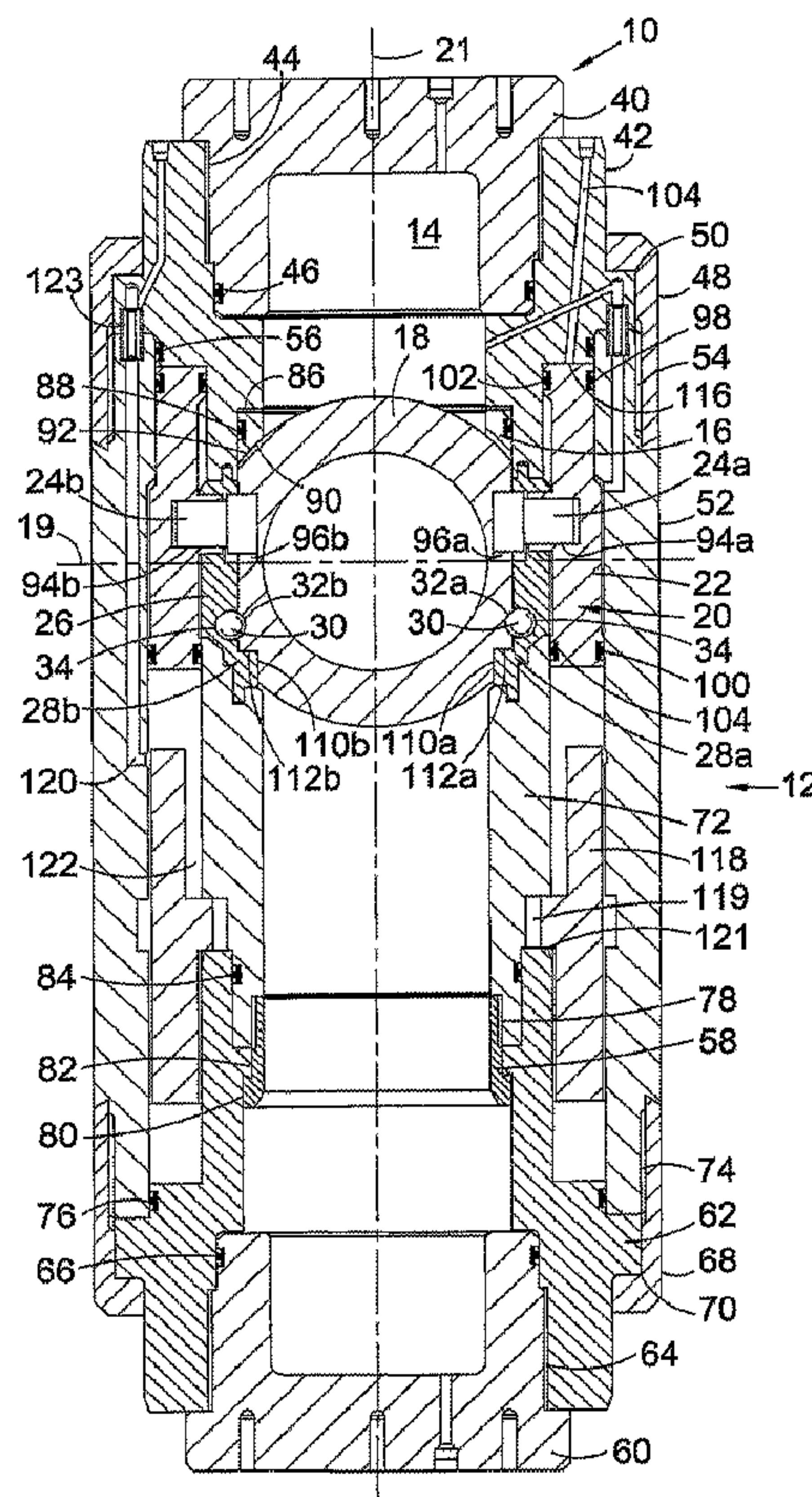




(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2005/10/17
(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2006/04/20
(45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2013/04/02
(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2007/04/13
(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: GB 2005/004001
(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2006/040592
(30) Priorité/Priority: 2004/10/16 (GB0423015.7)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *F16K 5/20* (2006.01),
E21B 34/10 (2006.01)
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(54) Title: IMPROVED BALL VALVE



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A bearing mounted ball valve (10) comprises a housing (12) having a throughbore and a valve seat (16) and an apertured ball (18) mounted within the housing in continuous engagement with the valve seat. The apertured ball is rotatable by rotation means (20),

(57) **Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):**

about an axis of rotation, between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position. The bearing mounted ball valve further comprises bearing means (26) coupled between the apertured ball and the housing for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball about the axis of rotation between the throughbore open and the throughbore closed position. In the throughbore closed position, the bearing means is adapted to release the apertured ball from the axis of rotation to permit the apertured ball to float into a sealing engagement with the valve seat.

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
20 April 2006 (20.04.2006)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2006/040592 A1

(51) International Patent Classification:
F16K 5/20 (2006.01) **E21B 34/10** (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/GB2005/004001

(22) International Filing Date: 17 October 2005 (17.10.2005)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
0423015.7 16 October 2004 (16.10.2004) GB

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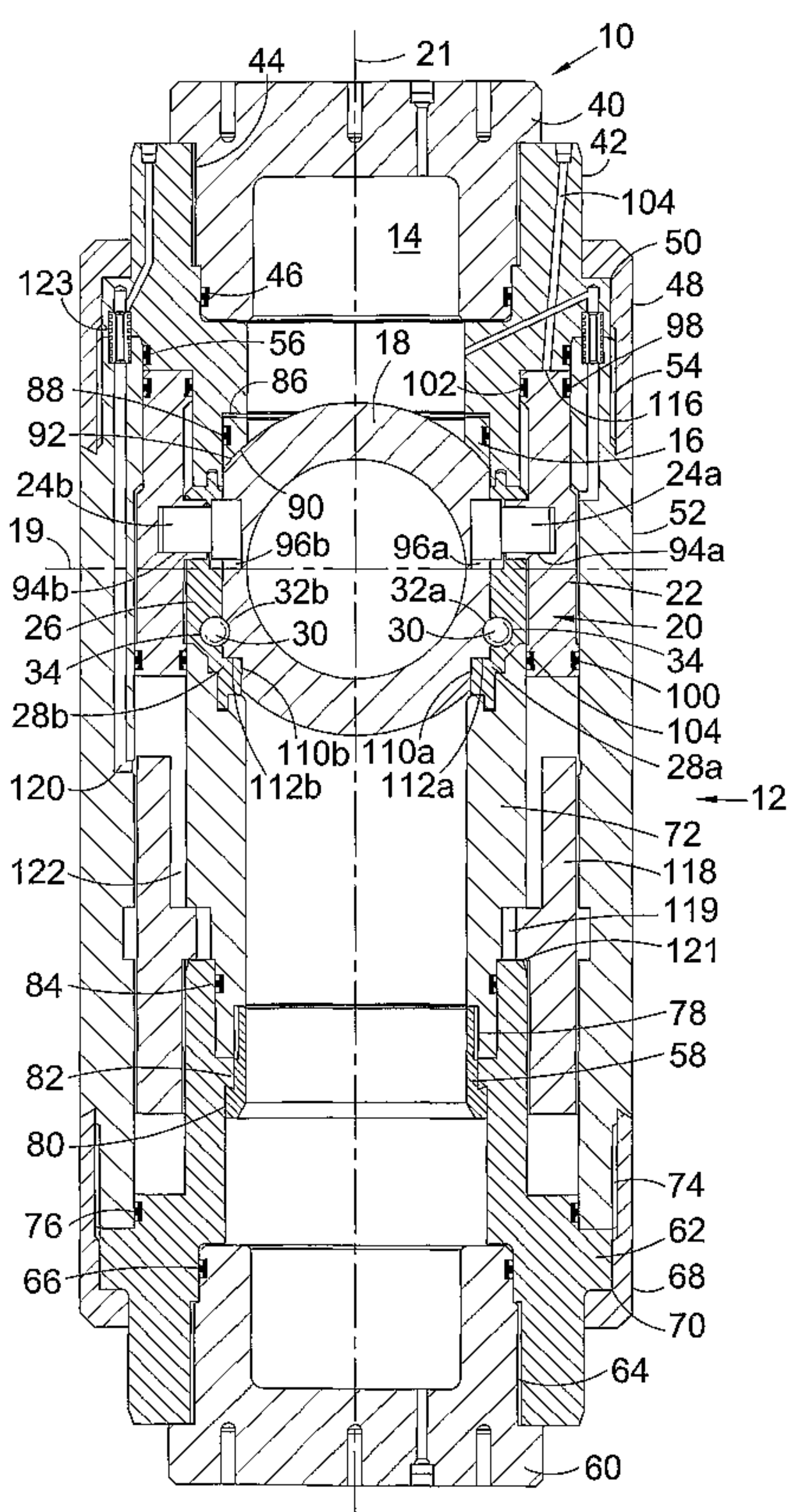
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(81) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of national protection available): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BW, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KM, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, LY, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM, PG, PH, PL, PT, RO, RU, SC, SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, SY, TJ, TM, TN, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, YU, ZA, ZM, ZW.

