D EXchange Spectroscopy (EXSY).<sup>49</sup>  $^1\text{H}\text{-}^1\text{H}$  EXSY is based on the exchange rate between two non-equivalent hydrogen atoms that can exchange with one another conformationally or chemically. Selective irradiation of one resonance is followed, after a mixing time  $t_m$ , by detection of any perturbation, of resonances resulting from exchange processes.<sup>50</sup> It is a powerful tool to study multisite systems not amenable to study by

conventional methods. Moreover, it gives site to site rate constants, whereas line-shape methods are sensitive only to lifetimes and less informative. An alternative method already used in the study of dynamic processes is proton SPT-SIR.<sup>51</sup> The use of this technique is recommended over VT-NMR for many reasons including solvent viscosity changes over temperature, aggregation effects or precipitation of the sample. However, EXSY is preferred over SPT-SIR when the dynamic processes are slow and the cross peaks are well defined as it gives a fast and reliable quantitative measurement of the rate and allow calculation of the energy barriers. The equatorial and axial benzylic macrocycle protons ( $H_{E1}$  and  $H_{E2}$ ) of fumaramide rotaxanes *E*-[4]-[7] are in slow conformational exchange due to the slow pirouetting motion of the macrocycle around the thread as can be observed by the broad appearance of the  $^1H$  NMR signals (Figure 2).

EXSY experiments were performed in a 1:1  $CDCl_3$ - $CD_3CN$  mixture to overcome solubility problems. At room temperature, the exchange of the  $H_{E1}$  and  $H_{E2}$  protons is very slow in *E*-[4] due to the strong hydrogen bonding seen in the x-ray structure between the carbonyl groups on the thread and the amino hydrogen atoms on the macrocycle. EXSY measurements gave the room-temperature pseudo-first-order rate constant  $k_{obs} = 0.21\text{ s}^{-1}$ , which is equivalent to an activation free energy of  $18.37\text{ kcal mol}^{-1}$  (Table 1, entry 1; details of the kinetic measurements are given in the Supporting Information). Protonation of the pyridine groups on the macrocycle by any of the acids used in this study led to an increase of  $k_{obs}$ . This might be caused by electron reorganization in the macrocycle that weaken the hydrogen bonding in the molecule. Thus, protonation can be used to change the rate of pirouetting in this type of rotaxanes.

Comparing the conformational exchange rates of *E*-[5]-[7] (Table 1, entries 2, 4 and 6) it is apparent that rotaxanes with WCAs, *E*-[6] and *E*-[7], undergo more rapid pirouetting than *E*-[5] with closely coordinating trifluoroacetate anions. This experimental evidence is what we were

expecting: the boron cluster containing rotaxanes show higher  $k_{obs}$  and lower energy barrier than  $E$ -[5] because the ion pair interaction of the anions with the pyridinium protons is weaker. The WCA nature of boron clusters allows a higher degree of freedom to the rotation of the macrocycle. Interestingly, it can be observed some differences between  $E$ -[6] and  $E$ -[7]. The presence of B-Br vertices in  $E$ -[7] causes a higher acidity on the C<sub>e</sub>-H hydrogen atoms seen by their downfield shift in the <sup>1</sup>H NMR. This could be the reason for a lower interaction between the metallabisdicarbollide and the macrocycle in  $E$ -[7] which causes a higher  $k_{obs}$ , 45.6 for  $E$ -[7] vs. 40.3 s<sup>-1</sup> for  $E$ -[6]. The exchange rates correspond to activation energies ( $\Delta G^\ddagger$ ) of around 15 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> and the difference in energy between the least and the most coordinating anion is 0.5 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>. This energy difference is small compared to the 3.2 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup> energy barrier found upon protonation. Moreover, it is even smaller compared to the barrier found on similar systems upon photoisomerization of the thread component (6.8 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>).<sup>12</sup> The presence of a fumaryl group in the thread of compounds  $E$ -[5]-[7] gives the opportunity to study the dynamics of their isomerized  $Z$  counterparts upon UV light. Irradiation of  $E$ -[4] at 312 nm gives  $Z$ -[4] in 59% yield. Protonation of  $Z$ -[4] gave the desired  $Z$ -[5]-[7] rotaxanes. Characterization of  $Z$  isomers can be found in the Supporting Information. Preliminary NMR experiments on photoisomerized  $Z$ -[5],  $Z$ -[6] and  $Z$ -[7] show that counter anion effects are negligible in these rotaxanes where the pirouetting rate is very high (on the order of 1 s<sup>-1</sup> for similar systems). As an example, <sup>1</sup>H NMR spectrum of  $Z$ -[5] at 223 K show a single peak corresponding to the axial and equatorial H<sub>D</sub> hydrogen atoms on the macrocycle, indicating a very fast rotation. Therefore, we propose that the use of different counter anions could play a key role on the fine tuning of pirouetting motion at slow dynamics.

