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(54) Title: PRE-ASSEMBLED BELLOWS-TYPE ARRANGEMENT FOR COVERING ARTICULATED SHAFTS

(54) Bezeichnung: VORMONTIERTE BALGARTIGE ANORDNUNG ZUM UMMANTELN VON GELENKWELLEN

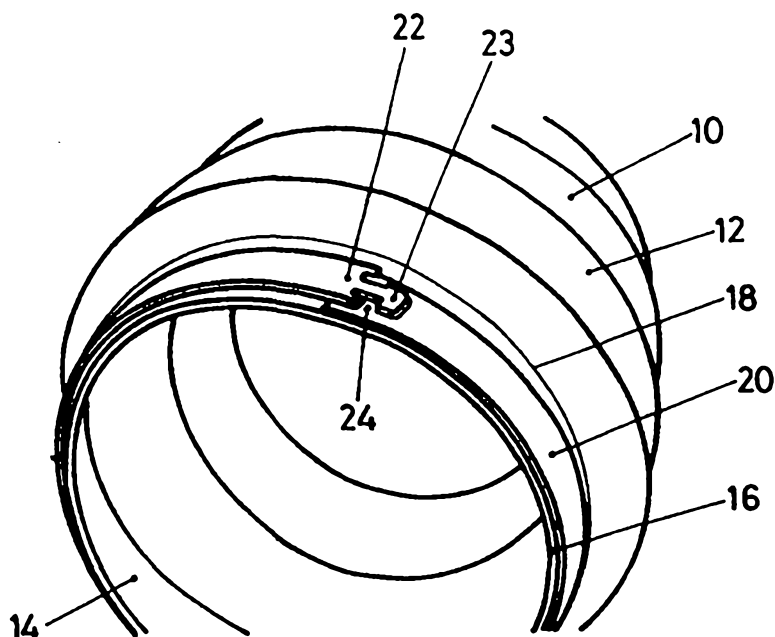
(57) Abstract

The invention relates to an arrangement for covering a shaft-type mechanism and/or a joint-type connection of two shafts or a steering gear, comprising a bellows-type element (10). Said bellows-type element (10) has a collar-type essentially ring-shaped section (14) at each end, with an open clamping, pressing or shrink ring (20) or a so-called open hose clamp located thereon. Said hose clamp is pre-stressed in the direction of the centre in such a way that the two open ends (22, 24) mutually overlap each other and the ring or the clamp is automatically held tight on the respective section.

(57) Zusammenfassung

Eine Anordnung ist vorgesehen zum Ummanteln eines wellenartigen Organes und/oder einer gelenkartigen Verbindung zweier Wellen bzw. eines Lenkgetriebes, bestehend aus einem balgartigen Element (10). Das balgartige Element (10) weist je endständig einen kragenartigen, weitgehendst ringförmig ausgebildeten Abschnitt (14) auf, mit darauf angeordnet

einem offenen Klemm-, Press- oder Schrumpfring (20) bzw. einer sogenannten offenen Schlauchklemme. Diese Schlauchklemme ist in Richtung Zentrum derart vorgespannt, dass sich die beiden offenen Enden (22, 24) gegenseitig überlappen, so dass der Ring bzw. die Klemme selbsttätig fest auf dem jeweiligen Abschnitt gehalten wird.



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Pre-mounted bellow-like arrangement for sheathing drive shafts

The present invention relates to an arrangement provided for sheathing a shaft-like element and/or a connection between two shafts – or a joint – and a method for arranging a bellow-like sheathing of a drive shaft.

Bellow-like arrangements are known for sheathing shaft-like elements, connections of shafts, such as in particular joint connections or drive shafts, gear shafts and the like. Especially in the auto industry, drive shafts, gear joints, etc. are sheathed by means of rubber bellow joints, e.g. in order to protect the joints and prevent leakage of the lubrication.

As a rule, rubber bellow joints are mounted on the drive shafts with, already mounted at each end of the bellows, closed hose clamps or clamping rings or press rings such as the commercially very well known "Oetiker" clamps that are clamped or contracted on by means of suitable tools or devices for solid, tight connection of the bellow with the respective shaft sections.

With this pre-mounted, already closed arrangement of the clamps or clamping or press rings, on the one hand cost-intensive measures are necessary on the bellow so that the non-contracted or unclamped, loose mounted clamps or rings are held on collar-like end sections, and in addition, after loose mounting of the bellows on the drive shaft to be sheathed, any defective clamps or rings can no longer



be replaced and/or additional clamps or rings or replacement clamps or ring cannot be mounted.

