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(74) Agent: **JORRITSMA, Ruurd**; Nederlandsch Octrooibureau, Scheveningseweg 82, P.O. Box 29720, NL-2502 LS The Hague (NL).

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(71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): **SKF ENGINEERING AND RESEARCH CENTRE B.V.** [NL/NL]; P.O. Box 2350, NL-3430 DT Nieuwegein (NL).

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(72) Inventors; and

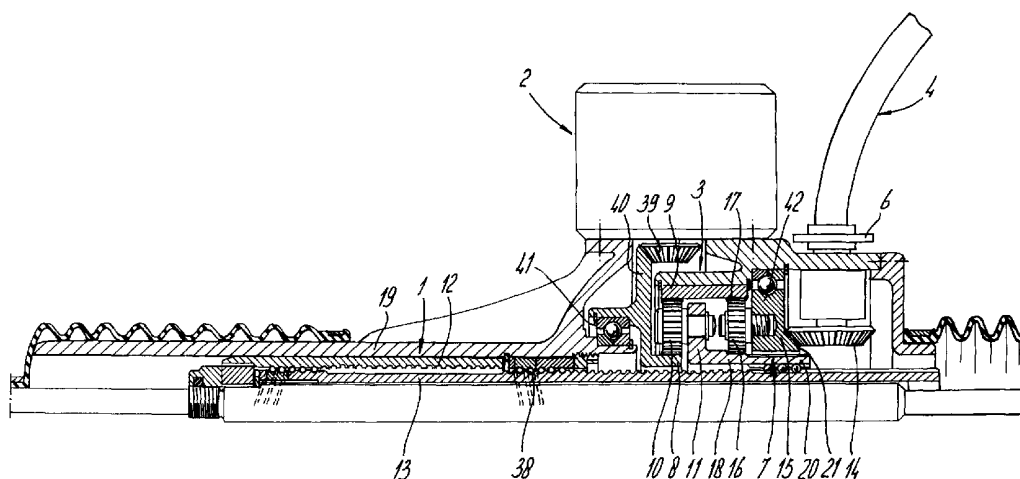
(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): **KAPAAAN, Hendrikus, Jan** [NL/NL]; Waterhoen 5, NL-3455 DM Nieuwegein (NL). **HOLWEG, Eduardus, Gerardus, Maria** [NL/NL]; Paradijspoort 44, NL-2611 MB Delft (NL). **NERVO, Aurelio** [IT/IT]; Via S. Tomasso, 6, I-10122 Torino (IT).

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(54) Title: ELECTRIC SCREW ACTUATOR SYSTEM



(57) Abstract: An electric screw actuator system, e.g. for an electrically driven and controlled steering device, comprises a screw actuator, an electric motor (2) engaging the screw actuator through a reduction gear mechanism (3), electronic operating means for operating the screw actuator electrically, and a mechanical back-up system for operating the screw actuator in the absence of electric power e.g. in the case of an electric power failure of in the case the electric power is switched off, maintenance, garage parking etc. The mechanical back-up system comprises a manually controllable operation member (4) and an electromagnetic coupling (6), said coupling disengaging the rotation member from the screw actuator in the case of nominal operation and availability of electric power, and engaging the rotation member with the screw actuator in the case of electric power failure.



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Electric screw actuator system

The invention is related to the field of electric screw actuator systems which are to be applied as the main drive for all kinds of tasks, such as the electric drive and  
5 control of the steering device of a vehicle, the brake device thereof etc. A major point of concern in this field is the degree of reliability of the electric components thereof, including the supply of electric current which is necessary for powering the system.

Although the reliability has meanwhile been raised to a level which is accepted in most fields of technology, e.g. the aircraft industry, and the automotive industry,  
10 nevertheless several reasons still exist to apply a mechanical back-up system. Such mechanical back-up system might not always be necessary for reasons of lack of reliability, but other reasons, such as a feeling of confidence by the car driver, (long term) garage parking etc. may make it desirable to incorporate a mechanical back-up.