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, NL, PL, PT, RO, SE, SI, SK, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: BALL VALVE



(57) Abstract: A bearing mounted ball valve (10) comprises a housing (12) having a throughbore and a valve seat (16) and an apertured ball (18) mounted within the housing in continuous engagement with the valve seat. The apertured ball is rotatable by rotation means (20), about an axis of rotation, between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position. The bearing mounted ball valve further comprises bearing means (26) coupled between the apertured ball and the housing for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball about the axis of rotation between the throughbore open and the throughbore closed position. In the throughbore closed position, the bearing means is adapted to release the apertured ball from the axis of rotation to permit the apertured ball to float into a sealing engagement with the valve seat.

WO 2006/040592 A1

WO 2006/040592 A1



Published:

— *with international search report*

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

IMPROVED BALL VALVE

The present invention relates to ball valves and particularly to bearing mounted ball valves.

Apertured ball valves are well known for controlling the flow of a fluid through a bore, particularly in the oil and chemical process industries.

In an apertured ball valve, the valve operation may be broken down into two separate stages; firstly, the ball moves between an open and a closed position by rotating through 90° such that the ball aperture moves from an orientation coaxial with the flow direction, i.e. when the valve is open, to a position whereby the ball aperture is perpendicular to the flow direction. Secondly, the valve seals in the closed position to prevent flow through the bore across the ball valve.

A common type of conventional ball valve is the trunnion mounted ball valve in which the ball element is positionally constrained inside the valve, usually by radial bearings. The ball is rotated by the application of torque to the trunnion. Sealing occurs as a result of the valve seat floating onto the ball element. A disadvantage of this type of ball valve is that seal reliability is reduced because the sealing force only develops in proportion to the annular area of the valve seat. Thus, when trunnion mounted ball valves are used in

high pressure wells and especially in "aggressive" wells in which the well fluid has a high proportion of particulate matter, the pressure is such that the particulate matter may cause degradation of the sealing
5 surfaces of the ball and the valve seat, resulting in the valve not achieving adequate sealing integrity.

Another type of conventional ball valve is known as the floating ball valve. In this type of valve the ball is not positionally constrained relative to the valve
10 body. Rotation is caused by the application of force to a point that is offset from the ball centre, which, in conjunction with the mating curvatures of the ball and seat, causes the ball to rotate. Sealing occurs as a result of the ball floating onto the valve seat. The
15 disadvantage of the floating ball valve is the rotational reliability is reduced as the friction effects between the ball and seat are considerably larger than that of trunnion mounted devices. With aggressive wells, the reliability of the floating ball valve creates a problem
20 in that the valve often seizes between the open and the closed position giving rise to serious problems in both operational and safety terms.

It is an object of the present invention to obviate or mitigate at least one of the aforementioned
25 disadvantages.

According to a first aspect of the present invention there is provided a bearing mounted ball valve comprising:

a housing having a throughbore and a valve seat;

5 an apertured ball mounted within the housing in continuous engagement with the valve seat, the apertured ball being rotatable by rotation means, about an axis of rotation, between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position, and

10 bearing means coupled between the apertured ball and the housing for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball about the axis of rotation between the throughbore open and the throughbore closed position,

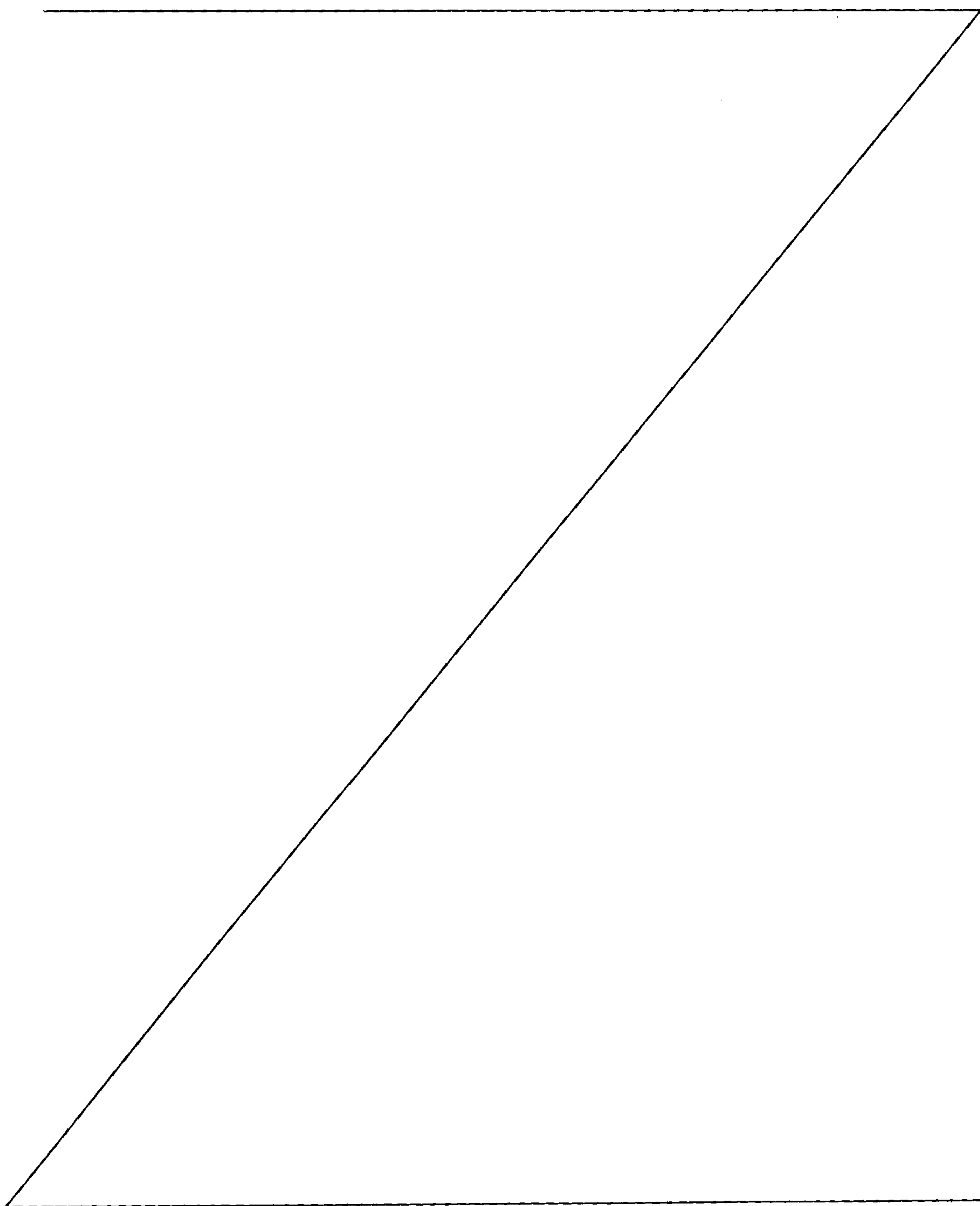
wherein in the throughbore closed position, the
15 bearing means is adapted to release the apertured ball from the axis of rotation to permit the apertured ball to float into a sealing engagement with the valve seat, and

wherein the bearing means comprises a pair of bearing plates located on diametrically opposite sides of
20 the throughbore, each plate having a plurality of hemispherical pockets, each of the pockets containing a ball bearing.

