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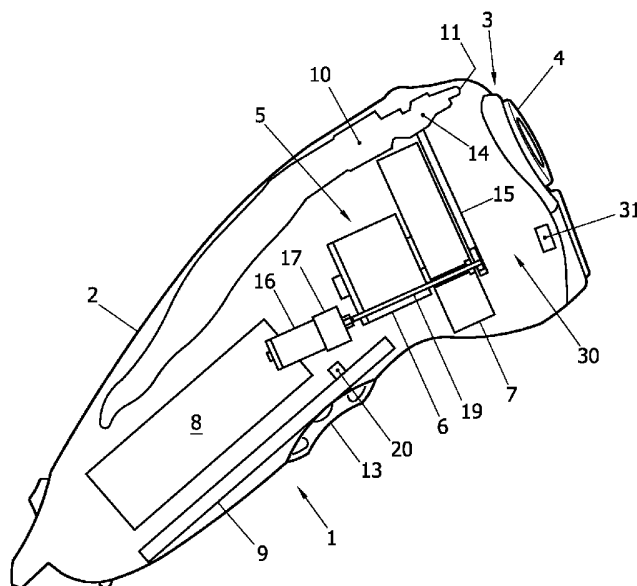
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(54) Title: APPLIANCE FOR PERSONAL CARE WITH AUTOMATIC FLUID DISPENSER



(57) Abstract: An appliance for personal care, such as skin, dental or hair treatment, comprising a dispensing structure (30) for automatically dispensing a fluid. The dispensing structure (30) includes a fluid reservoir (10), a discharge opening (11) and a fluid drive structure (9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) for driving the fluid to be dispensed from the reservoir (10) to and out of said discharge opening (11) in accordance with a dispensing rate / time profile (S_x). The fluid drive structure (9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) is arranged for spurting at least once during said dispensing operation for squirting an additional quantity of the fluid to and out of the discharge opening (11) in addition to the fluid being dispensed in accordance with said dispensing rate / time profile (S_x).

WO 2006/100627 A1



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Appliance for personal care with automatic fluid dispenser

The invention relates to an appliance for personal care, such as a shaver, toothbrush or hairdryer, including a dispensing structure for dispensing a fluid to a body part to be treated in order to facilitate or enhance treatment thereof.

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An example of such an appliance is a shaver as disclosed in U.S. patent 3,176,392. In this document, it is disclosed that the flow of the fluid may be controlled by various means such as an On-Off valve, a variable flow control means, or a metering device, which delivers a known quantity each time it is actuated. It is further disclosed that actuation
10 of the flow control means may be achieved by actuating the valve in response to pressure on a roller associated with the shaver or by actuating a liquid dispensing valve via a valve actuating lever. Another example of such an appliance is a shaver as disclosed in U.S. patent 6,126,669. This shaver is equipped with a reservoir for holding a fluid in the form of a shaving lotion or gel, and with a diaphragm pump for automatically dispensing the fluid onto
15 the skin. The diaphragm pump is driven by a solenoid via an actuator. A control circuit supplies a current pulse at regular intervals through the coil of the solenoid so that a regular supply of fluid is obtained.

To achieve the proper dosage of the fluid throughout the treatment, the dispensing means that cause a quantity of the fluid to be supplied to the treatment area, need
20 to be activated quite frequently. Moreover, a lack of the fluid is generally experienced before actuation, while an excess of the fluid is generally experienced briefly after the activation. Where a fluid is automatically supplied continuously or at regular intervals, the need of operating the dispenser during treatment is avoided. However, at least at some portions of the treatment area, the dosage of the fluid is often too high or too low.

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It is an object of the invention to reduce the extent to which users experience lack or scarceness of fluid dispensed from an appliance for personal care, without the necessity of frequent operations to actuate the dispensing means.

According to the present invention this object is achieved by providing an appliance according to claim 1.