The invention aims at providing such electric screw actuator system, e.g. for an  
15 electrically driven and controlled steering device. Said system comprises a screw actuator, an electric motor engaging the screw actuator through a reduction gear mechanism, electronic operating means for operating the screw actuator electrically, and a mechanical back-up system for operating the screw actuator in the absence of electric power, e.g. in the case of an electric power failure or in the case the electric  
20 power is switched off, maintenance, garage parking etc., said mechanical back-up system comprising a manually controllable operation member and an electromagnetic coupling, said coupling disengaging the rotation member from the screw actuator in the case of nominal operation and availability of electric power, and engaging the rotation member with the screw actuator in the case of absence of electric power.

25 In the electric screw actuator system according to the invention, an automatic switch takes place from electric operation towards manual, full mechanic operation when, for whatever reason, no electric current is available. Under normal conditions however, full electric drive and control takes place, for instance through control buttons, a joystick etc.

30 Although the mechanical back-up is primarily intended to provide relief under emergency conditions, additional "normal" or desired functions can be attributed thereto as well. In the case of automotive applications for instance it may be desirable to apply additional mechanical actuation of the park brake for long term braking of the

vehicle, such as uninterrupted parking for several weeks or months. In such case, the electric battery would gradually loose most of its energy when electric drive of the parking brake would be applied.

The electric motor is usually a relatively high revolution motor, which  
5 necessitates the application of the reduction gear mechanism. On the other hand, the manually controllable operation member, such as a steer, a stick etc., usually only provides a limited displacement or rotation. Thus, according to the invention, an auxiliary gear mechanism is provided for obtaining the necessary number of revolutions of the nut or screw so as to obtain the required displacement. Said auxiliary  
10 gear mechanism is an accelerating gear mechanism.

Preferably, the reduction gear mechanism and the auxiliary gear mechanism are integrated. In that case, the reduction gear mechanism comprises a sun gear wheel which is driveable by the electric motor, a fixed ring gear wheel connected to one of the nut and the screw, satellite gear wheels which engage the sun gear wheel and the ring  
15 gear wheel, and a carrier onto which the satellite gear wheels are rotatably mounted, said carrier engaging the other of the nut and the screw.

In a compact embodiment, the nut of the screw actuator is connected to a housing, said housing furthermore carrying the fixed ring gear wheel(s) which is (are) concentric with respect to the nut and the screw, as well as the electromagnetic  
20 coupling.

Furthermore, the axis of the coupling can be transverse with respect to the axis of the screw actuator, in which case the coupling engages the auxiliary gear mechanism through bevel gears.

The mechanical back-up system may comprise a flexible cable drive which at one  
25 end is connected to the coupling, and which at the other end is provided with a manually operated lever means, e.g. a steer, joystick or the like. An additional gear acceleration unit may also be located near the joystick.

The manually operated lever means has a swivel point which is fixed with respect to the screw actuator, the flexible cable drive being connected to the lever means at the  
30 swivel point thereof, electromagnetic immobilisation means being provided for preventing rotation of the lever means in the case of nominal operation and availability of electric power, and for allowing rotation of the lever means in the case of absence of electric power.

Preferably, the lever means carry the electronic operating means for electrically operating the screw actuator, like existing drive-by-wire systems. This electronic operating means may for instance be a joystick which is directly mounted to the swivel point, or at a distance therefrom at the free end of the lever means.

5 A sensor may be provided for monitoring and controlling a displacement and/or a rotation of e.g. the nut and/or the screw in closed loop configuration with the electric motor, the electronic operating means, and an electronic control unit.

As mentioned, the system according to the invention may be applied to steer a vehicle. Thus, the invention is also related to an electromechanical steering device,  
10 comprising an electric screw actuator system as described before and a joystick having at least one force sensor and/or at least one displacement or rotation sensor for steering, and/or braking, and or accelerating action.

The invention will now be described further with reference to an electromechanical steering device according to the invention as shown in the drawings.

15 Fig. 1 shows the general layout of a vehicle provided with an electric steering and brake device according to the invention.

Fig. 2 shows the general layout of the electric steering device according to the invention.

Fig. 3 shows a cross-section of the screw actuator.

