

(12) UK Patent Application (19) GB (11) 2 207 297 A (13)
 (43) Application published 25 Jan 1989

(21) Application No 8716383
 (22) Date of filing 11 Jul 1987

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(51) INT CL⁴
H01R 4/00 H01L 23/00

(52) Domestic classification (Edition J):
H2E CAGX DCF
H1K 1FD 4C1P1 4C1PY 5A5 RB
U1S 1990 2059 H1K H2E

(56) Documents cited

GB 1482713	GB 1058630	GB 0755897
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(58) Field of search
H2E
H1K

(54) Encapsulated electronic components

(57) A thermistor probe comprises a pair of springy pins (P) held in a body (1) and resiliently holding a negative temperature coefficient (NTC) thermistor chip (TH) between their tips. A second body (31) fig 2 not shown of glass-loaded plastics is injection moulded over the pins and chip and bonds integrally with body (1) to enhance the contact pressure and encapsulate the probe.

The probe is suitable for vehicle engine air charge temperature measurement.

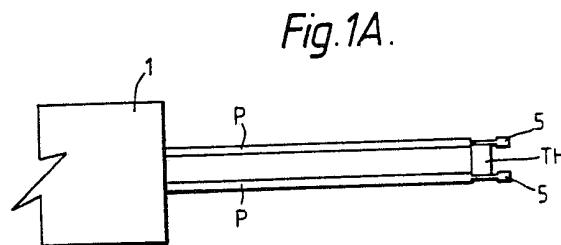
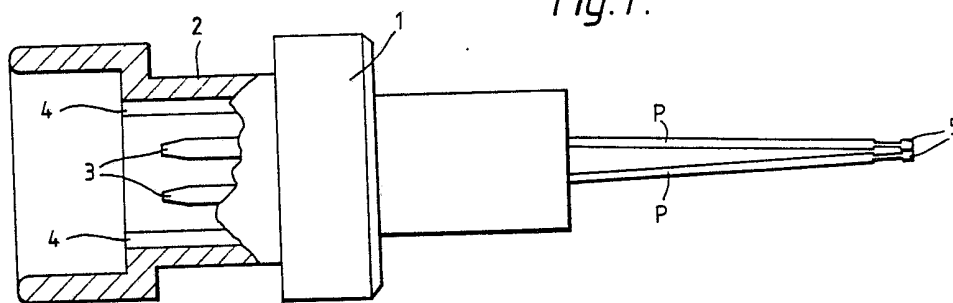


Fig. 1.