Thus, the bearing mounted ball valve of the present invention combines highly reliable rotation of the

3a

apertured ball between the throughbore open and throughbore closed positions with increased reliability of sealing due to the apertured ball being permitted to float onto the valve seat. As the apertured ball remains
5 continuously in contact with the valve seat, the ingress of debris or particulate matter is reduced.



Preferably, the bearing means comprises a pair of bearing plates located on diametrically opposite sides of the throughbore, each plate having a plurality of hemispherical pockets, each pocket containing a ball bearing. A pair of bearing plates is optimal for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball on the axis of rotation from the throughbore open to the throughbore closed position.

Preferably, the apertured ball has an outer surface defining a pair of channels, each channel opposing one of the bearing plates. Each ball bearing engages the channel opposing the bearing plate within which they are located. The channels may have a substantially semi-circular cross-section, the width of each channel being substantially the same as the diameter of the/each ball bearing.

In an alternative arrangement, each of the pair of bearing plates defines a channel, and the ball bearings are located in hemispherical pockets defined by the portions of the outer surface of the apertured ball which oppose the bearing plates.

Preferably, the channels are arcuate channels, the arc being centred on the axis of rotation of the apertured ball.

5

Preferably, at least one portion of each channel is dimensioned to permit the apertured ball to move in an axial direction towards the valve seat when the apertured ball is in the throughbore closed position. The at least
5 one portion of each channel may be dimensioned by providing an increased width. An increased width permits the apertured ball to float into a sealing engagement with the valve seat.

The axial movement of the apertured ball may be
10 approximately 0.6mm (0.025"). A movement of the apertured ball of approximately 0.6mm applies a sufficient load to the valve seat to form a high integrity seal.

Preferably, each bearing plate comprises three
15 hemispherical pockets and three ball bearings. The use of three ball bearings on each plate provide adequate reliability of rotation of the apertured ball at an acceptable level of friction.

Where the bearing plate comprises three ball
20 bearings, one of the ball bearings is located on a plane which passes through the axis of rotation of the apertured ball, the plane additionally being perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the throughbore. Positioning one of the three ball bearings
25 as described means that when the apertured ball reaches

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the closed position, the channel immediately below this ball bearing is sufficiently axial for the apertured ball to move towards the valve seat without need for the width of the channel at this location to be increased.

5 Therefore in the case of three ball bearings, only two channel portions of increased width are required.

The housing may further include at least one support surface distal to the valve seat, the outer surface of the apertured ball having at least one complementary

10 surface for engaging the at least one support surface. There may be two support surfaces on diametrically opposed sides of the housing. Alternatively, the support surfaces are incorporated into the bearing plates. A support surface is provided to withstand the pressure

15 associated with testing the valve when closed, the test pressure being applied from the valve seat side of the valve.

The rotational means may comprise an annular piston located within the housing and adapted to engage the

20 apertured ball.

Preferably, the annular piston engages the apertured ball by means of a pair of arms, the arms being pivotally mounted to the annular piston.

The annular piston may be hydraulically actuated.

25 Alternatively, the annular piston may mechanically or

electromechanically actuated. In a further alternative the annular piston can be actuated by any suitable means.

According to a second aspect of the present invention there is provided a method of sealing a wellbore with an apertured ball valve, the method comprising:

disposing a ball valve housing having a throughbore and a valve seat in the wellbore, an apertured ball mounted within the housing in continuous engagement with the valve seat, the apertured ball being rotatable by rotation means, about an axis of rotation, between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position, and bearing means coupled between the apertured ball and the housing for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball about the axis of rotation between the throughbore open and the throughbore closed position;

rotating the apertured ball from the throughbore open position to the throughbore closed position; and permitting the apertured ball to move axially when in the throughbore closed position into a sealing engagement with the valve seat in the throughbore closed position,

wherein the bearing means comprises a pair of bearing plates located on diametrically opposite sides of the throughbore, each bearing plate having a plurality of

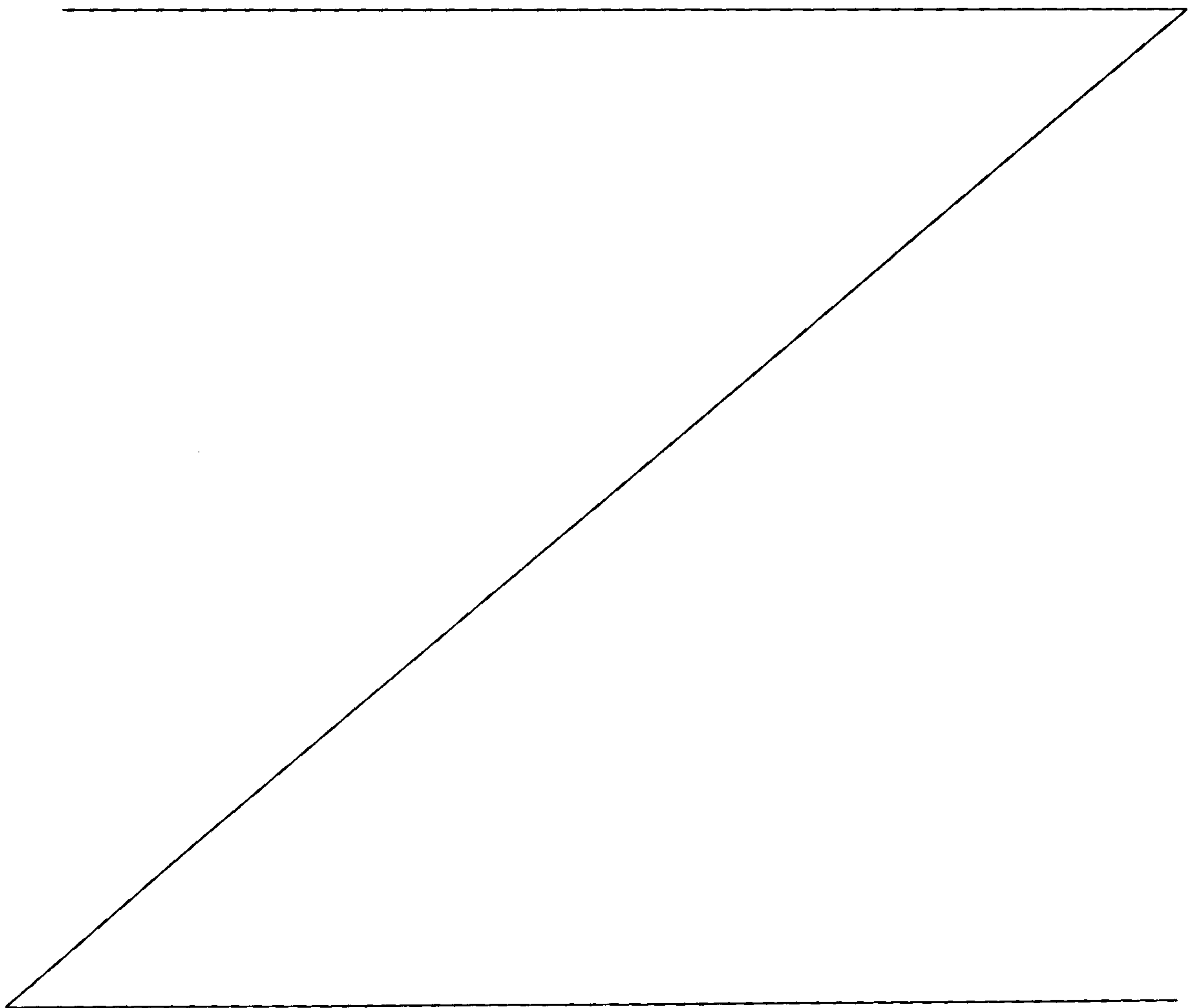
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hemispherical pockets, each pocket containing a ball bearing.

By virtue of the present invention a bore can be sealed by a bearing mounted ball valve, which combines
5 highly reliable rotation with increased reliability of sealing.