20 The vehicle shown in fig. 1 comprises a steering actuator 1 which is connected to the front wheels of the vehicle, as well as a joystick 26 situated near the driver's seat. Furthermore, electromechanical brake actuators 28 are provided which control the disk brakes on all wheels of the vehicle, and which also may be controlled by the joystick 26. Electromechanical drum brakes may also form a part of a complete  
25 electromechanical brake system.

The joystick 26 is connected to an electronic control unit 27, which through the driving dynamic controller 29 controls the electric motor 2 of the screw actuator 1.

The joystick 26 also controls the electromechanical brake actuators 28 on the basis of signals received from the wheel speed sensors 30. Furthermore, sensors 31  
30 have been incorporated which monitor the driving status, all sensors being connected to the sensor electronics control device 32.

As shown in fig. 2, the control unit 27 receives signals related e.g. to the load exerted on the screw actuator 1, displacements and/or rotations of components thereof,

through cable 33. Through cable 34, the control unit 27 receives signals from the joystick 26. On the basis of these signals, the electric motor 2 is controlled, through cable 35, for actuating the screw actuator 1.

5 The joystick 26 is mounted at the free end of the lever 23, which is rotatable around a vertical axis on the swivel point 24. Furthermore, the lever 23 can pivot about the horizontal pivot axis of the hinge 36.

By means of the immobilisation means 25, e.g. an electromagnetic coupling, the lever 23, and thereby the joystick 26 are held in a nominal position under nominal conditions, that is when electric current is available.

10 In the absence of electric current, e.g. when the electric current is switched off or in case of an electric power failure, the electromagnetic coupling 25 is released and by manipulating the lever 23 through the joystick 26, a rotation through swivel 24 is imparted on the flexible cable 4 which is capable to transmit a torque.

In turn, this flexible cable 4 drives the screw actuator 1 in such a way that  
15 steering action is still possible.

Additionally, a flexible brake cable 37 is provided, which, in the absence of an electric power, is controlled by pivoting the lever 23 about the hinge 36. The flexible cable 37 is connected to the brake actuators 28, but is not shown in further detail.

The actuator applied can be executed with a rotating nut and a moving screw, or a  
20 moving nut and a rotating screw.

As shown in fig. 3, the screw actuator 1 is accommodated in a housing 19, which is non-rotatably fixed with respect to e.g. the chassis of a vehicle. The nut 12 is immovably fixed within the housing 12. The screw 13 is rotatably and translatably supported within the nut 12 by means of the balls 38, which engage correspondingly  
25 shaped screw threads in the nut 12 and the screw 13.

The screw actuator 1 is actuated through an electric motor 2 which two bevel pinion 39 drives a first reduction bevel gear 40 which is positioned around the screw 13. The bevel gear 40 is rotatably supported by means of bearing 41. The bevel gear 40 is integrated with a sun gear wheel 8, which engages satellite gear wheels 10. The  
30 housing 1 carries a fixed ring gear wheel 9, which also engages the satellite gear wheels 10.

The satellite gear wheels 10 are rotatably mounted on a carrier 11, which through the spline/ball mechanism 20 is able to rotate the screw 13.

The bevel gears 39, 40, as well as the satellite gear wheel mechanism 8 – 11 provide the necessary reduction of the motor rotations for driving the screw actuator 1.

In case of an electric power interruption, the electric motor 2 is no longer able to drive the screw actuator 1. For this reason, a mechanical back-up system is provided, comprising a flexible cable 4, which is connected to electromagnetic coupling 6. In case of a power interruption 6, this electromagnetic coupling 6 connects the flexible cable 4 to the auxiliary drive (bevel) gear wheel 14. The auxiliary drive gear wheel 14 engages a bevel gear 21, which surrounds the screw 13. The bevel gear 21 is integrated with an auxiliary carrier 15, rotatably supported with respect to the housing by means of the bearing 42.

The carrier 15 carries auxiliary satellite gear wheels 16, which engage a fixed auxiliary ring gear wheel 17, as well as an auxiliary sun gear wheel 18 integrated with the carrier 11.

By rotating the flexible cable through the lever 23 (see fig. 2) the screw 13 can thus be rotated mechanically.

The bevel gears 14, 21 or other appropriate gear transmission principles are preferably accelerating gear wheels.

