United States Patent [19]

Patrick et al.

[11] **3,748,672**

[45] **July 31, 1973**

[54] **INNER TUBE-TYPE RECREATION VEHICLE**

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[22] Filed: **Aug. 23, 1971**

[21] Appl. No.: **174,012**

Related U.S. Application Data

[63] Continuation-in-part of Ser. No. 133,169, April 12, 1971, abandoned.

[52] **U.S. Cl.** **9/347**

[51] **Int. Cl.** **B63c 9/04**

[58] **Field of Search** ..... 297/DIG. 3, 452; 9/347, 11 A, 7, 11 R, 337, 310

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Assistant Examiner—Paul E. Sauberer
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[57] **ABSTRACT**

An inner tube-type recreation vehicle is described having a torus inflatable tube with a seat secure at a desired elevation in the central opening of the tube. The seat is secured to the tube by a plurality of strap assemblies at angularly spaced locations about the tube.

6 Claims, 19 Drawing Figures

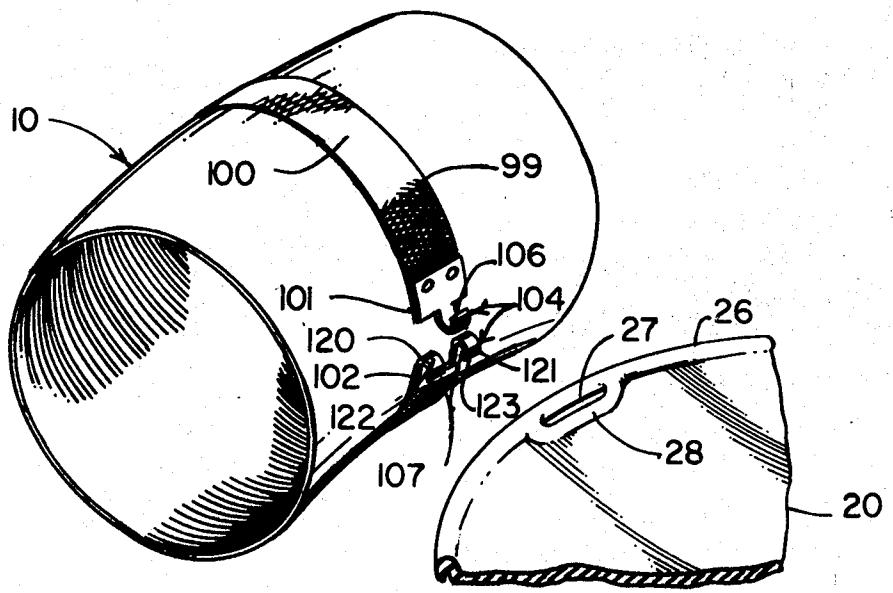

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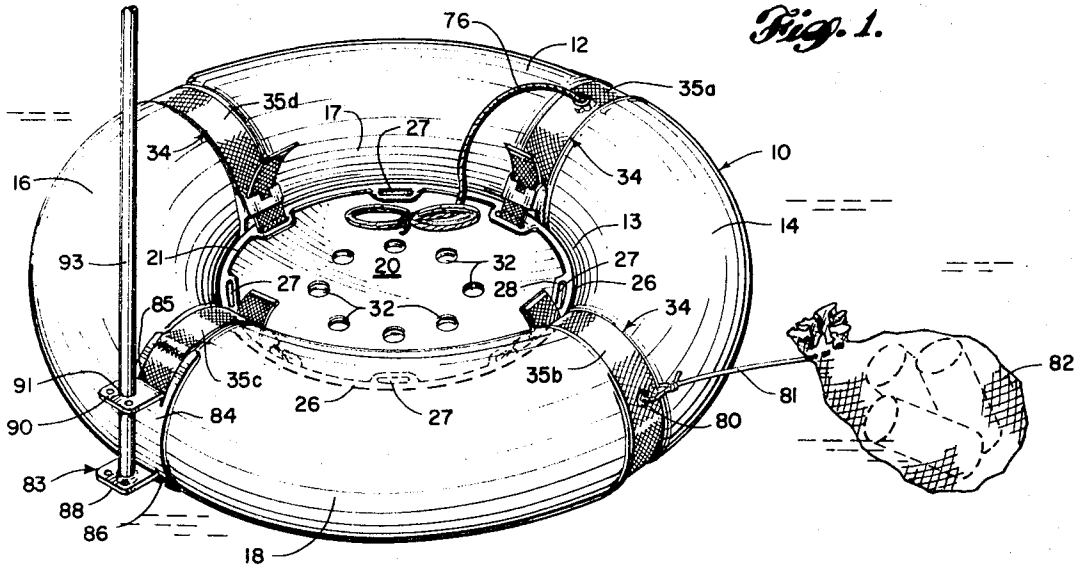
Fig. 1.