5 A still open clamping ring already pre-mounted on a rubber bellow end is indeed proposed in EP 0 545 629 that is held "automatically" on a mounting section at each end of the rubber bellow. After mounting the rubber ring, however, this clamping ring must first be clamped and closed in a first mounting step by applying a tool, to then be compressed in a second mounting step if necessary. The latter is true especially when, due to manufacturing tolerances, the clamping or press ring does not already allow secure
10 mounting of the bellow by clamping.

It is therefore the technical problem of the present invention to propose a measure such that already loosely pre-mounted clamps or clamping or press rings can also be easily held on a bellow and can be easily replaced, or additional clamps or rings can be mounted that subsequently allow a secure, solid mounting of the bellow preferably only
15 be means of one further processing step.

Object of the Invention

It is an object of the present invention to substantially overcome or at least ameliorate one or more of the disadvantages of the prior art, or at least to provide a useful
20 alternative.

Summary of the Invention

In a first aspect, the present invention provides an arrangement provided for sheathing the shaft-like element and/or a joint-like connection between two shafts and/or
25 steering gears, having a bellow-like element wherein the bellow-like element has at each end a collar-like, section designed largely annularly with, arranged on it, an open clamping, press or contracting ring or an open hose clamp that is pre-stressed toward the center such that the two ends mutually overlap and the ring or the clamp is automatically retained on the section, and that in the two belt ends of the clamp or the ring, meshing or
30 interlocking sections are provided so that when the ring or clamp is opened up, they mesh or interlock and snap the ring belt or clamp belt closed.



In a second aspect, the present invention provides a method for arranging a bellow-like sheathing of a drive shaft or a gear joint, to protect the lubricant of a shaft connection or a joint, wherein at each end the bellow-like sheathing is provided at a collar-like end section with an open clamping, press or contracting ring or a hose clamp, the ends of which are provided with corresponding contours to form a meshing or interlocking connection of the belt ends, and these ends mutually over-lap, where at least the one collar-like end section is pushed on or slid in sleeve-like manner onto a largely circular support surface provided in the area of the shaft end and provided for the mounting and holding one of the ends of the bellow-like sheathing, in connection with which, when it is pushed on or slid on in sleeve-like manner and the collar-like end of the bellow-like sheathing is widened, the clamping, press or contracting ring or the clamp is widened such that the two belt ends of the ring are moved in the belt-widening direction far enough that the firm meshing or interlocking connection or the seal between the two belt ends is created, and then by a pressing or contracting process, the ring or the clamp is solidly attached on the collar-like end in the diameter-reducing direction to produce the solid connection between the bellow and the shaft or shaft end.

It is proposed that an arrangement intended for sheathing a shaft-like element and/or a connection between two shafts or a drive shaft and having a bellow-like element which in turn has at each end a collar-like section designed largely annularly, with, mounted on it, an open clamping, press or contracting ring or a so-called open hose clamp that is pre-stressed toward the center such that the two ends of the ring or clamping belt mutually overlap and the ring or the clamp is automatically retained on the section. In the two belt ends of the clamp or ring, meshing or interlocking sections are provided in order, when the ring or the clamp widens, to mesh or interlock and snap the ring belt or clamp belt closed.

Also proposed is a method for arranging a bellow-like sheathing of a drive shaft or a gear joint, for example to protect the lubrication of a shaft connection or a joint, in connection with which at each end the bellow-like sheathing is provided at a collar-like end section with an open clamping, press or contracting ring or a hose clamp that is pre-stressed toward the center and the ends of which are provided with corresponding contours to form a meshing or interlocking connection of the ends, and these ends mutually overlap due to the pre-stressing such that subsequently at least the one collar

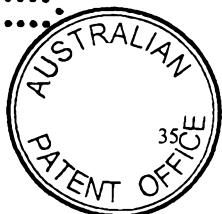


section at each end is slid in sleeve-like manner or pushed on a largely circular support section provided a shaft or in the area of the shaft end. This support section is provided for mounting and holding one of the ends of the bellow-like sheathing, in connection with which, when the collar-like end of the bellow-like sheathing is slid in sleeve-like manner or pushed on and widened, the clamping, press or contracting ring or the hose clamp is widened such that the two ends of the ring or the clamp are moved far enough in the belt-widening direction that the meshing or interlocking solid connection of the two belt ends arises due to the contours provided for, and then, by means of a press, contracting or clamping step, the ring or the clamp is fastened on the collar-like end in the diameter-reducing direction to produce the solid connection between the bellow-like element and the shaft.