Claims

1. Electric screw actuator system, e.g. for an electrically driven and controlled steering device, said system comprising a screw actuator (1), an electric motor (2)  
5 engaging the screw actuator (1) through a reduction gear mechanism (3), electronic operating means (26) for operating the screw actuator (1) electrically, and a mechanical back-up system (4) for operating the screw actuator (1) in the absence of electric power e.g. in the case of an electric power failure or in the case the electric power is switched off, maintenance, garage parking etc., said mechanical back-up system (4) comprising a  
10 manually controllable operation member (5) and an electromagnetic coupling (6), said coupling (6) disengaging the rotation member (5) from the screw actuator (1) in the case of nominal operation and availability of electric power, and engaging the rotation member (5) with the screw actuator (1) in the case of absence of electric power.
- 15 2. System according to claim 1, wherein an electromagnetic coupling (6) is connected to an auxiliary gear mechanism (7) which engages the screw actuator (1) in case of absence of electric power.
3. System according to claim 2, wherein the reduction gear mechanism (2) and the  
20 auxiliary gear mechanism (7) are integrated.
4. System according to claim 3, wherein the reduction gear mechanism (2) comprises a sun gear wheel (8) which is driveable by the electric motor (2), a fixed ring gear wheel (9) connected to one of the nut (12) and the screw (13), satellite gear wheels  
25 (10) which engage the sun gear wheel (8) and the ring gear wheel (9), and a carrier (11) onto which the satellite gear wheels (10) are rotatably mounted, said carrier (11) engaging the other of the nut (12) and the screw (13).
5. System according to claim 4, wherein the coupling (6) is connected to an  
30 auxiliary drive gear wheel (14) which engages the screw actuator (17).
6. System according to claim 5, wherein the auxiliary drive gear wheel (14) engages an auxiliary carrier (15) onto which auxiliary satellite gear wheel (16) are rotatably

mounted, said auxiliary satellite gear wheels (16) engaging an auxiliary ring gear wheel (17) which is fixed with respect to the other ring gear wheel (9), and an auxiliary sun gear wheel (18) connected to the other carrier (11).

5 7. System according to any of claims 2-6, wherein the auxiliary gear mechanism (7) is an accelerating gear mechanism.

8. System according to any of claims 4-7, wherein the nut (12) of the screw actuator (1) is connected to a housing (19), said housing (19) furthermore carrying the fixed ring  
10 gear wheels (5, 9, 17) which is (are) concentric with respect to the nut (11) and the screw (12), as well as the electromagnetic coupling (6).

9. System according to claim 8, wherein the screw (12) engages the carrier (11) through a spline/ball mechanism (20).

15

10. System according to claim 8 or claim 9, wherein the axis of the coupling (6) is transverse with respect to the axis of the screw actuator (1), and the coupling (6) engages the auxiliary gear mechanism (7) through bevel gears (14, 21).

20 11. System according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the mechanical back-up system (4) comprises a flexible cable drive (22), capable of transmission a torque, or a pulling cable or a mechanical linkage, which at one end is connected to the coupling (6), and which at the other end is provided with an hand operated lever means (23), e.g. a steer, joystick or the like.