The present invention allows an additional dosage of fluid by causing the fluid drive structure to spurt and thereby squirt an additional quantity of the fluid out of the reservoir during a limited period of time.. Thereby, lack or scarceness of fluid during treatment is counteracted. Moreover, by squirting the fluid at the right moment and by keeping effective the dispensing rate / time profile during non-spurting dispensing operation, effective treatment conditions are ensured, while waste of fluid is avoided since the additional fluid is only dispensed for a limited period of time and the normal dispensing rate / time profile can be relatively lean, without causing unavoidable lack or scarceness of fluid in the area or areas to be treated.

Particular embodiments of the invention are set forth in the dependent claims.

Further features, effects and details of embodiments of the invention are described below with reference to the accompanying schematical drawings, wherein:

Fig. 1 is a cross-sectional view of an example of an appliance according to the invention;

Fig. 2 is a cross-sectional view of a shaving head of the appliance shown in Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a graph illustrating the influence of the application of a shaving gel on the friction between the shaving head and the skin of a user;

Fig. 4 is an enlarged view of Fig 1, showing a reservoir with a cartridge and a pump, as well as an alternative actuator for activating said pump;

Fig. 5 shows an alternative embodiment of a pump; and

Fig. 6 is a graph in which four alternative examples of dispensing rate / time profiles are shown;

Fig. 7 is a graph depicting a voltage V applied to the secondary motor as a function of time; and

Fig. 8 is another graph depicting a voltage V applied to the secondary motor as a function of time.

In this description, a shaver according to the invention is described. However, the invention is not limited to shavers, but may also be embodied in other personal care appliances for treatment of a body part, wherein a fluid is dispensed to enhance the treatment, such as an epilator, a toothbrush or a hairstyler. The fluid to be dispensed may for instance be
5 a gas or vapor, a liquid, a paste or a gel containing a cleaning or polishing agent, steam, a skin treatment agent, a disinfecting agent, perfume or a hairstyling agent, such as wax or a fixating or coloring agent. For the purpose of shaving, the fluid may for instance be any form of liquid, gel or paste which reduces the friction between the head and the face and which may be generally characterized as a glide agent.

10 The shaver 1 shown in Figure 1 comprises a housing 2 and a shaving head 3, which is hinged or otherwise removably connected to the housing 2. The shaving head 3 is provided with cutters 4, driven by a main drive system 5, which is accommodated in the housing 2. The main drive system 5 comprises a main motor 6, a transmission 7, power supply circuitry 8 including for instance a battery and conductors, a main motor control
15 circuit 9 and a power switch 13. The power switch 13 may have other functions as well, as will be discussed later.

The housing 2 furthermore accommodates a dispensing structure 30. According to this example, the dispensing structure 30 includes a reservoir 10 for holding a fluid, such as a shaving gel or lotion, and a discharge opening 11 in or near the shaving head
20 3. The reservoir 10 communicates with the discharge opening 11. A fluid drive structure for driving the fluid from the reservoir 10 to and out of the discharge opening 11 during a dispensing operation is also part of the dispensing structure 30. When empty, the reservoir 10 can be replaced.

According to the present example illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2, the fluid drive
25 structure includes a diaphragm pump 14, an actuator 15 for activating the pump 14, a secondary motor 16 and transmission members 15, 17, 19, 27. The diaphragm pump 14 is shown in more detail in Figs. 2 and 4. In the pump 14, a pump chamber 21 is located, which has a flexible wall portion 22, a one-way inlet (not shown) connecting to the reservoir 10 and a one-way outlet (not shown) connecting to the discharge opening 11. The actuator 15 is
30 formed by a push rod of which one end is coupled to an excenter 18 on a drive shaft 19 coupled to the secondary motor 16 and the other end is provided with a slotted guide hole 26 in which a fixed guide pin 27 engages. In operation, this configuration transforms rotary motion of the drive shaft 19 into a reciprocating movement of the push member 15, causing the flexible wall portion 22 of the pump chamber 21 to be alternately compressed and

allowed to flex back. This generates a repetitive cycle of overpressure during which the chamber 21 is emptied and sub-pressure during which the chamber 21 is filled with fresh fluid from the reservoir 10.

