

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
6 April 2006 (06.04.2006)

PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 2006/036429 A1

(51) International Patent Classification⁷: **B60B 33/08**

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(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2005/030723

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(22) International Filing Date: 30 August 2005 (30.08.2005)

(25) Filing Language: English

(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, 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.

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
10/937,168 9 September 2004 (09.09.2004) US

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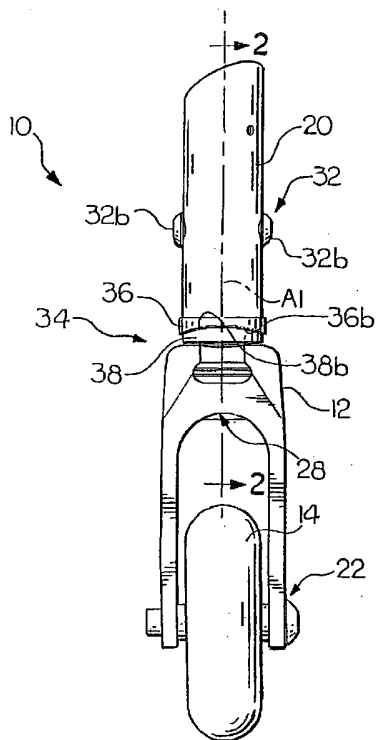
(84) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI,

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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: ADJUSTABLE WHEEL ASSEMBLY

(57) Abstract: An improved wheel assembly comprises a caster swivel post that is adapted to pivot about pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post. A caster fork is supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supports a caster wheel. The caster swivel post is adapted selectively pivot about the pivot axis that is transverse to the caster swivel post or be held in a substantially fixed position. A setscrew can be threadable into an upper end of a pivot nut to hold the pivot nut and thus the caster swivel post in a fixed position within the housing.



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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).

— *with amended claims and statement*

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.

ADJUSTABLE WHEEL ASSEMBLY

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This application is a Continuation-in-Part of U.S. Patent Application No. 10/454,756, filed on June 4, 2003, which is a continuation of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/386,050, filed on June 5, 2002, the descriptions of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

[0002] This invention relates in general to improvements in wheel assemblies of the type used with wheelchairs and other devices. More particularly, this invention relates to an improved caster wheel assembly having an adjustable caster swivel post for varying the angle of the caster swivel post to ensure that the caster swivel post remains in a vertical orientation. Moreover, this invention relates to an improved rear wheel assembly having an adjustable axle for varying the camber angle of the axle.

[0003] Caster wheel assemblies in general are well known in the art for use with many different types of castered devices. Such caster wheel assemblies are commonly employed as the front wheels in a typical wheelchair. Each caster wheel assembly typically includes a caster fork, which rotatably supports a relatively small diameter caster wheel, and which further includes a generally upright caster swivel post captured by appropriate caster post bearings for rotation about a swivel axis within a fixed cylindrical housing. The fixed housing is adapted in turn for mounting onto frame components of the wheelchair, or other castered device. Such caster wheel assemblies beneficially provide a high degree of turning maneuverability.

[0004] The caster swivel post defines a vertically oriented axis about which the caster fork rotates. The caster post bearings are typically used to provide a smooth, frictionless pivot. The caster wheel is rotatably supported by the caster fork via a caster wheel axle, which is situated rearward with respect to the caster swivel post. This ensures that the caster wheel axle is always trailing the caster swivel post in the

direction of travel. The rearward offset distance of the caster wheel axle with respect to the caster swivel post is commonly referred to as the "rake". The caster swivel post must be oriented vertically to ensure that the caster wheel remains in contact with a supporting surface as the caster fork pivots about the caster swivel post. This vertical orientation ensures that the caster wheel will not lift off the supporting surface while turning.

[0005] Wheelchairs and other castered devices typically incorporate a number of adjustments, including wheel height adjustment, wheel camber adjustment, and wheel size adjustment. Such adjustments are common with regard to the rear wheels of the wheelchair to allow a wheelchair occupant to customize the wheelchair to his or her anthropometry or driving conditions. When any of these adjustments are made, the angle of the caster swivel post changes and must also be adjusted to ensure that the caster swivel post remains vertical. Various means have been used to achieve caster swivel post angle adjustment, and are currently available on the market. Such means are typically bulky, heavy, and cumbersome for the user to adjust.

[0006] What is needed is an improved adjustable wheel assembly having a unique means for providing adjustability and that is a very compact, lightweight, and easy for the user to adjust.

SUMMARY OF INVENTION

[0007] The present invention is directed toward an improved caster wheel assembly that meets all the foregoing needs. The caster wheel assembly comprises a caster swivel post that is adapted to pivot about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post. A caster fork is supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supports a caster wheel. The caster swivel post is adapted to selectively pivot about the pivot axis, which is transverse to the caster swivel post, and be held in a fixed position.

[0008] In one embodiment of the invention, the caster swivel post has a shaft having a lower end supporting the caster fork and an upper end engaging a lower end of a pivot nut. The pivot nut is rotatable about a pivot pin within a housing. A setscrew is threadable into an upper end of the pivot nut. Upon tightening the setscrew, the pivot caster swivel post is drawn upwards within the housing, cause upper and lower splines to meet to fix the angular position of the caster fork with respect to the housing.

[0009] In another embodiment of the invention, the caster swivel post has a pivot stem bolt with a slot therein. The slot receives a pivot pin that extends through a caster housing. The pivot stem bolt has a nut that is thread onto its lower end for mounting the caster fork to the pivot stem bolt. An upper end of the pivot stem bolt has a tapped hole for threaded engagement by a setscrew. The setscrew has a lower end that is adapted to contact the pivot pin. Upon tightening the setscrew, the pivot stem bolt is drawn upwards within the housing, cause upper and lower splines to meet to fix the angular position of the caster fork with respect to the housing.

[0010] Various objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment, when read in light of the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0011] Fig. 1 is a front elevational view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to the invention.

[0012] Fig. 2 is a cross-sectional view of the caster wheel assembly taken along the lines 2-2 in Fig. 1.

[0013] Fig. 3 is a reduced scale exploded perspective view of the caster wheel assembly illustrated in Figs. 1 and 2.

[0014] Fig. 4 is a cross-sectional view of the caster wheel assembly illustrated in Fig. 2, wherein the caster swivel post is adjusted forward with respect to the housing.

[0015] Fig. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the caster wheel assembly illustrated in Fig. 2, wherein the caster swivel post is adjusted rearward with respect to the housing.

[0016] Fig. 6 is a sectional view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to another embodiment of the invention, wherein the caster swivel post is adjusted forward with respect to the housing.

[0017] Fig. 7 is a cross-sectional view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to yet another embodiment of the invention, wherein the caster swivel post is adjusted rearward with respect to the housing.

[0018] Fig. 8 is a cross-sectional view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to still another embodiment of the invention, wherein the caster swivel post is adjusted forward with respect to the housing.

[0019] Fig. 9 is a cross-sectional view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to another embodiment of the invention, wherein the caster swivel post is adjusted forward with respect to the housing.

[0020] Fig. 10 is a partial sectional view of an improved rear wheel assembly according to the invention, wherein the axle sleeve is adjustable to change the camber angle of the rear wheel.

[0021] Fig. 11 is a front elevational view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to another embodiment of the invention.

[0022] Fig. 12 is a cross-sectional view of the caster wheel assembly taken along the lines 12-12 in Fig. 11.

[0023] Fig. 13 is an exploded perspective view of the caster wheel assembly illustrated in Figs. 11 and 12.

[0024] Fig. 14 is a front elevational view of an improved caster wheel assembly according to yet another embodiment of the invention.

[0025] Fig. 15 is a cross-sectional view of the caster wheel assembly taken along the lines 15-15 in Fig. 14.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0026] Referring now to the drawings, there is illustrated in Figs. 1-3 an improved caster wheel assembly 10 for use with many different types of castered devices (not shown). Caster wheel assemblies 10 according to the invention are particularly useful as the front wheels in a typical wheelchair (not shown). The caster wheel assembly 10 comprises a caster fork 12, which rotatably supports a relatively small diameter caster wheel 14, and which further includes a generally upright caster swivel post 16 captured by the caster fork 12 by appropriate caster post bearings 18. The caster swivel post 16 is adapted to pivot about a pivot axis A1 within a fixed cylindrical housing 20. The fixed housing 20 is adapted, in turn, for mounting onto frame components of the wheelchair or other castered device. The caster wheel assembly 10 provides a high degree of turning maneuverability.

[0027] The caster swivel post 16 defines a vertically oriented axis about which the caster fork 12 rotates. This axis is coincident with the pivot axis A1 described above. The caster post bearings 18 are typically used to provide a smooth, frictionless pivot. The caster wheel 14 is rotatably supported by the caster fork 12 via a caster wheel axle 22, which is situated rearward, or toward the right when viewing Fig. 2, with respect to the caster swivel post 16. This ensures that the caster wheel axle 22 is always trailing the caster swivel post 16 in the direction of travel, or toward the left when viewing Fig. 2. The caster swivel post 16 must be oriented vertically, or along the vertically oriented axis A1, to ensure that the caster wheel 14 remains in contact with a supporting surface (not shown) as the caster fork 12 pivots about the caster swivel post 16. This vertical orientation ensures that the caster wheel 14 will not lift off the supporting surface while turning.