The present invention will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying figures in which:

10 Figure 1 is a partially cut-away side view of part a bearing mounted ball valve in a closed configuration in



accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 2 is a cross sectional side view of the whole bearing mounted ball valve of Figure 1 in a closed configuration;

Figure 3 is a cut-away perspective view of part of the bearing mounted ball valve of Figure 1 in an open configuration with the apertured ball removed;

Figure 4 is an exploded perspective view of the apertured ball and bearing means of the bearing mounted ball valve of Figure 1;

Figure 5 is a cross sectional side view of the whole bearing mounted ball valve of Figure 2 in an open configuration;

Figure 6 is a side view of part of the apertured ball of Figure 5,

Figure 6A shows an enlarged view of a first portion of the ball bearing channel of Figure 6; and

Figure 6B shows an enlarged view of a second portion of the ball bearing channel of Figure 6.

Referring firstly to Figure 1 there is shown a partially cut away side view of part of a bearing mounted ball valve, generally indicated by reference numeral 10 in a closed configuration in accordance with a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

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The bearing mounted ball valve 10 includes a housing 12 having a throughbore 14 and a valve seat 16. The throughbore is a longitudinal throughbore with a longitudinal axis 21. An apertured ball 18 is mounted within the housing 12 in continuous engagement with the valve seat 16. The apertured ball 18 is rotatable by rotation means 20 around an axis of rotation 19. The rotation means is discussed in greater detail with reference to Figures 2 and 3.

The ball mounted bearing valve 10 further includes bearing means 26 which is discussed in greater detail with references to Figures 2 and 4.

The apertured ball 18 rotates around an axis of rotation 19 between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position. When the apertured ball 18 is in the throughbore closed position as shown, the bearing means 26 is arranged to release the apertured ball 18 from the axis of rotation 19 permitting the apertured ball 18 to float into a sealing engagement with the valve seat 16, as will be described later in detail.

Referring now to Figure 2, there is shown a cross sectional side view of the whole bearing mounted ball valve 10 of Figure 1 also in the closed configuration. The housing 12 comprises a top cap 40 which is connected to an upper body 42 by means of a threaded connection 44.

10

The top cap 40 and the upper body 42 are sealed by a top cap seal 46. An upper collar 48 provides a shoulder 50 which captures the upper body 42 and fixes it to the main body 52 by means of a threaded connection 54. The upper
5 body 42 is sealed to the main body 52 by means of an upper body seal 56.

At the lower end of the bearing mounted ball valve
10 there is a bottom cap 60 connected to a lower body 62 by means of a threaded connection 64. The bottom cap 60
10 is sealed to the lower body 62 by means of bottom cap seal 66. A lower collar 68 defines a shoulder 70 which captures the lower body 62 and secures it to the main body 52 by means of a threaded connection 74. A seal is formed between the lower body 62 and the main body 52 by
15 a lower body seal 76.

The lower body 62 is also secured to a mandrel 72 by an inner collar 58. The inner collar 58 is secured to the mandrel by a threaded connection 78 and is secured to the lower body 62 by an annular hook 80 which engages a
20 complimentary annular lug 82 defined by the lower body 62. The mandrel 72 is sealed to the lower body 62 by means of a mandrel seal 84.

The valve seat 16 is disposed in a pocket 86 defined by the upper body 42. A seal is formed between the valve
25 seat 16 and the upper body 42 by a valve seat seal 88.

11

The valve seat 16 has a concave hemispherical face 90 for engaging and forming a seal with a portion of the outer surface 92 of the apertured ball 18.

5 The apertured ball 18 is rotatable between the closed throughbore position shown in Figure 2 and an open throughbore position (best seen in Figure 5) by rotation means 20, in particular by an annular piston 22. The annular piston 22 is connected to the apertured ball 18 by means of a pair of arms 24a,24b. One end of each arm 10 24a,24b is pivotally mounted to the annular piston 22 in respective pockets 94a,94b. The other end of each arm 24a,24b engage a respective recess 96a,96b in the outer surface of the apertured ball 18. A perspective view of the arm 24a and the annular piston 22 is shown in Figure 15 3, which is a cut away perspective view of part of the bearing mounted ball valve 10 of Figure 1 with the apertured ball removed.

The upper end of the annular piston 22 is sealed to the main body 52 via the piston upper outer seal 98 and 20 the piston lower outer seal 100. The annular piston 22 is also sealed to the upper body 42 by a piston upper inner seal 102 and to the mandrel 72 by a piston lower inner seal 104.

25 Captured between the upper body 42, the apertured ball 18, annular piston 22 and the mandrel 72 is the

12

bearing means 26. The bearing means 26 comprises a pair of bearing plates 28a,28b containing three hemispherical pockets 34. Within each hemispherical pocket 34 is disposed a ball bearing 30 so that in the assembled valve shown in Figure 2, each ball bearing 30 engages one of a pair of channels 32a,32b defined by the outer surface 92 of the apertured ball 18.

This arrangement is best seen in Figure 4, which is an exploded perspective view of the apertured ball 18 and bearing means 26 of the bearing mounted ball valve 10 of Figures 1 and 2. It can be seen from Figure 4 there are three ball bearings 30 associated with each bearing plate 28a,28b and three mating hemispherical pockets 34 associated with each bearing plate 28. Also shown on Figure 4 is the channel 32a defined by the outer surface 92 of the apertured ball 18.

The channels 32 have a substantially semicircular cross section and are arcuate in form. The arcuate channels 32a,32b are centred on the axis of rotation 19 of the apertured ball 18.

As will be discussed later two spaced portions 124,126 of the channels 32a,32b are dimensioned to permit the apertured ball 18 to move axially along the longitudinal axis 21 of the bearing mounted ball valve 10

13

towards the valve seat 16 when the apertured ball 18 is in the throughbore closed position shown in Figure 5.

Each bearing plate 28 also defines a support surface 110a,110b for engaging a complimentary surface 112a,112b defined by the outer surface 92 of the apertured ball 18. The support surfaces 110 are provided to withstand the pressure associated with testing the bearing mounted ball valve 10 from above when the valve 10 is closed. Also visible on Figure 4 is an apertured ball recess 96a which is dimensioned to receive the arm 24a of the rotation means 20.

In operation, to rotate the apertured ball 18 from the throughbore closed position shown in Figure 2 to the throughbore open position shown in Figure 5, hydraulic fluid is pumped through an "open" line 104 into an "open" chamber 116. The open chamber 116 is formed by the upper body seal 56, the piston upper outer seal 98 and the piston upper inner seal 102. The hydraulic pressure created within the open chamber 116 forces the annular piston 22 away from the upper body 42 and towards the lower body 62 to the position shown in Figure 5. This movement is transferred to the apertured ball 18 by the arms 24a,24b and causes the apertured ball 18 to pivot around the axis of rotation 19 from the throughbore closed position to the throughbore open position.

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The apertured ball 18 is constrained to rotate around the axis of rotation 19 by the channels 32a,32b moving relative to the ball bearings 30 which are trapped between the apertured ball 18 and the bearing plates 26
5 by the hemispherical pockets 34 and the channels 32a,32b.

When the piston 22 has completed its travel towards the lower body 62, the piston 22 abuts a shoulder ring 118. Shoulder ring 118 comprises three 120° segments which are locked together by an inner ring 119. The
10 inner ring 119 is positionally captured in a recess 121 defined by the lower body 62 and the mandrel 72.

To move the apertured ball 18 from the throughbore open position shown in Figure 5 to the throughbore closed position in Figure 2, hydraulic fluid would be vented
15 from the open chamber 116 and introduced to a "close" chamber 122 through a "close" line 120. The close line 120 includes a hydraulic stab 123 to permit hydraulic fluid to pass from the upper body 42 to the main body 52.

The close chamber 122 is sealed by the piston lower
20 outer seal 100, the piston lower inner seal 104, the lower body seal 76 and the mandrel seal 84.

When the apertured ball 18 reaches the throughbore closed position (Figure 2) it is released from the axis of rotation permitting the apertured ball 18 to float
25 into a sealing engagement with the valve seat 16. The

15

release is best explained with reference to Figures 6, 6A
and 6B. Wider portions 124,126 of the channels 32 are
positioned such that they receive two spaced bearings
30x, 30z (shown in broken outline), the bearings 30x,30z
5 having a diameter which is slightly smaller than portions
124,126. When the apertured ball 18 is in the
throughbore closed position (Figure 2) the apertured ball
18 is free to move along the longitudinal axis 21 of the
bearing mounted ball valve 10 towards the valve seat 16
10 because of the clearance at the increased width locations
124,126.