In the illustrated embodiment, the actuator 15 is driven by a secondary motor 16 and via transmission 17, which are both separate from the main motor 6 and the transmission driving the cutters of the shaver. In an alternative embodiment, the actuator and cutters are coupled so as to be driven by a single motor. Such a single motor is preferably combined with two sets of transmission means, with independently adjustable transmission ratios, so that the rotation speed of the cutters 4 and the frequency of the actuator 15 may be independently varied with respect to each other.

Instead of via the actuator 15, power can alternatively be transmitted to the pump by means of, for example, a piezoelectric element 25 placed against the flexible wall portion 22 of the pump chamber 21 (Figs. 4A and 4B). This element 25 is designed in such a way that, in the powered condition, it bends towards the pump chamber 22, as illustrated in figure 4B, thereby depressing the wall portion 22 and causing pumping action. Alternatively, the piezoelectric element 25 may be arranged to act on a flexible part of the reservoir 10 or a cartridge disposed therein (not shown). Piezoelectric means 25 have good dynamic characteristics (short response time), can be accurately controlled by a suitable electric control signal and require little space, and may therefore be advantageously applied in relatively small appliances, such as a shaver. Instead of the diaphragm pump 14, other types of pumps can be employed, such as a gear pump as shown in Figure 5 or a piston pump.

Also, instead of a pump, drive means may be employed, such as pressurizing means for maintaining a pressure in the fluid reservoir that drives fluid to the discharge opening, in combination with a valve restricting the flow of fluid to the discharge opening. A combination of, for instance, a pump and a valve is also possible, so that the dosage of fluid may be controlled by adjusting the pump frequency, the stroke and/or the valve opening or the return flow via a return conduit.

The drive structure further includes a control unit 20 for controlling the rate at which fluid is dispensed in accordance with a predetermined dispensing rate / time profile S_x . The control unit 20 is preferably formed by an electronic circuitry. The circuitry may be suitable to adjust the rate / time S_x and/or may include a memory for storing one or more dispensing rate / time profiles S_x . The electronic circuitry may form a microcontroller for also controlling other functions of the appliance. It is equally possible to provide the circuitry as an application specific integral circuit (ASIC).

The dispensing rate / time profiles S_x may be established on the basis of theoretical knowledge or empirical data regarding the influence of the dispensing rate on the treatment carried out with the personal care appliance. An example of such knowledge is for instance reflected in Figure 3, showing how the friction F between a shaving head 3 and the skin of a consumer changes over time T in response to application of shaving gel during a shaving session. As can be seen in Figure 3, at the start of the shaving session the friction is relatively high. After application of a first dose of shaving gel (indicated by a black dot A) the friction drops quite considerably and then gradually increases back to its initial value. Upon reaching this initial value, a new dose of shaving gel is applied, causing the friction level to drop and rise again. As this pattern is repeated, it appears that the time interval before returning to the original high friction level increases during the shaving session to a more or less constant value. From this information a dispensing rate / time profile can be derived that will keep the friction at a satisfactorily low level during the shaving session. This dispensing rate / time profile S_x may have an initially high fluid dispensing rate ϕ that gradually decreases towards a constant lower value, as illustrated by profile S_1 in Figure 6.

A dispensing rate / time profile S_1 can be pre-programmed in the appliance 1 by the manufacturer. However, the required dispensing rate / time profile S_x may differ per situation, for instance depending on the shaving conditions (e.g. the rotation speed of the cutters, the number of cutters, the climate and the type of fluid used) or the user (e.g. the condition of the body part, the treatment habits of the user, such as the frequency of using the appliance, the applied (shaving) force, etc.). To cater to such different situations and/or users, a number of dispensing rate / time profiles may be stored in the control unit 20. The most appropriate dispensing rate / time profile S_x may for instance be selected by means of a humanly operable interface, such as a touch screen, a switch or a speech recognition unit.

