



(51) International Patent Classification:
F02M 37/08 (2006.01) *F02M 37/14* (2006.01)
F02M 37/20 (2006.01) *B60K 15/035* (2006.01)

(21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2011/020454

(22) International Filing Date:
7 January 2011 (07.01.2011)

(25) Filing Language: English

(26) Publication Language: English

(30) Priority Data:
61/293,363 8 January 2010 (08.01.2010) US

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

(84) Designated States (unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

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(54) Title: VAPOR SEPARATOR WITH INTEGRAL LOW PRESSURE LIFT PUMP

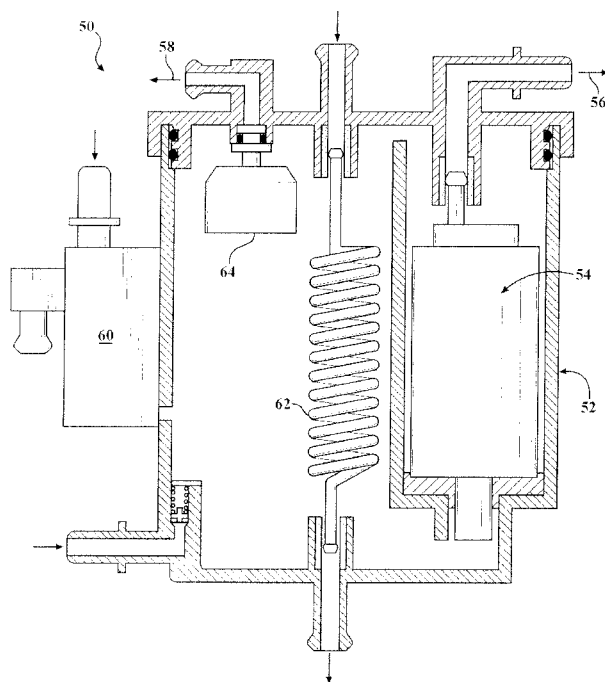


FIG. 3

(57) Abstract: A system for supplying fuel under pressure to an internal combustion engine, and to control fuel delivery to a fuel injection system in an internal combustion engine having a low pressure pump formed integrally as at least part of a main housing of a vapor separator assembly. The low pressure pump lifts fuel into a cavity of a reservoir, which is drawn from a high pressure pump into the internal combustion engine. Due to the integrated nature of the low pressure pump, leak paths and assembly costs are reduced.



Published:

— *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*

VAPOR SEPARATOR WITH INTEGRAL LOW PRESSURE LIFT PUMP

CLAIM FOR PRIORITY

[0001] This application claims the benefit of priority to U.S. Serial No. 61/293,363, filed January 8, 2010, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

[0002] The subject invention relates to a system for supplying fuel under pressure to an internal combustion engine, and, more specifically, to controlling fuel delivery to a fuel injection system in an internal combustion engine having a low pressure pump formed integrally as at least part of a main housing of a vapor separator assembly.

2. Description of the Prior Art

[0003] In fuel supply systems, and in particular for a marine engine having in-board and stern drive type engines, it is often challenging to supply an uninterrupted flow of fuel under all operating conditions. The operating environment is frequently very hot, causing the fuel to vaporize if not carefully controlled. And fuel delivery must be compatible with marine engine run cycles which are characterized by long periods of operation at a steady RPM, punctuated by abrupt instances of rapid acceleration or deceleration. Throughout these cycles and conditions, fuel is expected to be delivered to the engine without interruption.

[0004] Furthermore, marine applications are often subject to harsh vibrations and jarring. The fuel delivery system must be heartily designed and fortified to prevent fuel leakage even under violent operating conditions. Leaked fuel on a marine vessel can, in extreme instances, result in fire which may require immediate human evacuation regardless of the vessel location or weather conditions.

