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DESCRIPTION

FIELD OF INVENTION

[0001] This invention relates to devices for moving an object by pulling on an elongate element to which the object is attached. More particularly, the invention relates to a device that can lift or pull heavy objects by pulling on a rope or cable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Winches are typically used to lift heavy loads or pull loads across horizontal obstacles. Winches are either motor-driven or hand powered and utilize a drum around which a wire rope (i.e. metal cable) or chain is wound. Manually lifting or pulling heavy objects is not a viable option due to the strength required to lift or pull such objects. Often, fatigue and injury result from manually lifting or pulling such objects. This is why winches are used; they possess massive pulling and towing capabilities, and can serve well for handling heavy objects.

[0003] However, winches are limited in their usefulness for several reasons. First, the cable or rope is fixed permanently to the drum, which limits the maximum pull distance and restricts the towing medium to only that rope or cable. Second, the winch must be fixed to a solid structure to be used, limiting its placement and usability. Third, controlled release of tension is not a capability of many winches, further limiting usability.

[0004] Current technology in rope ascenders used by people for vertical climbing consists of passive rope ascenders which must be used in pairs. These rope ascenders function as a one-way rope clamp, to be used in pairs. By alternating which ascender bears the load and which ascender advances, upward motion along a rope can be created.

[0005] Passive ascenders such as these are severely limited in their usefulness for several reasons. First, they rely on the strength of the user for upward mobility. Thus, passive ascenders are not useful in rescue situations where an injured person needs to move up a rope. Second, the need to grip one ascender with each hand limits multitasking during an ascent because both hands are in use. Third, the rate and extent of an ascent are limited to the capabilities of the user. Fourth, the diamond grit used to grip the rope is often too abrasive, destroying climbing ropes for future use. Fifth, the type of rope to be used is limited by what the ascenders' one-way locks can interact properly with.

[0006] Raising heavy loads upward via cable is accomplished by winches pulling from above the load, or by a device such as a hydraulic lift that pushes from below. Passive rope ascenders are useless for moving a dead weight load upward along a rope. U.S. Patent No. 6,488,267 to Goldberg et al., entitled "Apparatus for Lifting or Pulling a Load" is an apparatus

which uses two passive ascenders along a rope with a pneumatic piston replacing the power a human would normally provide. Thus, this powered device is limited in its usefulness by the same factors mentioned above. In addition, the lifting capacity and rate of ascent are limited by the power source that fuels the pneumatic piston.

[0007] A further drawback of this design is that at any reasonable rate the load will experience a significant jerking motion in the upward direction during an ascent. Therefore, fragile loads will be at risk if this device is used.

[0008] US 5 402 985 discloses a device according to the preamble of claim 1 and relates to a single sheave rope winch particularly suitable for use with an anchor warp. The sheave is fixed on a shaft rotatably mounted in a base adapted for mounting on a deck of a vessel. An electric motor operates through a gear-drive to rotate the sheave about a vertical axis. Warp feed-in and feed-out means direct a warp to and from the sheave. Warp guide means control a warp during its tracking about with or through the sheave, the guide means including a fixed and shorter section and a longer articulated arm section. The arm is arcuately shaped to extend about a sector of the sheave and is biased by spring radially inward such that an inner face thereof impinges onto a warp tracking in that sector of the sheave. In a preferred embodiment the inner impinging face of the arm incorporates a compound curvature, the radius of curvature increasing toward a free end of the arm.

[0009] It is therefore an object of the present invention to provide an apparatus for lifting or pulling heavy loads which solves one or more of the problems associated with the conventional methods and techniques described above.

[0010] It is another object of the present invention to provide an apparatus for lifting or pulling heavy loads which can be manufactured at reasonable costs.

[0011] It would also be desirable as well to be able to attach any such rope pulling device to a rope at any point along that rope without having to thread an end of the rope or cable through the device. This would increase the usability of such a device considerably over other rope pulling and climbing devices, allowing for instance a user to attach himself for ascent at a second story window past which a rope hangs.