Ball bearing 30y is located on a plane 23 which
passes through the axis of rotation 19 of the apertured
ball 18 and is perpendicular to the longitudinal axis 21
15 of the throughbore 14. When the apertured ball 18 is in
the throughbore closed position the channel 32
immediately below the ball bearing 30y is appropriately
positioned to permit the apertured ball 18 to move
towards the valve seat 16 without the need for the width
20 of the channel 32 at location "128" to be increased.

The increased width at first location 124 and second
location 126 is in the region of 0.6 mm (0.125 inches).
A movement of the apertured ball 18 over this distance
applies a sufficient load to the valve seat 16 to form a
25 high integrity seal.

16

Various modifications and improvements may be made to the embodiments hereinbefore described without departing from the scope of the invention. For example, it will be understood that any suitable number of ball bearings could be used to constrain the rotation of the apertured ball to the axis of rotation. Similarly, although the support surfaces are provided on the bearing plates, they could be provided on the mandrel. In an alternative arrangement, each of the pair of bearing plates defines a channel, and the ball bearings are located in hemispherical pockets defined by the portions of the outer surface of the apertured ball which oppose the bearing plates.

Those of skill in the art will also recognise that the above described embodiment of the invention provides a bearing mounted ball valve 10 which combines highly reliable rotation with increased reliability of sealing.

CLAIMS

1. A bearing mounted ball valve comprising:
 - a housing having a throughbore and a valve seat;
 - 5 an apertured ball mounted within the housing in continuous engagement with the valve seat, the apertured ball being rotatable by rotation means, about an axis of rotation, between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position; and
 - 10 bearing means coupled between the apertured ball and the housing for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball about the axis of rotation between the throughbore open and the throughbore closed position,
 - wherein in the throughbore closed position, the
 - 15 bearing means is adapted to release the apertured ball from the axis of rotation to permit the apertured ball to float into a sealing engagement with the valve seat, and
 - wherein the bearing means comprises a pair of bearing plates located on diametrically opposite sides of
 - 20 the throughbore, each plate having a plurality of hemispherical pockets, each of the pockets containing a ball bearing.

2. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 1, wherein the apertured ball has an outer surface defining a pair of channels, each channel opposing one of the bearing plates.

5

3. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 2, wherein each of the channels have a substantially semi-circular cross-section, the width of each channel being substantially the same as the diameter of each ball bearing.

4. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 1, wherein each of the pair of bearing plates defines a channel, and the ball bearings are located in hemispherical pockets defined by the portions of the outer surface of the apertured ball which oppose the bearing plates.

5. The bearing mounted ball valve of either of claims 3 or 4, wherein each of the channels in an arcuate channel, the arc being centred on the axis of rotation of the apertured ball.

6. The bearing mounted ball valve of any of claims 3 to 5, wherein at least one portion of each channel is dimensioned to permit the apertured ball to move in an

25

axial direction towards the valve seat when the apertured ball is in the throughbore closed position.

7. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 6, wherein
5 the at least one portion of each channel is dimensioned by providing an increased width.

8. The bearing mounted ball valve of either of claims 6
or 7, wherein the axial movement of the apertured ball is
10 approximately 0.6 mm (0.025").

9. The bearing mounted ball valve of any of claims 1 to
8, wherein each bearing plate comprises three
hemispherical pockets and three ball bearings.

15

10. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 9, wherein
each bearing plate comprises three ball bearings, one of
the ball bearings being located on a plane which passes
through the axis of rotation of the apertured ball, the
20 plane additionally being perpendicular to the
longitudinal axis of the throughbore.

11. The bearing mounted ball valve of any of claims 1 to
10, wherein the housing further includes at least one
25 support surface distal to the valve seat, the outer

surface of the apertured ball having at least one complementary surface for engaging the at least one support surface.

5 12. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 11, wherein there are two support surfaces on diametrically opposed sides of the housing.

13. The bearing mounted ball valve of any of claims 1 to
10 12, wherein the rotational means comprises an annular piston located within the housing and adapted to engage the apertured ball.

14. The bearing mounted ball valve of claim 13, wherein
15 the annular piston engages the apertured ball by means of a pair of arms, the arms being pivotally mounted to the annular piston.

15. The bearing mounted ball valve of either of claims
20 13 or 14, wherein the annular piston is hydraulically actuated.

16. The bearing mounted ball valve of either of claims
13 or 14, wherein the annular piston is mechanically or
25 electromechanically actuated.

17. A method of sealing a wellbore with an apertured ball valve, the method comprising:

disposing a ball valve housing having a throughbore and a valve seat in the wellbore, an apertured ball
5 mounted within the housing in continuous engagement with the valve seat, the apertured ball being rotatable by rotation means, about an axis of rotation, between a throughbore open position and a throughbore closed position, and bearing means coupled between the apertured
10 ball and the housing for constraining the rotation of the apertured ball about the axis of rotation between the throughbore open and the throughbore closed position;

rotating the apertured ball from the throughbore open position to the throughbore closed position; and

15 permitting the apertured ball to move axially when in the throughbore closed position into a sealing engagement with the valve seat in the throughbore closed position,

wherein the bearing means comprises a pair of
20 bearing plates located on diametrically opposite sides of the throughbore, each bearing plate having a plurality of hemispherical pockets, each pocket containing a ball bearing.

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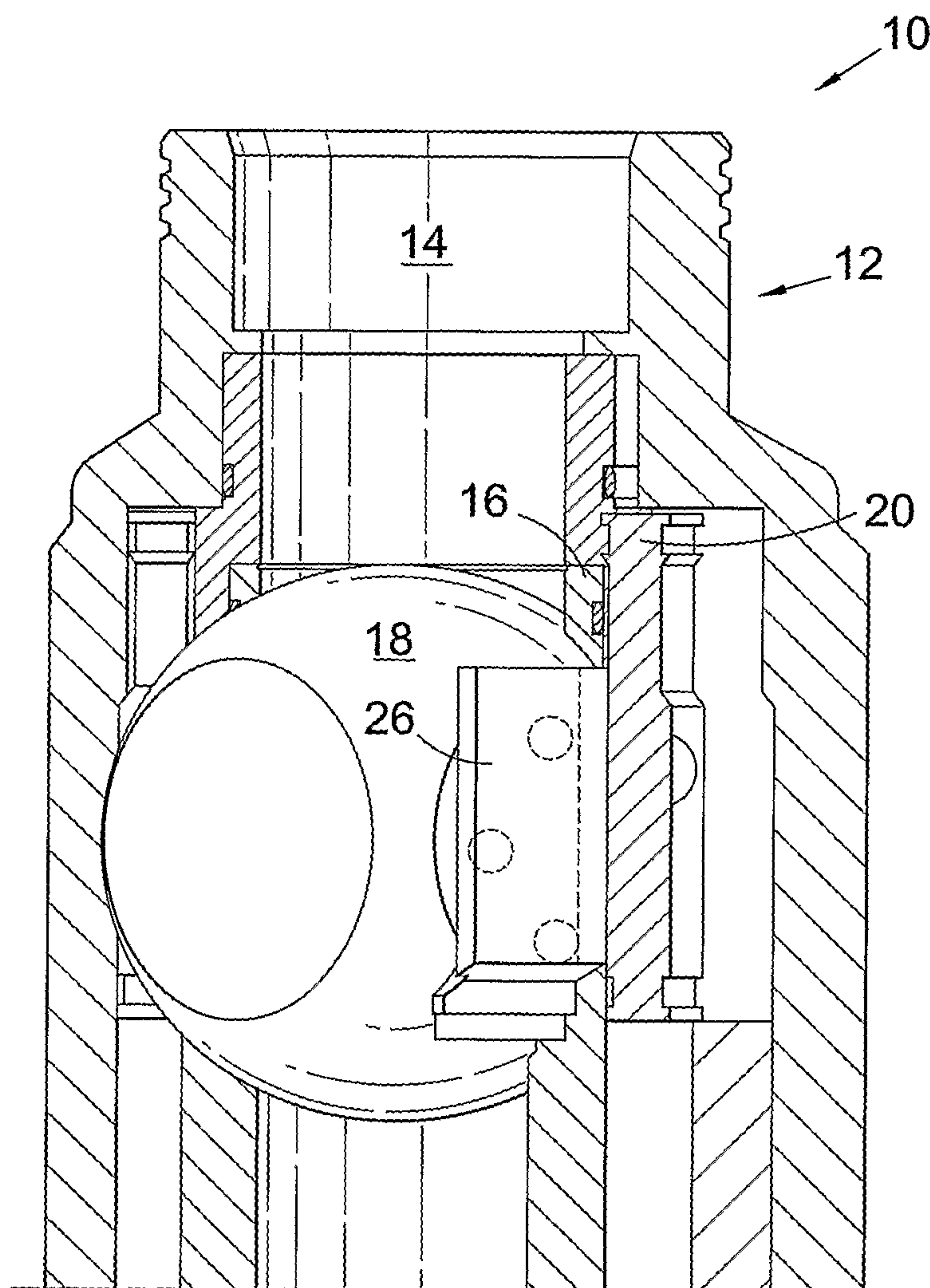