It is known that solvent effect or moisture can change the dynamics in interlocked molecules.<sup>51</sup> As we are seeking for a fine tuning of the motion we wanted to check that the addition of a solvent wouldn't change the trend observed before upon using WCA. Moisture effects have been discarded as all experiments have been carried out under dry conditions. In our case we would like to study the effect upon addition of methanol to the mixture chloroform:acetonitrile that we were already using. As has been discussed above, the slow pirouetting motion is attributed to the fact that the fumaryl template form strong interactions with the macrocycle causing a decrease on the effect of the counteranion. The addition of a polar solvent such as methanol could break hydrogen bonding and increase the kinetic constants. However, counteranions could play an additional role by protecting the hydrogen bonding from solvent effects. In order to demonstrate this hypothesis we repeated 2D EXSY experiments adding 30% of CD<sub>3</sub>OD to the solvent mixture. Indeed, a very small difference in  $k_{obs}$ , 19.75 vs. 19.28 s<sup>-1</sup>, was observed for *E*-[5]. In the case for *E*-[6], the increase in  $k_{obs}$  was more pronounced although it stayed within the same order of magnitude, 40.3 and 61.4 s<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. Overall, it has been shown that the use of WCA as counter anions increase the pirouetting rate in positively charged rotaxanes.

**Zwitterion *E*-[11]:** EXSY experiments on *E*-[11] give a  $k_{obs}$  of 24.2 s<sup>-1</sup> and an energy barrier of 15.5 kcal mol<sup>-1</sup>. The structure of *E*-[11] prevents a close ion pair between the negative and the positive charges as the first is located on the macrocycle and the latter on the stoppers. In order to keep the electrostatic force between ions, the macrocycle or the thread should distort from their structure. Therefore, the motion will be hindered and the intramolecular electrostatic interactions will slow down the kinetics. Indeed, a comparison between  $k_{obs}$  of *E*-[11] and *E*-[6]