[0028] Continuing with reference to Figs. 2-3, the caster post bearings 18 are preferably press fit within the caster fork 12 so that the caster post bearings 18 are concentric with respect to one another. Although two caster post bearings 18 are shown, it should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art of the invention that one or more caster post bearings or bushings may be suitable for carrying out the invention. An internal retaining ring 24 is provided for retaining and/or spacing the caster post bearings 18 within the housing 20. A flat washer 26 is provided within the internal retaining ring 24 and concentric with the caster post bearings 18. The flat washer 26 is provided to maintain a spaced relation between the inner raceway 18a of the caster post bearings 18.

[0029] The caster swivel post 16 is comprised of a stem bolt 28 having a shaft 28a having a lower end that mates with the inner raceway 18a of the caster post bearings 18. This allows the stem bolt 28 to rotate freely with respect to the caster fork 12. An upper end of the shaft 28a of the stem bolt 28 is threaded so as to thread into a pivot nut 30 within the housing 20. A pivot pin 32 passes through a cross-hole 30a in the pivot nut 30, such that the pivot nut 30 can rotate about the pivot pin 32, or about a pivot axis A2 defined by the pivot pin 32, while remaining captive within the housing 20. The pivot pin 32 is held fixed within the housing 20. The pivot pin 32 may be comprised of, but is not limited to, a bolt and nut, a dowel pin with one or more retaining rings, or a pin, such as the pivot pin 32 shown, with a central tapped hole 32a held secure by two end screws 32b.

[0030] A spline assembly, generally indicated at 34, resides between the housing 20 and an upper one of the caster post bearings 18 within the caster fork 12. The spline assembly 34 comprises an upper spline 36 that is in fixed relation to the housing 20 and a lower spline 38 that is in a fixed relation to the caster fork 12. The upper and lower splines 36, 38 can be integral with the corresponding housing 20 and caster fork 12 or may be supported on separate members, as illustrated in the drawings. The upper spline 36 has a central slot 36a therein while the lower spline 38 has a central

hole 38a. The stem bolt 28 passes through the central hole 38a in the lower spline 38 and the central slot 36a in the upper spline 36. When the stem bolt 28 is tightened into the pivot nut 30, teeth 38b on the lower spline 38 lock into engagement with the mating teeth 36b on the upper spline 36, fixing the angular position of the caster swivel post 16 with respect to the frame of the wheelchair or castered device (not shown). The center of curvature of the spline teeth 36b, 38b is coincident with the pivot axis A2. The teeth 38b, 36b on the lower and upper splines 38, 36 are preferably spaced two degrees apart along this radius of curvature, providing two-degree increments of adjustment of the caster swivel post 16 with respect to the frame of the wheelchair or castered device. Because the pivot nut 30 can rotate about the pivot axis A2, the pivot nut 30 remains aligned with the stem bolt 28 over the range of angle adjustment of the caster swivel post 16. The total range of adjustment of the caster swivel post 16 is limited by the clearance between the inner diameter 20a of the housing 20 and the outer diameter 30c of the pivot nut 30. According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the inside diameter 20a of the housing 20 and outside diameter 30b of the pivot post 30 are dimensioned to permit a total adjustment range of about eight degrees forward and rearward relative to the housing 20, as shown in Figs. 4 and 5. It should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art of the invention that the caster wheel assembly 10 could be modified to provide coarser or finer increments of adjustment, or a different range of adjustment, depending on the particular wheelchair or castered device application.

[0031] In operation, the stem bolt 28 can be loosened until the teeth 36b on the upper spline 36 and the teeth 38b on the lower spline 38 separate enough to clear one another. The pivot nut 30 is then pivoted about the pivot axis A2 until the new desired angle is achieved. As clearly illustrated in the drawings, the pivot nut 30 can be pivoted forward relative to the housing 20, or in a counter-clockwise direction when viewing Fig. 4, or rearward relative to the housing 20, or in a clockwise direction when viewing Fig. 5. Ideally the angle is adjusted with the stem bolt 28 as close to vertical when the wheelchair or other castered device (not shown) is on a level

supporting surface. The stem bolt 28 is then tightened, causing the spline teeth 36b, 38b to engage, locking the caster swivel post 16 in a desired angular position.

The foregoing caster wheel assembly 10 is very compact and lightweight. This is achieved by placing the caster post bearings 18 in the caster fork 12, rather than in the housing 12. Placing the caster post bearings 18 in this location allows the pivot assembly to occupy the housing 12. Because most of the angle adjustment components are internal to either the housing 20 or the caster fork 12, the design is extremely compact and efficiently integrated into the wheelchair or other castered device. This produces a lightweight and low profile appearance.

[0032] It should be clearly understood that the present invention is not intended to be limited in scope to the preferred embodiment of the invention described hereinabove. Several examples of alternative embodiments of the invention are described hereinbelow.

[0033] As illustrated in Fig. 6, an upper end 40a of a pivot stem bolt 40, instead of the pivot nut 30 illustrated above, can be supported within the housing 20 by the pivot pin 32. A stem nut 42 beneath of the caster post bearings 18 on the lower end 40b of the pivot stem bolt 40 serves to fix the spline assembly 34 between the caster post bearings 18 and the housing 20 so as to retain the caster swivel post in a desired angular position. The form and function of this embodiment is similar to the embodiment described above.

[0034] Another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Fig. 7. This embodiment of the invention comprises an angled wedge 44 between the caster post bearings 18 and the housing 20. The wedge 44 functions to retain the caster swivel post 16 in a desired angular position. The wedge 44 is secured in compression between the caster post bearings 18 and an engagement key slot 46a in a slotted member 46 fixed relative to the housing 20. In order to adjust the angle of the caster swivel post 16, the wedge 44 is removed from the assembly, and reoriented, or

replaced by a wedge, or series of wedges, having a different angle. Mating features on the engagement key slot 46a and the wedge 44 ensure that the wedge 44 is properly aligned when installed. These features allow the wedge 44 to be installed in two different positions by rotating the wedge 180 degrees about the caster swivel post 16. It should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art of the invention that the invention is not intended to be limited to the wedge shown but may be carried out with any components with mating or interlocking shapes, including but not limited to components having curved surfaces, hexentric shapes, curved acme threads, and curved unified threads.

[0035] Yet another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Fig. 8. This embodiment of the invention comprises a pivot nut 48 that resides within a housing 50, and which is allowed to rotate about a pivot axis A2 within the housing 50. Two setscrews 52 are threaded into the pivot nut 48 and bear against the housing 20 above and below the pivot axis A2 to prevent the pivot nut 48 from pivoting. The setscrews 52 are used to adjust and fix the angle of the pivot nut 48 with respect to the wheelchair or other castered device (not shown). The user can change the angle of the pivot nut 48 by adjusting setscrews 52 accordingly to fix the angle of the pivot nut 48 with respect to the wheelchair or other castered device. For example, to change the angle of the pivot nut 48 so that the pivot nut 48 pivots rearward, or in a counter-clockwise direction when viewing Fig. 8, the user loosens the upper setscrew 52, or moves the upper setscrew 52 to the left when viewing Fig. 8, and tightens the lower setscrew 52, or moves the lower setscrew 52 to the right when viewing Fig. 8. The upper setscrew 52 resist movement of the pivot nut 48 in a counter-clockwise direction when viewing Fig. 8 and the lower setscrew 52 resist movement of the pivot nut 48 in a clockwise direction when viewing Fig. 8. It should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art of the invention that the threaded setscrews 52 may be threaded into a pivot stem bolt instead of the pivot nut 48 shown.

Still another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Fig. 9. This embodiment of the invention comprises a spline assembly 54 similar in function to the spline assembly 34 of the preferred embodiment set forth above, except that the pivot axis has been omitted. A spline insert 56 fixed within the housing 58 has upper and a lower spline surfaces 56a, 56b. These spline surfaces 56a, 56b are curved, having curvature that is concentric with a virtual axis A3 about which the pivot stem bolt 60 rotates when assuming different angular positions. The pivot stem bolt 60 has a concave spline surface 60a that engages the upper spline insert surface 56a. A spline washer 62 has an upper spline surface 62a that engages the lower spline insert surface 56b. A stem nut 64 tightened beneath the caster post bearings 18 secures the angular position of the pivot stem bolt 60.

[0036] It further should be appreciated that the present invention is not intended to be limited in scope to caster assemblies, as set forth above, but could be applied to the rear wheels of a wheelchair (not shown) to allow for camber adjustment of the rear wheels. For example, there is illustrated in Fig. 10 a rear wheel assembly 66 comprising a housing 68, such as the cylindrical camber tube shown, that is adapted to be supported by the frame of a wheelchair (not shown). An axle sleeve 70 is supported by to the camber tube 68. An axle 72 is in turn adapted to be inserted into the axle sleeve 70 to rotatably support a relatively large diameter rear wheel 74 relative to the axle sleeve 70. The axle 72 may include one or more spring balls 72a that function to capture the axle 72 in the axle sleeve 70. The rear wheel 74 provides a driving force for propelling the wheelchair.

[0037] The axle 72 defines an axis A4 about which the rear wheel 74 rotates. Wheel bearings 76 are used to permit the axle 72 to rotate smoothly and without significant friction. The wheel bearings 76 are preferably press fit within the hub 74a of the rear wheel 74 so that the wheel bearings 76 are concentric with respect to one another. An inner end of the axle sleeve 70 is threaded so as to thread into a pivot nut 78 within the camber tube 68. A pivot pin 80 passes through a cross-hole 78a in the

pivot nut 78, such that the pivot nut 78 can rotate about the pivot pin 80, or about a pivot axis A5 defined by the pivot pin 80, while remaining captive within the camber tube 68. The pivot pin 80 is held fixed within the camber tube 68.