Fig. 1

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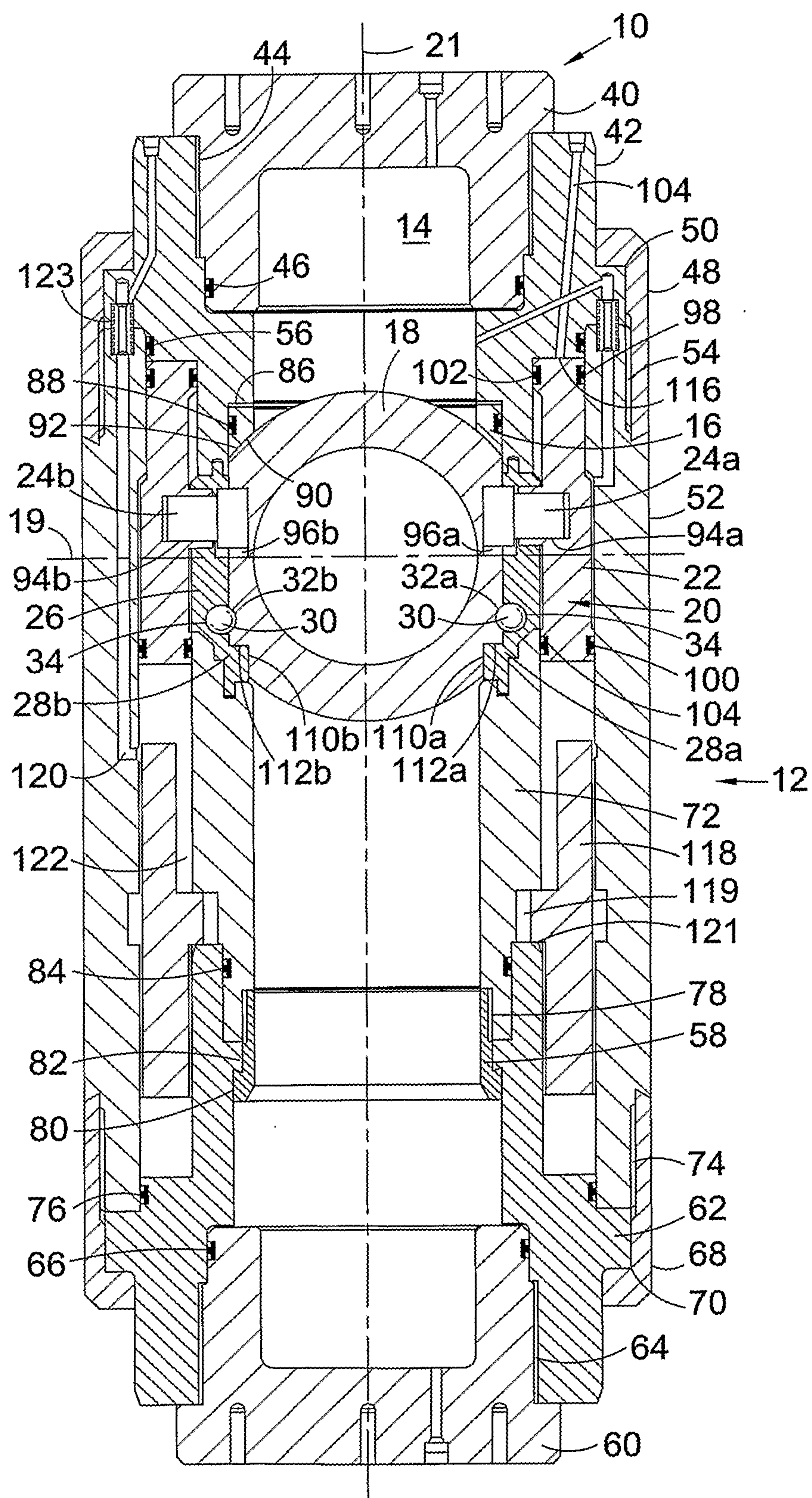


Fig. 2

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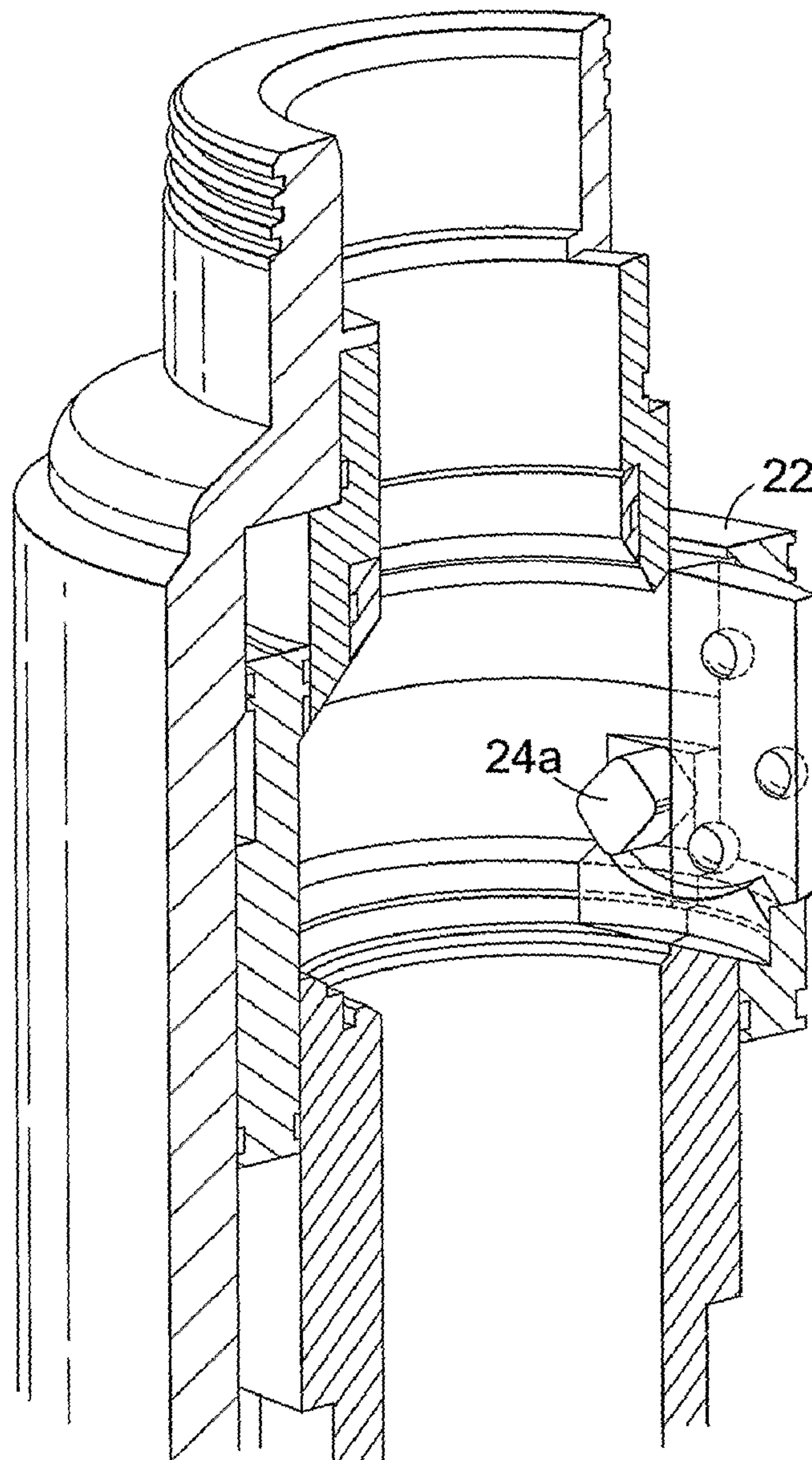