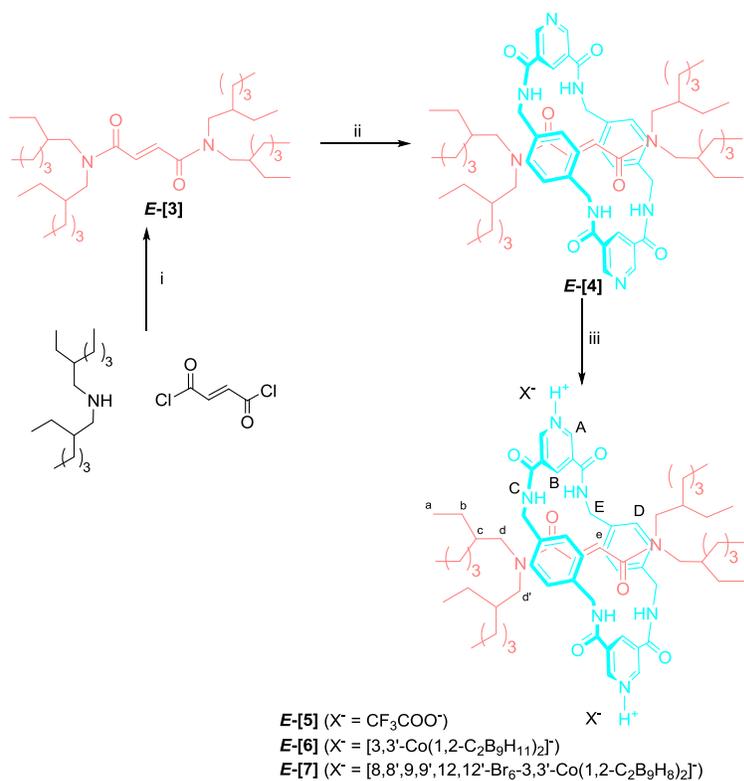
shows that the latter rotates twice as fast. In addition to this, *E*-[11] contains cobaltabisdicarbollide moieties that behave as both a stopper and an electroactive unit. Its incorporation into these potentially machine-like structures could give rise to a series of electrochemically induced events such as electron transfer, acting in the sense of *para*-carborane or C<sub>60</sub> in a new kind of electroactive dyad.<sup>52,53</sup> However, we wanted to see if its redox and optical properties changed because of the intramolecular interactions present in the molecule. Interestingly, spectroscopic and electrochemical properties of the cobaltabisdicarbollide are not affected by its integration in the rotaxane skeleton (see Supporting Information for full details).

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we have demonstrated that the dynamics of positively charged rotaxanes can be fine-tuned by using different counterions. The rate of pirouetting follows the expected trend of  $E$ -[5] <  $E$ -[6] <  $E$ -[7], the latter being the fastest to rotate since hexabromo derivative of cobaltabisdicarbollide is the weakest coordinating anion. The difference in the rotation frequency between them is within the same order of magnitude and therefore, a proper modulation of the pirouetting motion is achievable by this methodology. The effect of the counteranion is important under slow kinetics but is negligible when the pirouetting rate is very high, as in the case for *Z* isomers. On the other hand, the pirouetting rate in *E*-[11] is twice as slow as *E*-[6], where intramolecular electrostatic interactions play a key role. This indicates that cobaltabisdicarbollide stoppers are slowing down the rotation of the macrocycle by their interactions with the protonated pyridine groups. Besides, *E*-[11] is an interesting example of

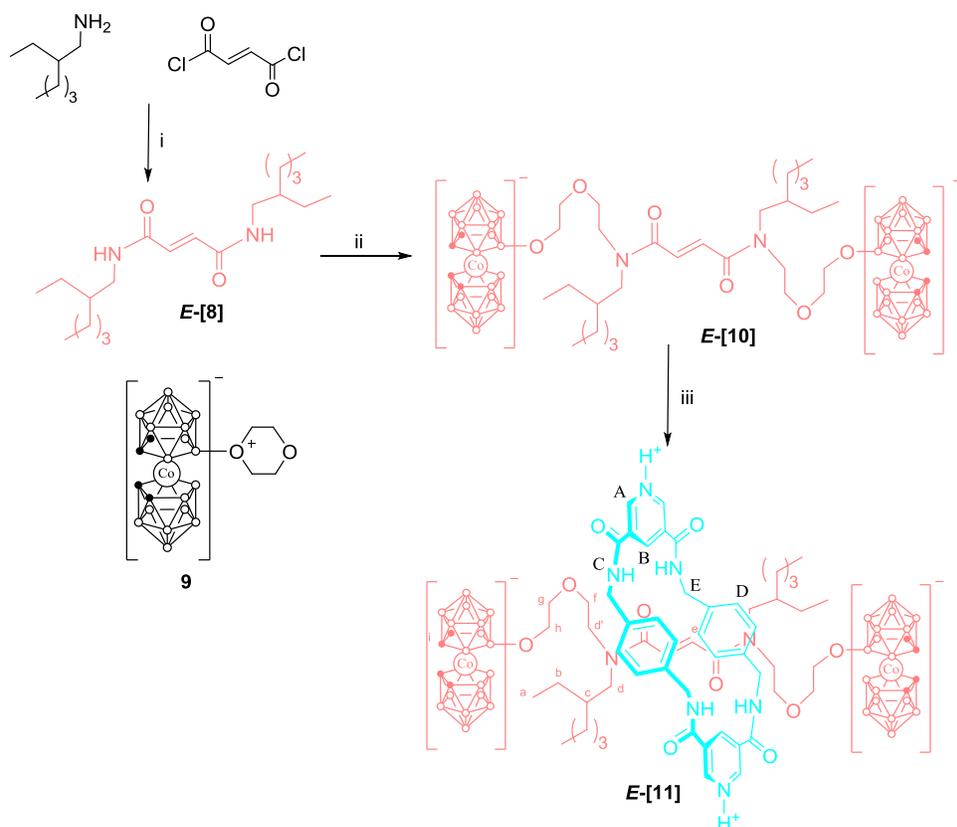
zwitterionic rotaxane and investigations on the use of its redox properties as an additional stimulus to control rotaxane dynamics are currently under way in our laboratories.