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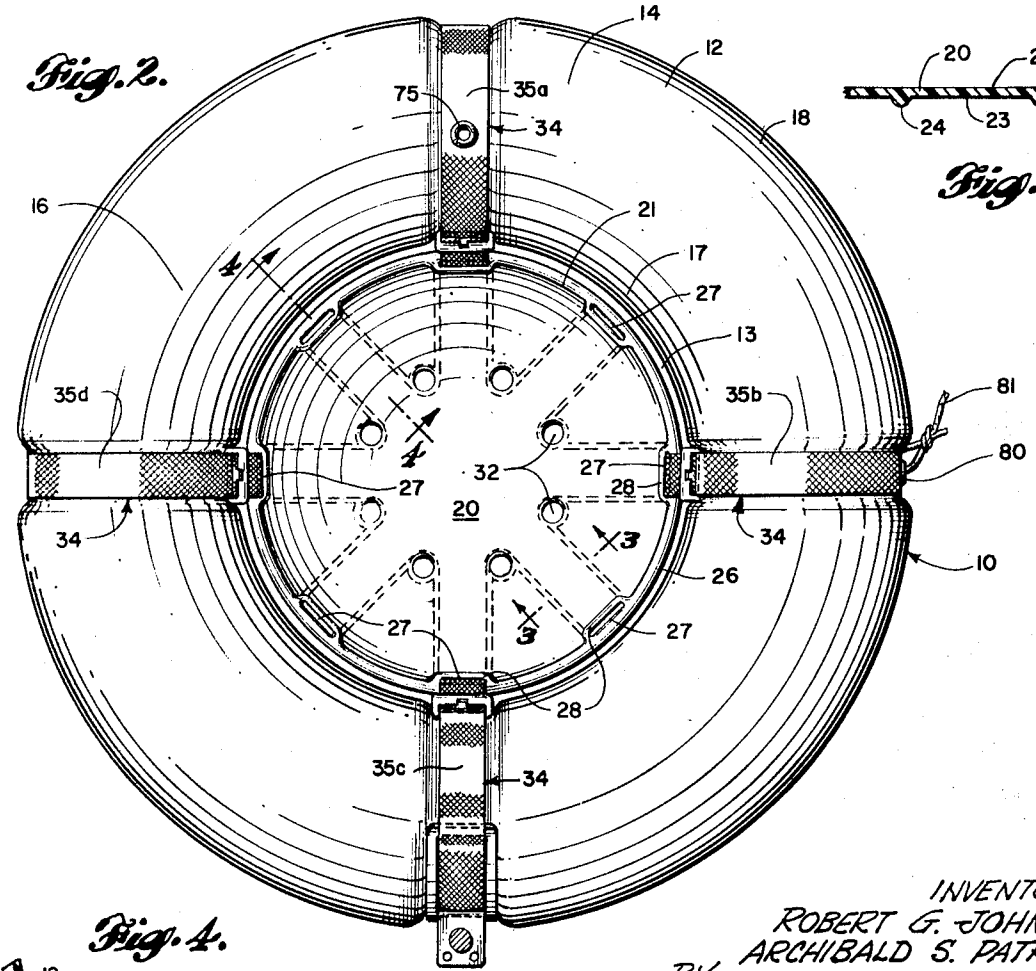

Fig. 3.

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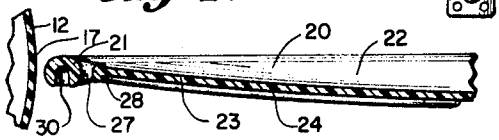

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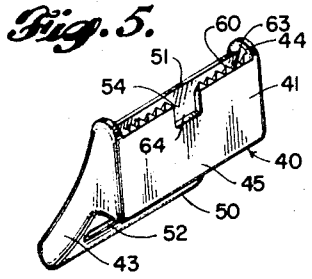
Fig. 5.



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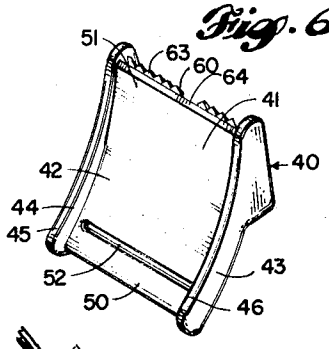

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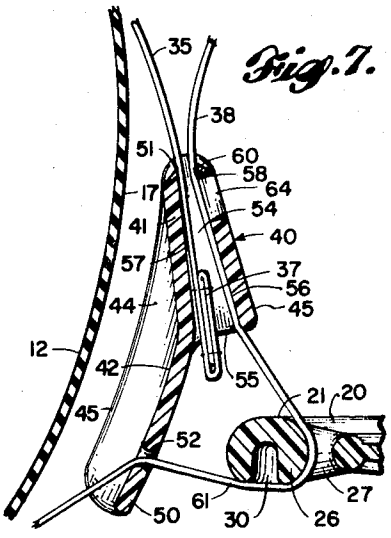

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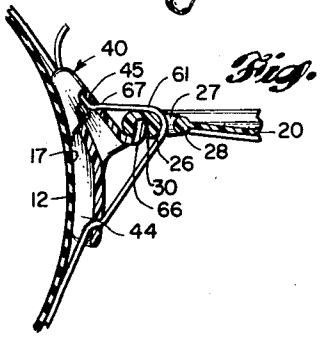