Fig. 3

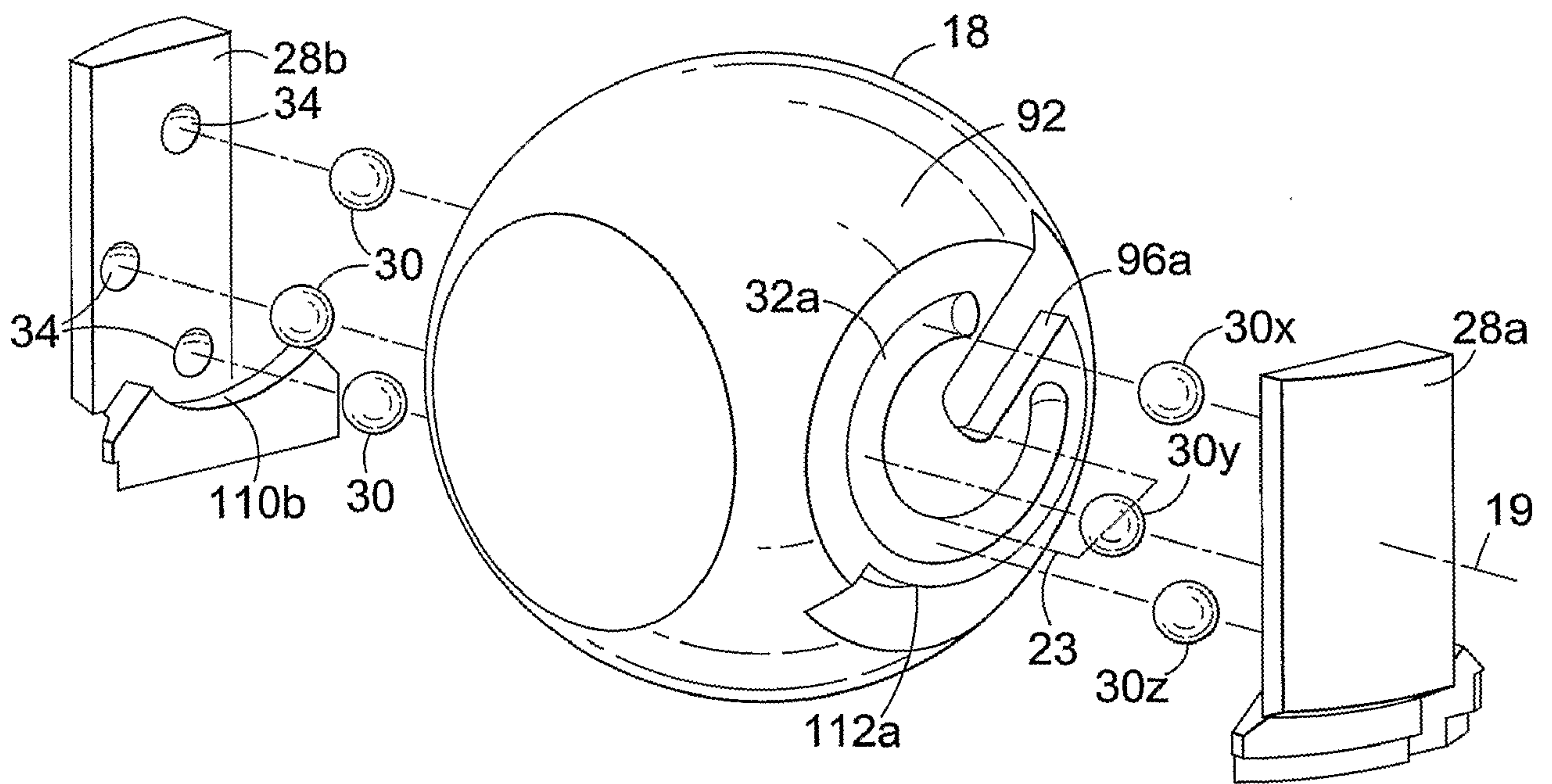


Fig. 4

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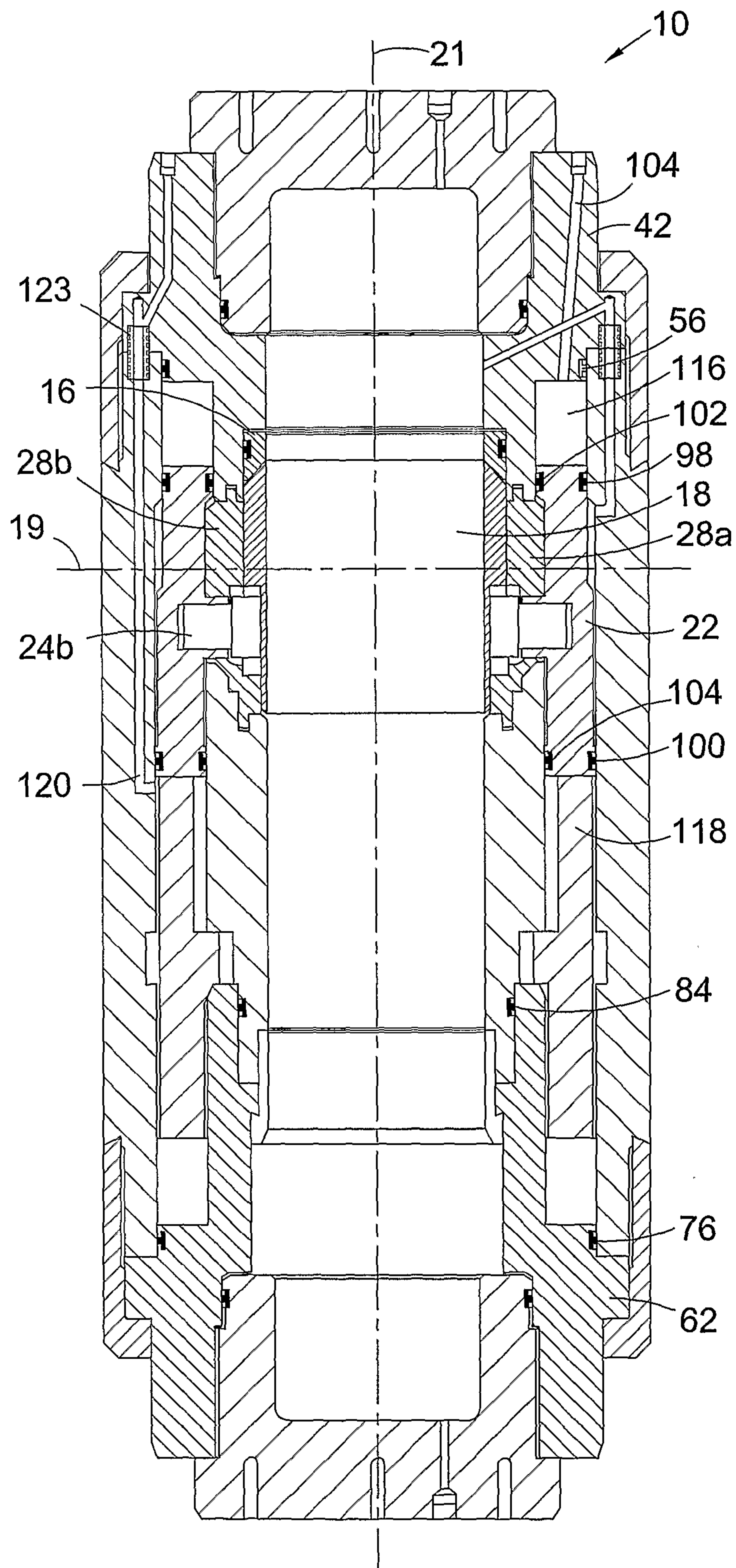