[0038] A spline assembly, generally indicated at 82, resides between the camber tube 68 and an axle sleeve nut 84 on an outer end of the axle sleeve 70. The spline assembly 82 comprises an inner spline 86, which is in fixed relation to the camber tube 68, and an outer spline 88. The inner spline 86 has a central slot 86a therein while the outer spline 88 has a central hole 88a. The axle sleeve 70 passes through the central hole 88a in the outer spline 88 and the central slot 86a in the inner spline 86. When the axle sleeve nut 84 is tightened into the axle sleeve 70, teeth 88b on the outer spline 88 lock into engagement with the mating teeth 86b on the inner spline 86, fixing the angular position of the axle sleeve 70 with respect to the frame of the wheelchair (not shown).

[0039] An improved caster wheel assembly 90 according to another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Figs. 11-13. This caster wheel assembly 90 is similar to the caster wheel assembly 10 according to the first embodiment of the invention, disclosed above, and illustrated in Figs. 1-5. However, in the caster wheel assembly 10 disclosed above, adjustment is made by loosening and tightening a caster stem bolt 16a from below. Loosening the caster stem bolt 16a allows mating spline teeth 36b and 38b to separate, such that the caster angle could be adjusted. The head of the caster stem bolt 16a resided between the caster fork 12, just below the fork bearings 18. Accessing the head of this bolt 16a with a wrench may prove to be difficult. If the caster wheel 14 is sufficiently large, accessing the caster stem bolt 16a may require the removal of the caster wheel 14.

[0040] The caster wheel assembly 90 illustrated in Figs. 11-13, comprises a caster fork 92, which rotatably supports a caster wheel 94, and which further includes a generally upright caster swivel post 96 captured by the caster fork 92 by appropriate caster post bearings 98. The caster fork 92 is adapted to pivot relative to the caster

swivel post 96 about a pivot axis A6. The caster swivel post 96 is adapted to pivot about a pivot axis A7 within a fixed cylindrical housing 100. The fixed housing 100 is adapted, in turn, for mounting onto a frame component (not shown) of a wheelchair or other castered device.

[0041] The pivot axis A6 about which the caster fork 92 pivots is a substantially vertically oriented axis coincident with the axis of the caster swivel post 96. The caster post bearings 98 are typically used to provide a smooth, frictionless pivot. The caster wheel 94 is rotatably supported by the caster fork 92 via a caster wheel axle 102, which is situated rearward, or toward the right when viewing Fig. 12, with respect to the caster swivel post 96. This ensures that the caster wheel axle 102 is always trailing the caster swivel post 96 in the direction of travel, or toward the left when viewing Fig. 12. The caster swivel post 96 must be oriented substantially vertically, or along the vertically oriented pivot axis A6, to ensure that the caster wheel 94 remains in its trailing orientation as the caster fork 92 pivots about the caster swivel post 96. The vertical orientation of the pivot axis A6 also ensures that the caster wheel 94 will not lift off the supporting surface while turning.

[0042] Continuing with reference to Figs. 12-13, the caster post bearings 98 are preferably press fit within the caster fork 92 so that the caster post bearings 98 are concentric with respect to one another. Although two caster post bearings 98 are shown, it should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art of the invention that one or more caster post bearings or bushings may be suitable for carrying out the invention. An internal retaining ring 104 is provided for retaining and/or spacing the caster post bearings 98 within the caster fork 92. A flat washer 106 is provided within the internal retaining ring 104 and concentric with the caster post bearings 98. The flat washer 106 is provided to maintain a spaced relation between the inner raceway 98a of the caster post bearings 98.

[0043] The caster swivel post 96 is comprised of a stem bolt 108 having a shaft 108a having a lower end that mates with the inner raceway 98a of the caster post

bearings 98. This allows the caster fork 92 to rotate freely with respect to the stem bolt 108. An upper end of the shaft 108a of the stem bolt 108 is preferably threaded so as to thread into a lower tapped hole 110a in a pivot nut 110 within the housing 100. A pivot pin 112 passes through a through slot 110b in the pivot nut 110, such that the pivot nut 110 can rotate about the pivot pin 112, or about the pivot axis A7, which is defined by the pivot pin 112, while remaining captive within the housing 100. The pivot pin 112 is held fixed within the housing 100. The pivot pin 112 may be comprised of, but is not limited to, a bolt and nut, a dowel pin with one or more retaining rings 112a, as shown, or a pin with a central tapped hole held secure by one or more end screws.

[0044] A spline assembly, generally indicated at 114, resides between the housing 100 and an upper one of the caster post bearings 98 within the caster fork 92. The spline assembly 114 comprises an upper spline 116 that is in fixed relation to the housing 100 and a lower spline 118 that is in a fixed relation to the caster fork 92. The upper spline 116, can be integral with the corresponding housing 100 or may be supported on a separate member, as illustrated in the drawings. The upper spline 116 has a central slot 116a therein while the lower spline 118 has a central hole 118a. The stem bolt 108 passes through the central hole 118a in the lower spline 118 and the central slot 116a in the upper spline 116, and is secured within or relative to the pivot nut 110.

[0045] A setscrew 120 is threaded into an upper tapped hole 110c in the pivot nut 110. When the setscrew 120 is tightened into the pivot nut 110, teeth 118b on the lower spline 118 lock into engagement with the mating teeth 116b on the upper spline 116, fixing the angular position of the caster swivel post 96 with respect to the frame of the wheelchair or castered device (not shown). The center of curvature of the spline teeth 116b, 118b is coincident with the pivot axis A7. The teeth 118b, 116b on the lower and upper splines 118, 116 are preferably spaced two degrees apart along this radius of curvature, providing two-degree increments of adjustment of the caster

swivel post 96 with respect to the frame of the wheelchair or castered device. Because the pivot nut 110 can rotate about the pivot axis A7, the pivot nut 110 remains aligned with the stem bolt 108 over the range of angle adjustment of the caster swivel post 96. The total range of adjustment of the caster swivel post 96 is limited by the clearance between the inner diameter 100a of the housing 100 and the outer diameter 110d of the pivot nut 110. According to a preferred embodiment of the invention, the inside diameter 100a of the housing 100 and outside diameter 110d of the pivot nut 110 are dimensioned to permit a total adjustment range of about eight degrees forward and rearward relative to the housing 100. It should be appreciated by one of ordinary skill in the art of the invention that the caster wheel assembly 90 could be modified to provide coarser or finer increments of adjustment, or a different range of adjustment, depending on the particular wheelchair or castered device application.

[0046] In operation, the setscrew 120 can be loosened as the pivot nut 110 drops relative to the pivot pin 112 passing through the through slot 110b until the teeth 116b on the upper spline 116 and the teeth 118b on the lower spline 118 separate enough to clear one another. The pivot nut 110 is then pivoted about the pivot axis A7 until the new desired angle is achieved. As clearly illustrated in the drawings, the pivot nut 110 can be pivoted forward relative to the housing 100, or rearward relative to the housing 100. Ideally the angle is adjusted with the stem bolt 108 as close to vertical when the wheelchair or other castered device (not shown) is on a level supporting surface. The setscrew 120 is then tightened, causing the pivot nut 110 to ascend relative to the pivot pin 112 in the through slot 110b, and the spline teeth 116b, 118b to engage, locking the caster swivel post 96 in a desired angular position. It should be noted that the setscrew 120 is tightened into engagement with the pivot pin 112. Engagement of the spline teeth 116b, 118b holds the pivot nut 110 in a fixed angular position with respect to the housing 100 and wheelchair frame (not shown).

[0047] The foregoing caster wheel assembly 90 is very compact and lightweight. This is achieved by placing the caster post bearings 98 in the caster fork 92, rather

than in the housing 92. Placing the caster post bearings 98 in this location allows the pivot assembly to occupy the housing 92. Because most of the angle adjustment components are internal to either the housing 100 or the caster fork 92, the design is extremely compact and efficiently integrated into the wheelchair or other castered device. This produces a lightweight and low profile appearance.

[0048] An improved caster wheel assembly 122 according to yet another embodiment of the invention is illustrated in Figs. 14-15. This caster wheel assembly 122 is similar to the caster wheel assembly 90 disclosed immediately above except for the pivoting stem bolt 124 shown. The pivot stem bolt 124 has a slot 124a for receiving the pivot pin 112 within the caster housing 100. A nut 126 threaded onto the pivot stem bolt 124 on the underside of the bearings 108 serves to mount the fork 92 with bearings 108 to the pivoting stem bolt 124. A setscrew 128 is in threaded engagement with a tapped hole 124b at the top of the pivot stem bolt 124. The lower end of the setscrew 128 is adapted to contact the pivot pin 112. Tightening the setscrew 128 draws the pivot stem bolt 124 upward within the housing 100, until the upper spline 116 and lower spline 118 meet. The teeth 116b on the upper spline 116 lock into engagement with the mating teeth 118b of the lower spline 118, fixing the angular position of the fork 92 with respect to the wheelchair frame (not shown). The remaining form and function of this design is otherwise like the caster wheel assembly 90 disclosed immediately above. The pivot stem bolt 124 and nut 126 of this caster wheel assembly 122 have replaced the stem bolt 108 and pivot nut 110 of the caster wheel assembly 90 disclosed above.