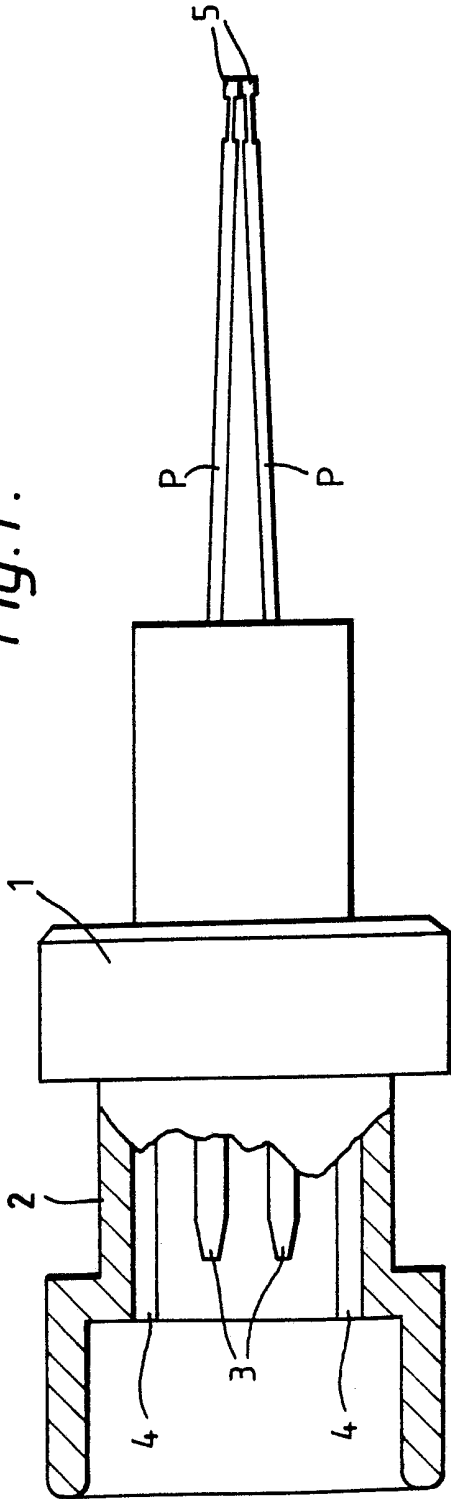


Fig. 1A.

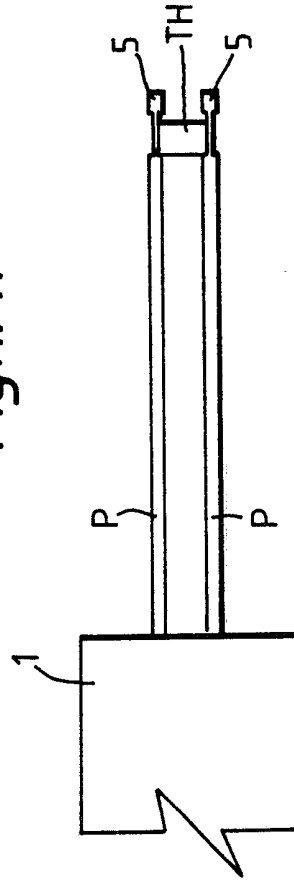
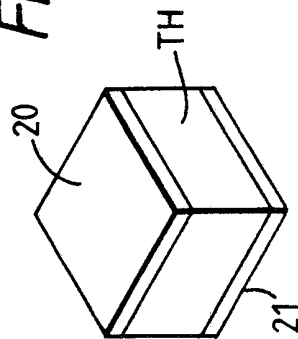


Fig. 1B.