The arrangement and, respectively, the method defined according to the preferred embodiment is of course suitable for sheathing shafts or shaft-like elements or different kinds, for sheathing or protecting joint-like connections, drive shafts, gear shafts, etc. The widest variety of bellow-like elements made of the widest variety of elastic materials such as rubber, elastomer, thermoplastic, plastics, etc. can also be used for the arrangements and/or methods according to the preferred embodiment, as can the widest variety of hose clamps, clamping or press rings as well. In this connection, the ends joining the two belt ends of the clamps or the rings can have the widest variety of designs. The essential point is that the two ends have a contour which, when the clamp or the belt is widened, allows a meshing or interlocking connection or allows them to slide into each other or snap in. In this connection, the following clamps should be pointed out, for example: those described in EP 570 742, EP 591 648, EP 503 609, CH 561 383, CH 555 026, CH 669 642, CH 677 010, CH 679 945, EP 543 338, as well as so-called "Oetiker" clamps, as are widely used commercially and very well known, just to name a few.

The major advantage of the method proposed according to the preferred embodiment in the fact that the pre-stressed clamping, press or contracting ring selected according to the invention can be designed smaller and more accurate and is thereby less expensive to manufacture. In addition, there is a smaller contracting path than there is, for example, with an already mounted, closed ring.

Another advantage results from the fact that the ring according to the preferred embodiment can be inserted from the side and can be precisely positioned where it is to be mounted in the end. In this way, a contracting or press ring can also be mounted at a specific location



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that is provided with corresponding production or mounting data, which should be placed precisely at that location. These – if necessary – important details on the contracting or press ring placed according to the invention can thus be reviewed later; for example, they can be stamped into the press ring.

The invention is described in more detail below with reference to the attached figures.

They show:

Fig. 1 in exploded view and as seen in the direction of an opening, a bellow having at one end an open contracting or press ring as proposed by the invention,

Fig. 2 a cutout from Fig. 1, showing the overlapping belt ends of the contracting or press ring from Fig. 1,

Fig. 3 possible designs of contracting or press rings,



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and Fig. 4 known from the state of the art for the pre-mounted arrangement of the press and contracting rings,

Fig. 5 the contracting or press ring from Fig. 1 in the non-mounted status,

Fig. 6 the bellow from Fig. 1 in the status mounted on a shaft end before compression of the press or contracting ring,

Fig. 6a a rear-axle shaft, and respectively, a drive shaft by means of a bellow, corresponding to that of Fig. 6,

Fig. 7 a possible design of the two belt ends of the press or contracting ring,

Fig. 8 a further form of construction of the connection of the press or contracting ring, and

Fig. 9 as an example, an installation for contracting or clamping the clamping ring or press ring on the bellow.

Fig. 1 shows in an exploded view as seen in the direction of the larger bellow end, an arrangement according to the invention having a bellow 10 with the individual bellow sections 12. The bellow 10 may be made of a rubber or a rubber mixture, for example, or of another suitable elastic material, such as a suitable thermoplastic plastic. On the larger collar-like end 14 visible in Fig. 1, a clamping or press or contracting ring 20 is mounted. The two ends 22 and 24 are mounted loosely and mutually overlapping, i.e., in other words, the contracting ring 20 is loose and can be removed at any time



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by pulling apart the two ends of the collar 14 of the bellow 10. In order for the contracting ring 20 to be firmly retained automatically on the collar 14 at each end of the bellow 10, as already mentioned it is designed pre-stressed toward the middle of the ring on the one hand, and in addition, the collar 14 preferably has a further, second edge-like grading 18 designed toward the first bellow section. The edge 16 as well as the grading 18 are preferably designed at such a distance from each other that the ring can be attached with its width between them. In particular in Fig. 2, in which the two belt ends 22 and 24 from Fig. 1 are illustrated enlarged, it can be clearly seen that the one belt end 22 has a protruding tongue 23 or latch with sections protruding laterally, i.e., crosswise to the direction of the belt. A corresponding recess or notching 25 – not shown – is provided in the other belt end 24 so that when the ring belt 20 is opened up, the latch 23 can snap into the corresponding recess 25 without loss. As can furthermore be seen in Fig. 2, that belt end is arranged directed outward that has the latch or the tongue 23.

It was already attempted in the state of the art to solve at least a portion of the technical problem at the basis of this invention; i.e., to hold a not yet contracted press or clamping or contracting ring on the collar-like end of a bellow. A possible start of a solution is shown in Fig. 3, in that, for example, the belt is designed oval or elliptic in order to achieve a clamping effect vis-à-vis the collar surface. According to a further illustration from Fig. 3,



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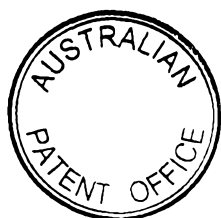
the belt is arranged triangularly in order to achieve a clamping effect vis-à-vis the collar at least at three support sections.