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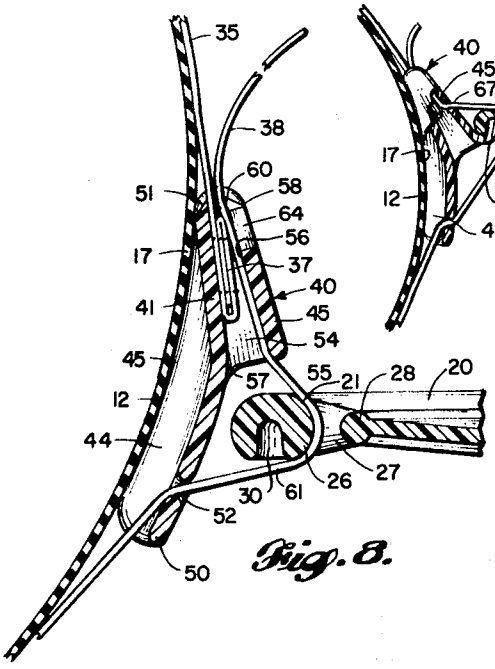

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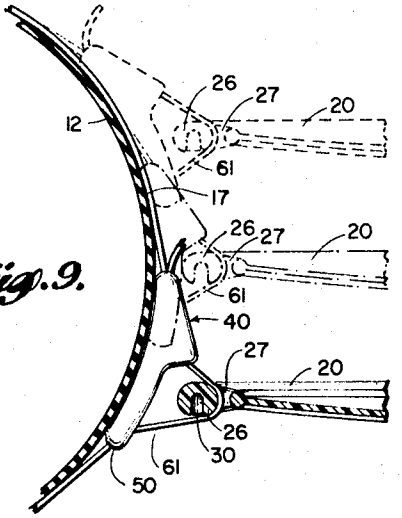

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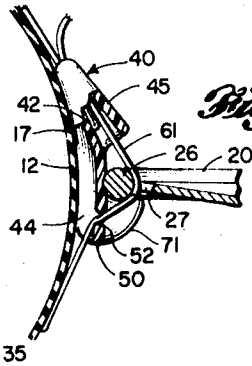

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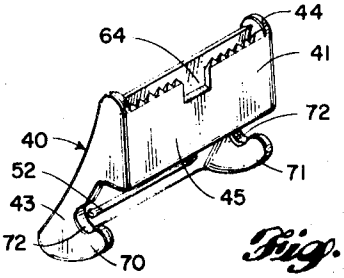

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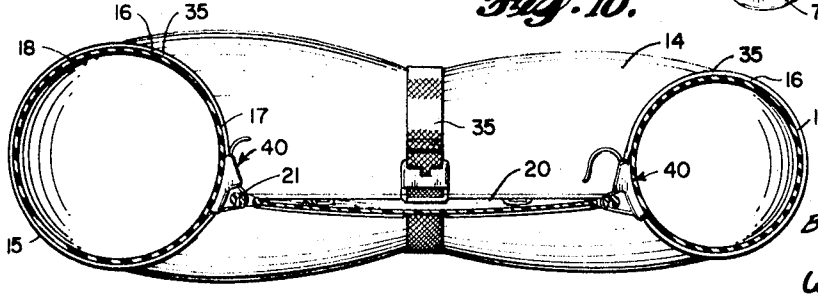

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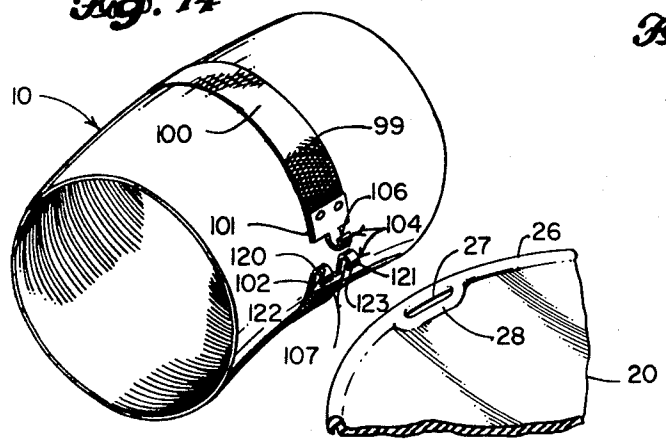
Fig. 14



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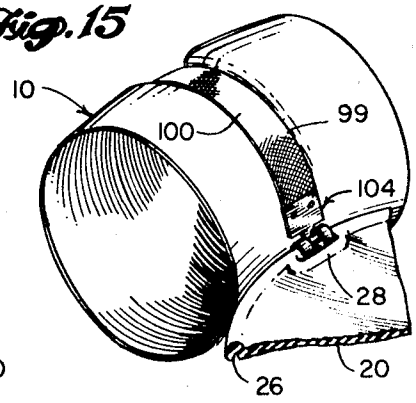

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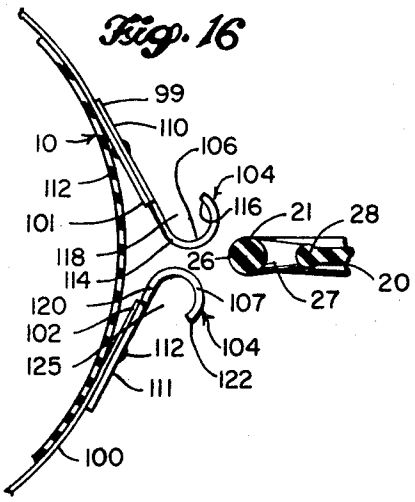