**Scheme 1.** Hydrogen bond templated synthesis of rotaxanes with a doubly positively charged macrocycle with a range of counterions.<sup>a</sup>



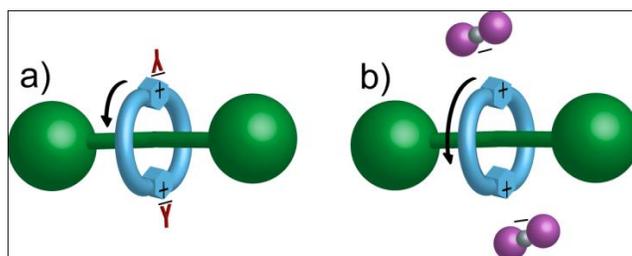
<sup>a</sup>Reagents and conditions: (i)  $\text{Et}_3\text{N}$ ,  $\text{CHCl}_3$ ,  $0^\circ\text{C}$ , 2 h. 75%. (ii) *Para*-xylene diamine, pyridine-3,5-dicarbonyl dichloride,  $\text{Et}_3\text{N}$ ,  $\text{CHCl}_3$ , rt, 20 h. 8%. (iii) Trifluoroacetic acid or H[1] or H[2],  $\text{CH}_2\text{Cl}_2$ . quant.

**Scheme 2.** Synthesis of a zwitterionic [2]rotaxane with inter-component ion pairs.<sup>a</sup>

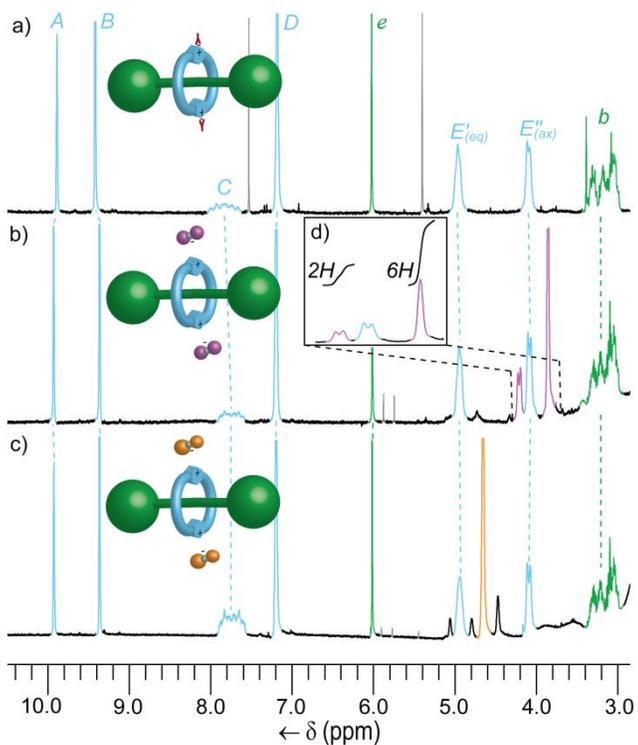


<sup>a</sup>Reagents and conditions: (i) Et<sub>3</sub>N, CHCl<sub>3</sub>, 0 °C, 2 h. 42%. (ii) 1. NaH, toluene-tetrahydrofuran 2:1, 0°C, 2 h. 2. [3,3'-Co(8-C<sub>4</sub>H<sub>8</sub>O<sub>2</sub>-1,2-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>10</sub>)(1',2'-C<sub>2</sub>B<sub>9</sub>H<sub>11</sub>)] [**9**], rt, 18 h. 90%. (iii) *Para*-xylene diamine, pyridine-3,5-dicarbonyl dichloride, Et<sub>3</sub>N, CHCl<sub>3</sub>, rt, 20 h. 2. 1M HCl<sub>(aq)</sub>. 18%.