In Fig. 4, on the other hand, a further starting point for a solution is shown, in that it is also conceivable that during the pre-mounting of the already closed clamping or contracting ring, the bellow is reduced in diameter by an inward-facing deformation thereof, so that the already closed ring can be pulled on. This method is indeed possible in connection with rubber-like materials for bellows but hardly in connection with the thermoplastic materials or elastomers such as Hytrel, Anitel, etc. often used nowadays.

In addition, the potential solutions illustrated in Fig. 3 and 4 always start from already closed clamping or contracting rings, occasionally a disadvantage.

For this reason, it is proposed to use the contracting or press ring 20 shown in Fig. 5, which is designed pre-stressed toward the center, and to have the two belt ends 22 and 24 overlap in loose status. This creates a tensioning or clamping effect which automatically holds the press or contracting ring 20 on the collar-like end 14, as shown in Fig. 1.

When mounting the bellow 10 with pre-mounted contracting or press ring 20, such as a so-called multi-crimp ring (MCR) on the metal counterpiece or end of a shaft, the collar-like end 14 of the bellow is widened. The MCR overlapping with the two open belt ends in delivery condition is likewise extended due to this widening process, and the two ends automatically snap



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in on the same belt level, as Fig. 6 clearly shows. The latch or tongue 23 snaps into the corresponding recess 25 in the belt end 24, and due to the design of the tongue or latch 23 with the sections protruding laterally crosswise to the belt direction, the two ends are locked.

Fig. 6a shows a rear-axle shaft 50 having two joints arranged on the one hand between a drive shaft 51 and connecting shaft or steering shaft 53, and on the other hand between the connecting or steering shaft 53 and the wheel shaft or wheel-hub 55. The two joints are each sheathed by means of a bellows 10 that protects each of the joints and "secures" their lubrication. The two bellows 10 are in turn secured with contracting or press rings 20 proposed according to the invention, with the two belt ends 22 and 24 as well as the tongue 23 engaging a corresponding recess are clearly recognizable on the contracting ring near the drive shaft 51. The major advantage of the present invention again becomes clear with the help of such a rear-axle shaft or drive shaft 50, in that it can be delivered with "loose" contracting or press rings, but with no risk that these press or contracting rings may fall off. There is also the possibility at any time to remove one of the already mounted contracting or press rings even if the rear-axle shaft has already been definitively mounted, since a new, still open contracting or press ring can still be pushed laterally onto the collar to be compressed.

Possible forms of construction of belt ends are illustrated in figures 7 and 8, for example, in connection with which in Fig. 7, the latch protruding from the one end 22 or the edge 26 has the aforementioned sections 28 protruding crosswise to the belt direction.



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Furthermore, the end of the belt section 22 has sections 29 protruding laterally relative to the latch 23, in order to prevent a lateral breaking out of the end areas 24 grasped from behind by the two sections 28. The latch and the corresponding recess are preferably designed such that a meshing is ensured without loss.

Fig. 8 shows a further form of construction of a connection, in connection with which the latch or tongue 23' arranged once again in the middle of the belt end 22 is mounted meshing in a corresponding recess 25'. In this form of construction, several sections protruding laterally and crosswise to the belt direction are provided that additionally have special contours.

The two belt connections or belt closures shown in figures 7 and 8 are of course only examples and are only used to better comprehend the present invention. Of course, this also covers any number of other belt locks or connections that make possible an automatic meshing or interlocking connection or snapping in of the ends during the widening step of the b.

After successfully mounting the bellow on a shaft end, as shown in figures 6 and 6a, only the press or contracting ring or the pre-mounted MCR then need to be clamped or compressed. Once again as an example, Fig. 9 shows such an installation that is suitable for contracting pre-mounted MCRs. In this procedure, the lock of the contracting or press ring, attached in the pre-mounted status, is sealed such that it can no longer be automatically opened or separated. The



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installation 40 shown in Fig. 9 has, described in simplified manner, clamping segments 41 able to be actuated annularly inward and together displaying an annular opening 43 with their inner contours. With a hydraulic or pneumatic installation 42, the individual clamping segments 41 can be pressed or driven radially inward in order to reduce the diameter of or contract the contracting or press ring.