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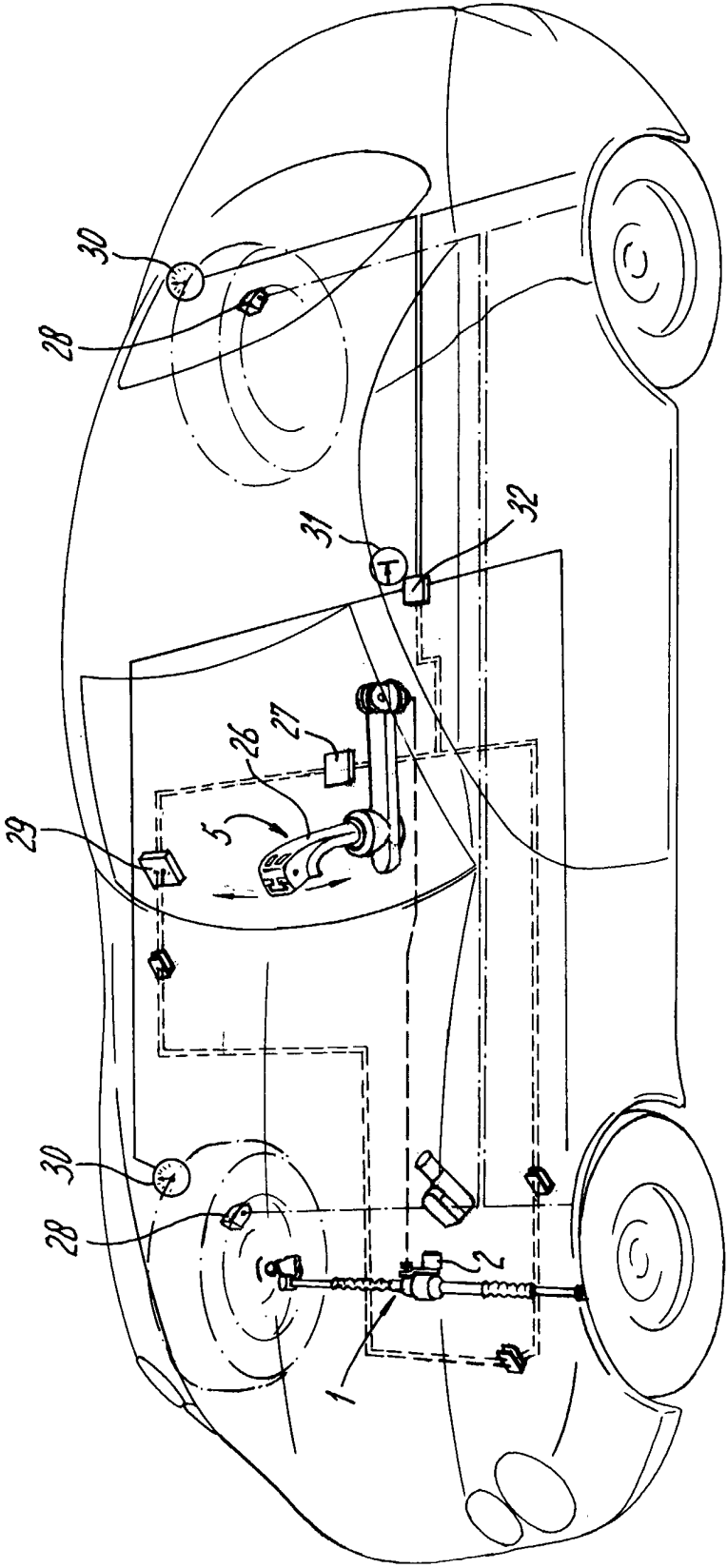
12. System according to claim 11, wherein the manually operated lever means (23) has a swivel point (24) which is fixed with respect to the screw actuator (1), the flexible cable drive (22) being connected to the lever means (22) at the swivel point (24) thereof, electromagnetic immobilisation means (25) being provided for preventing  
30 rotation of the lever means (23) in the case of nominal operation and availability of electric power, and for allowing rotation of the lever means (23) in the case of electric power failure.

13. System according to claim 12, wherein the lever means (23) carries said electronic operating means (26) for operating the screw actuator (1) electrically.
- 5 14. System according to claim 13, wherein the electronic operating means comprises a joy stick (26).
15. System according to claim 14, wherein the joystick is at a distance from the swivel point (24).
- 10 16. System according to claim 14, wherein the joystick (26) is directly mounted to the swivel point (24), and is rotatable and/or liftable (x-y-z axis).
- 15 17. System according to any of the preceding claims, wherein a sensor is provided for monitoring and controlling a displacement and/or a rotation of e.g. the nut and/or the screw in closed loop configuration with the electric motor (2), the electronic operating means (26), and an electronic control unit (27).
- 20 18. System according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the reduction gear mechanism (13) comprises an excentric gear reduction.
- 25 19. System according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the reduction gear mechanism (13) comprises a combination of bevel gears, and/or planetary gears, and/or excentric gears.
20. System according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the screw actuator (1) has a rotatably supported nut (12) and a non-rotatable, translatable screw (13).
- 30 21. System according to any of claims 1 – 19, wherein the screw actuator has a non-rotatable, translatable nut and a rotatably supported screw.
22. System according to claim 21, wherein the nut is connected to or integrated with a piston.