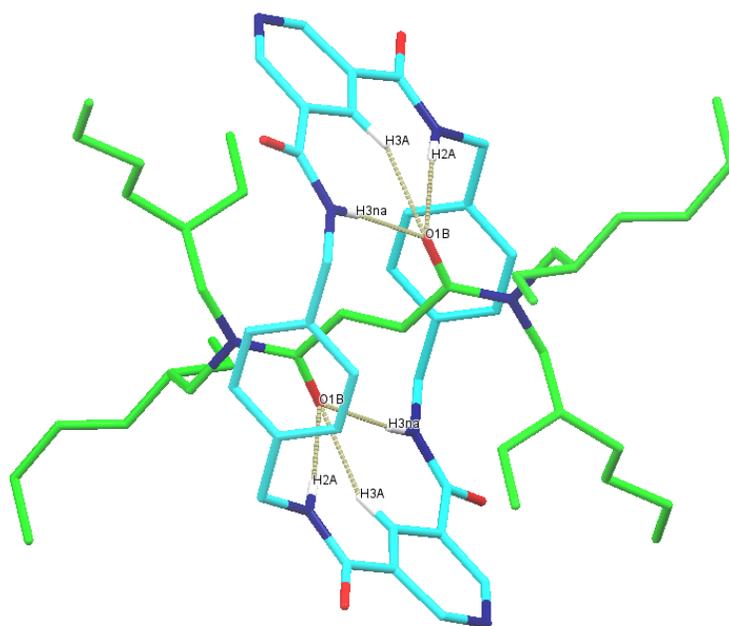
**Figure 1.** Controlling the rotation of the macrocycle relative to the thread (pirouetting motion) in a [2]rotaxane by counter ion coordination capacity. The doubly protonated macrocycle shown in blue pirouettes more slowly with (a) a small, strongly coordinating counterion such as trifluoroacetate (shown in red) than in comparison with (b) a large, weakly coordinating counterion such as cobaltabisdicarbollide (shown in pink and grey).



**Figure 2.** Partial  $^1\text{H}$  NMR spectra (400 MHz,  $\text{CD}_3\text{CN}$ , 298 K) of protonated benzylic amide rotaxane with a)  $\text{TFA}^-$  counterion  $E$ -[**5**], b)  $[3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_{11})_2]^-$  counterion  $E$ -[**6**], c)  $[8,8',9,9',12,12'\text{-Br}_6\text{-}3,3'\text{-Co}(1,2\text{-C}_2\text{B}_9\text{H}_8)_2]^-$  counterion  $E$ -[**7**] and d) expansion of the region showing the metallabisdicarbollide anion  $\text{C}_C\text{-H}$  resonances in rotaxane  $E$ -[**6**] with integrals. The lettering corresponds to that shown in Scheme 1.