[0005] Thus, meeting the fuel demands of a marine engine under these operating conditions and in consideration of these safety issues can be a

challenge. A prior art technique to provide fuel to a marine engine is shown in applicant's own U.S. Pat. No. 6,257,208, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference. According to this technique, a high pressure fuel pump delivers a continual supply of fuel to the engine injector system in sufficient quantities to meet engine demands at so-called 'full throttle.' When the engine fuel demands are less than 'full throttle,' a return line is employed to return unneeded fuel from the engine injector system to the vapor separator.

[0006] One disadvantage of this technique resides in the requirement to design and fabricate the return line and associated fittings with extremely high quality and durable components to avert the possibility of fuel leakage over the foreseeable service interval of the fuel supply system. This increases both the cost of the fuel supply system and the risk of leakage, particularly where operating conditions are harsh and service intervals extend beyond manufacturer recommendations.

[0007] Another prior art owned by applicant is U.S. Pat. No. 7,168,414, the contents of which are hereby incorporated by reference. The system eliminates the recirculation of unused fuel through the engine injector system, as described above. In turn, this also eliminates the added design and fabrication costs of the return line, and reduces the risk of fuel leakage. As illustrated in Figure 1, the system is characterized by a bypass line 40 which extends between the fuel delivery line 34 and the vapor separator 20 for returning excess fuel to the vapor separator prior to its reaching the engine injector system. In this manner, fuel in excess of the demands of the engine injector system is returned directly to the vapor separator thus eliminating the need to recirculate unneeded fuel through the engine injector system.

[0008] In addition to the disadvantages describe above, this system suffers from having a low pressure lift pump 18 located outside of the vapor separator 40. This requires additional mounting hardware and fuel hose routings, which increase the costs and leakage points of fuel.

[0009] Another prior art system is U.S. Pat. No. 6,390,871, which discloses a fuel reservoir mounted to a driveshaft housing of an outboard motor. As illustrated in Figure 2, a first fuel pump 20 is a lift pump which draws fuel from a fuel tank and pumps the fuel into the cavity 12 of the reservoir 10. A second fuel

pump 30 is a high pressure pump which draws fuel from the cavity and pumps the fuel at a higher pressure to a fuel rail of an engine. Both the first and second pumps are disposed within a volume of fuel stored in the fuel reservoir. Although providing less leakage points than the aforementioned prior art, this system still suffers from leakage points and costs associated with assembly and mounting.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0010] The subject invention overcomes the disadvantages of the prior art by eliminating leakage points and increased costs associated with assembly. Rather, a low pressure lift pump, such as a pulse pump, is integrally formed at least in part with the vapor separator. The pump, for example, may be located internally, externally or partly internally and partly externally to the vapor separator. This, in turn, eliminates the added design and fabrication costs of a prior art, and reduces the risk of fuel leakage.

[0011] In one embodiment of the invention, there is a fuel vapor separator, including a housing, a low pressure pump delivering fuel from to the vapor separator and a high pressure pump delivering fuel to an engine, wherein the low pressure pump is formed at least in part as a single piece of material with the housing. In one aspect, the low pressure pump may be internal or external to the housing. A reservoir in the housing has a cavity to contain liquid fuel for use by an engine, wherein the high pressure pump draws fuel from the cavity and pumps fuel to the engine, and the low and high pressure pumps are disposed in thermal communication with the fuel when the fuel is within the cavity. A hollow tube is configured into a coil having a plurality of loops, the coil dimensions to fit within the interior of the housing, the tube having first and second ends extending through the housing for connection to respective coolant supply and discharge members. A decoupled float valve vents vapor from the vapor separator when the fuel in the cavity falls below a predetermined level. A pressure relief valve opens when a predetermined pressure is reached within the cavity to vent fuel vapor from the cavity.