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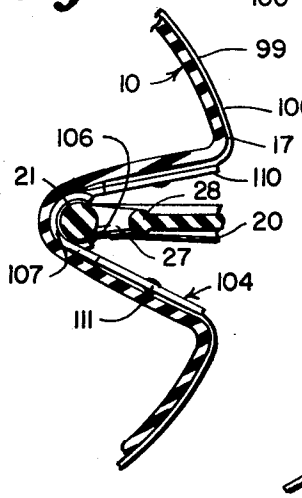

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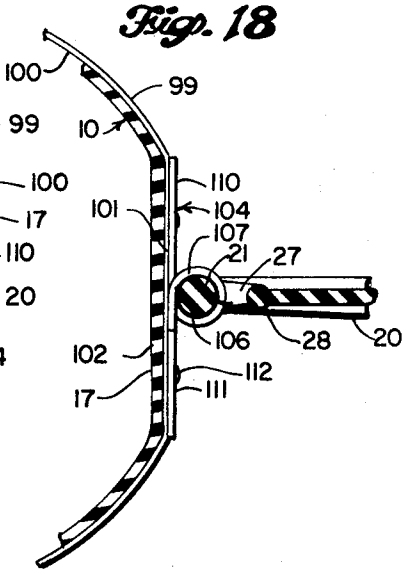

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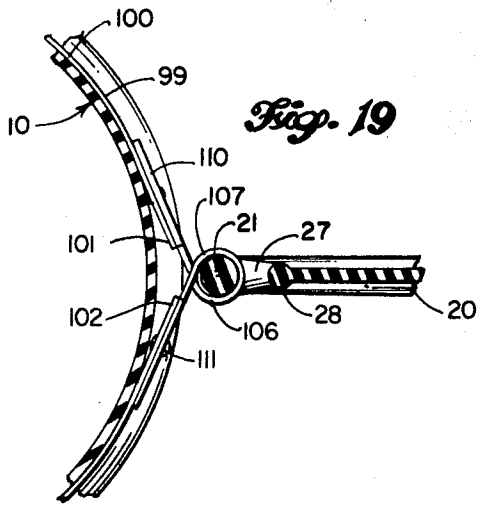

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INNER TUBE-TYPE RECREATION VEHICLE

This application is a continuation-in-part of application Ser. No. 133,169, filed Apr. 12, 1971, now abandoned.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to recreation vehicles and more particularly to inner tube-type recreation vehicles that are principally adapted for floating on moving bodies of water such as rivers and down snow covered slopes.

Tire "inner tubes" have long been utilized as recreation vehicles to support persons as they float down rivers or slide down snow covered slopes. Normally, the rider sits on the tube with his buttocks in the center of the tube and his limbs extending over the sides of the tube. Many serious accidents have been caused when the rider's buttocks or limbs strike rocks and the like immediately below the water surface. Frequently, such accidents cause serious injury requiring substantial hospitalization and recuperation. Similar accidents have occurred when the inner tube is utilized for sliding down snow covered slopes. It is not infrequent that the rider has a limb that becomes caught between the snow surfaces and the tube. On some snow slopes, inner tubes are prohibited because of this danger.

One of the principal objects of this invention is to provide a recreation vehicle of the inner tube-type that is particularly adaptable for carrying an individual down a river or through rapids or down snow covered slopes in a safe manner.

An additional object of this invention is to provide a recreation vehicle having a seat that is supportable above the bottom of the tube to protect the individual from becoming injured on rocks or other obstacles over which the tube is carried.

A further object of this invention is to provide such a recreation vehicle that is very economical to construct and durable in use.

An additional object of this invention is to provide a recreation vehicle that is extremely compact and can be readily conveyed to the area of use.

A further object of this invention is to provide a recreation vehicle of the inner tube-type having a seat that may be vertically adjustable as desired.

An additional object of this invention is to provide a low cost recreation vehicle enabling persons of all ages to enjoy the outdoors and to reach otherwise unattainable scenic locations which would be too expensive to reach by other vehicles.

A still further object of this invention is to provide an inner tube-type recreation vehicle that may be easily assembled by persons of all ages.