The present new development thus includes clamping or contracting rings or so-called multi-crimp rings (MCR) with open ends and known mechanical lock. Due to the fact that these MCRs are produced with open ends, they can be manufactured with corresponding pre-stress. This pre-stress causes a spring effect in the direction of the ring center. This spring effect can be used to the effect that the ring automatically holds, will no structural adaptation on the bellow, in the area of the end collar in an appropriately provided groove, e.g. provided for receiving MCRs. This is because, as is well known, practically every model of bellow is manufactured with the aforementioned groove. This groove can be designed running throughout or also as just an individual cam arranged on the bellow periphery. A pre-mounting is thus possible, namely without any structural modification on the bellow, i.e., every mass-production bellow can be equipped with the integrated MCR, provided as a system, thereby saving a work step during definitive mounting.

The forms of construction or installations shown in figures 1 – 9 in connection with the arrangement of bellows are of course only examples intended to explain in greater detail



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the inventive step or the aforementioned mounting step. The design of the bellow, particularly the material used for the bellow, and also the design of the contracting or press ring or the so-called MCR, and in turn the material used for this, may be modified in any desired manner, of course, and the invention is not limited to any form of construction. It has indeed been shown that for manufacturing the MCR, aluminum is suitable, for example but stainless steel or any other suitable metallic materials can also be used for this, of course.



The claims defining the invention are as follows:

1. Arrangement provided for sheathing the shaft-like element and/or a
5 joint-like connection between two shafts and/or steering gears, having a bellow-like
element wherein the bellow-like element has at each end a collar-like, section designed
largely annularly with, arranged on it, an open clamping, press or contracting ring or an
open hose clamp that is pre-stressed toward the center such that the two ends mutually
overlap and the ring or the clamp is automatically retained on the section, and that in the
10 two belt ends of the clamp or the ring, meshing or interlocking sections are provided so
that when the ring or clamp is opened up, they mesh or interlock and snap the ring belt or
clamp belt closed.

2. Arrangement according to claim 1, wherein at least one retaining
15 section is provided on the collar-like section in order to hold the ring belt or clamp belt in
open, non-mounted status on the section.

3. Arrangement according to claim 2, wherein the retaining section is an
edge at each end, or a groove-like section is designed on the collar at each end, in order to
20 hold the clamp belt or ring belt in it in pre-mounted status.

4. Arrangement according to any one of claims 1 through 3, wherein the
one end of the ring belt or the clamp belt has at least one tongue or lash protruding in the
direction of the belt and with sections protruding crosswise to it, and the other end of the
25 ring belt or clamp belt has at least one notching or punch out corresponding at least nearly
to the contour of the latch or tongue, in order to receive and close them preferably without
loss during mounting of the bellow and widening of the ring or the clamp of the ring belt
or clamp belt.

5. Arrangement according to claim 4, wherein when the clamp is open and
loosely pre-mounted or when the ring is open, the ring end or belt end that has the tongue
or latch rests facing outward on the other, inner belt end having the notch cutout.



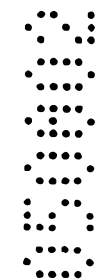
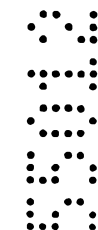
6. Arrangement according to any one of claims 1 through 5, wherein the collar-like end of the bellow is designed roughened on its inside face and/or has ribs or grooves in order to rest on the shaft section, engaging appropriately designed grooves if necessary.

7. Arrangement according to any one of claims 1 through 6, wherein the clamping or contracting ring is a multi-crimp ring.

8. Method for arranging a bellow-like sheathing of a drive shaft or a gear joint, to protect the lubricant of a shaft connection or a joint, wherein at each end the bellow-like sheathing is provided at a collar-like end section with an open clamping, press or contracting ring or a hose clamp, the ends of which are provided with corresponding contours to form a meshing or interlocking connection of the belt ends, and these ends mutually over-lap, where at least the one collar-like end section is pushed on or slid in sleeve-like manner onto a largely circular support surface provided in the area of the shaft end and provided for the mounting and holding one of the ends of the bellow-like sheathing, in connection with which, when it is pushed on or slid on in sleeve-like manner and the collar-like end of the bellow-like sheathing is widened, the clamping, press or contracting ring or the clamp is widened such that the two belt ends of the ring are moved in the belt-widening direction far enough that the firm meshing or interlocking connection or the seal between the two belt ends is created, and then by a pressing or contracting process, the ring or the clamp is solidly attached on the collar-like end in the diameter-reducing direction to produce the solid connection between the bellow and the shaft or shaft end.

9. Method according to claim 8, wherein the press ring or clamping ring or contracting ring or the hose clamp is pre-stressed toward the center such that the two ends mutually overlap in the loose pre-mounted status.