[0012] In another embodiment of the invention, there is a fuel supply system for a marine engine, including a vapor separator receiving liquid fuel from a fuel tank and collecting vapors given off from the fuel, the vapor separator

including a housing having an interior and an exterior; a high pressure pump received in a main body of the vapor separator, and having an inlet in communication with a reservoir in the main body and an outlet through which pressurized fuel is delivered to the engine; and a low pressure pump integrally formed as at least part of the vapor separator main body, and delivering fuel to the vapor separator. In one aspect, the low pressure pump may be internal or external to the housing. A reservoir has a cavity to contain liquid fuel for use by an engine, wherein the high pressure pump draws fuel from the cavity and pumps fuel to the engine, and the low and high pressure pumps are disposed in thermal communication with the fuel when the fuel is within the cavity. A hollow tube is configured into a coil having a plurality of loops, the coil dimensions to fit within the interior of the housing, the tube having first and second ends extending through the housing for connection to respective coolant supply and discharge members. A decoupled float valve vents vapor from the vapor separator when the fuel in the cavity falls below a predetermined level. A pressure relief valve opens when a predetermined pressure is reached within the cavity to vent fuel vapor from the cavity.

[0013] In still another embodiment of the invention, there is a vapor separator for a fuel pump assembly of an internal combustion engine, including a reservoir having a cavity for containing fuel for use by the engine; and a low pressure pump providing the fuel to the reservoir, wherein the low pressure pump is integrally formed as at least part of a main body of the vapor separator. In one aspect, a high pressure pump draws the fuel from the cavity and pumping the fuel to the engine, and being disposed within the cavity of the reservoir and in thermal communication with the fuel when the fuel is within the cavity. A hollow tube is configured into a coil having a plurality of loops, the coil dimensions to fit within the interior of the main body, the tube having first and second ends extending through the main body for connection to respective coolant supply and discharge members. The low pressure pump may be disposed in a location external or internal to the reservoir.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0014] Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings wherein:

[0015] FIG. 1 is a schematic diagram of a marine vapor separator with a bypass line in accordance with the prior art.

[0016] FIG. 2 is a schematic representation of a fuel system for a marine propulsion system in accordance with the prior art.

[0017] FIG. 3 is a schematic diagram according to the invention where the low pressure pump is formed integrally with the vapor separator.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0018] Referring to the Figures, wherein like numerals indicate like or corresponding parts throughout the several views, a fuel supply system for a marine internal combustion engine in is illustrated schematically in FIG. 3.

[0019] Figure 3 illustrates a fuel vapor separator 50 having a main body 52 formed of polymeric materials that is adapted to received a supply of liquid fuel and provide a substantially vapor free supply of liquid fuel to fuel pump 54. The fuel pump 54 is preferably carried by the fuel vapor separator 50 and may be an electric motor driven fuel pump having an inlet in communication with the supply of liquid fuel in the main body 52 and an outlet 56 through which pressurized fuel is discharged for delivery to an engine. Fuel is pumped from a tank using a low pressure lift pump 60 into a reservoir of the vapor separator 50. The low pressure lift pump 60 is formed integrally with the vapor separator 50. That is, at least part of the low pressure lift pump is formed from the same material and integral with the vapor separator body 50. This provides fewer leakage paths and helps to reduce costs associated with assembly. The low pressure pump may reside external to the vapor separator 50, as illustrated in Fig. 3, or it may reside internal to the vapor separator (not illustrated), as well known in the art. For example, the low pressure pump and vapor separator may be formed from the same material to create a single continuous unit. In a preferred embodiment, the low pressure pump 60 is a pulse type pump. A pulse fuel pump typically has four tubes connected to it. One tube connects the fuel tank. Two tubes connect to the

crankcase of the engine and one tube connects to the inlet of the fuel vapor separator. When the engine revolves, the tube connecting the engine delivers fuel with a pulse of pressure at each revolution. The diaphragm pulsates with the pressure. At the top of the pump are two chambers, which are separated by a pair of one way valves. These valves ensure that the fuel that passes through does not come back. Fuel flows from one chamber to the other at one pulse and at the next pulse, fuel moves to the engine.