Several examples of conceivable dispensing rate / time profiles S_{1-4} are depicted in Figure 6.

Figure 7 depicts an example in which two squirts Z_1 and Z_2 are dispensed in addition to the dispensing according to a gradually decreasing dispensing rate / time profile.

The squirts may be of a predetermined duration, triggered when the dispensing structure is operated for producing a squirt of the fluid. It is also possible that the duration of the spurting is dependent on the duration the operating interface is operated, for instance by keeping a push button depressed.

Hence, the fluid drive structure drives the fluid to be dispensed from the reservoir to and out of the discharge opening 11 in accordance with a dispensing rate / time profile S_x and can spurt during said dispensing operation by squirting the fluid to and out of

the discharge opening 11 at a squirting rate higher than the rate at which the fluid is dispensed in accordance with the dispensing rate / time profile S_x .

When dispensing rate / time profiles S_x are applied for which it holds that the dispensing rate ϕ does not exceed 2 ml/minute, which is a practical value for current glide agents for shaving, it has been found that the dispensing rate ϕ during spurting is preferably between 0.5 - 100.0 ml/minute. Furthermore, it has been found that the average dispensing rate during spurting is preferably at least five times, and more preferably at least ten times higher than the average dispensing rate during the non-spurting dispensing operation.

It is possible to arrange the fluid drive structure for effectuating the spurting in reaction to a user command. This can for example be realized with a user switch that is connected to the control means 20. The user is then able to decide when a squirt of the fluid is desired.

It is also possible to arrange the fluid drive structure for automatically starting the spurting at one or more predetermined moments during a dispensing period. An advantage is that a squirting of fluid is automatically caused at a pre-known, suitable moment. Such a moment may for example be substantially at the beginning of a dispensing operation period, since then the skin usually is still completely fluid free.

It is furthermore possible to arrange the fluid drive structure for automatically starting one or more spurtings in reaction to the detection of a condition of the treatment and/or of the body part. To this end, a sensor 31 (see Figure 1) may be provided for detecting such a condition. If the appliance is a shaver, such a condition may be that the friction between the body part and treatment parts 4 of the appliance 1 exceeds a predetermined level. The squirting of the fluid is then automatically initiated at a suitable moment, which depends on the condition of the treatment and/or of the body part. For example, it is to be expected that during shaving under a shower a dry-skin situation will be detected less often than during shaving at a washbasin.

In particular in embodiments in which pressure in the fluid reservoir drives the fluid or in which the dispensing is controlled using a return flow channel instead of a pump, a valve may be arranged for allowing the increased spurting dispensing rate for squirting the fluid to the treatment area.

The dispensing of the fluid according to a predetermined dispensing rate / time profile S_x may also be achieved by supplying voltage pulses to the secondary motor 16. This is shown in Figure 6 (profile S_2) and in Figure 8, which depicts the voltage V applied to the secondary motor 16 as a function of time T . By changing the duration of the time intervals

between the different pulses at maximum voltage V_M and/or the duration of the pulses, different profiles S_x may be obtained.

When the dispensing structure is operated for producing a squirt of the fluid, instead of applying voltage pulses, an increased voltage is supplied to the secondary motor 16 continuously, but for a limited period of time. This period of time is substantially longer than the duration of an individual pulse. However, compared with the duration of a total dispensing operation, this time period is only small. In this way the fluid drive structure 30 temporarily spurts during a dispensing operation. This spurting results in the fluid being squirted out of the reservoir 10 at a temporarily increased dispensing rate. This squirting of additional fluid will terminate after the spurting has ended. Then, the dispensing of fluid according to the still active dispensing rate / time profile S_x is resumed. Figure 8 shows the occurrence of two squirts Z_3 and Z_4 temporarily overriding a dispensing rate / time profile. In the present example, the voltage during spurting is higher than the maximum voltage during normal dispensing. However, the voltage during spurting may also be the same as, or even lower than, during normal dispensing, in which case the increased dispensing rate during squirting is achieved only by the continuous application of that voltage.