[0012] Other objects and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to one of ordinary skill in the art in light of the ensuing description of the present invention. One or more of these objectives may include:

1. (a) to provide a line pulling device that can handle a range of rope types, cables, and diameters;
2. (b) to provide a device which can grip any such range of ropes with equal efficacy irrespective of load;
3. (c) to provide a device which does not require an end of the rope or cable to be fixed to the device;

4. (d) to provide a device which provides a smooth, controlled, continuous pull;
5. (e) to provide a device which itself is capable of traveling upward along a rope or cable smoothly and continuously to raise a load or a person;
6. (f) to provide a device which is easy and intuitive to use by minimally trained or untrained personnel;
7. (g) to provide a device which can let out or descend a taut rope or cable at a controlled rate with a range of loads;
8. (h) to provide a device which can apply its pulling force both at high force levels, for portable winching applications, and at fast rates, for rapid vertical ascents;
9. (i) to provide a device with a safety lock mechanism that prevents unwanted reverse motion of the rope or cable;
10. (j) to provide a device that can attach to a rope or cable at any point without having to thread an end of the rope or cable through the device;
11. (k) to provide a device that prevents the rope from becoming disengaged while the rope is under load;
12. (l) to provide a device that is not limited in its source of power to any particular type of rotational motor; and
13. (m) to provide a device that is usable in and useful for recreation, industry, emergency, rescue, manufacturing, military, and any other application relating to or utilizing rope, cable, string, or fiber tension.

[0013] Still further objects and advantages are to provide a rope or cable pulling device that is as easy to use as a cordless power drill, that can be used in any orientation, that can be easily clipped to either a climbing harness or Swiss seat, that can be just as easily attached to a grounded object to act as a winch, that is powered by a portable rotational motor, and that is lightweight easy to manufacture.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0014] The invention provides a device according to the features of independent claim 1.

[0015] A device of the invention can conveniently be configured as a portable hand-held device, and in particular, can be configured as a portable rope ascender. Further aspects of the invention will become clear from the detailed description below, and in particular, from the attached claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0016]

Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic view of a device not forming part of the invention;

Figure 2 shows an isometric view of an embodiment not forming part of the invention, showing a motor, batteries, handle, rotating drum, guiding rollers, safety clamp, tensioning roller and clip-in attachment point;

Figure 3 shows a front view of the device of Figure 2;

Figure 4 shows a side view of the device of Figure 2;

Figure 5 shows a close-up profile and isometric view of the rotating drum of the device of Figure 2;

Figure 6 shows an isometric view of an alternative embodiment not forming part of the invention;

Figure 7 shows a front view of the embodiment of Figure 6;

Figure 8 shows a side view of the embodiment of Figure 6;

Figure 9 illustrates a further embodiment not forming part of the invention;

Figure 10 shows isometric view of the embodiment of Figure 9;

Figure 11 shows a side view of the embodiment of Figure 9;

Figure 12 illustrates a further embodiment not forming part of the invention;

Figure 13 shows two isometric views of the embodiment of Figure 12;

Figure 14 shows a side view of the embodiment of Figure 12;

Figure 15 shows three views of rotating jaws used in the embodiment of Figure 12;

Figure 16 illustrates the device of Figure 12 configured for use as a powered rope ascender;

Figure 17 illustrates an embodiment according to the invention; and

Figure 18 illustrates the use of the embodiment of Figure 17 configured as a powered rope ascender.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0017] Referring now to Figure 1, a device 100 not forming part of the invention for pulling a resilient elongate element such as a cable or a rope 114 is illustrated diagrammatically. The device includes a rotational motor 102 from which the pulling motion of the device is derived. A number of different types of motors, such as two or four stroke internal combustion engines, or

ac or dc powered electric motors, could be employed to provide the rotational motion desired for pulling the rope or cable. A motor power source 104 can also be included that is appropriate to the rotational motor used, such as gasoline or other petroleum products, a fuel cell, or electrical energy supplied in ac (such as from a power outlet in a typical building) or dc (such as from a battery) form. In one preferred embodiment, the rotational motor is a dc electric motor and the motor power source is one or more rechargeable lithium ion batteries.