[0020] In more detail, fuel is routed from a tank (not illustrated) via a low-pressure type lift pump 60, such as a pulse pump, which urges fuel into a vapor separator, generally indicated at 50. The vapor separator 50 thus receives liquid fuel from a fuel tank through a direct distribution system. The primary purpose of the vapor separator 50 is to collect and discharge vapors given off from the fuel. In this embodiment, the low pressure pump 60 is integrally formed as at least part of the vapor separator 50 and continually adds more liquid fuel to a reservoir of vapor separator 50. The vapor vent 58 allows vapors to bleed off. The vapor vent 58 is controlled by a float valve, preferably decoupled 64, which is responsive to the level of liquid fuel in the reservoir of vapor separator 50. Whenever liquid fuel threatens to escape through the vapor vent 58, the float valve automatically closes. In all non-threatening conditions, the vapor vent 58 remains open to exhaust fuel vapors.

[0021] The high pressure pump 54 has a fuel inlet for withdrawing liquid fuel from the reservoir region of the vapor separator 50. The high pressure pump 54 also has a fuel outlet 56 for delivering fuel under pressure to an engine injector system. The engine injector system can be of any type suited to vaporize fuel for a marine engine (not shown). In the typical case, the engine injector system includes a plurality of injectors.

[0022] The high-pressure pump 54 is designed to run continuously whenever the engine is in operation. The pump 54 is also rated to provide maximum fuel delivery and pressure for engine 'full throttle' conditions. However, because an engine is not run at full throttle condition at all times, the pump 54 will attempt to deliver more fuel than is needed during other (non 'full throttle') conditions.

[0023] To alleviate excess pressure build-up in the fuel delivery line and the associated fittings, as well as in the engine injector system, a bypass or return line may extend between the fuel delivery line and the vapor separator 50 (not shown). The bypass or return line returns excess fuel to the vapor separator 50 prior to the fuel reaching the engine injector system and thereby eliminates the need to recirculate unused fuel through the engine injector system.

[0024] In operation, fuel is supplied to the engine by first moving liquid fuel from a fuel tank (not shown) to the vapor separator 50 by use of the low pressure pump 60. Water is separated from the fuel prior to reaching the low pressure pump. In the vapor separator 50, vapors given off from the fuel are collected and vented, or bled, to the atmosphere or other suitable collection system. The float valve automatically interrupts the vapor bleeding in response to the level of liquid fuel in the vapor separator 50 reaching a predetermined height to prevent the escape of liquid fuel through the vapor vent 58.

[0025] The high pressure pump 54 withdraws liquid fuel from the vapor separator 50 and delivers it under pressure to the engine injector system via a fuel delivery line (fuel out 56). However, the fuel pressure between the high pressure pump 54 and the engine injector system is monitored to determine whether the engine injector system is being presented with more fuel than is required for efficient engine operation. If more fuel than needed is being supplied by the high pressure pump 54, the extra, unneeded fuel may be automatically returned to the vapor separator 50 through a bypass or return line. Thus, fuel in excess of engine demand is returned to the vapor separator 50 prior to its reaching the engine injector system.

[0026] In addition, positioned internally within main body 52 of vapor separator assembly 50 is a hollow cylindrical tube 62 which is bent and configured into a coil having multiple circular loops. An intake end is connected to a source of liquid coolant (not shown) which in the case of a Marine engine is typically a pump that pumps water from the lake or ocean water environment in which the engine is operating into the engine for cooling purposes. The coolant water typically is used to cool the combustion chambers of the engine as well as the vapor separator assembly 50. The lake or ocean water or other liquid coolant is

pumped through tube coil 62 from the first end to a second outlet end thereby removing heat from the interior of main body 52 of vapor separator assembly 20.

[0027] The invention has been described in an illustrative manner, and it is to be understood that the terminology which has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation.