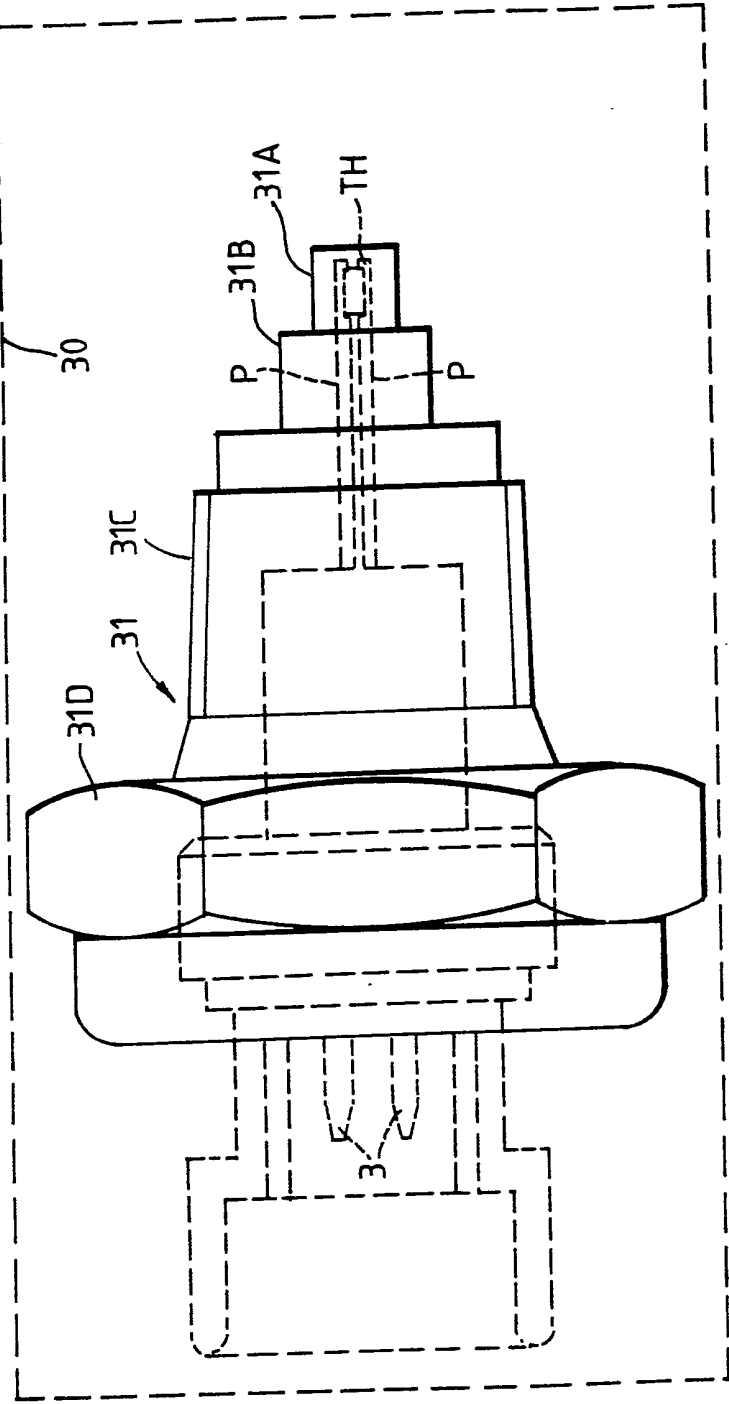


Fig. 2.

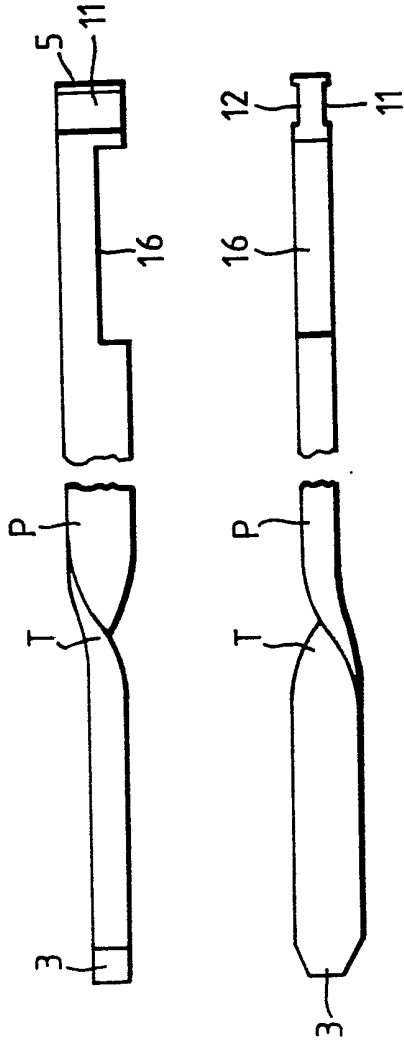


Fig. 3.