These and other objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent upon the reading of the following detailed description of a preferred embodiment.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

A preferred and several alternate embodiments of this invention are illustrated in the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an inner tube-type recreation vehicle embodying the principal features of the invention including a seat secured to the inner tube by a plurality of strap assemblies;

FIG. 2 is a plan view of the recreation vehicle illustrated in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a fragmentary cross-sectional view taken along line 3—3 in FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary cross-sectional view taken along line 4—4 in FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a front perspective view of a component of the strap assembly;

FIG. 6 is a rear perspective view of the component illustrated in FIG. 5;

FIG. 7 is a fragmentary, vertical cross-sectional view taken through the strap assembly showing the seat being secured to the inner tube;

FIG. 8 is a fragmentary, vertical cross-sectional view similar to FIG. 7 except showing the seat secured to the inner tube;

FIG. 9 is a fragmentary, vertical cross-sectional view similar to FIGS. 7 and 8 except showing alternate vertically adjustable positions of the seat with respect to the inner tube in which a lower position is shown in solid line and two vertically spaced upper positions are illustrated in dotted line;

FIG. 10 is a vertical cross-sectional view taken along a diameter of the tube illustrating strap assemblies being applied with varying snugness to deform the tube to a desired configuration;

FIG. 11 is a vertical cross-sectional view of a section of a strap assembly illustrating an alternate embodiment;

FIG. 12 is a fragmentary, vertical cross-sectional view similar to FIGS. 8 and 11 except showing a second alternate embodiment;

FIG. 13 is a perspective front view of a component of the strap assembly illustrating the second embodiment;

FIG. 14 is a fragmentary perspective view of a section of an inner tube illustrating an alternate embodiment of the strap assemblies for securing a seat to the inner tube;

FIG. 15 is a fragmentary perspective view similar to FIG. 14 except showing the seat secured to the inner tube; and

FIGS. 16–19 are fragmentary vertical cross-sectional views taken along line 16—16 in FIG. 14 showing in sequence the mounting of the seat to the inner tube by the strap assemblies.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring now in detail to the drawings, there is shown in FIG. 1 a recreation vehicle generally designated by the numeral 10 for supporing a rider on bodies of water and particularly for floating down rapidly moving bodies of water such as rivers. The recreation vehicle can also be utilized for sliding down snow covered slopes. Although not limited to any particular age group it is principally enjoyed by younger members of our society.

The recreation vehicle 10 is of an inner tube-type having as one of its components an inflatable torus-shaped tube 12. Such tubes 12 are similar to inner tubes utilized in automobile tires. The tubes 12 are generally made of a rubber composition having a central opening 13 therethrough and can be provided in a variety of colors. The tube 12 has an inner diameter defined by the central open aperture 13 and an outer circumferential diameter defined by major dimension of the tube. Generally, the tubes are constructed in a variety of sizes depending upon the dictates of the particu-

lar need of the wheeled vehicle. The most common sizes of inner tubes have an inner diameter that varies between 20 and 22 inches.

The torus-shaped tube **12** has a section diameter which is frequently referred to as the thickness of the inflated tube. The tube **12** is shown inflated in FIGS. **1** and **2.** The tube **12,** when inflated, will generally assume a uniform cross-section with a relatively small amount of positive pressure on the interior thereof. For purposes of illustration only, the condition of the tube when it initially assumes a substantially uniform cross-section will be referred to as "soft inflation." With additional interior air pressure the tube expands slightly making the tube more rigid although still resilient. The more rigid condition of the tube will be referred to as "hard inflation." The tube **12** has an exterior peripheral torus surface **14** that will be divided for purpose of illustration into a bottom surface **15** along the lower arc of the tube, a top surface **16** along the upper arc of the tube, an inner surface **17** on the inside of the tube defined by the central opening **13** and an outer surface **18** (FIG. **10**). The bottom surface **15** is submerged below the water surface when the vehicle is afloat and engages the snow surface when the vehicle is utilized for sliding down snow covered slopes.

The recreation vehicle **10** has a seat **20** that is disc-shaped for being positioned in the central opening **13** so that there is very little space between the periphery **21** of the seat and the inner surface **17.** The seat **20** is designed of a rather semi-rigid material that will support a human being when the seat is supported to the tube along the periphery **21.** The seat **20** does not have any holes or voids of sufficient size to enable the person riding the vehicle to extend any of his limbs downward through the central opening **13.** This prevents the rider from having any of his limbs caught between the vehicle **10** and the surface on which the vehicle is supported. Furthermore, when the recreation vehicle is utilized for floating down river rapids it protects the rider's buttocks from rocks and other obstacles that may be just immediately below the surface of the water. The seat **20** is preferably made of a semi-rigid plastic. The seat **20** has a top surface **22** that is rather smooth and a bottom surface **23.** The top surface **22** is slightly concave in shape to allow water and melted snow to flow from the periphery to the center. The bottom surface **23** has radial ribs **24** formed thereon that extend outward in a radial direction to add additional strength and rigidity to the seat. The seat **20** has a peripheral rib or rim **26** extending around the periphery **21** of the seat. Elongated holes or slots **27** are formed through the seat **20** from the top surface to the bottom surface at evenly angularly spaced locations adjacent the peripheral rim **26.** In the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1** and **2,** eight slots **27** are formed at 45° intervals about the periphery. Ribs **28** are formed around the slots **27** to strengthen the seat at such locations to prevent cracks from developing from any stress concentrations caused by the slots **27.** The peripheral rim **26** has an annular groove **30** formed on the underside thereof as shown in FIG. **4.** Drain holes **32** are formed in the seat near the central portion thereof to enable water or melted snow to pass therethrough. The holes **32** are not large enough for one to extend a limb therethrough. As previously mentioned, the seat **20** is designed to support at least a portion of a rider in the central opening **13.**