[0028] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is, therefore, to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, wherein that which is prior art is antecedent to the characterized novelty and reference numerals are merely for convenience and are not to be in any way limiting, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

What is claimed is:

1. A fuel vapor separator, comprising:
a housing;
a low pressure pump to deliver fuel from to the vapor separator; and
a high pressure pump to deliver fuel to an engine, wherein the low pressure pump is formed at least in part as a single piece of material with the housing.
2. The fuel vapor separator of claim 1, wherein the low pressure pump is external to the housing.
3. The fuel vapor separator of claim 1, wherein the low pressure pump is internal to the housing.
4. The fuel vapor separator of claim 1, further comprising a reservoir having a cavity to include liquid fuel for use by an engine, wherein the high pressure pump draws fuel from the cavity and pumps fuel to the engine, and the low and high pressure pumps are disposed in thermal communication with the fuel when the fuel is within the cavity.
5. The fuel vapor separator of claim 4, further comprising a hollow tube configured into a coil having a plurality of loops, the coil dimensions to fit within the interior of the housing, the tube having first and second ends extending through the housing for connection to respective coolant supply and discharge members.
6. The fuel vapor separator of claim 1, further comprising a decoupled float valve to vent vapor from the vapor separator when the fuel in the cavity falls below a predetermined level.
7. The fuel vapor separator of claim 6, further comprising a pressure relief valve that opens when a predetermined pressure is reached within the cavity to vent fuel vapor from the cavity.

8. The fuel vapor separator of claim 1, wherein the low pressure pump is a pulse pump.
9. A fuel supply system for a marine engine, comprising:
 - a vapor separator to receive liquid fuel from a fuel tank and collecting vapors given off from the fuel, the vapor separator including a housing having an interior and an exterior;
 - a high pressure pump received in a main body of the vapor separator, and having an inlet in communication with a reservoir in the main body and an outlet through which pressurized fuel is delivered to the engine; and
 - a low pressure pump integrally formed as at least part of the vapor separator main body, and delivering fuel to the vapor separator.
10. The fuel vapor separator of claim 9, wherein the low pressure pump is external to the housing.
11. The fuel vapor separator of claim 9, wherein the low pressure pump is internal to the housing.
12. The fuel vapor separator of claim 9, further comprising a reservoir having a cavity to include liquid fuel for use by an engine, wherein the high pressure pump draws fuel from the cavity and pumps fuel to the engine, and the low and high pressure pumps are disposed in thermal communication with the fuel when the fuel is within the cavity.
13. The fuel vapor separator of claim 12, further comprising a hollow tube configured into a coil having a plurality of loops, the coil dimensions to fit within the interior of the housing, the tube having first and second ends extending through the housing for connection to respective coolant supply and discharge members.

14. The fuel vapor separator of claim 9, further comprising a decoupled float valve to vent vapor from the vapor separator when the fuel in the cavity falls below a predetermined level.

15. The fuel vapor separator of claim 14, further comprising a pressure relief valve that opens when a predetermined pressure is reached within the cavity to vent fuel vapor from the cavity.

16. The fuel vapor separator of claim 9, wherein the low pressure pump is a pulse pump.

17. A vapor separator for a fuel pump assembly of an internal combustion engine, comprising:

a reservoir having a cavity to include fuel for use by the engine; and

a low pressure pump to provide the fuel to the reservoir, wherein the low pressure pump is integrally formed as at least part of a main body of the vapor separator.

18. The vapor separator of claim 17, further comprising a high pressure pump drawing the fuel from the cavity and pumping the fuel to the engine, and being disposed within the cavity of the reservoir and in thermal communication with the fuel when the fuel is within the cavity.

19. The vapor separator of claim 18, further comprising a hollow tube configured into a coil having a plurality of loops, the coil dimensions to fit within the interior of the main body, the tube having first and second ends extending through the main body for connection to respective coolant supply and discharge members.

20. The vapor separator of claim 17, wherein the low pressure pump is disposed in one of a location external and internal to the reservoir.