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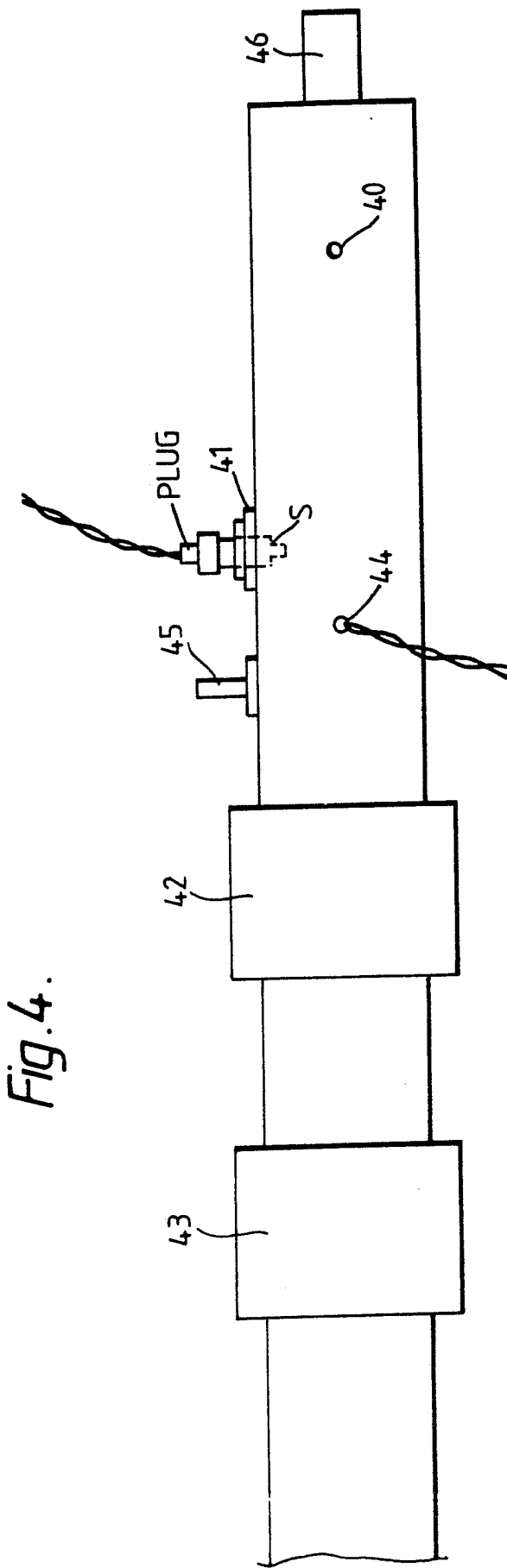


Fig. 4.

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HEATING TIME RESPONSE IN WIND
TUNNEL.

Fig.5.