Within the framework of the present invention, various modifications other than those described above are possible. For instance, the data processor may be adapted for determining the dispensing rate / time profile in accordance with squirt commands inputted during at least one previous treatment. If a large number of squirt commands is inputted, the dispensing rate / time profile to be applicable during a next treatment may for instance be increased and it may also be taken into account whether the squirt commands have predominantly been inputted during an early stage or during a late stage of the treatment. If no or very few squirt commands have been inputted, the dispensing rate / time profile to be applicable during a next treatment may for instance be lowered.

These and comparable variations are understood to fall within the scope of the invention as outlined in the following claims.

CLAIMS:

1. An appliance for personal care, such as skin, dental or hair treatment, comprising a structure for performing said treatment and a dispensing structure (30) for automatically dispensing a fluid, wherein the dispensing structure (30) comprises a fluid reservoir (10), a discharge opening (11) and a fluid drive structure (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) for driving the fluid to be dispensed from the reservoir (10) to and out of said discharge opening (11) in accordance with a dispensing rate / time profile (S_x), the fluid drive structure (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) being arranged for spurting at least once during a dispensing operation an amount of the fluid to and out of the discharge opening (11) at a squirting rate higher than the dispensing rate at which the fluid is dispensed in accordance with said dispensing rate / time profile (S_x).
2. An appliance according to claim 1, wherein the fluid drive structure (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) is arranged in such a way that, during spurting, the fluid is dispensed at a rate at least five times higher than an average dispensing rate during non-spurting dispensing operation.
3. An appliance according to claim 1, further comprising a humanly operable interface for inputting a squirt command, the fluid drive structure (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) being connected to the operating member for spurting in reaction to a signal received from said operating member.
4. An appliance according to claim 1, wherein the fluid drive structure (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) is arranged for automatically spurting in response to being activated.
5. An appliance according to claim 1, further comprising a sensor (31) for sensing a condition of the treatment and/or of a body part to be treated, wherein the fluid drive structure (9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20) communicates with said sensor (31) and is arranged for automatically spurting in response to a condition meeting a predetermined requirement, signalled by said sensor (31).

6. An appliance according to claim 5, wherein the treatment structure is a shaving structure and wherein said sensor (31) is adapted for sensing friction between a skin to be treated and the shaving structure (4).

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7. An appliance according to claim 1, further comprising a data processor for determining the dispensing rate / time profile (S_x) to be applicable during a treatment in accordance with squirt commands inputted during at least one previous treatment.

10 8. An appliance according to claim 5, further comprising a data processor for determining the dispensing rate / time profile (S_x) in accordance with signals received from the sensor (31), the signals representing operating conditions picked up by the sensor (31).

9. An appliance according to claim 1, wherein the fluid drive structure comprises
15 a pump (14) communicating with the reservoir (10) and with the discharge opening (11) for driving the fluid from the reservoir (10) to the discharge opening (11).

10. An appliance according to claim 1, further comprising a control valve
downstream of the reservoir, for controlling fluid flow from the reservoir to the discharge
20 opening, said control valve being arranged for selectively allowing said spurting.

11. An appliance according to any one of the preceding claims, wherein the personal care appliance (1) is one of the following:

- a hair removing apparatus, wherein the fluid to be dispensed is for instance a
25 shaving lotion or gel; or
- a brush, wherein the fluid to be dispensed is for instance a toothpaste or
polishing agent; or
- a hairstyler, wherein the fluid to be dispensed is a hairstyling product, such as
steam, a fixing agent, wax or a dye.