10. Drive shaft or near-axle shaft, particularly for use in motor vehicles by means of at least one arrangement according to one of claims 1 through 7.



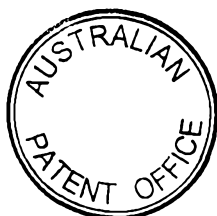
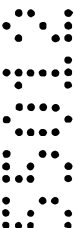
11. An arrangement provided for sheathing the shaft like element and/or a joint connection between two shafts and/or steering gears substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to any one of the embodiments as that embodiment is shown in the accompanying drawings.

12. A method for arranging a bellow-like sheathing of a drive shaft or a gear joint substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to any one of the embodiments as that embodiment is shown in the accompanying drawings.

Dated 4 June, 2002

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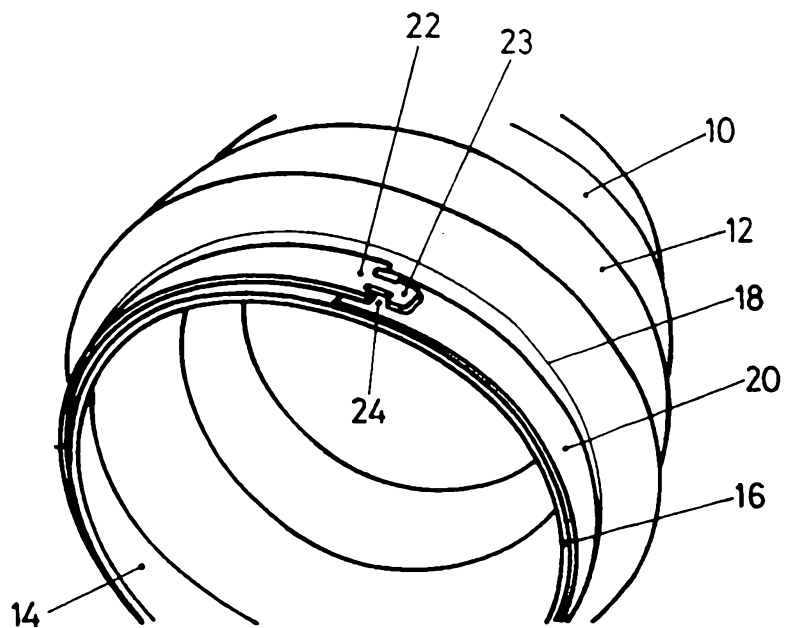