**Figure 3.** X-ray crystal structure of rotaxane *E*-[4] (for clarity, carbon atoms of the macrocycle are shown in blue and the carbon atoms of the thread in green; oxygen atoms are depicted in red, nitrogen atoms are dark blue, and selected hydrogen atoms are white. Disorder has been also omitted). Intramolecular hydrogen bond distances (Å): O1B-H2A = 2.16, O1B-H3na = 2.14, O1B-H3A = 2.15.



**Table 1.**  $k$  and  $\Delta G^\ddagger$  values for compounds  $E$ -[4]-[7] and  $E$ -[11] calculated by the 2D-EXSY technique.<sup>a</sup>

Entry	Rotaxane	Solvent	$k_{obs}$ (s <sup>-1</sup> )	$\Delta G^\ddagger_{298}$ (kcal mol <sup>-1</sup> )
<b>1</b>	$E$ -[4]	1:1 CDCl <sub>3</sub> -CD <sub>3</sub> CN	0.21	18.37
<b>2</b>	$E$ -[5]	1:1 CDCl <sub>3</sub> -CD <sub>3</sub> CN	19.75	15.67
<b>3</b>	$E$ -[5]	35:35:30 CDCl <sub>3</sub> - CD <sub>3</sub> CN-CD <sub>3</sub> OD	19.28	15.68
<b>4</b>	$E$ -[6]	1:1 CDCl <sub>3</sub> -CD <sub>3</sub> CN	40.33	15.25
<b>5</b>	$E$ -[6]	35:35:30 CDCl <sub>3</sub> - CD <sub>3</sub> CN-CD <sub>3</sub> OD	61.38	14.99
<b>6</b>	$E$ -[7]	1:1 CDCl <sub>3</sub> -CD <sub>3</sub> CN	45.59	15.17
<b>7</b>	$E$ -[11]	1:1 CDCl <sub>3</sub> -CD <sub>3</sub> CN	24.25	15.54

<sup>a</sup>Dynamic constants calculated at room temperature (298 K)

## ASSOCIATED CONTENT

**Supporting Information.** EXSY experimental details are fully explained. Spectroscopic and electrochemical data for *E*-[11] is shown. Crystallographic data for *E*-[4]. This material is available free of charge via the Internet at <http://pubs.acs.org>

## Web-Enhanced Feature

Portions of the experimental section appear in P.F. dissertation available through <http://tdx.cat/handle/10803/3305>.

## AUTHOR INFORMATION

### Corresponding Author

Email: [pau.farras@ncl.ac.uk](mailto:pau.farras@ncl.ac.uk); [teixidor@icmab.es](mailto:teixidor@icmab.es).

### Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

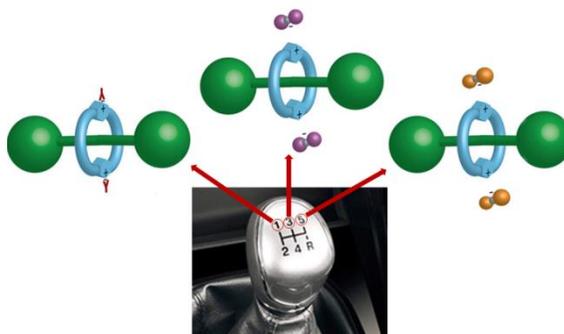
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## SYNOPSIS

Fine tuning of the pirouetting motion of rotaxanes has been achieved by changing the counterion of protonated benzylic amide macrocycle-containing fumaramide moieties. The effect of weakly coordinating anions such as metallocarboranes has been investigated using the EXSY NMR technique. Our hypothesis was that the stronger the ion pair the lower the rate of rotation, as the anion would act as an anchor for the pirouetting motion.

## TOC GRAPHICS



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