The recreation vehicle **10** further includes a plurality of strap assemblies **34** that interconnect and secure the seat to the inner tube **12.** In the embodiment shown in FIGS. **1** and **2,** four strap assemblies **34** are utilized. The strap assemblies **34** are an extremely important feature of this invention and are provided to enable the seat **20** to be vertically adjusted at desired elevations and held firmly at those elevations in relationship to the inner tube **12.** Each of the strap assemblies **34** includes a flexible strap or belt **35** made of a fabric material having a length sufficient to evolve or loop around a torus section of the tube as shown in FIGS. **1** and **2.** In the embodiment illustrated in FIGS. **1–13** each of the straps **34** have an enlarged one end **37** and an opposite other end **38.** The enlarged end **37** may be formed by folding the strap back upon itself to build up several layers. End **37** is shown with three layers. Each of the strap assemblies **34** further includes means **40** for interconnecting and interlocking the ends **37** and **38** and to snugly secure the seat to the inner tube. The means **40** is designed to hold the seat **20** to the inner tube **12** to maintain and secure the seat to the tube **12** at a desired elevation. The means **40** also is designed to support the seat along the periphery **21.** The means **40** illustrated in FIGS. **5–10,** has a body **41** with a curved back wall **42** and adjacent side walls **43** and **44** respectively. The side walls **43** and **44** have curved back side edges **45** and **46** respectively that engage the inner surface **17** of the tube when the strap assemblies are mounted snugly on the tube. This is particularly shown in FIG. **8.** The body **41** has a front wall **45.** The body **41** has a lower end **50** and an upper end **51.** A slot or elongated hole **52** is formed through the body, in particularly the back wall **42,** adjacent the lower end **50.** The slot **52** is of sufficient dimension to enable the belt or strap to be inserted therethrough.

The body **41** further has a cavity, slot, or hole **54** extending therethrough for receiving the ends **37** and **38** therein. The cavity has an enlarged frontal opening **55** and tapered front and back walls **56** and **57** respectively that taper down from the front opening **55** to a rear opening **60** adjacent a throat **58** defining the minimal dimension between the front wall **56** and the back wall **57.** The cavity **54** is of sufficient size to enable the ends **37, 38** of the strap to be extended therethrough. The tapered walls **56** and **57** extend in one direction from the frontal opening **55** to the rear opening **60.** A throat **58** is designed to prevent the ends **37** and **38** from being separately pulled from the cavity **54** when the ends are frictionally interlocked. The interlocking is accomplished by providing the throat **58** with an opening dimension sufficient to enable the enlarged end **37** to be inserted into the cavity **54** through the throat **58** in an opposite direction to the tapered walls **56** and **57** and to enable the other end **38** to be extended through the cavity **54** in the same direction as the tapered walls **56** and **57** but insufficient to enable both ends from passing therethrough when the ends are overlapped. The tapered wall **56** and **57** provides a wedge clamping means for clamping the ends **37** and **38** together in frictional contact to secure the strap **35** firmly to a torus section of the tube.

FIG. **7** illustrates the mounting of the seat **20** to tube **12.** Initially, the tube **12** is inflated to the "soft inflation" condition. Each strap is then looped about a torus section of the tube with the enlarged end **37** of the strap inserted into the cavity **54** in the opposite direction to

the taper as shown in FIG. 7. The other end 38 is initially inserted through the slot 52 from the back to the front of the unit 45. The end 38 is then inserted upward through one of the slots 27 in the seat 20. The end 38 is then doubled back and inserted through the cavity 54 in the same direction as the taper to form a loop 61 about the section of the peripheral rib 26 and to overlap the end 37. The end 38 is then cinched through the cavity 54 to pull the looped strap snugly against the torus section with the edges 45 and 46 bearing against the surface 17. As the end 38 is pulled, the overlapped ends 37 and 38 are forced toward the throat 58 causing the ends to be forced together in a firm frictional contact to interlock the ends together. After the strap 35 has been firmly cinched with the strap firmly engaging the peripheral surface 14, additional air pressure is applied to the inner tube 12 to expand the tube slightly and form bulges adjacent the straps as shown in FIGS. 1 and 2. This provides a radial outward pressure on the straps to prevent the straps from sliding on the periphery surface 14 and to secure the seat to the tube at the desired elevation. The location of the interconnecting means 40 may be adjusted as shown in FIG. 9 to adjustably position the seat 20 at various elevations with respect to the tube. Once the desired elevation is obtained, the tube is inflated from the soft inflation to the hard inflation to firmly secure the seat to the tube. The uniform outward radial pressure of the tube on the straps creates a uniform tension on the ends 37 and 38 to maintain the frictional contact and interlock in the cavity 54. The additional weight of the human body on the seat 20 does not change the uniform tension on the ends 37 and 38 but merely causes the tube to slightly torsionally deform to adjust to varying loads.

In the configuration shown in FIGS. 1 and 2, strap assemblies are located at 90° spacings around the tube with the straps 35 being extended through every other hole or slot 27.