23. Electromechanical steering system, comprising an electric screw actuator system according to one of the claims 1 – 21, and comprising a joystick (26) having at least one force sensor and/or at least one displacement or rotation sensor for steering, and/or  
5 braking, and or accelerating action.

24. Electromechanical brake system, comprising an electric screw actuator system according to one of claims 1 – 21.

fig-1



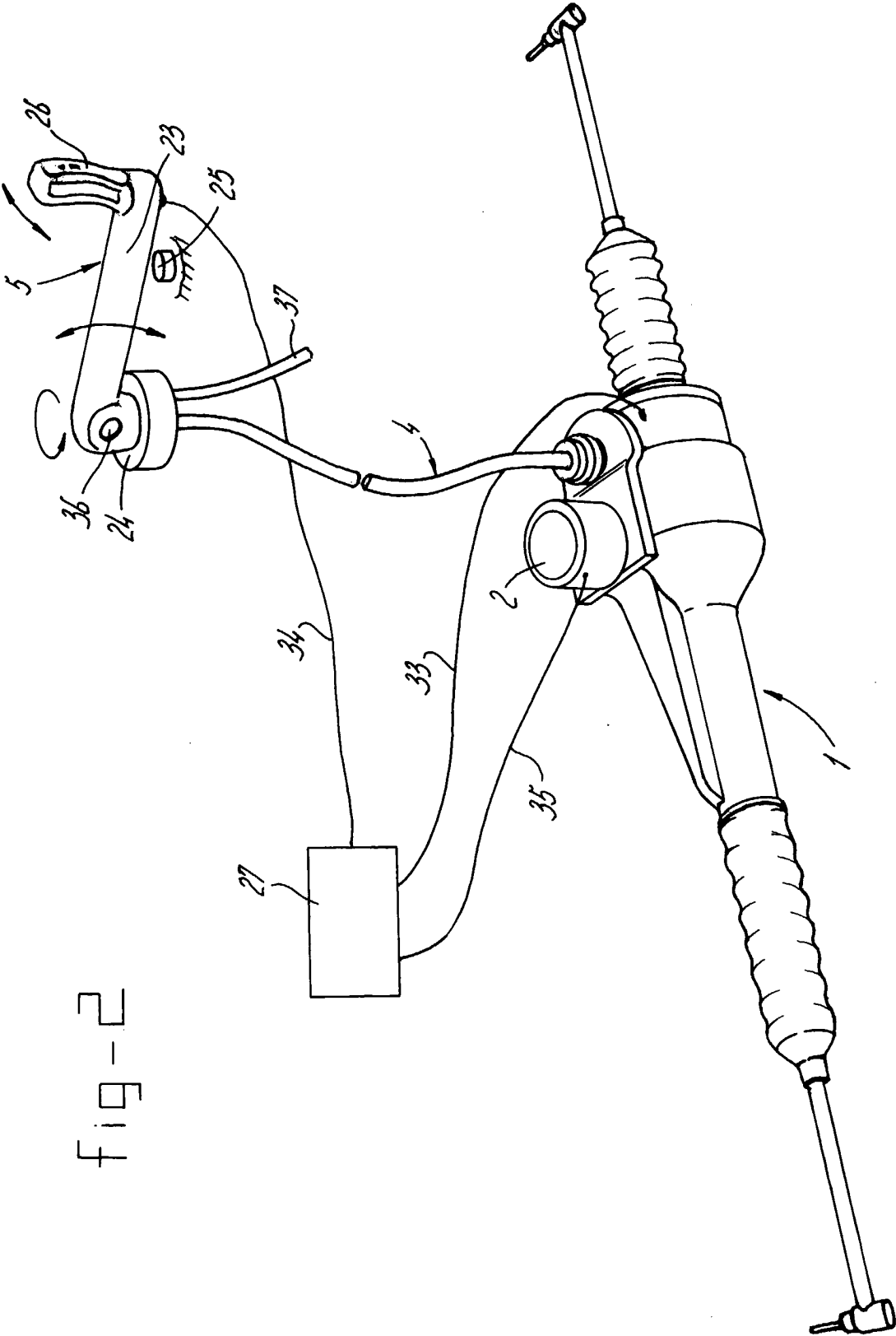
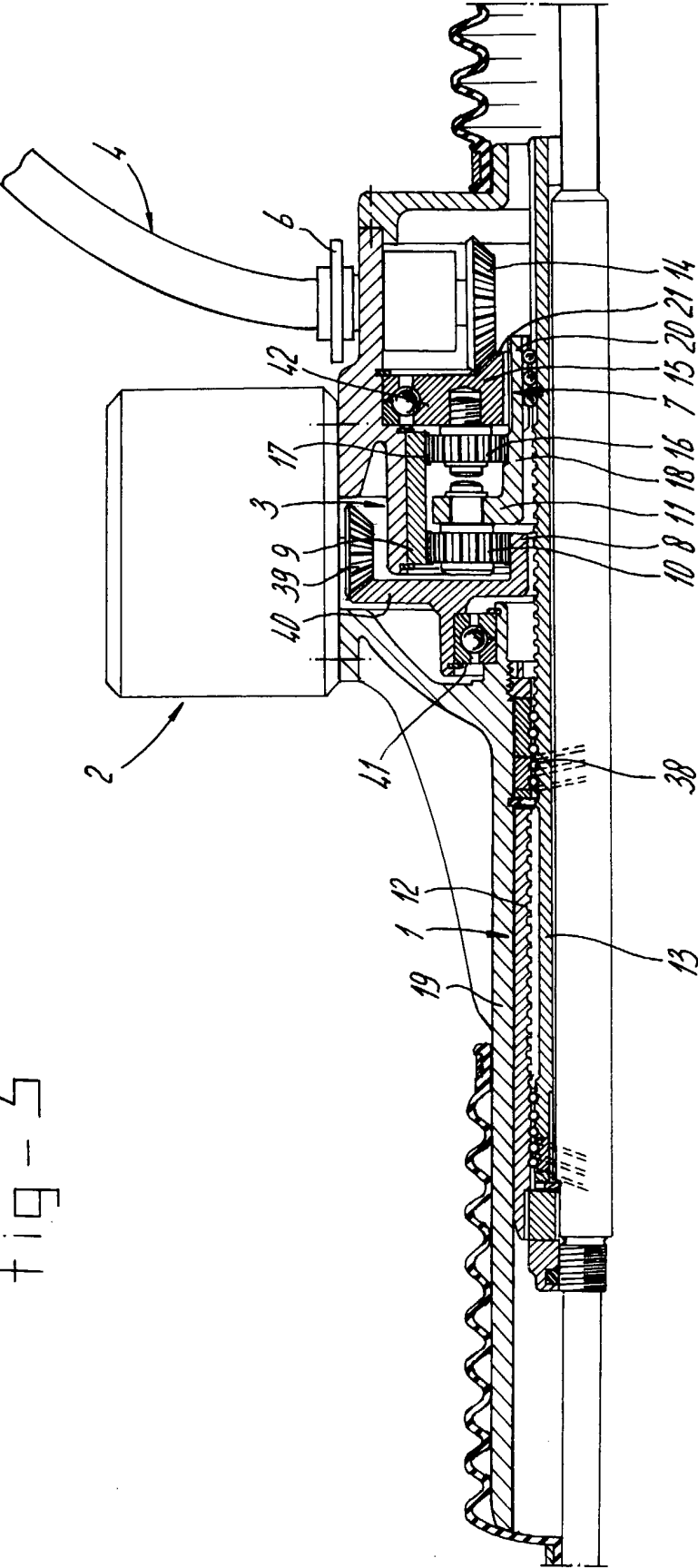


fig-2

fig-3



## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/NL 01/00289

## A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 7 F16H25/20 B62D5/04

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 F16H B62D B60T

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, PAJ

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Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.



Patent family members are listed in annex.

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European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2  
NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk  
Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Tx. 31 651 epo nl,  
Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016

Authorized officer

Mende, H

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