[0049] The principle and mode of operation of this invention have been explained and illustrated in its preferred embodiment. However, it must be understood that this invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically explained and illustrated without departing from its spirit or scope.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A caster wheel assembly for a wheelchair, the assembly comprising:
a caster swivel post adapted to pivot about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post; and
a caster fork supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supporting a caster wheel, the caster swivel post is adapted to selectively pivot about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post and be held in a fixed position.
2. A caster wheel assembly for a wheelchair, the assembly comprising:
a caster swivel post adapted to pivot about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post;
a caster fork supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supporting a caster wheel; and
a set screw that is adapted to be loosened to permit the caster swivel post to pivot about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post and tightened to hold the caster swivel post in a fixed position.
3. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the caster swivel post is adapted to pivot about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post within a fixed housing.
4. The assembly of claim 3, wherein the housing is adapted to be mounted onto a frame component of a castered device.
5. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the caster fork is adapted to pivot relative to the caster swivel post about a pivot axis coincident with the caster swivel post.

6. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the caster wheel is rotatably supported by the caster fork via a caster wheel axle, which is situated rearward in a trailing relation to the caster swivel post.

7. The assembly of claim 2, further comprising one or more caster post bearings between the caster fork and the caster swivel post.

8. The assembly of claim 7, wherein the one or more caster post bearings are preferably press fit within the caster fork so that the one or more caster post bearings are concentric with respect to one another.

9. The assembly of claim 7, further comprising an internal retaining ring spacing the caster post bearings within the caster fork.

10. The assembly of claim 9, further comprising a flat washer within the internal retaining ring and concentric with the caster post bearings for maintaining a spaced relation between inner raceways of the caster post bearings.

11. The assembly of claim 2, wherein caster swivel post comprises a shaft having a lower end supporting the caster fork and an upper end engaging a lower end of a pivot nut, the pivot nut being rotatable about a pivot pin within a housing, a setscrew being threadable into an upper end of the pivot nut to engage the pivot pin to hold the pivot nut in a fixed position within the housing.

12. The assembly of claim 11, wherein the shaft is part of a stem bolt and the upper end of the shaft is threaded, and wherein the lower end of the pivot nut is tapped to mate with the threaded upper end of the shaft of the stem bolt.

13. The assembly of claim 12, wherein the lower end of the shaft of the stem bolt mates with an inner raceway of a caster post bearing to allow the stem bolt to rotate freely with respect to the caster fork.

14. The assembly of claim 2, further comprising spline comprising an upper spline that is in fixed relation to a housing and a lower spline that is in a fixed relation to the caster fork, teeth on the lower spline being adapted to lock into engagement with the mating teeth on the upper spline, fixing the angular position of the caster swivel post.

15. The assembly of claim 14, wherein the spline assembly is positioned between a housing and a caster post bearings within the caster fork.

16. The assembly of claim 15, wherein the upper and lower splines are integral with the housing and caster fork, respectively.

17. The assembly of claim 15, wherein the caster swivel post comprises a stem bolt that passes through a central hole in the lower spline and the central slot in the upper spline, the stem bolt being adapted to be secured relative to a pivot nut within a housing.

18. The assembly of claim 14, wherein the caster swivel post comprises a pivot stem bolt having a slot therein, the slot receiving a pivot pin extending through the caster housing, the pivot stem bolt having a nut threading onto a lower end thereof for mounting the caster fork thereto, an upper end of the pivot stem bolt having a tapped hole for threaded engagement by a setscrew, the setscrew having a lower end that is adapted to contact the pivot pin, whereby tightening the setscrew draws the pivot stem bolt upwards within the housing, until the upper spline and lower spline meet, fixing the angular position of the caster fork with respect to the housing.

19. The assembly of claim 14, wherein the spline teeth have a center of curvature that is coincident with the pivot axis.

20. The assembly of claim 19, wherein the teeth on the upper and lower splines are spaced about two degrees apart along this radius of curvature, providing two-degree increments of adjustment of the caster swivel post.

AMENDED CLAIMS

[received by the International Bureau on 9 January 2006 (09.01.2006);
original claims 1-3,5,11,14,15 and 18 amended; remaining claims unchanged]

1. A caster wheel assembly for a wheelchair, the assembly comprising:
a caster swivel post pivotable in forward and rearward directions about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post; and
a caster fork supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supporting a caster wheel, the caster swivel post being selectively pivotable about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post and be held in a fixed position.
2. A caster wheel assembly for a wheelchair, the assembly comprising:
a caster swivel post pivotable about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post;
a caster fork supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supporting a caster wheel; and
a set screw that is selectively loosened to permit the caster swivel post to pivot about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post and tightened to hold the caster swivel post in a fixed position.
3. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the caster swivel post is pivotable about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post within a fixed housing.
4. The assembly of claim 3, wherein the housing is adapted to be mounted onto a frame component of a castered device.
5. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the caster fork is pivotable relative to the caster swivel post about a pivot axis coincident with the caster swivel post.
6. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the caster wheel is rotatably supported by the caster fork via a caster wheel axle, which is situated rearward in a trailing relation to the caster swivel post.

7. The assembly of claim 2, further comprising one or more caster post bearings between the caster fork and the caster swivel post.

8. The assembly of claim 7, wherein the one or more caster post bearings are preferably press fit within the caster fork so that the one or more caster post bearings are concentric with respect to one another.

9. The assembly of claim 7, further comprising an internal retaining ring spacing the caster post bearings within the caster fork.

10. The assembly of claim 9, further comprising a flat washer within the internal retaining ring and concentric with the caster post bearings for maintaining a spaced relation between inner raceways of the caster post bearings.

11. A caster wheel assembly for a wheelchair, the assembly comprising:
a housing;
a pivot pin within the housing;
a caster swivel post pivotable in forward and rearward directions about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post, the caster swivel post comprises a shaft having a lower end and an upper end;
a pivot nut having a lower end and an upper end, the lower end engaging the upper end of the caster swivel post, the pivot nut being rotatable about the pivot pin within the housing;
a setscrew threadable into the upper end of the pivot nut to engage the pivot pin to hold the pivot nut in a fixed position within the housing, the set screw being adapted to be loosened to permit the caster swivel post to pivot about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post and tightened to hold the caster swivel post in a fixed position; and
a caster fork supported for rotation by the lower end of the caster swivel post and rotatably supporting a caster wheel.

12. The assembly of claim 11, wherein the shaft is part of a stem bolt and the upper end of the shaft is threaded, and wherein the lower end of the pivot nut is tapped to mate with the threaded upper end of the shaft of the stem bolt.

13. The assembly of claim 12, wherein the lower end of the shaft of the stem bolt mates with an inner raceway of a caster post bearing to allow the stem bolt to rotate freely with respect to the caster fork.

14. The assembly of claim 2, further comprising spline assembly comprising an upper spline that is in fixed relation to a housing and a lower spline that is in a fixed relation to the caster fork, teeth on the lower spline being adapted to lock into engagement with the mating teeth on the upper spline, fixing the angular position of the caster swivel post.

15. The assembly of claim 14, wherein the spline assembly is positioned between a housing and at least one caster post bearing within the caster fork.

16. The assembly of claim 15, wherein the upper and lower splines are integral with the housing and caster fork, respectively.

17. The assembly of claim 15, wherein the caster swivel post comprises a stem bolt that passes through a central hole in the lower spline and the central slot in the upper spline, the stem bolt being adapted to be secured relative to a pivot nut within a housing.

18. A caster wheel assembly for a wheelchair, the assembly comprising:
a housing;
a caster swivel post pivotable in forward and rearward directions about a pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post, the caster swivel post comprising a pivot stem bolt having a slot therein, the slot receiving a pivot pin extending through the caster housing;

a caster fork supported for rotation relative to the caster swivel post and rotatably supporting a caster wheel, the set screw being adapted to be loosened to permit the caster swivel post to pivot about the pivot axis transverse to the caster swivel post and tightened to hold the caster swivel post in a fixed position, the pivot stem bolt having a nut threading onto a lower end thereof for mounting the caster fork thereto;

a spline assembly having an upper spline that is in fixed relation to the housing and a lower spline that is in a fixed relation to the caster fork, the lower spline having teeth that are adapted to lock into engagement with mating teeth on the upper spline, fixing the angular position of the caster swivel post; and

a setscrew threadably engageable with a tapped hole in an upper end of the pivot stem bolt, the setscrew having a lower end that is adapted to contact the pivot pin, whereby tightening the setscrew draws the pivot stem bolt upwards within the housing, until the upper spline and lower spline meet, fixing the angular position of the caster fork with respect to the housing.

19. The assembly of claim 14, wherein the spline teeth have a center of curvature that is coincident with the pivot axis.

20. The assembly of claim 19, wherein the teeth on the upper and lower splines are spaced about two degrees apart along this radius of curvature, providing two-degree increments of adjustment of the caster swivel post.

STATEMENT UNDER ARTICLE 19(1)

Applicant herewith submits replacement sheets numbered 16 through 19 to replace sheets numbered 16 through ~~19~~, originally filed for this application.

Claims 1-3, 5, 11, 14, 15 and 18 have been amended. Claims ~~4~~, 6-10, 12, 13, 16 and 17 are unchanged.