Fig. 5

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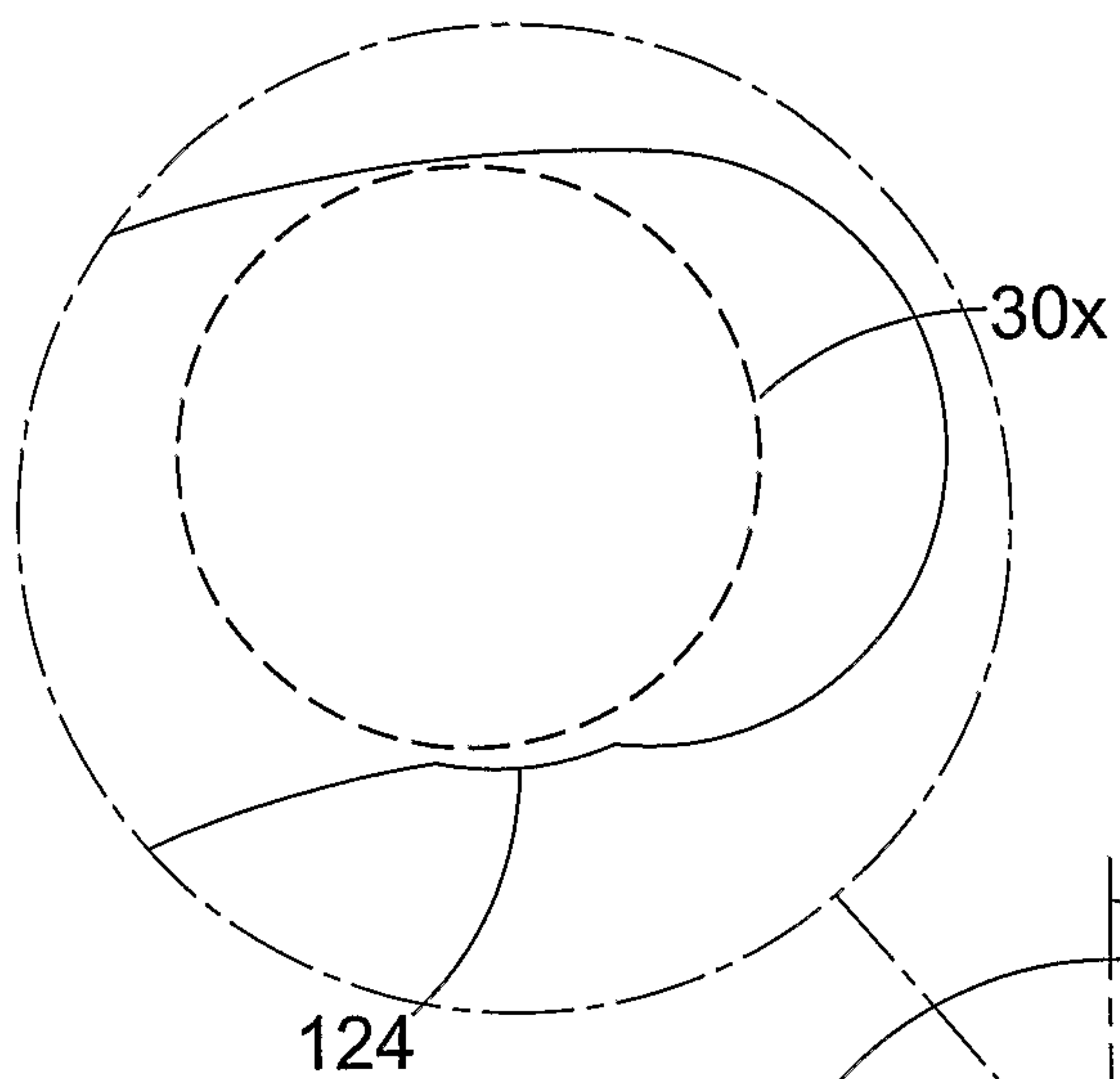


Fig. 6A

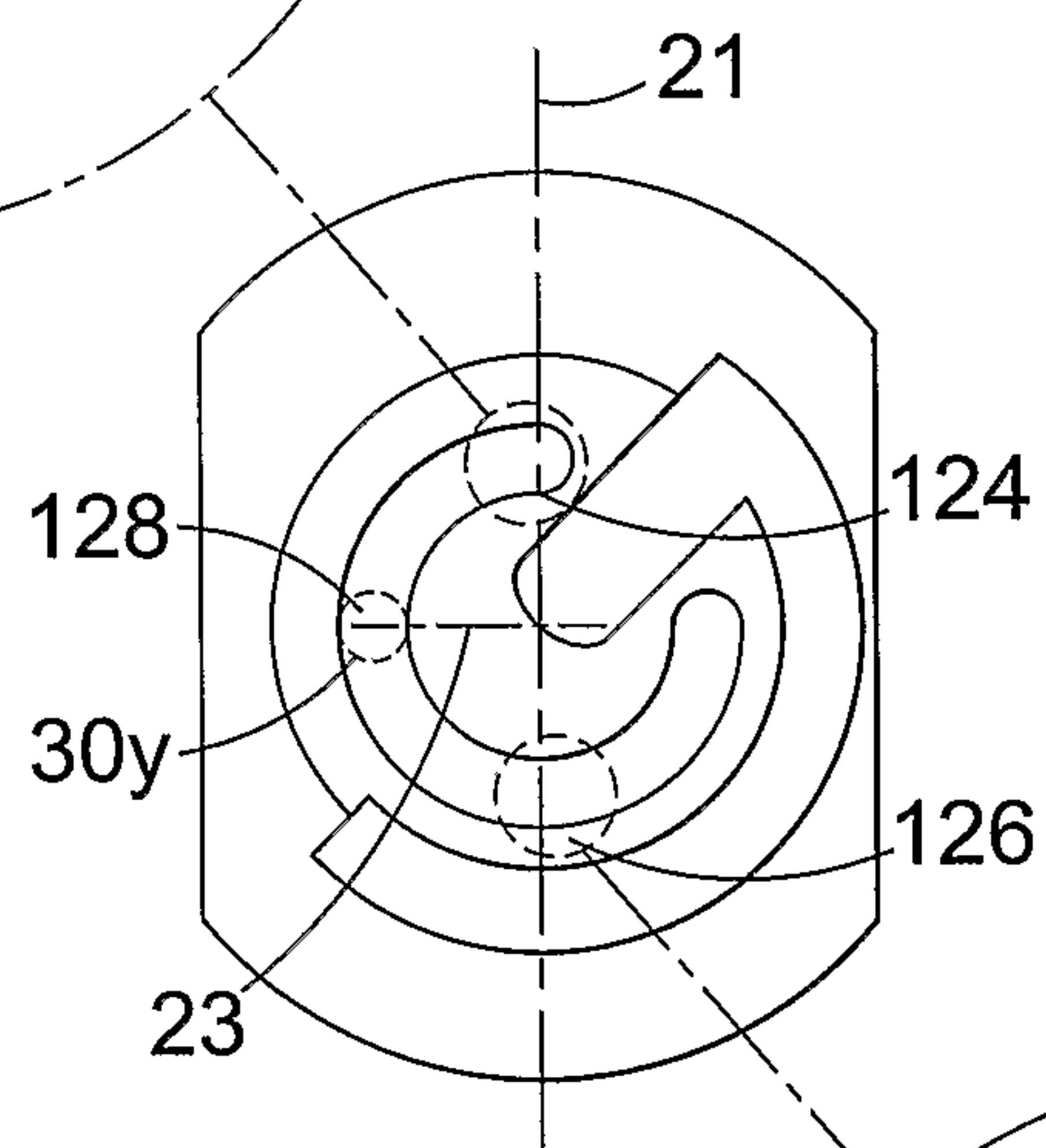


Fig. 6

Fig. 6B