2/4

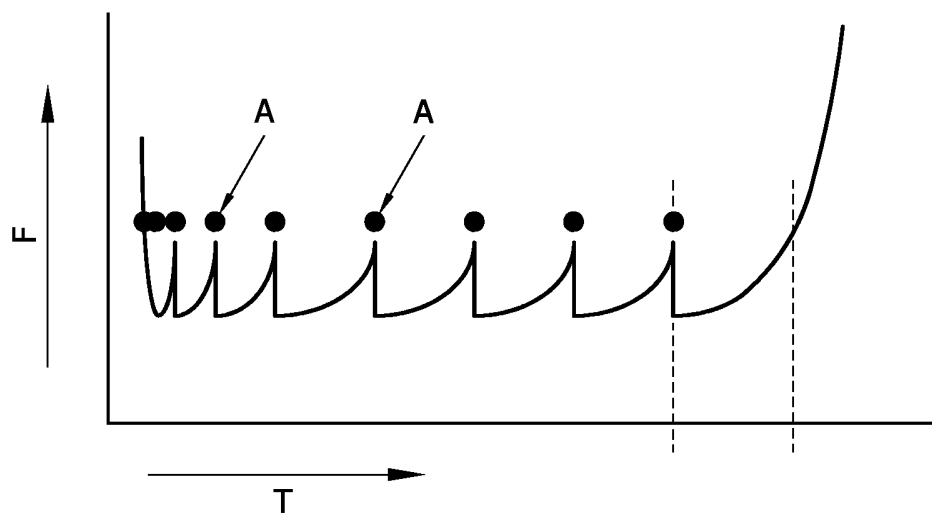


FIG. 3

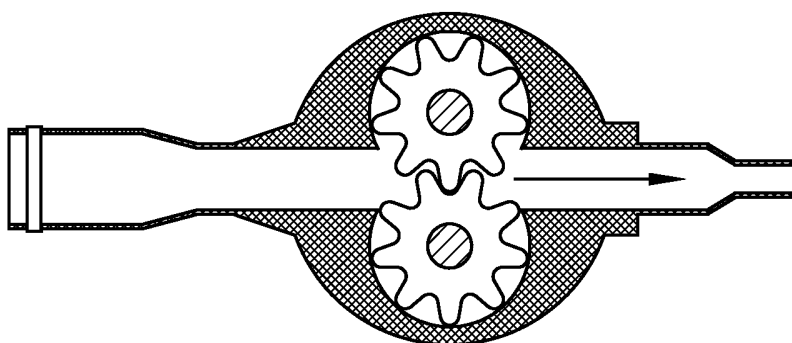


FIG. 5

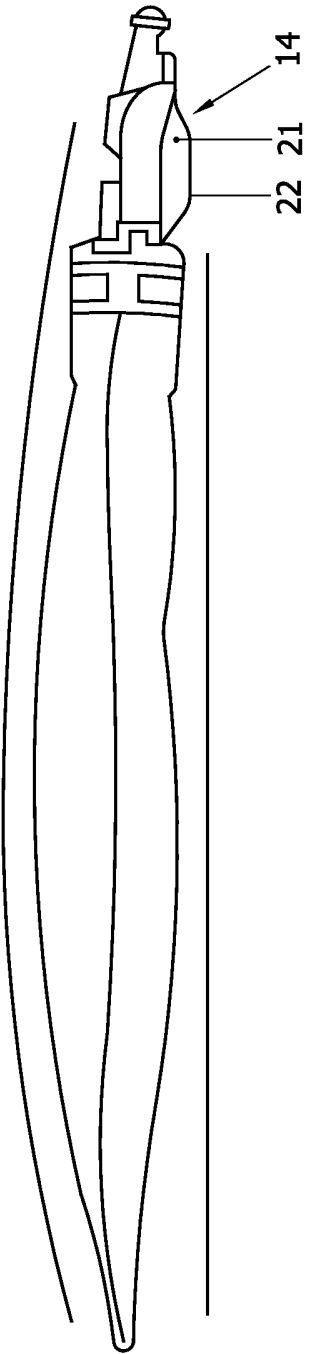


FIG. 4