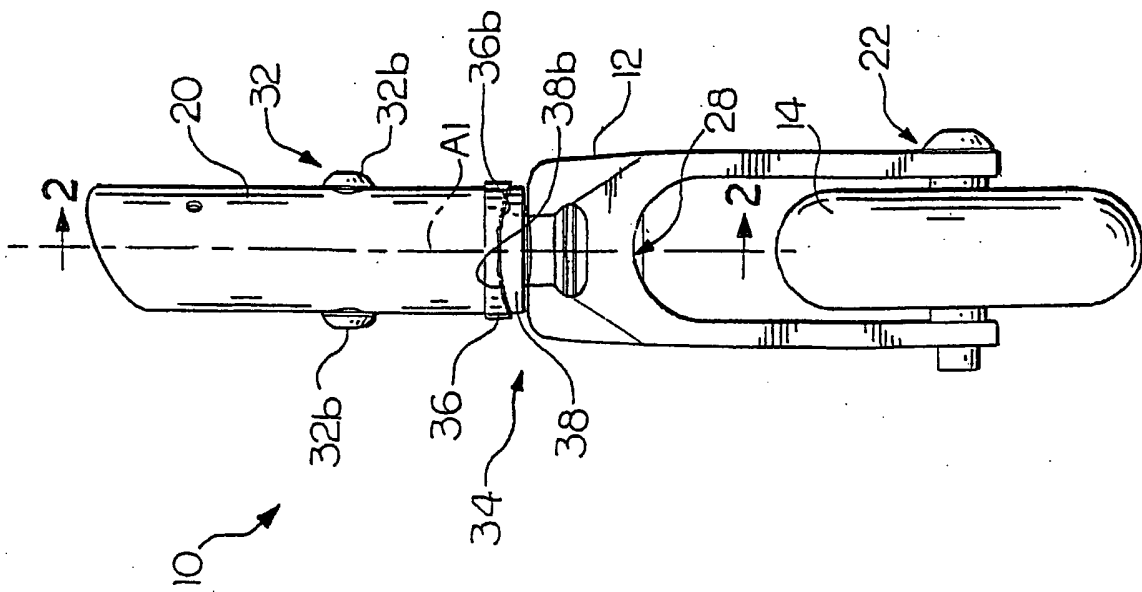


FIG. 1

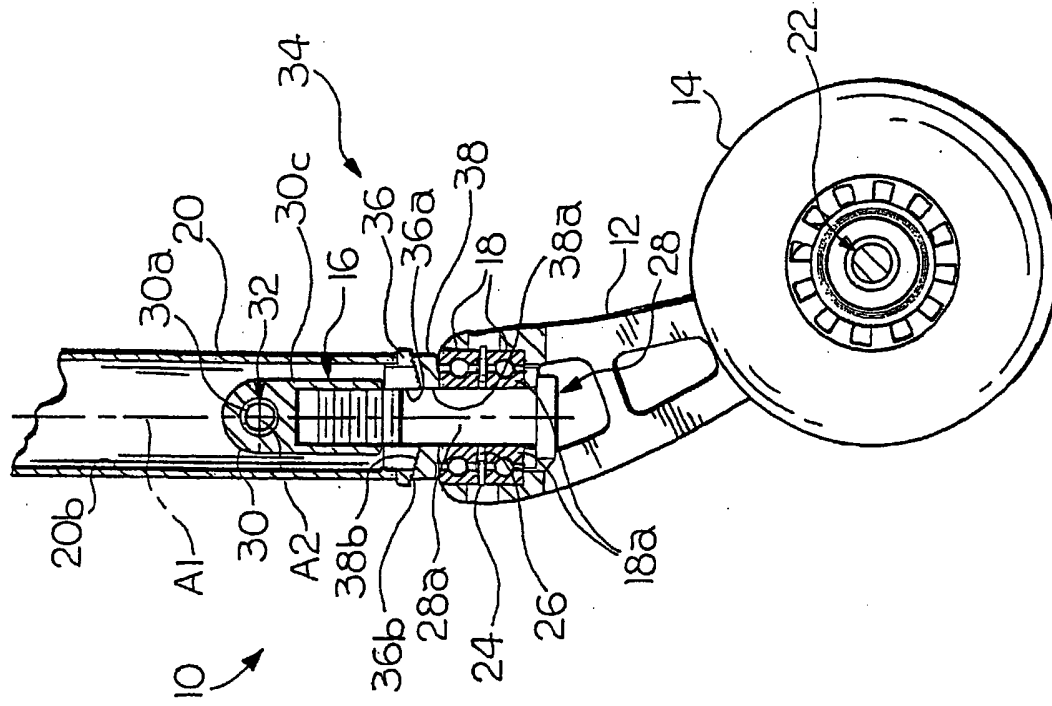


FIG. 2

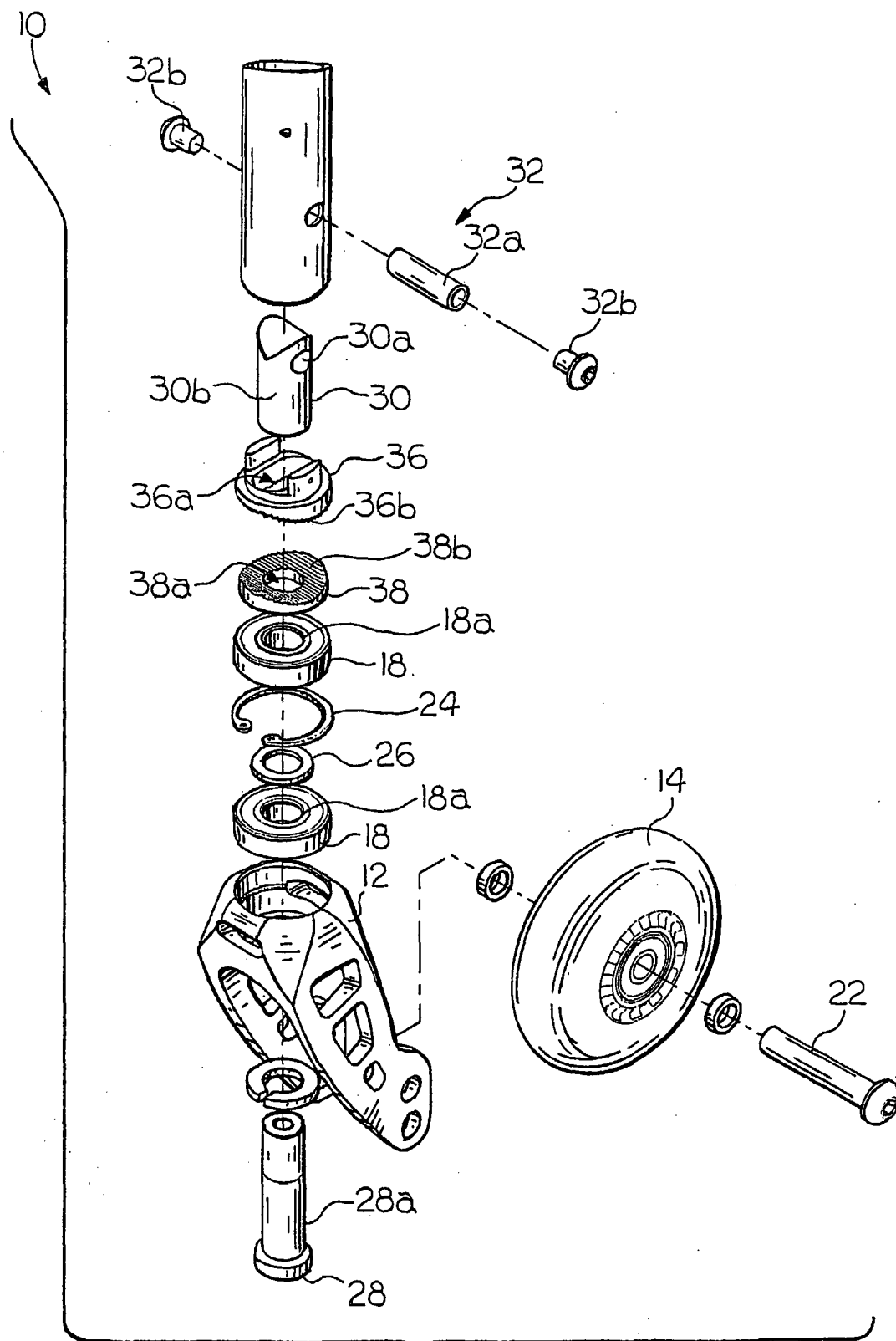


FIG. 3

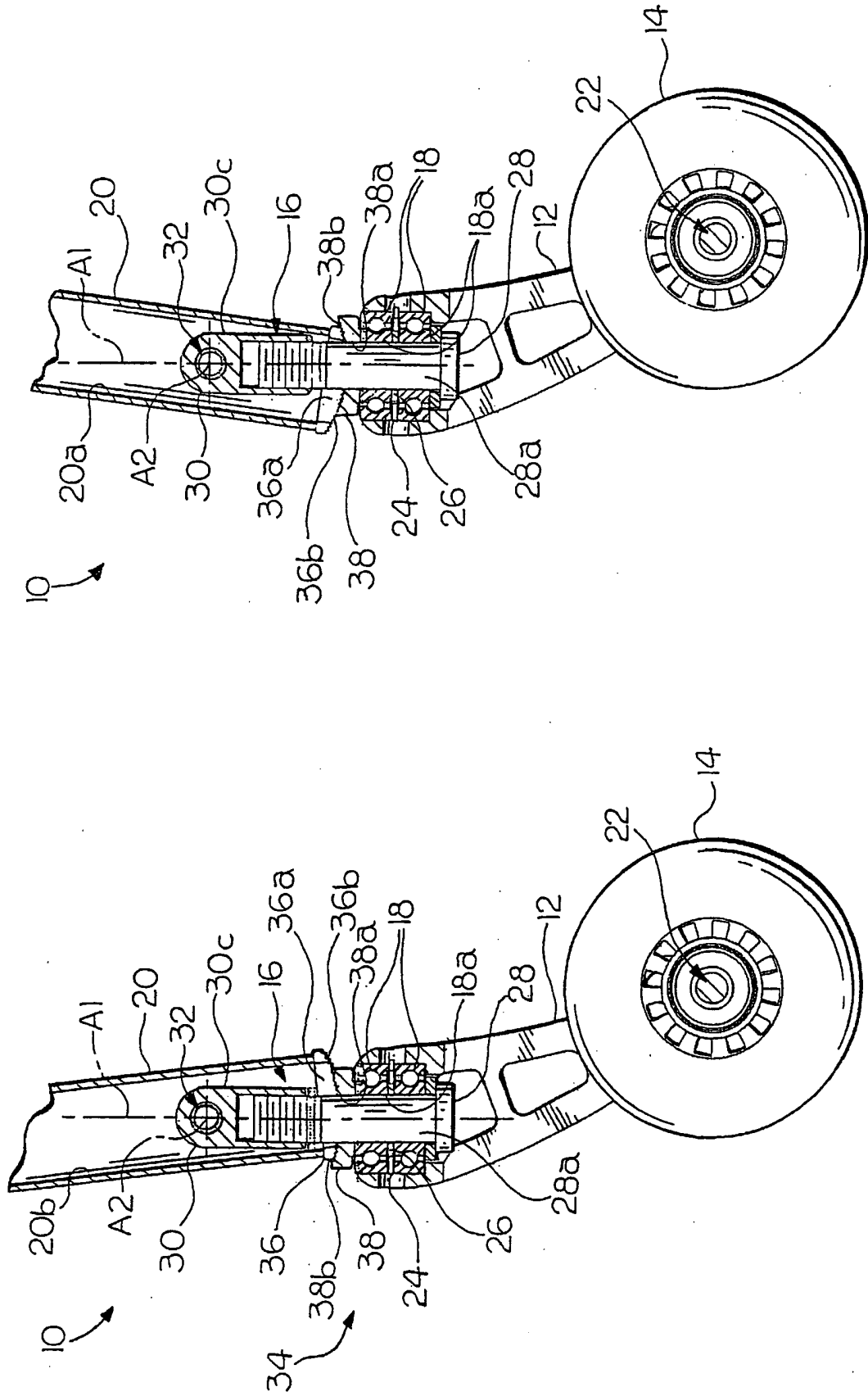


FIG. 5

FIG. 4

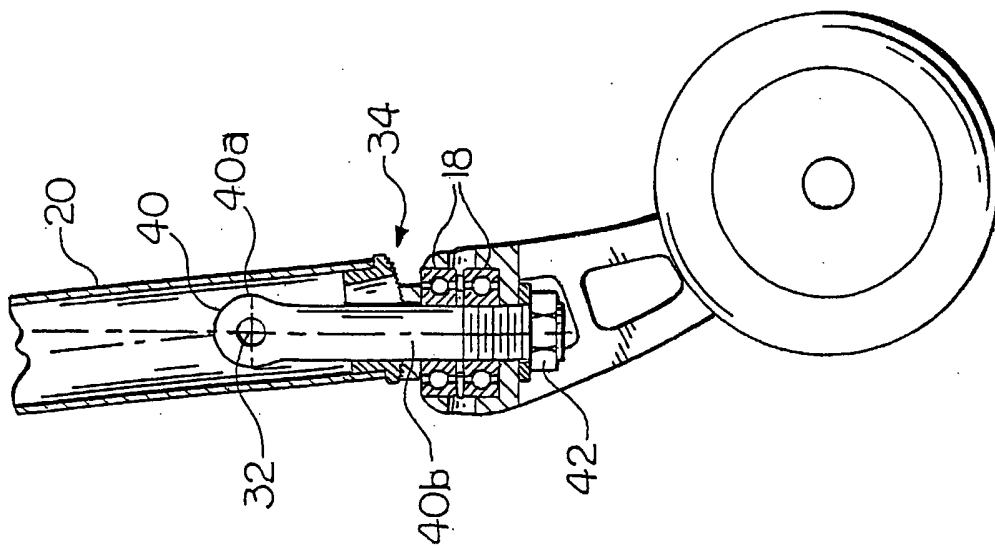


FIG. 6

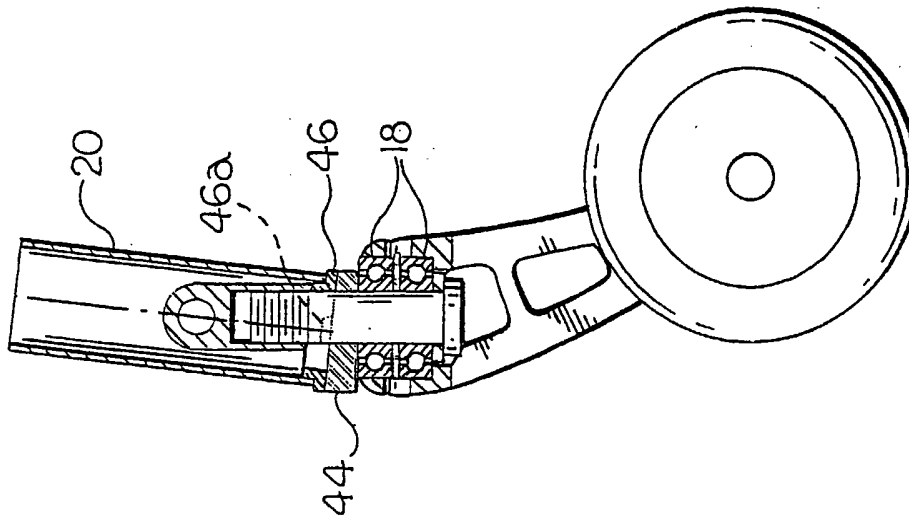


FIG. 7

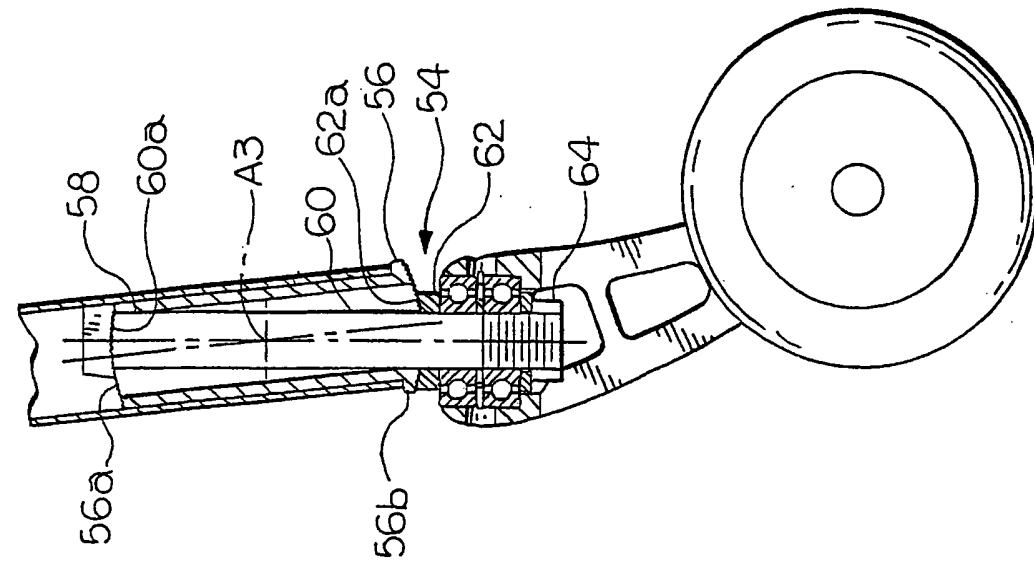


FIG. 9

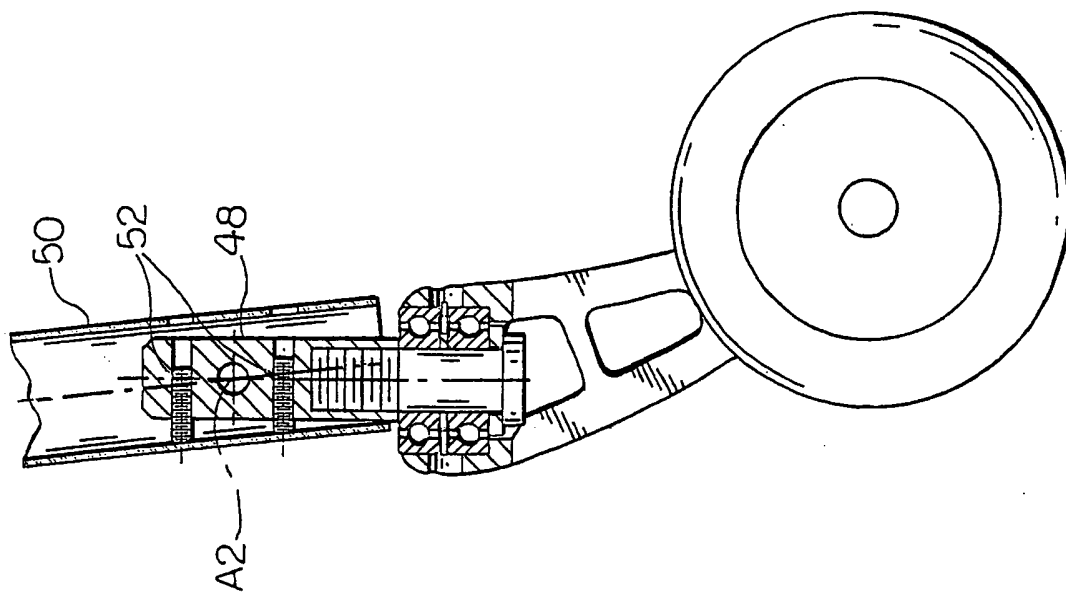


FIG. 8

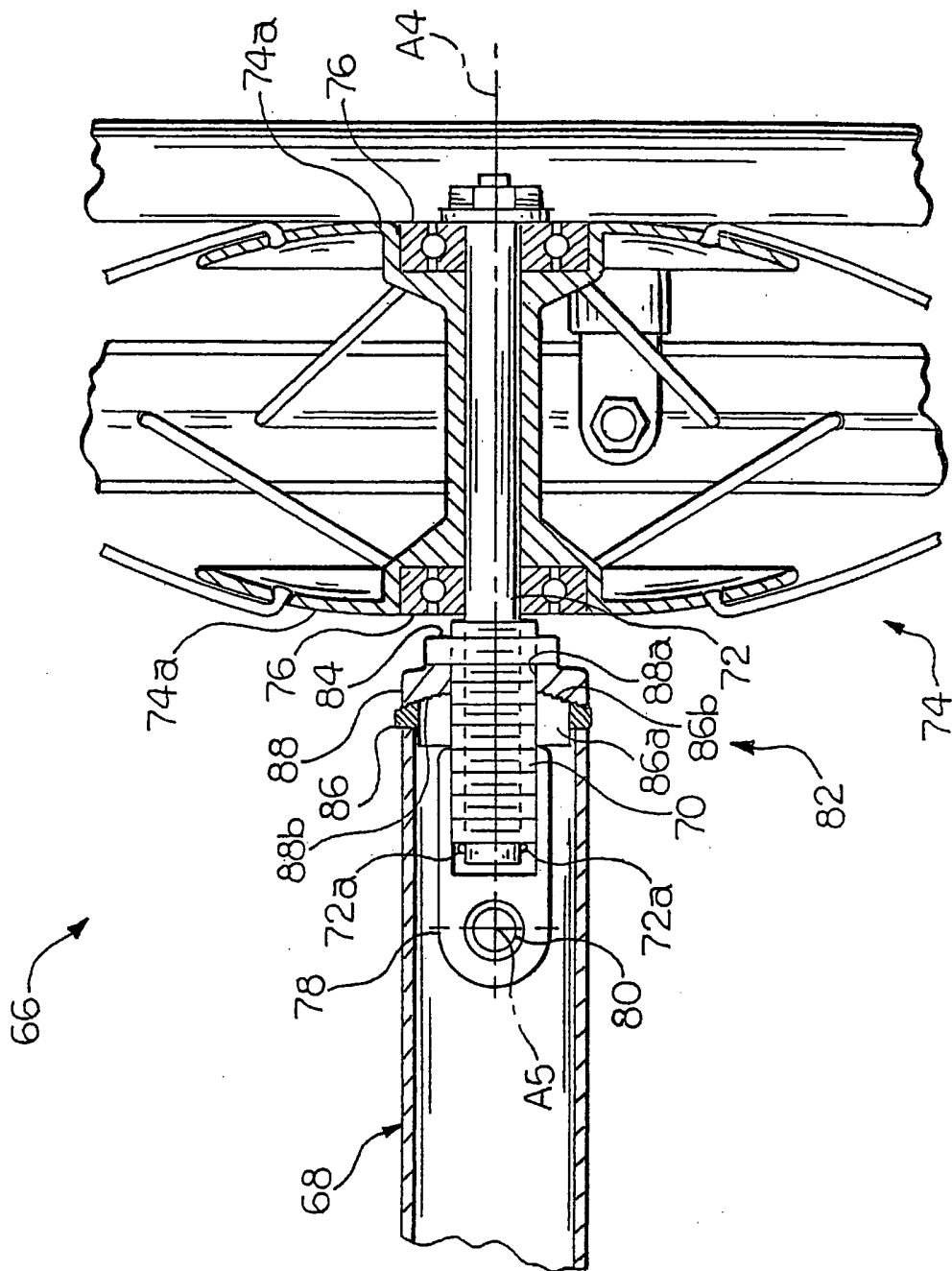


FIG. 10

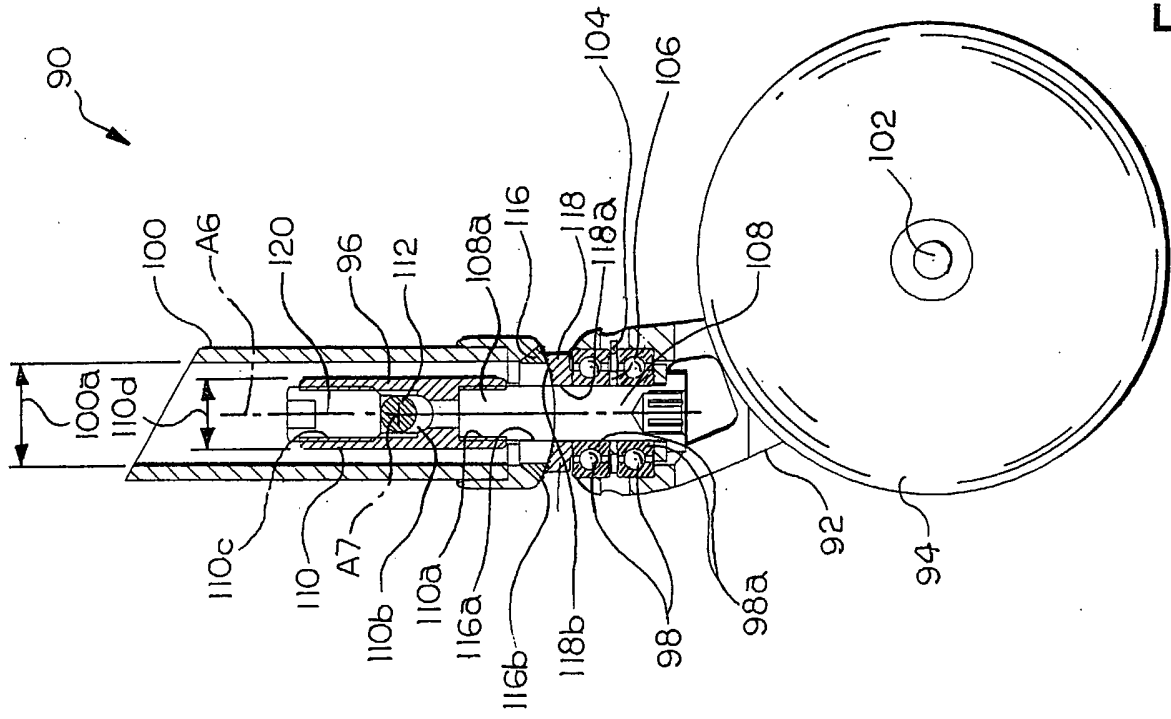


FIG. 12