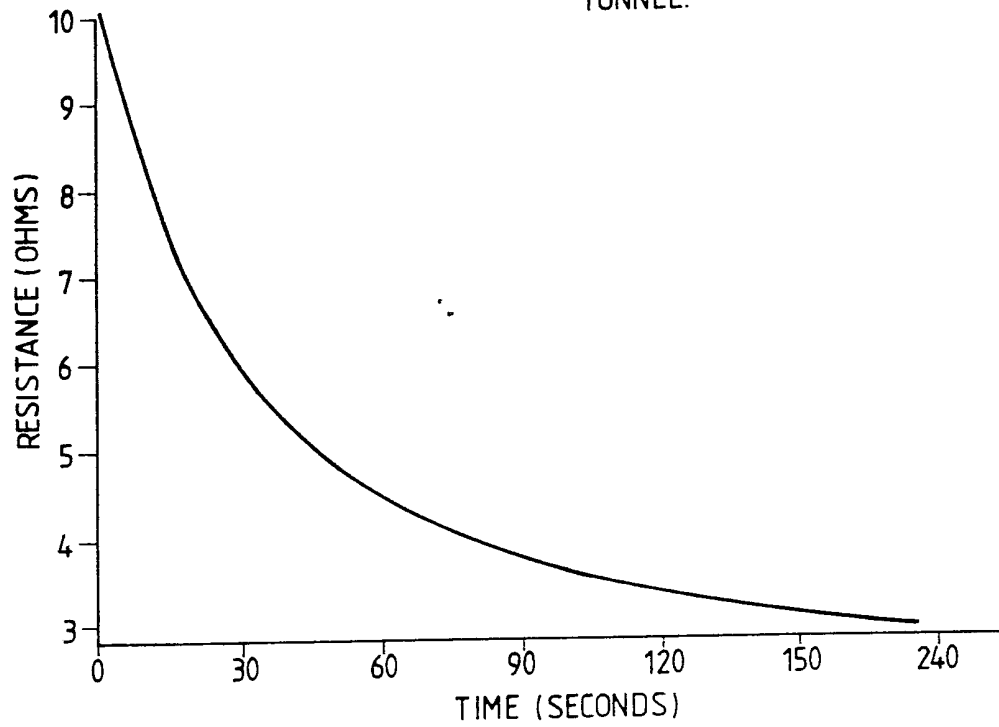
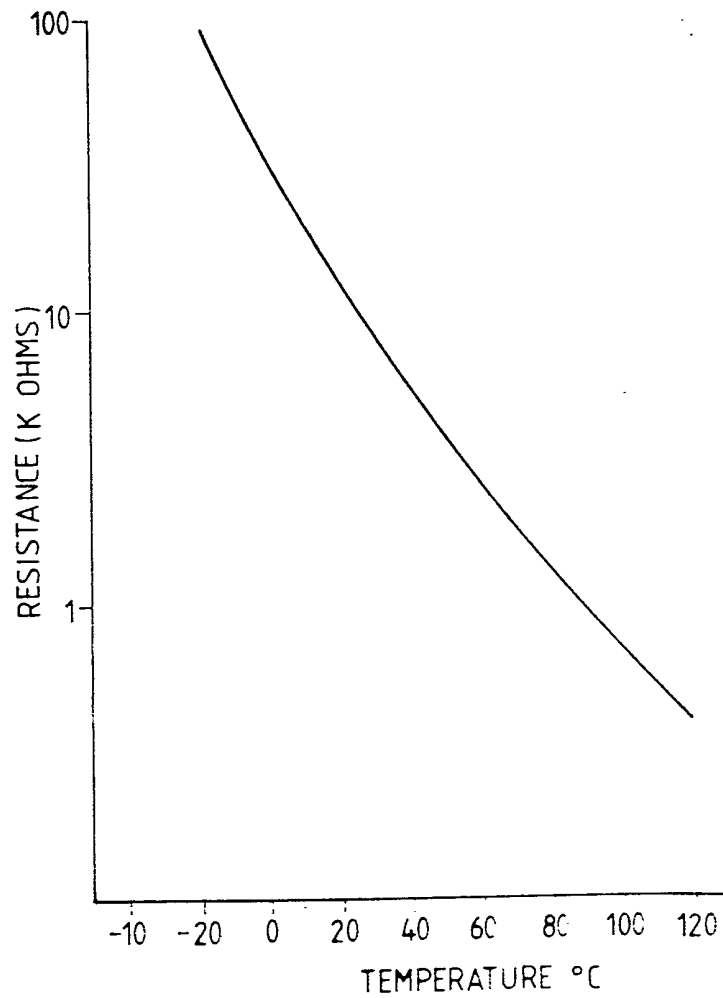


Fig.6.



ENCAPSULATED ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS

This invention relates to encapsulating electronic components, particularly but not exclusively thermistor temperature sensors, particularly but not exclusively sensors for automotive air charge sensing applications.

Modern fuel injected motor vehicle engine management systems have adopted micro computers that demand knowledge of temperatures, pressures and flow rates for optimum operating efficiency.

Negative temperature coefficient (NTC) thermistors e.g. thermistor disc, enclosed within suitable housing, have been used for many years to monitor engine temperatures. The thermistor disc is sleeved and crimped into a brass or steel probe body. One of the terminations (the earth termination) is connected to the probe body itself, and the second termination, being a blade or threaded stud, is connected via a compression coil or a leaf spring or a soldered wire that maintains contact between the thermistor disc face and the probe body.

With the use of microprocessors and the damage to them that can be associated with the inherent electrical noise in a motor vehicle, the sensor signals received through such an earth circuit are no longer acceptable.

It is an object of the present invention to provide an encapsulated electronic component,

particularly but not exclusively a thermistor for vehicle applications, which is cheap to make and which is reliable in operation even under arduous conditions including wide temperature ranges and rapid temperature changes within these temperature ranges.

According to the present invention there is provided an electronic component including an electronic component element having two electrical contact faces, two electrical connection terminals making pressure contact with the electrical contact faces, and a plastics material directly injection moulded over the component element and the electrical connection terminals, whereby to maintain the pressure contacts.