[0018] The rotational motor can also have speed control 106 and/or a gearbox 108 associated with it to control the speed and torque applied by the rotational motor to the task of pulling a rope. These elements can be integrated into a single, controllable, motor module, be provided as separate modules, or be provided in some combination thereof. In one embodiment, speed control elements can be provided integrally with a dc rotational motor, while a separate, modular gearbox is provided so that the gearing, and thus the speed and torque characteristics of the rope pulling device, can be altered as desired by swapping the gears.

[0019] A rotating drum 110 is connected to the rotational motor, either directly or through a gearbox (if one is present). It is the rotating drum, generally in the manner of a capstan, that applies the pulling force to the rope that is pulled through the device 116. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the rotating drum provides anisotropic friction gripping 112 of the rope. In particular, in a preferred embodiment, the surface of the rotating drum has been treated so that large friction forces are created in the general direction of the pulling of the rope (substantially around the circumference of the drum), and smaller friction forces are created longitudinally along the drum so that the rope can slide along the length of the drum with relative ease.

[0020] In the alternative embodiment of the rope interaction assembly depicted in figures 9, 10 and 11, the rotating drum is split into sections. These sections rotate between stationary sections which contain guide rollers that move the rope from one wrap to the next. This embodiment also makes use of the splined drum to exploit the anisotropic friction when advancing the rope from each wrap to the next.

[0021] A rope or cable is also referenced in Figure 1. The device is intended to be able to be able to pull any elongate resilient element that can withstand a tension. Cables and ropes are the most common of these, but the invention is not meant to be limited by the reference to ropes or cables.

[0022] A preferred embodiment of a rope pulling device 100 not forming part of the invention is shown in Figs. 2 (Isometric view), 3 (front view) and 4 (side view). In this embodiment, rotational motor 4 applies rotational power to rotating drum 8 via gearbox 6. Batteries 3 apply necessary power to motor 4. A rope handling mechanism guides a rope to and from the rotating drum. In particular, rope 21 enters through rope guide 1 and continues through safety clamp 2. The rope is further guided tangentially onto the rotating drum 8 by a pulley 7 and rotating guide 15. Once the rope is on the drum 8 it is guided around the drum 8 by the rollers 9 (and non-labeled adjacent rollers). On the last turn, the rope passes between the tensioning

roller 10 and the drum 8. A user attaches to the device, such as by a tether, at attachment point 11.

[0023] As noted above, the operation of a rope pulling device can be aided by designing the surface of the rotating drum 8 to have anisotropic friction properties. In particular, the drum can be designed to have a high friction coefficient in a direction substantially about its circumference and a lower friction coefficient in a substantially longitudinal direction. In the embodiment illustrated in Figs. 2 through 4, the surface of the drum is provided with longitudinal splines to create this anisotropic friction effect. A preferred embodiment of such a splined drum is shown in figure 5. In this embodiment, a cylinder, preferably constructed of aluminum or another lightweight metal or material, is extruded to include the illustrated longitudinal splines. More specifically, the rotating drum 8 embodiment of Figure 5 can include longitudinal shaped-splines 12 and a hole for a shaft with a keyway cutout 14. Forming the longitudinal splines as shaped features angled into the direction of motion of the rotating drum 8 further enhances the friction between the rope and the drum. A person skilled in the art will recognize that the drum of Figure 5 is one preferred embodiment and that other features or methods of manufacture can be used to create the desired anisotropic friction effect.

[0024] Weight-reducing holes 13 can also be utilized to minimize weight of the entire device.