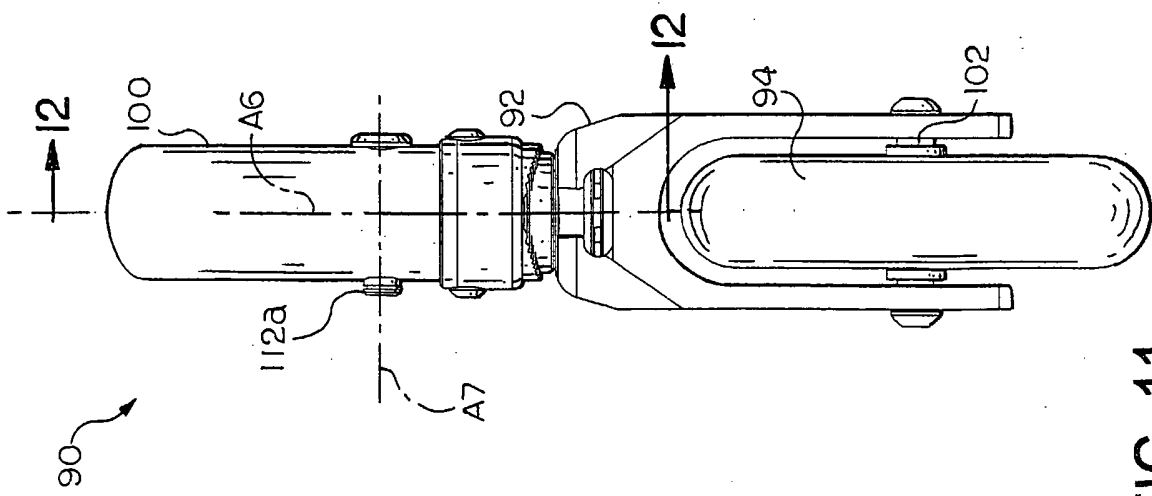


FIG. 11

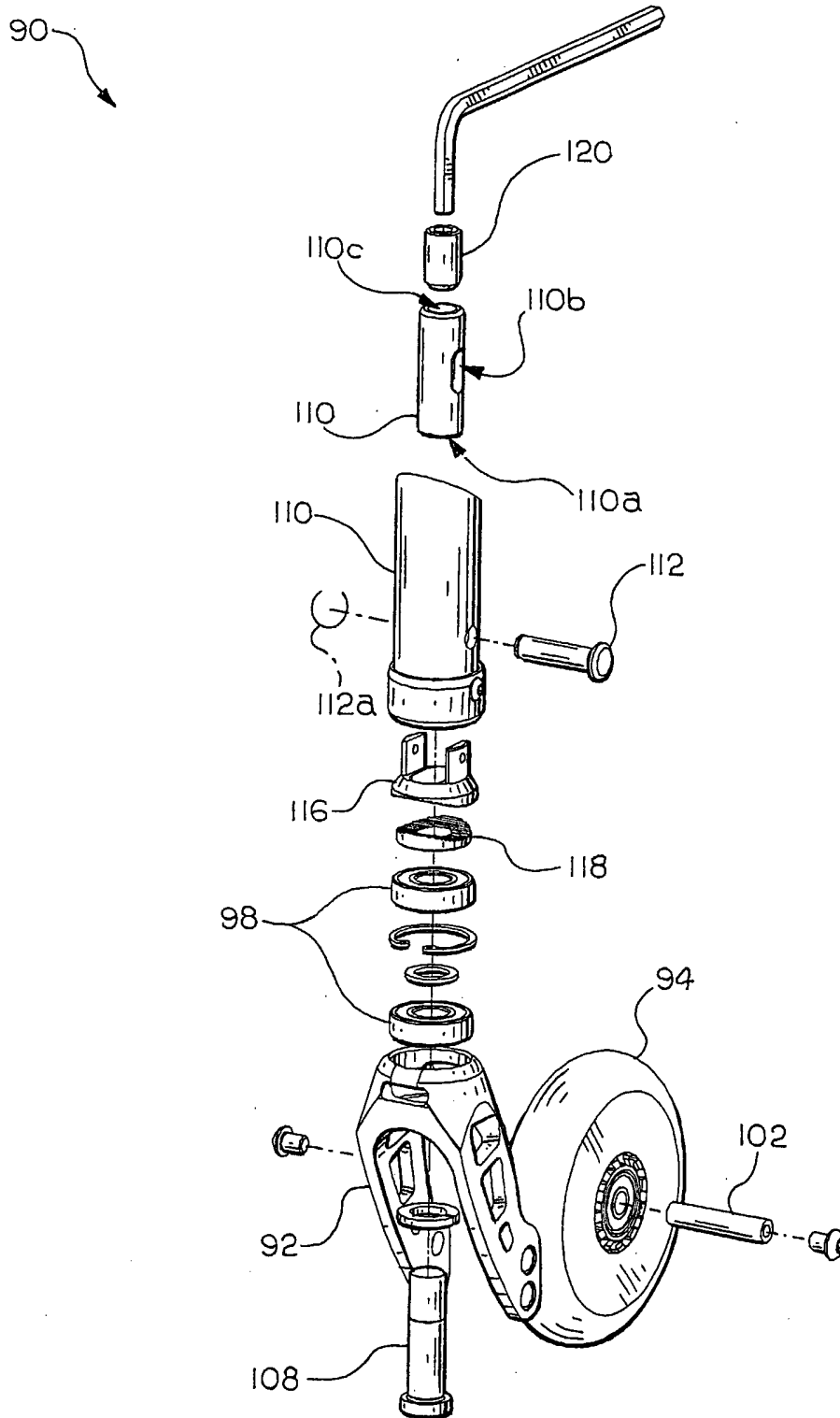


FIG. 13

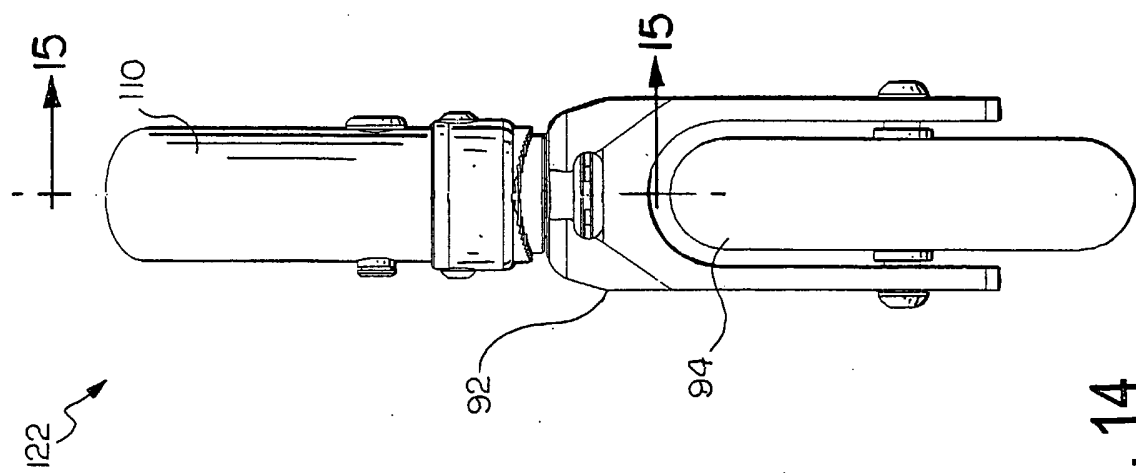


FIG. 14

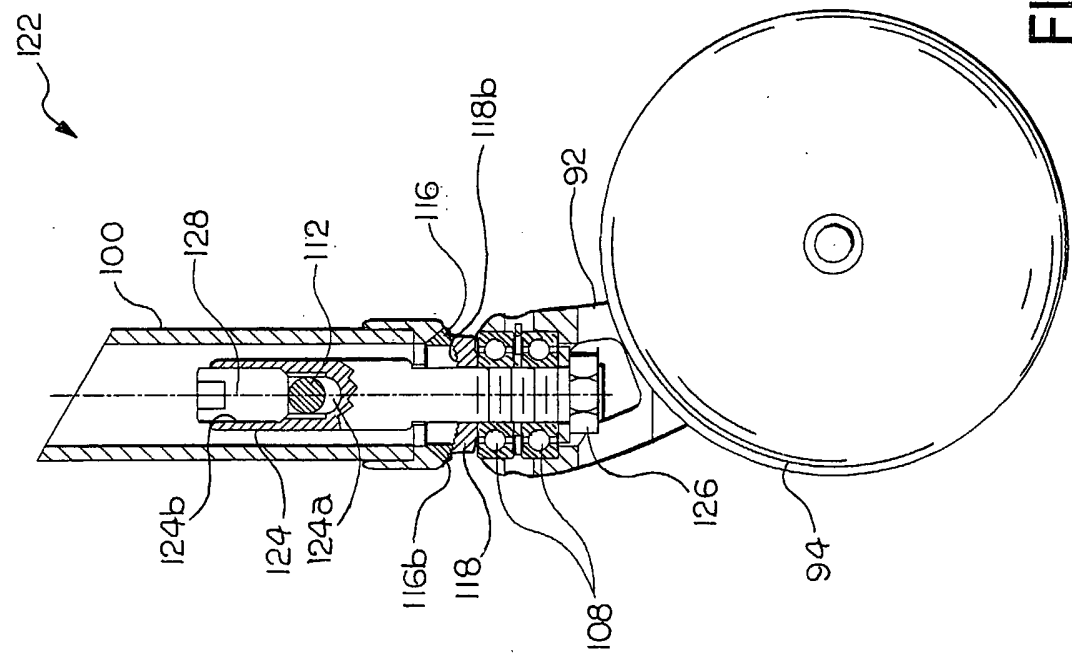


FIG. 15

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US05/30723

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) : B60B 33/08
 US CL : 16/28, 19, 22, 29; 280/47.11, 250.1, 755; 180/6.28, 219

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)
 U.S. : 16/28, 19, 22, 29; 280/47.11, 250.1, 755; 180/6.28, 219

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 practicable, search terms used)
 east

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 6,113,117 A (MIMURA) 05 September 2000, see entire document.	1-10, 14-17, 19, 20
A	US 4,721,321 A (HAURY ET AL.) 26 January 1988, see entire document.	
A	US 4,981,305 A (LOCKARD ET AL.) 01 January 1991, see entire document.	
A	US 4,989,890 A (LOCKARD ET AL.) 05 February 1991, see entire document.	

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

<p>* Special categories of cited documents:</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier application or patent published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p>	<p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"&" document member of the same patent family</p>
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Date of the actual completion of the international search

31 October 2005 (31.10.2005)

Date of mailing of the international search report

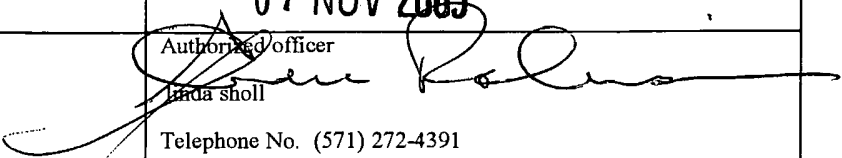
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