According to another aspect there is provided a thermistor probe comprising a pair of elongate springy connection terminals, a thermistor element resiliently held in electrical contact with and between said terminals, and a moulded plastics insulating material encapsulating said element and said terminals at least in the region of said contact and reinforcing the contact pressure between said terminal and said thermistor element, and external electrical connection means for making external electrical connection with said terminals.

According to yet another aspect there is provided a method of making an electrical component which comprises providing a pair of connection terminals, holding said terminals, inserting an electrical component element between and in electrical contact with said terminals so that it is resiliently held thereby, and subsequently moulding a body of insulating material around said element and terminal so as to encapsulate the element and reinforce the contact pressure between the element and the terminals.

In order that the invention may be clearly understood, reference will now be made to the accompanying drawings which show an embodiment of the

present invention and in which :-

Fig. 1 is a side view of a thermistor temperature sensor probe for an internal combustion engine air charge application during a first stage of manufacture, and Figs. 1A and 1B show details;

Fig. 2 is a side view of the probe of Fig. 1 which has been injection moulded with a loaded plastics material to encapsulate the element and the connection terminals;

Fig. 3 shows a detail of the probe of Figs. 1 and 2 and

Fig. 4 shows the probe situated in test equipment which shows the air charge application for which the probe is intended, and

Figs. 5 and 6 show, respectively typical response time and resistance -temperature characteristics of the probe.

Referring now to the drawings, in Fig. 1 is shown a stage in the manufacture of the probe before encapsulation of the temperature sensing element takes place. The probe comprises a moulded plastics body 1 which in this particular embodiment is made of a glass-filled plastics material "NYLON 66".

At one end of the moulded plastics body 1 is defined a female electrical connection socket 2 having a pair of connection terminals 3 and defining a key-way 4 to ensure that the male plug can be fitted one way round only into the socket 2.

The connection terminals 3 are formed by end portions of integral springy connection pins P which in this embodiment are made of nickel-plated phosphor bronze with a coating of tin. These pins are shown in greater detail in Fig. 3 and are located in the injection moulding tool prior to injection moulding the body 1. They are so located in the injection moulding tool that their opposite ends 5 are touching one another in the relaxed state of the connection pins.

Referring to Fig. 3 each pin P comprises a tin-coated nickel-plated phosphor bronze strip which is twisted through 90° at an intermediate position T between its ends. The ends 3 are profiled to provide the connection pins as discussed earlier for the electrical socket and at the other ends the pins have a cut-away portion 10 which is designed to give the correct thermal response characteristics for the probe.

The ends 5 have opposed recesses 11 and 12 which co-operate to locate the thermistor chip TH in between as shown in Fig. 1A.

The next stage in the process is to insert the thermistor chip TH (Fig. 1B) in between the pins P as shown in Fig. 1A so that the pins are elastically force apart and resiliently engage the chip.

The thermistor chip is an NTC device, in this embodiment, and has silvered contact faces 20 and 21. Referring now to Fig. 2 the next stage in the process is to insert the probe end of the moulding from Fig. 1 into a second injection moulding tool 30 which injection moulds glass-filled "NYLON 66" plastics material around the thermistor chip TH and the pressure contact faces 11 and 12 and occupies the shape shown in outline in Fig. 2. The broken lines show the shape of the first moulded body 1 produced according to Fig. 1, together with the pins P and thermistor TH.

The second moulded material 31 bonds integrally with the first moulding 1 and also shrinks slightly particularly around the contact pins P and the thermistor chip TH, whereby to cause the pins P to produce an enhanced contact pressure force on the thermistor chip TH and maintain that enhanced force in use of the probe.

The second moulding 31 has a probe end portion 31A which provides a plastic material thickness of about 1mm around the thermistor chip TH i.e. the thickness is great enough to seal the chip and give a measure of

physical protection and also enhance the contact pressure on the chip. but the thickness is not great enough to provide a thermal barrier around the chip. The thermal response is illustrated in Fig. 5. The probe diameter increases at the step to 31B which surrounds the pins P, and increases yet again to 31C around the moulding 1, and provides a screw thread securing the probe in a threaded aperture in the fuel/air charging manifold of the motor vehicle engine.