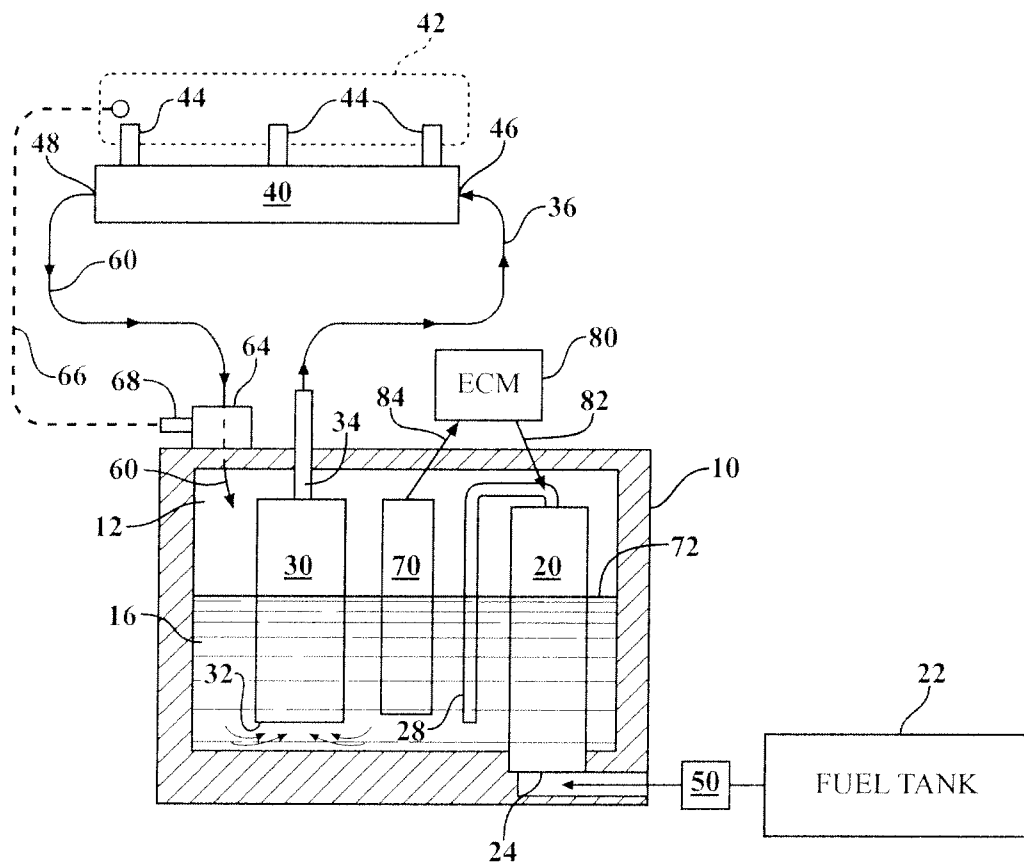


FIG. 2
PRIOR ART

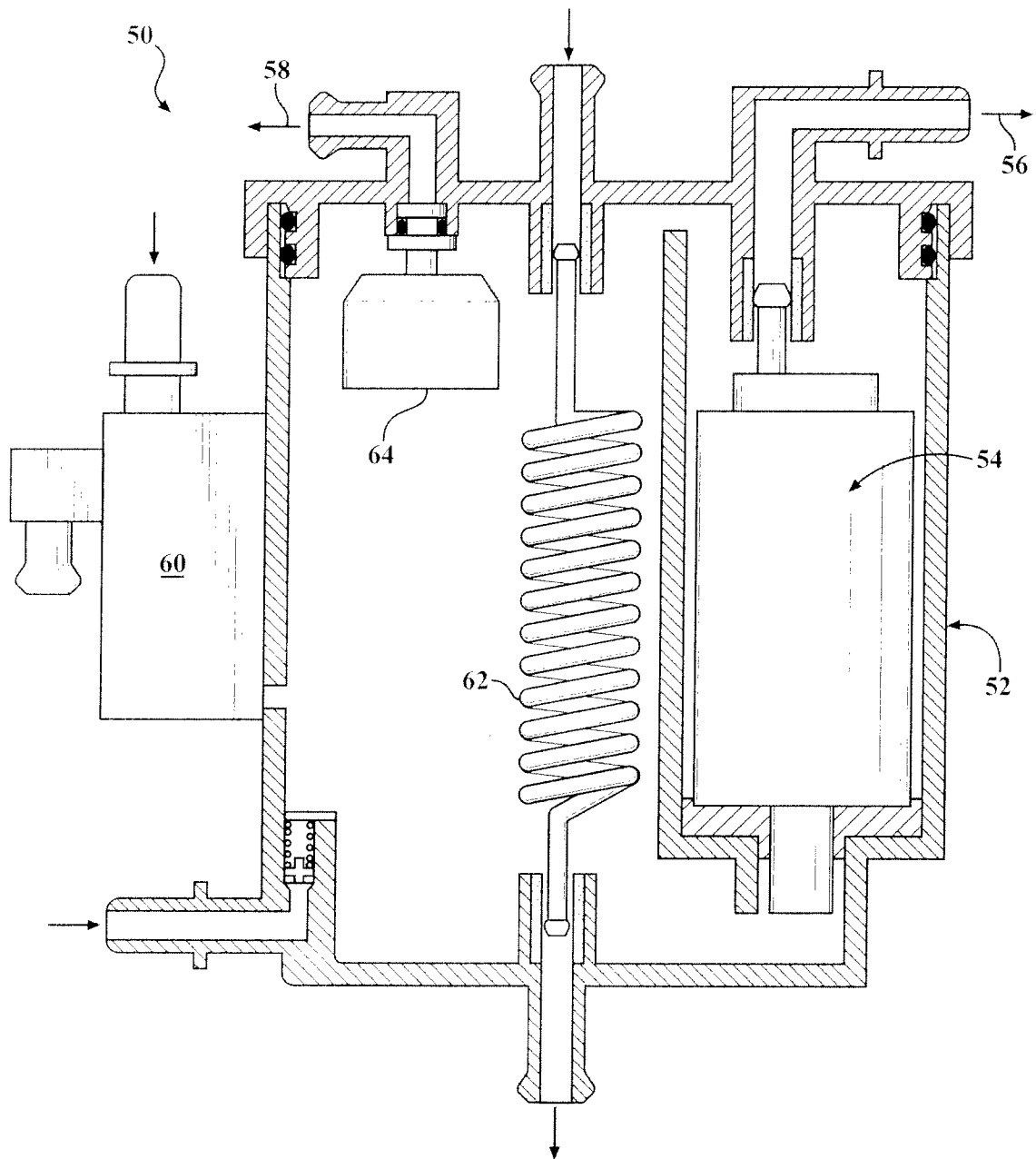


FIG. 3

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2011/020454

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. F02M37/08 F02M37/20 F02M37/14 B60K15/035
ADD.

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)

F02M B60K

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.
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Y	column 1, line 61 - column 3, line 13; figure 1	5-7, 13-15,19
X	US 5 070 849 A (RICH GREGORY E [US] ET AL) 10 December 1991 (1991-12-10)	1,2, 8-10, 16-18,20
A	column 1, line 57 - column 3, line 42; figure 1	3-7, 11-15,19
X	FR 2 798 164 A1 (MARWAL SYSTEMS [FR]) 9 March 2001 (2001-03-09)	1,3,4,8, 9,11,12, 16-18,20
	page 4, line 15 - page 13, line 5; figures 1-7	
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

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"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

"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

"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.

"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

17 March 2011

Date of mailing of the international search report

24/03/2011

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2011/020454

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
Y	US 6 857 419 B1 (HARVEY RICHARD W [US] ET AL) 22 February 2005 (2005-02-22) column 4, line 1 - column 5, line 11; figure 2 -----	5-7, 13-15,19

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No

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