[0025] Returning now to Figures 2-4 to further describe the features and operation of this embodiment of a rope pulling device not forming part of the invention, rope 21 enters the device through the clip-in rope guide 1. As illustrated, a solid loop is provided, however, the rope guide 1 is preferably a carabiner-type clip into which the rope is pushed, rather than having to thread the rope through by its end. The rope then passes through the safety clamp 2, which allows rope to only move through the device in the tensioning direction.

[0026] In the case that rope is pulled backward through the device by any means, the safety clamp 2 grips the rope and pinches it against the adjacent surface. The handle on the safety clamp 2 allows a user to manually override that safety mechanism, by releasing the self-help imposed clamping force which the clamp applies to the rope against the body of the device. The safety clamp 2 is simply one as used in sailing and rock climbing, and uses directionally gripping surfaces along a continuously increasing radius to apply a stop-clamping force proportional to the rope tension which squeezes the rope against its guide.

[0027] After passing through the safety clamp, the rope is wrapped past the pulley 7 which guides the rope tangentially to the drum. The set of rollers 9 folds away from the drum, allowing the user to wrap the rope the designated number of times around the drum (in this case 5). After having wrapped the rope to the specified spacing, the rollers 9 fold back against the drum and are locked in place. The tensioning roller 15 squeezes the last turn of the rope against the splines in order to apply tension to the free end of the rope. Since the capstan effect occurs as:

$$T_1 = T_2 e^{(\mu\theta)} \quad [1]$$

Where T_2 is the tension off the free end (exiting tensioning roller 15), T_1 is the tension in the

rope as it enters through the rope guide 1, μ is the frictional coefficient between the rope and the rotating drum 8, and θ is the amount the rope is wrapped around the rotating drum 8 in radians. An initial tension in the free end exiting roller 10 is necessary to achieve any kind of circumferential gripping of the rope around the capstan, i.e. T_2 cannot be 0. By squeezing the rope against the capstan splines 1 with the tensioning roller 10, T_2 tension is created by the last turn as it makes a no-slip condition which is reflected back through each turn to achieve a large tension at the first turn, T_1 .

[0028] Since the rope guide 1 has a clip-in and the rollers 9 and tensioner 10 attached to roller support 18 fold away from the drum via pivot 17 (a person of skill in the art will note that the roller support is not limited to pivotal movement-any sliding motion, rotation, or combination thereof can suffice to move roller support 18 away), loading the rope into the device does not require stringing a free end through the device. The device can thus accommodate any length of rope and can join or detach from the rope at any point. This is a significant advantage over standard winch systems which must only use the length of rope or cable that is already attached, and which must be confined to one particular position and orientation for operation.

[0029] A person skilled in the art will also note that the rollers 9 can be held from within the rotating drum 8, positioned and held by stationary cylindrical segments fixtured to the gearbox 6 from solid supports located within rotating drum 8. Rotating drum 8 could thus be segmented with rollers 9 positioned in between segments of drum 8 at the same interval as in Figs. 2-4. This circumvents the need for an external roller support 18, allowing for a elongate tensioning member to be wrapped around drum 8 and guided by rollers 9 roller support 18 in the way. An embodiment that utilizes this configuration is depicted in Figs. 10 (isometric view), 11 (side view), and 12 (side view including rope illustration).

[0030] Longitudinal splines 12 on drum 8 improve the operation of the illustrated embodiment. These features create and use the anisotropic friction behavior along the drum which allows a wrap of a rope or cable to grip the drum circumferentially while moving readily along that drum axially. Exemplary splines 12 are jagged in the forward rotational direction in Figure 5 where the illustrated drum is intended to apply force in a counterclockwise direction. The additional grip provided by the exemplary drum 8 maximizes the capstan effect in equation [1] created by a tensioned cable wrapped around a drum, significantly increasing the circumferential gripping, while still allowing axial motion of the wrap along the drum. This, combined with the axial force applied by rollers 9, overcomes a significant problem faced by others attempting to use a turning capstan (cylindrical drum) to advance a rope while maintaining a free end.

