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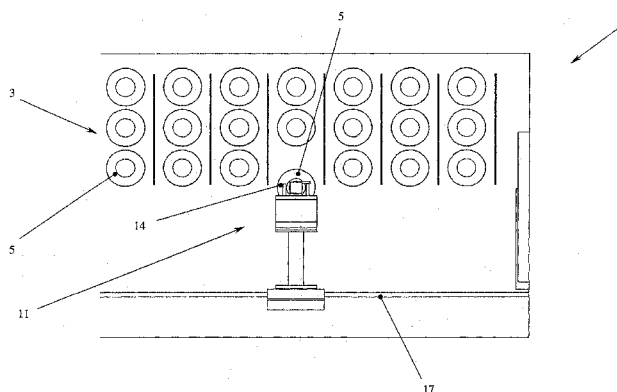


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: An automatic dye-meter (1) is described, composed of at least one first compartment (3) for stocking and storing a plurality of bottles (5) containing the dyeing components, each one of such bottles (5) being equipped with at least one plug equipped with pumping means for such component, such bottles (5) being arranged inside such first compartment (3) according to a known order, at least one second compartment (7) for batching such components from such bottles (5) to obtain a final dyeing compound inside at least one mixing container (9) arranged inside such second compartment (7), handling means (11) adapted to take at least one of such bottles (5) from such first compartment (3), transport such bottle (5) from such first compartment (3) to such second compartment (7), incline such bottle (5), actuate such pumping means to allow pouring and batching such component inside such mixing container (9), and take back such bottle (5) inside such first compartment (3).



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AUTOMATIC DYE-METER

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The present invention refers to an automatic dye-meter.

As known, dye-meters are batching machines for preparing dyeing composites, such as paints, enamels, pictures, typically comprising a plurality of stocking tanks for the individual dyeing components and batching and delivering devices for such components suitable to draw from the individual tanks accurate amounts of component, depending on the desired compositions, in order to arrive at the desired end compound. In general, the art has two families of dye-meter: those with tanks in a fixed position connected through ducts to a delivering head placed above a container of the final compound, in which delivery of the individual components can occur simultaneously, and those in which the tanks are placed on rotary platforms equipped with a kinematism adapted to position in turn the individual tanks, or individual sub-assemblies of tanks, on the container of the final

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compound in order to allow delivering the component. In general, therefore, the above types of dye-meters provide that the individual dyeing composites are poured into their related stocking
5 tanks from the containers inside which they are available on the market. Alternatively, the art provides for dye-meters, such as for example the one disclosed in WO-A1-2010113186 of the same Applicant, in which the batching and delivering
10 device directly draw from the commercial containers of the individual dyeing components in which particular covers are arranged, comprising integrated pumping and stirring means.

However, a current technical trend nowadays is
15 marketing the dyeing components, especially in the particular sector of motor vehicle body, inside plastic bottles that must be stored inside special thermostatic cabinets and do not require any more a continuous stirring of the component inside them:
20 currently, however, there are no specific dye-meters that allow the automatic batching of individual dyeing components directly from their commercial bottles. In fact, usually, in order to obtain a dyeing component aimed for painting a
25 vehicle, an operator proceeds, depending on the

standard formulation of the compound usually provided by the supplier of the vehicle itself, taking from the cabinet every time the individual bottles of the component pointed out by the
5 formulation, stirring such bottles in order to revive and homogenise the components therein, by manually weighing on suitable balances the amount of component designated by the formulation, and putting again the bottles inside the cabinet.
10 Obviously, above all in case of particularly complex dyeing compounds, the execution of the above described operations for every single bottle of dyeing component requires a long interval of time. Moreover, the completely manual execution of
15 such operations, above all those pertaining to the selection of the individual bottles and the weighing of the batches of individual components, can often be subjected to human errors that, taking into account the non-neglected cost of the affected
20 paints, have a negative outcome on the economy of such operations.

Therefore, object of the present invention is solving the above prior art problems by providing an automatic dye-meter, in particular for the
25 vehicle body sector, that allows automatically

batching individual dyeing components directly from commercial bottles.

Another object of the present invention is providing an automatic dye-meter that allows making
5 the operations of preparing a dyeing compound, quicker, more efficient and reliable, in particular for painting motor vehicles in the field of bodies, directly from the commercial bottles of the individual components.

10 The above and other objects and advantages of the invention, as will appear from the following description, are obtained with an automatic dye-meter as described in claim 1. Preferred embodiments and non-trivial variations of the
15 present invention are the subject matter of the dependent claims.

It is intended that the claims are an integral part of the present specification.

It will be immediately obvious that numerous
20 variations and modifications (for example related to shape, sizes, arrangements and parts with equivalent functionality) can be made to what is described, without departing from the scope of the invention as appears from the enclosed claims.