FIG.1

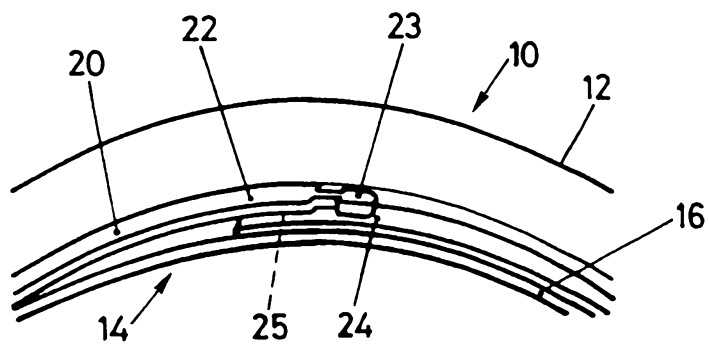


FIG.2

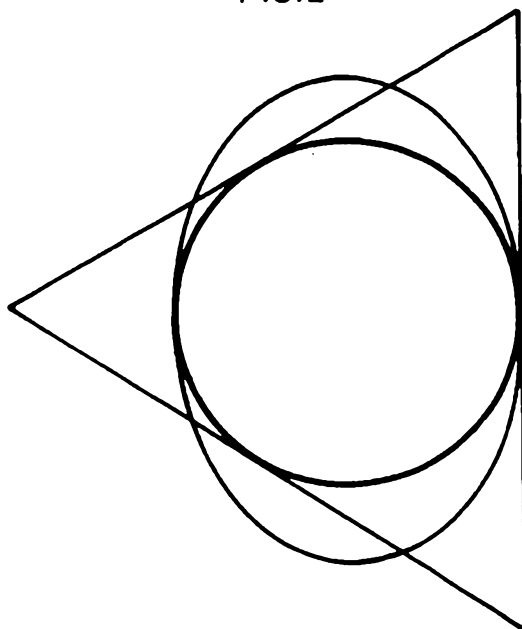


FIG.3

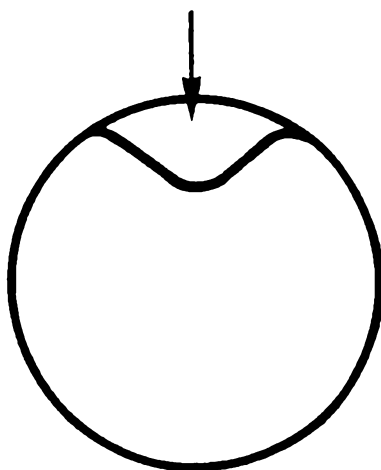


FIG. 4

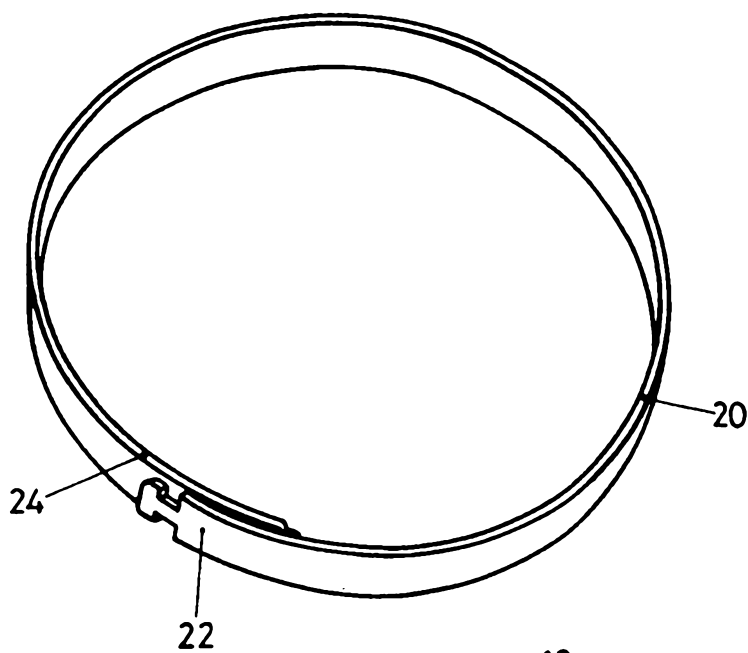


FIG. 5