[0031] In a standard winch, rope is progressively built up on the rotating drum. If one were to attempt to maintain a free end of the rope and have the rope travel through the winch and exit continuously, a problem would arise. First, as shown by equation [1], without tension T_2 on the free end, no pulling force can be applied to the rope. Additionally, since the rope grips around the drum circumferentially while under tension, even if T_2 is artificially created, the rope will wrap back on itself because of spiraling of the wraps. Due to the uneven tension and uneven

placement of that tension along the drum, an axial restoring force appears which pulls the taut first wrap (T_1) toward the loose wrap at tensioner 10. When the rope wraps back on itself, it binds, preventing any further pulling.

[0032] In the illustrated device, the rollers 9 positioned along the capstan provide a restoring force in the axial direction to keep the wraps from backing up and binding. The rotating guide 15 applies back-force to the first (and tightest) wrap where tension is T_1 (and therefore the most force is necessary to move that wrap down the drum). The splines 12 facilitate the use of the rollers 9 and rotational guide 15 by allowing circumferential gripping and torque application in the correct rotational direction, while allowing the tensioned wraps to be moved axially along the drum as they enter and exit the device. While this particular embodiment works well as illustrated, any sort of material or feature (such as other edge profiles, re-cycling sliders, pivots, and rollers) providing similar anisotropic friction conditions could be used as effectively.

[0033] An additional embodiment of the splined drum is one that changes diameter along its longitudinal axis in order to aid axial movement of wraps along its body. This could aid in the movement of the high-tension wraps as pushed by the rollers 9.

[0034] This illustrated embodiment of the rope pulling device enables new capabilities in pulling ropes and cables at high forces and speeds. The embodiment described utilizes a high-power DC electric motor 4, as built by Magmotor Corporation of Worcester, MA (part number S28-BP400X) which possesses an extremely high power-to weight ratio (over 8.6HP developed in a motor weighing 7 lbs). The batteries 3 utilized are 24V, 3AH Panasonic EY9210 B Ni-MH rechargeable batteries. The device incorporates a pulse-width modulating speed control, adjusted by squeezing the trigger 16, that proportionally changes the speed of the motor. This embodiment is designed to lift loads up to 250lbs up a rope at a rate of 7 ft/sec. Simple reconfigurations of the applied voltage and gear ratio can customize the performance to lift at either higher rates and lower loads, or vice-versa.

[0035] Any embodiment of the design as described above can be used to apply continuous pulling force to flexible tensioning members (strings, ropes, cables, threads, fibers, filaments, etc.) of unlimited length. Also since the design allows for attachment to such a flexible tensioning member without the need of a free end, significant versatility is added. The design allows for a full range of flexible tensioning members to be utilized for a given rotating drum 8 diameter, further enhancing the usability of such a pulling device.

[0036] A further embodiment not forming part of the invention is illustrated in Figures 6, 7 and 8. This embodiment operates on a number of the same simple principles as the embodiment of Figures 2 through 4, but relies on slightly different implementations of those principles. Rope enters the device by wrapping around the safety cam 2. This cam is a modified version of a Petzl Grigri rope belayer/descender, and uses a self-help pinching mechanism to prevent unwanted backward motion of a rope or cable. The handle allows the user to manually override that safety clamp in order to control a descent or back-driving of the rope through the device.

[0037] After the safety cam 2, the rope is wrapped around the pulleys 7 to be guided tangentially onto the rotating drum 8 within the spiral of the helix guide 19. The rope is wrapped through the turns of the helix guide 19, and the tensioning roller housing 20 is opened away from drum 8 to accept the rope as it goes through. Then the tensioning roller housing 20 is closed and clamped tight to the base of the helix guide S, which applies pressure from the tensioning roller 10 to the rope, clamping the rope against the tensioning drum 22.