25 The present invention will be better described

by some preferred embodiments thereof, provided as a non-limiting example, with reference to the enclosed drawings, in which:

- Figure 1 shows a schematic top view of a preferred embodiment of the automatic dye-meter according to the present invention in an operating position thereof;
- Figure 2 shows a schematic front view of a preferred embodiment of the automatic dye-meter according to the present invention in another operating position thereof; and
- Figure 3 shows a detailed front view of the automatic dye-meter according to the present invention in its operating position of Figure 2.

With reference to the Figures, it is possible to note that the automatic dye-meter 1 according to the present invention is composed of at least one first compartment 3 for stocking and storing a plurality of bottles 5 containing dyeing components, each one of which is equipped with at least one plug equipped with pumping means for such component, such bottles 5 being arranged inside such first compartment 3 according to a known order, at least one second compartment 7 for batching such components from such bottles 5 for

preparing a final dyeing compound inside at least one mixing container 9 arranged inside such second compartment 7, handling means 11 adapted to take at least one of such bottles 5 from such first compartment 3 (Figure 1), transporting such bottle 5 from such first compartment 3 to such second compartment 7 (Figures 2 and 3), possibly in the meantime stirring such bottle 5, suitably inclining such bottle 5, actuating such pumping means to allow pouring and batching (volumetric or weight-type with the help of an electronic balance) of the component therein contained inside the mixing container 9, take again such bottle 5 (obviously after having taken it back into such a position as to prevent possible pouring) inside the first compartment 3 in the previously-occupied position.

The first compartment 3 and possibly also the second compartment 7 can be equipped with means, known in the art, for suitably internally conditioning and heating/cooling such compartments 3, 7 and guarantee the correct storage of the components contained inside the bottles 5.

Obviously, the type of arrangement of the bottles inside the first compartment 7 can be various: for example, as shown in the Figures, the

bottles 5 can be arranged inside the first compartment 3 on a plurality of supporting shelves, in order to obtain an array-type arrangement composed of n rows and m columns, each position n , m of such array being occupied, for example, by one bottle 5 containing a different and distinct dyeing component. Obviously, if $n = 1$ or $m = 1$, the arrangement is of the vector (linear) type, respectively horizontal or vertical. As spares, each position n , m can further be occupied by a queue of a plurality of bottles 5 containing the same dyeing component.

Obviously, the automatic dye-meter 1 according to the present invention is equipped with suitable control means adapted to cooperate with the handling means 11 to allow the correct drawing of the individual bottles 5 from the correct position n , m inside the first compartment 3: for such purpose, for example, such control means cooperate and communicate with a data base containing the mapping of the known order of the positions of the individual bottles 5 inside the first compartment 3 in such a way as to know the position n , m occupied by each distinct component and correctly address the handling means 11 for taking and re-positioning

the related bottle 5. In order to increase the reliability of the automatic dye-meter 1 according to the present invention, each bottle 5 can be equipped with suitable individual recognition means, such as for example a bar code or a RFID tag, that can be detected by related reading means arranged on the handling means 11 in order to ascertain the coincidence between the type of component that hypothetically occupies a certain position n, m in the first compartment 3 and signalled by the control means depending on the mapping contained in the data base, and the bottle 5 that actually occupies such position: in case of absence of such coincidence, for example if an operator has arranged one or more bottles 5 inside the first compartment 3 differently from what is included in the mapping of the positions signalled to the control means, the automatic dye-meter 1 according to the present invention can timely stop the procedure for preparing the dyeing compound in such a way as to avoid any waste of the products.

Depending on the formulation of the dyeing compound to be obtained starting from the components contained inside the bottles 5, provided for example by a data base cooperating and

communicating with such control means of the automatic dye-meter 1 according to the present invention or by a PC already currently used by the body operators, the handling means 11 are therefore
5 able to advantageously drawing every time the individual bottles 5 containing the necessary components for obtaining the compound from the first compartment 5 and to pour its contents inside the container 1 till the required batching is
10 reached. Obviously, batching of the individual components can occur through any mode known in the art: for example, in case of a weight-type batching, the automatic dye-meter 1 as shown in the Figures will be equipped with at least one balance
15 13 arranged below the mixing container 9 and the pumping means could comprise a simple peristaltic pump actuated by the handling means 11 till the required weight-type batching is reached. For such purpose, the balance 13 can cooperate with the
20 control means of the automatic dye-meter 1 according to the present invention in order to signal when the required batch of the individual component has been reached, such control means therefore driving the handling means to stop the
25 actuation of the pumping means, and therefore the

component delivery, and to take back the bottle 5 into its own position inside the first compartment 3. Instead, in the case, not shown, in which there is a volumetric-type batching, the pumping means
5 can comprise a rotary pump with progressive recesses of the known type that takes care of communicating with the control means to deliver the required batch of component and then take back the bottle 5 into its own position inside the first
10 compartment 3.