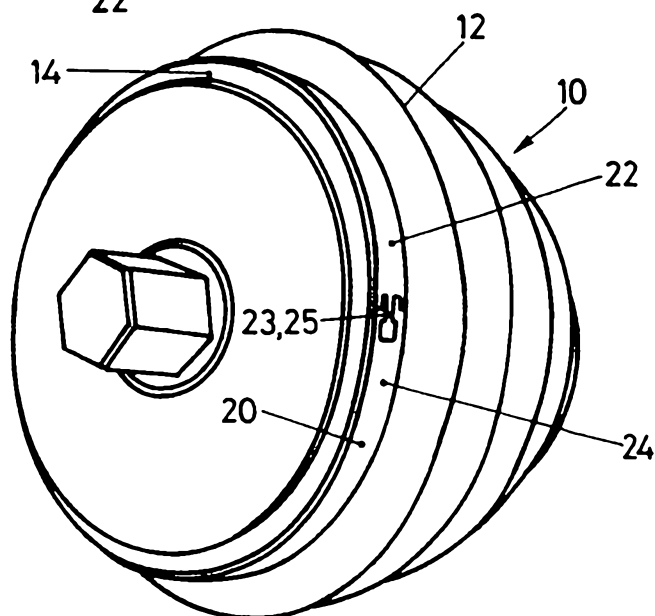
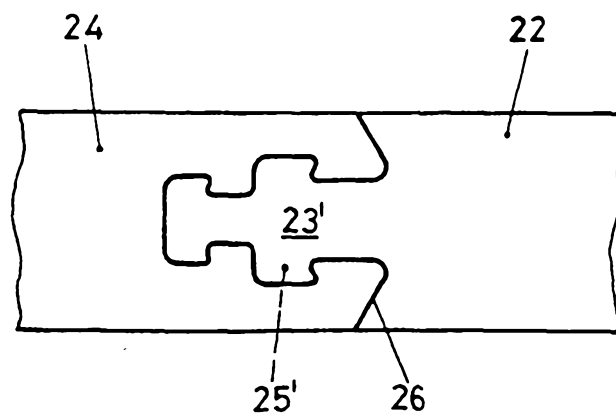
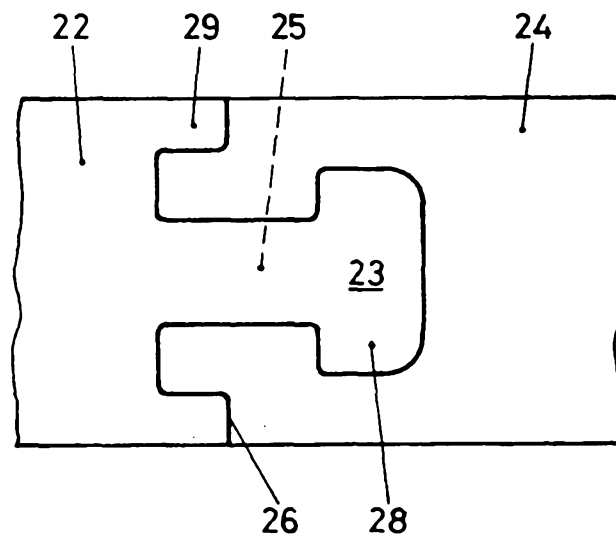
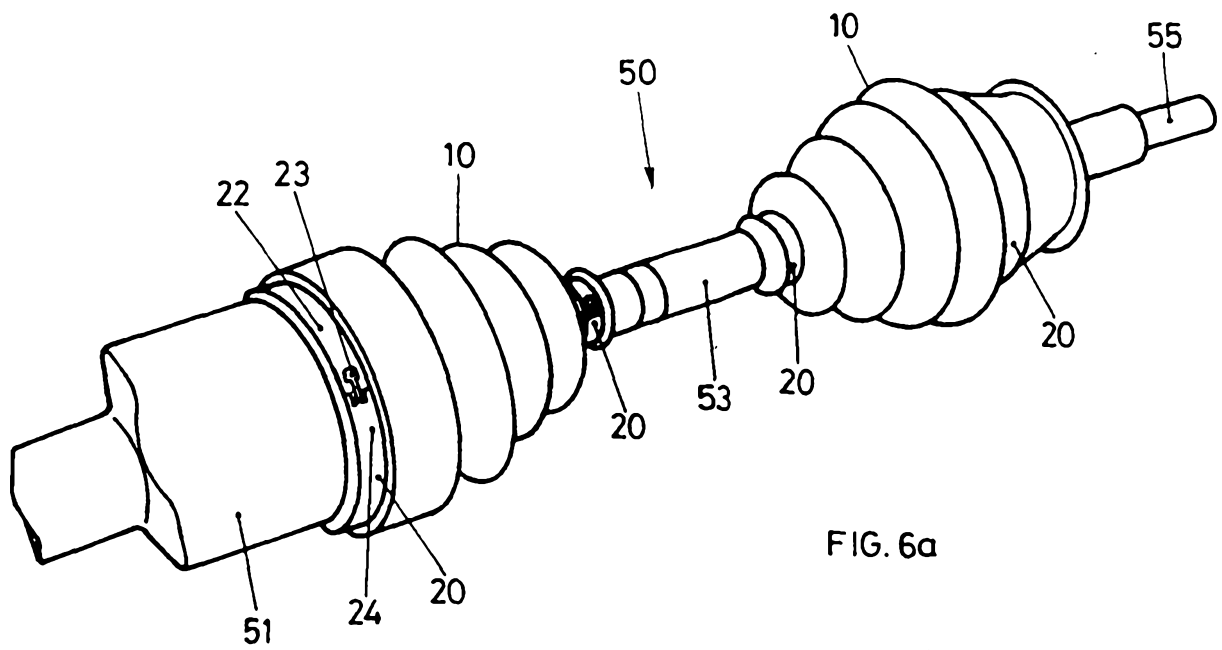


FIG. 6



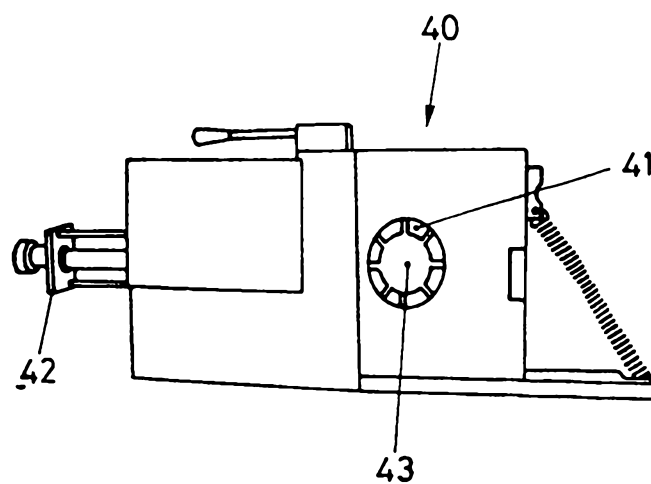


FIG. 9