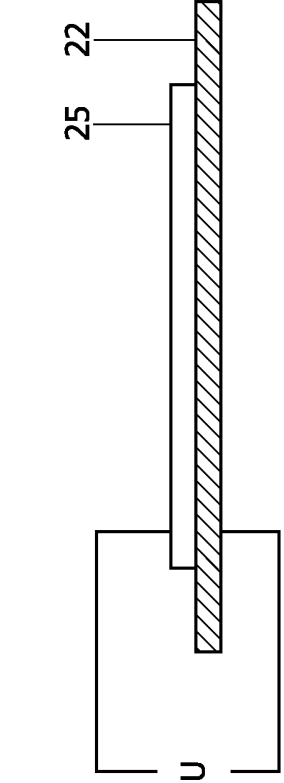
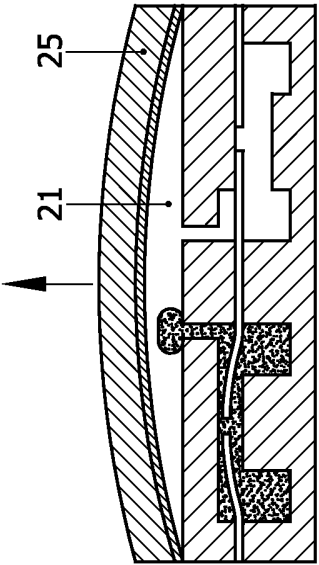


FIG. 4A

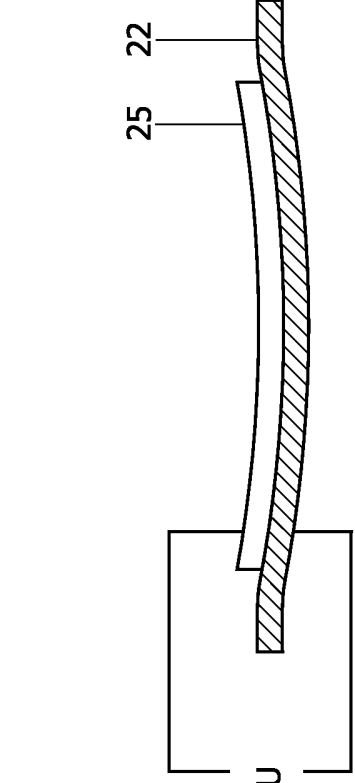
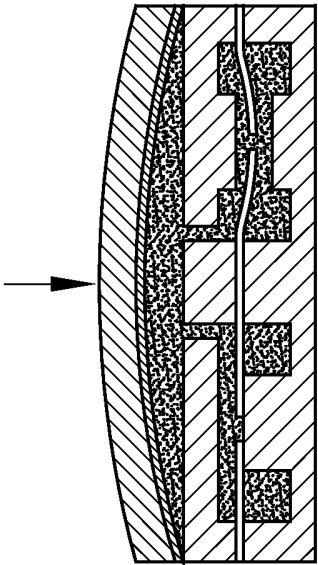