As shown in FIG. 10, each of the straps 35 may be cinched about its torus section with varying degrees of pressure to deform the tube to desired configurations. Consequently, the user of the recreation vehicle can deform the tube to add to his comfort. In some configurations, it may be desirable to mount the straps at relatively close angular torus sections to decrease the effective diameter of the tube at such sections while increasing the effective diameter at other angular torus sections, forming a bulge. Sometimes, it may be desirable to deform the tube at selected angular torus sections to enable the rider to extend his legs further into the water and to bulge an opposite torus section to form a back rest to provide more of a chair-like configuration. On very hot days, it may be desirable to decrease the diameter of the tube section at various angular locations to allow water to flow over the tube at the reduced diameters to cool the rider.

It may be desirable to construct the unit 40 with an upper edge 63 (FIGS. 5 and 6) having teeth thereon to assist in the cinching of the strap to the tube. A slot 64 is shown formed through the front wall 45 adjacent the top edge 63 to enable a tool to be inserted through the slot engaging the end 38 to push the overlapped ends 37 and 38 downward further into the cavity to release the interlock. The slot 54 shown is designed to enable a screwdriver to be inserted into the slot to accomplish this task if need be.

In an alternate embodiment shown in FIG. 11, the front wall 45 has a lip 66 that extends outward and upward from the unit 40 to reside in the angular groove to engagingly support the seat along its periphery. In this configuration the holding loop 61 is utilized to maintain this engagement and secure the peripheral seat section adjacent the slot 27 firmly to the unit 40. The slot 67 is formed in the front wall 45 to enable the end 38 to be inserted through the cavity 54.

A second alternate embodiment is illustrated in FIGS. 12 and 13 in which the unit 40 is modified to provide projections or hooks 70 and 71 formed in the body 41 and particularly on the curved side walls 43 and 44 that extend outward providing a receiving ledge 72 to engage the peripheral rib 26 to support the seat thereon. The loop 61 secures the peripheral rib 26 in engagement with the projections 70 and 71. Both the configurations shown in FIG. 11 and FIGS. 12 and 13 provide projection or ledge means for receiving the periphery of the seat to assist in supporting the seat at the desired elevation. In the configuration illustrated in FIGS. 6 and 7 the seat is principally supported by the loop 61. The unit 40 also firmly secures the seat to a desired longitudinal section of the strap defined by the loop 61. The unit 40 acts as a double eyelet with the strap 38 extending outward and through the slots 27 and back through the unit 40 to prevent the seat from sliding up and down on the strap.

Additional features of this invention include a grommet 75 (FIG. 1) formed in the strap 35*a* for receiving one end of a mooring-safety rope 76. The rope 76 can be connected to the clothing or body of the rider so that should the rider fall from the vehicle he will be sufficiently secured to the vehicle to pull on the rope and hold on to the vehicle to provide additional buoyancy and prevent drowning. An additional feature includes a grommet 80 formed in strap 35*b* with an auxiliary rope 81 attached thereto and extending therefrom. An auxiliary bag 82 is attached to the other end of the rope 81 for placement in the water to receive beverage items, fish or the like to keep the contents cool. On occasion it may be desirable to utilize the auxiliary bag 82 for a trash receptacle to keep from littering the landscape.

An additional feature includes a pole attachment 83 (FIG. 1) for securing to the strap 35*c*. The pole attachment 83 includes a curve plate 84 that is curved similar to the outer surface 18. The plate 84 has an upper elongated slot 85 and a lower elongated slot 86 to provide a double eyelet arrangement. The plate 84 has a lower bracket 88 and an upper bracket 90 extending outward therefrom. A hole 91 is formed in the upper bracket 90 to enable a pole end 93 to be extended downward through the hole 91 engaging the lower bracket 88 as shown in FIG. 1. The pole 93 may be utilized for supporting a flag or umbrella.

Often it will be desirable to mount an umbrella on the pole 93 to shade the rider from the intensive rays of the sun to enable the rider to utilize the recreation vehicle for an extended period of time without becoming overly sunburned.

The recreation vehicle 10 is also a useful vehicle for scuba divers to provide a platform for storing some of their gear. The rope 76 can be hooked to an anchor to position the vehicle while the scuba divers dive below the surface. The pole 93 may be utilized for mounting a flag to identify the location of the scuba divers.

An alternate embodiment is shown in FIGS. **14–19.** Such an embodiment utilizes strap assemblies **99** for securing the seat **20** firmly to the tube **12** in the central opening at a desired elevation along the inner surface **17.** Each strap assembly **99** has a strap **100** with ends **101** and **102** that extend about a section of the tube. Means **104** are provided for interconnecting the ends **101** and **102** to cinch the strap firmly to the tube **12** and for gripping the seat **20** along the periphery to support the seat.

The means **104** has complementary interlocking or hook elements **106** and **107** that are secured to the ends **101** and **102** respectively for gripping the rim **26** of the seat to secure the seat to the tube and to interconnect the ends **101** and **102** to cinch the strap firmly to the tube. The hook elements **106** and **107** have flat body sections **110** and **111** respectively that are secured to the respective ends **101** and **102.** The body sections **110** and **111** may be secured to the ends **101** and **102** by various means, including rivets **112** as shown in drawings.