Portion 31D is shaped as a nut to enable the probe to be screwed into or out of the aperture.

The injection moulded material is glass fibre loaded "NYLON 66". The "Nylon 66" is loaded with about 33% by weight of glass fibres, but 25% or more will be satisfactory. Other forms of loaded plastics material would also be suitable and indeed an unloaded plastics material may also be suitable provided it shrinks on solidification and is strong enough to maintain the compression force due to shrinkage over a wide temperature range and for the life of the product.

The dimensions of the probe are as follows. The diameter of the probe tip 31A is 4 to 5 mm, portion 31B is about 7.5mm diameter, portion 31C has a standard $\frac{3}{8}$ " tapered thread and portion 31D is a standard hexagonal nut contour. portions 31A and 31B are both about 5mm in length.

The pins P project about 16mm from the end of body moulding 1 to their tips 5/.

The spacing between the pins P where they emerge from the body 1 is comparable with the thickness of the thermistor TH so that they extend substantially parallel to each other with the thermistor TH held between the faces 11 and 12, and lies in the range 0.1 to 0.6mm.

The surface area of each contact face 11 or 12 is larger than the co-operating contact face 20 or 21 of the chip thermistor so ensuring that all the shrinkage

force of the plastics encapsulating material in the region of the chip and in the direction of contact pressure, is applied solely through the pins P and not to the contact faces 20 and 21 directly.

Referring to Fig. 4 there is shown a test jig for testing response time in air of the sensor probe. The probe sensor is shown as S and the test jig simulates the air charging device for the vehicle internal combustion engine. The pipe 40 has a mounting boss 41 for the sensor probe S, a mercury manometer tap 45, an independent temperature sensor 44, a diffuser 42. A vacuum port 46 is coupled to a suction device to draw air through the pipe and a heater element 43 is used to change the temperature of the air over a wide range.

Referring to Fig. 5 the graph there shows the variation of resistance of the thermistor probe with time. Initially the probe was allowed to reach equilibrium at ambient temperature; it was then inserted in the test jig at time zero. The temperature of the air flowing through the test jig was 55 degrees Celcius above the ambient temperature.

Fig. 6 shows the resistance versus temperature characteristic for the sensor S.

We have found that the connections to the thermistor chip using the pressure contacts enhanced with the moulded plastics material, provide reliable connection to the device through a wide temperature range of - 20°C to + 120°C.

The connection technique for the NTC thermistor probe described above would also be applicable to any other electronic component, for example a capacitor, a PTC thermistor, a capacitor, an integrated circuit chip, etc.

CLAIMS :

1. An electronic component including an electronic component element having two electrical connections, two electrical connection terminals making pressure contact with the electrical connections, and a plastics material directly injection moulded over the component element and the electrical connection terminals, whereby to maintain the pressure contacts.
2. A component as claimed in claim 1, each connection terminal comprising an elongate springy member.
3. A component as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, said components element comprising a thermistor device.
4. A component as claimed in any preceding claim, comprising a first moulded insulating body holding the connection terminals, wherein said directly injected plastics material forms a second moulded insulating body integrally bonded to said first moulded insulating body.
5. A component as claimed in claim 2, wherein said connection terminals each provide a connection in an electrical connector forming an integral part of said component for making external electrical connection to said component.
6. A component substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.
7. A thermistor probe comprising a pair of elongate connection terminals, a thermistor element resiliently held in electrical contact with and between said terminals, and a moulded plastics insulating material encapsulating said element and said terminals at least in the region of said contact and reinforcing the contact pressure between said terminal and said thermistor element, and external electrical connection means for making external electrical connection with said terminals.

8. A method of making an electrical component comprising providing a pair of connection terminals, holding said terminal, inserting an electrical component element between and in electrical contact with said terminal so that it is resiliently held thereby, and subsequently moulding a body of insulating material around said element and terminal so as to encapsulate the element and reinforce the contact pressure between the element and the terminals.

9. A method of making an electrical component substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.