It is moreover possible to provide that the dye-meter 1 according to the present invention comprises, preferably inside the second compartment 7, at least one room 15 for replacing and loading
15 the bottles. In fact, when the control means and their related sensors detect, in any suitable way, known in the art, that the contents inside a bottle 5 have finished, they take care of sending an alert signal: depending on such signal, an operator
20 therefore takes care of positioning a new bottle 5 inside such room 15: once having detected the presence of a new bottle inside such room 15 through the most suitable sensors, the control means take care of driving the handling means to
25 remove the empty bottle 5, for example by taking it

too inside the room 15, and to replace it with a new one, taking it from the same room 15.

Obviously, the handling means 11 can be made using any mechanical-electronic solution suitable for such purpose: merely as an example, it is possible to note that the handling means 11 can comprise at least one catching device 14 movable along a translation structure composed of at least one vertical sliding guide 16 movable along an horizontal direction and at least one horizontal sliding guide 17 movable along a vertical direction: the guides 16, 17 can therefore be suitably handled by actuating means, known in the art, and driven by the control means in order to be taken every time to cross themselves next to a specific position inside the first compartment 3, such position corresponding to a position n, m occupied by a bottle 5 to be taken. The catching device 14 is therefore taken, again under the action of actuating means, known in the art, driven by the control means, to the crossing position between the guides 16, 17 in such a way as to take such bottle 5. The translation structure, and in particular the guides 16, 17, is then again handled under the action of the control means in order to

transport the bottle 5 inside the second compartment 7 in such a position as to allow inclining and pouring the component contained therein inside the mixing container 9: once having
5 ended the batching of the component, the translation structure is handled under the action of the control means in order to take again the bottle 5 inside the first compartment 3 in its own previously-occupied position (or possibly in the
10 replacement room 15 if empty): obviously, the above operations are repeated for every individual bottle 5 containing the necessary component for obtaining the dyeing compound according to the formulation communicated to the control means.

15 The catching device 14, preferably composed of at least one gripping pliers for the bottle 5, is thereby articulated in such a way as to allow inclining, in a way controlled by the control means, such bottle 5 during its delivery and
20 batching inside the mixing container 9, and comprises means for actuating the pumping means arranged on the plug of such bottle 5: possibly, the catching device 14 can further comprise the means for reading the individual recognising means
25 and/or the stirring means for such bottles 5.

CLAIMS

1. Automatic dye-meter (1) composed of at least one first compartment (3) for stocking and storing a plurality of bottles (5) containing dyeing components, said bottles (5) being arranged inside said first compartment (3) according to a known order, at least one second compartment (7) for batching said components from said bottles (5) to obtain a final dyeing compound inside at least one mixing container (9) arranged inside said second compartment (7), handling means (11) adapted to take at least one of said bottles (5) from said first compartment (3), transport said bottle (5) from said first compartment (3) to said second compartment (7), incline said bottle (5), pour and batch said component inside said mixing container (9), and take again said bottle (5) inside said first compartment (3), characterised in that:
- each one of said bottles (5) is equipped with at least one plug equipped with pumping means of said component, said handling means (11) being further adapted to actuate said pumping means to allow pouring and batching said component inside said mixing container (9);

and

- said dye-meter (1) comprises at least one
room (15) for replacing said bottles (5),
said room (15) being arranged inside said
5 second compartment (7).

2. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 1,
characterised in that said bottles (5) are
arranged inside said first compartment (3)
according to an array-type arrangement composed
10 of n rows and m columns, each position n, m of
said array being occupied by a bottle (5)
containing a different and distinct dyeing
component, and in that it is equipped with
control means adapted to cooperate with said
15 handling means (11) to allow correctly taking
said individual bottles (5) from said position
n, m inside said first compartment (3), said
control means cooperating and communicating with
a data base containing a mapping of said known
20 order of said positions n, m of said individual
bottles (5) inside said first compartment (3).

3. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 1,
characterised in that each one of said bottles
(5) is equipped with individual recognition
25 means adapted to be detected by related reading

means arranged on said handling means (11).

4. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 2,
characterised in that said control means
cooperate and communicate with a data base or a
5 PC containing formulations of said dyeing
compounds starting from said components.

5. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 1 or
2, characterised in that said batching is of the
weight type, in that it comprises at least one
10 balance (13) arranged below said mixing
container (9) and in that said pumping means
comprise a peristaltic pump actuated by said
handling means (11).

6. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 5
15 characterised in that said balance (13)
cooperates with said control means in order to
signal when said required dose of said
individual component has been reached.

7. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 2,
20 characterised in that said batching is of the
volumetric type and in that said pumping means
comprise a rotary pump with progressive recesses
communicating with said control means in order
to deliver said required batch of said
25 component.

8. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 1,
characterised in that said handling means (11)
comprise at least one catching device (14)
mobile along a translation structure composed of
5 at least one vertical sliding guide (16) mobile
along an horizontal direction and at least one
horizontal sliding guide (17) mobile along a
vertical direction, said catching device (14)
being articulated in such a way as to allow
10 inclining in a controlled way said bottle (5)
during delivery and batching inside said mixing
container (9) and comprising means for actuating
said pumping means arranged on said plug of said
bottle (5).

15 9. Automatic dye-meter (1) according to claim 8,
characterised in that said catching device (14)
comprise at least one stirrer adapted to stir
said bottles (5) along a plurality of
directions.

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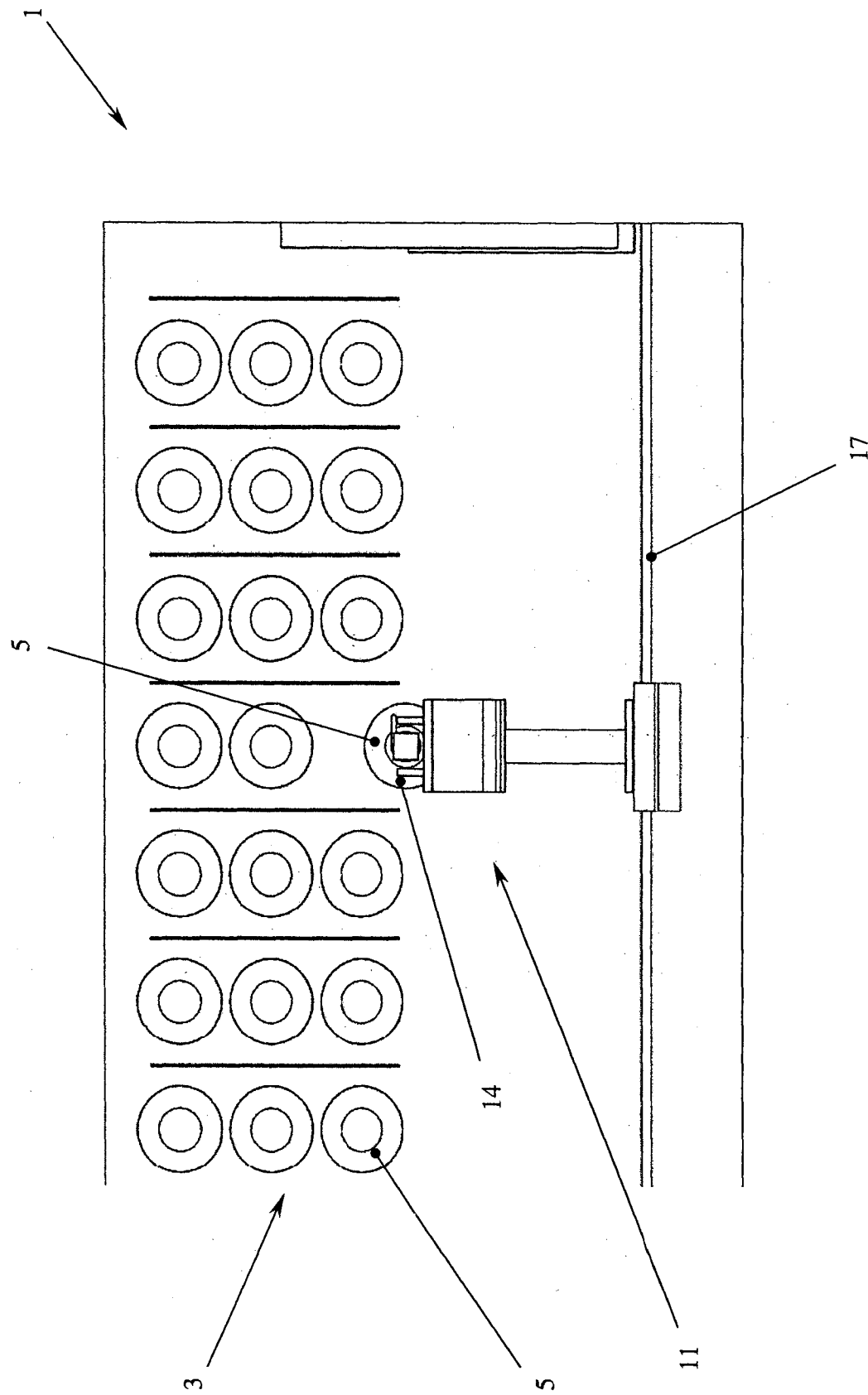


FIG. 1