In the configuration shown, the hook element **106** has a hook finger **114** extending from the body section **110** in an arc of approximately 180° or slightly greater terminating in a finger end **116** forming a slot or opening **118** between the finger end **116** and the base of the finger **114** of sufficient dimension to enable the rim **26** of the seat to pass through the opening **118** into the hook finger **114.**

The hook element **107** has spaced hook fingers **120** and **121** that are spaced sufficiently to enable the hook finger **114** to be inserted therebetween. The hook fingers **120** and **121** extend from the body section **111** in similar arcs of approximately 180° or slightly greater in an opposite direction to the arc of the finger **114** terminating in finger ends **122** and **123** respectively. A slot or opening **125** is formed between the finger ends **122** and **123** and the base of the fingers **120** and **121** of sufficient dimension to enable the rim **26** to pass therethrough into thP hook fingers **120** and **121.**

To mount the seat **20** to the inner tube **12** utilizing thP strap assemblies, one sequentially wraps the strap **99** about angularly spaced tube sections corresponding to hole locations **27.** The tube is preferably kept in the "soft inflation" condition during disassembly, however this is not absolutely necessary. As shown in FIG. **14,** hook element **106** extends downward and hook element **107** extends upward. The hook elements are then deflected against the inner surface **17** to indent the tube as shown in FIG. **16** to match the openings **118** and **125** to enable the rim **26** to be inserted through the matched openings **118** and **125** and into the finger hooks **114, 120** and **121** with the hook finger **114** extending in an arc under the rim **26** and the complementary hook fingers **120** and **121** extending in an arc over the rim partly enclosing the rim. The hook elements **106** and **107** are then allowed to assume the interlocking positions shown in FIG. **18** in which the finger **114** and the fingers **120** and **121** rotate in opposite directions about the rim section to fully enclose the rim section with the fingers **114, 120** and **121** extending into the hole **27** to firmly secure the rim section to the strap. This forms somewhat of a hinge connection between the strap ends and the seat rim with the rim section acting as a pin-like element. The tube is then inflated to the "hard inflation" condition as shown in FIG. **19** to provide equal tension on the strap ends and to cinch the strap firmly to the tube to prevent the strap from slipping. In the fully assembled condition the complementary hook elements **106** and **107** serve as interconnecting means for interconnecting the strap ends to cinch the strap to the tube and as means for securing the seat to the tube at the desired elevation in the central opening **13** along the inside surface **17.** The number of hook fingers **114, 120** and **121** is not particularly important as long as the hook fingers mesh together as described. The common denominator is illustrated for simplicity of description.

It should be understood that the above described embodiment is simply illustrative of the principles of this invention and that numerous other embodiments may be readily devised without deviating therefrom. Therefore, only the following claims are intended to define this invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An inner tube-type recreation vehicle for supporting a person thereon, comprising:

an inflatable torus-shaped tube having a central opening therethrough;

a disc-shaped seat constructed of semi-rigid material for positioning in and substantially enclosing the central aperture for support of at least a portion of the person thereon;

said seat having a periphery of sufficient diameter to prevent the supported person from projecting one or more of his limbs through the central opening and a plurality of angularly spaced holes formed therethrough adjacent the periphery; and

a plurality of strap assemblies having straps adapted to be looped about spaced sections of the tube, and each strap having ends with complementary hook means affixed to the strap ends and adapted to oppositely extend about a section of the seat periphery and into a respective seat hole with the hook means meshing with each other to enclose the section of the seat periphery and secure the seat to the inner tube at the desired elevation.

2. The recreation vehicle as defined in claim **1** wherein each of the hook means includes at least one hook finger that extends through the seat hole and about the seat periphery section.

3. The recreation vehicle as defined in claim **1** wherein at least one of the hook means has at least two hook fingers that are spaced apart a distance sufficient to receive a hook finger of the other hook means therebetween to form an interlock to enclose the seat periphery section therein.

4. The recreation vehicle as defined in claim **1** wherein the seat has a rim at the periphery with the holes located immediately adjacent the rim and wherein the hook means includes hook fingers that extend through the seat holes and about the rim to enclose the rim in which one hook finger of one hook means extends between two hook fingers of the complementary hook means to secure the seat to the tube.

5. A recreation vehicle supportable by an inflatable torus-shaped tube having a central opening therethrough, comprising:

a disc-shaped seat constructed of semi-rigid material for positioning in and substantially enclosing the central aperture to support at least a portion of a person thereon, said seat having a periphery of sufficient diameter to prevent the supported person from projecting one or more of his limbs through

the central opening, said seat having a plurality of angularly spaced holes formed therethrough adjacent a rim at the periphery;

a plurality of strap assemblies having straps adapted to be looped about spaced sections of the tube and each strap having ends with complementary hook means affixed to the strap ends and adapted to oppositely extend through a respective hole and oppositely about the rim to grip the rim and secure the seat to a spaced section of the inner tube at a desired elevation within the central opening of the tube.

6. The recreation vehicle as defined in claim 5 wherein the hook means includes hook fingers that extend through the seat holes and about the rim in which one hook finger at one end of the strap extends between two space fingers at the other end of the strap with the hook fingers at one strap end extending in a curved arc in the opposite direction to the hook fingers at the other strap end to grip the rim in the hook fingers to enclose the rim.

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