FIG. 4B

4/4

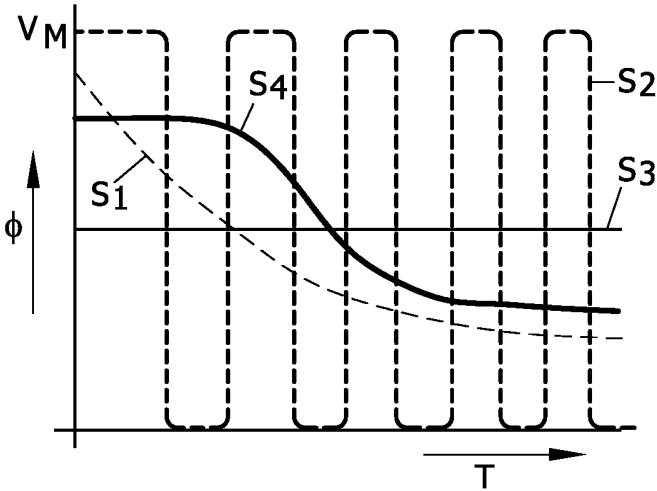


FIG. 6

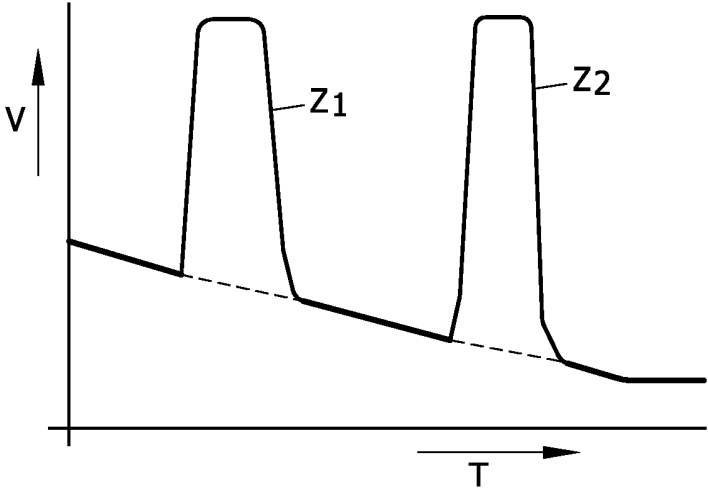


FIG. 7

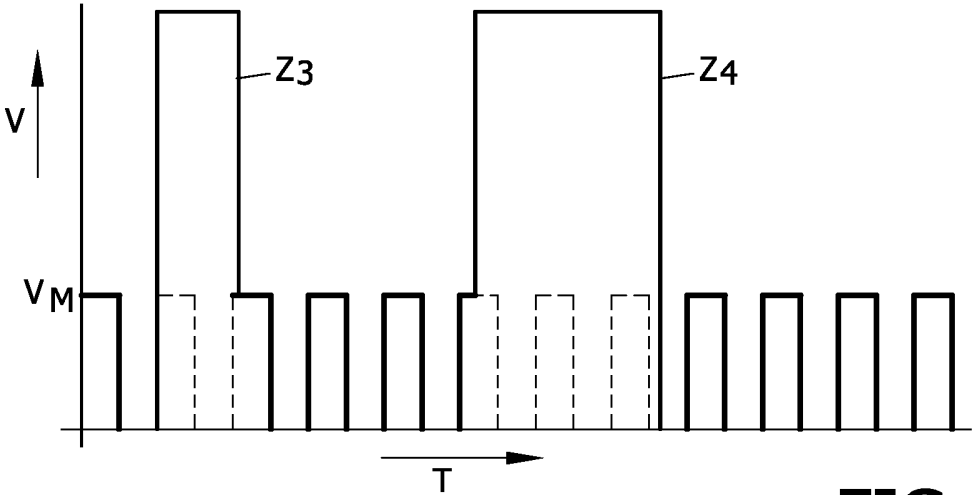


FIG. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/IB2006/050806

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. B26B19/40

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)
B26B

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

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
P, X	WO 2005/099977 A (KONINKLIJKE PHILIPS ELECTRONICS N.V.; EISINGA, REDMER; OOSTERHUIS, JAN,) 27 October 2005 (2005-10-27) the whole document	1-3, 7, 9-11
A	WO 2004/050313 A (KONINKLIJKE PHILIPS ELECTRONICS N.V.; GROSS, JEROEN, A) 17 June 2004 (2004-06-17) page 3, line 7 - page 5, line 22; figures 2, 3	1
A	FR 2 613 975 A (KUSTER RENE; KUSTER JEAN; KUSTER MARTINE) 21 October 1988 (1988-10-21) page 4, lines 15-29; figure 1	1
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☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

☒ See patent family annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

6 July 2006

Date of mailing of the international search report

14/07/2006

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Rattenberger, B

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/IB2006/050806

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 4 031 618 A (MANSFIELD ET AL) 28 June 1977 (1977-06-28) column 3, lines 28-66; figures 1,3 -----	1

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

PCT/IB2006/050806

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