[0038] Operation of this embodiment by a user is identical to that of the embodiment described above; the trigger 16 is squeezed, controlling the speed of the motor 4, which applies torque to the rotating drum 8 through the gearbox 6. The rope is gripped around the rotating drum 8 by the tension T_1 on the rope entering the device, as guided by the safety cam 2 and pulleys 7, and according to equation [1]. The tension T_2 which is necessary to make the device work is applied via the tensioning roller 10, as it is clamped by the tensioning roller housing 20. However, unlike the previous embodiments, instead of creating a no-slip condition to achieve T_2 , a dynamic friction is utilized to tug on the rope, creating the needed tension in the free end.

[0039] This is accomplished by the tensioning drum 22 having a larger diameter than the rotating drum 8. Since both are attached to the same drive shaft out of the gearbox 6, they have the same rotational velocity. But because of the bigger diameter on the tensioning part of the drum 22, the surface velocity is greater. Because more turns (and the higher tension turns) in the rope are along the original diameter on the drum 8, rope is fed at the rotational velocity times the diameter of drum 8. Since the tensioning drum 22 has a greater diameter, it constantly slips against the surface of the rope. The normal force of the rope against drum 22 is increased by the tensioning roller, allowing for a greater pulling force to be created by drum 22. Thus, the dynamic friction against the last turn of the rope creates a constant T_2 which is the basis for the operation of the device, as per equation [1].

[0040] The problem of the rope wrapping back on itself is solved with the helix guide 19, which guides the rope onto and off of the rotating drum 8. Splines may not be used in this version, since it is more useful for smaller loads and the anisotropic friction is not a required feature. The helix guide 19 continually pushes the wraps axially down the function as the rollers 9 in the preferred embodiment, however with more friction. The helix 19 also still accommodates utilization of the rope or cable at any point, and the design for this embodiment does not require a free end of the rope to be strung through.

[0041] A user attaches to the device (or attaches an object to the device, or the device to ground) via the attachment point 11 as in the previous embodiment. The ergonomic handle 5 with speed-controlling trigger 16 provide easy use similar to that of a cordless drill. The batteries and motor can be the same as in the previous embodiment. This embodiment of the design, however, may be less expensive to manufacture and more useful in applications where continuous pulling of a flexible tensioning member is necessary under lower loads (e.g., less than 250 lbs).

[0042] An alternative embodiment not forming part of the invention depicted in Figs. 9 (isometric view), 10 (side view) and 11 (side view including rope illustration). As previously noted with respect to Figs. 2 through 4, the guide rollers 9 are mounted to a non-rotating section of the device in order to guide the wraps of the rope down the rotating drum 8. In that embodiment, the rollers 9 are mounted to the roller support 18. However, this embodiment requires the support 18 to be moved away from the rotating drum 8 in order to wrap the rope onto the capstan.

[0043] An alternative is to mount the guide rollers 9 to stationary mounts 25 placed between rotating drum sections 8 as depicted in Figures 10, 11 and 12. These stationary mounts are held stiff with respect to the device via the rotational constraints 24. The contour of the rotational constraints 24 allows for the rope to be wrapped around the capstan in a spiral fashion, with the wraps guided from one to the next by the guide rollers 9. The rollers 9 in this embodiment are held in place by the guide roller bolts 27. The axis of the bolts is oriented radially inward to the rotational axis of the rotating drum 8. A person skilled in the art will note that the orientation of the guide rollers 9 with respect to the circumference and rotational axis of the rotating drum sections 8 is not limited to that of this particular example-other roller orientations will still accomplish the task of moving the rope through each wrap.

[0044] The mounting of the entire capstan assembly embodiment is such that it replaces everything below the gearbox 6 in either of the two aforementioned embodiments. The capstan assembly base 23 mounts to the gearbox 6, with a drive shaft extending through both, all the way to the capstan end plate 28. The rotating drum sections 8 are locked to the drive shaft, and radial bearings are inside each stationary section 25, the capstan assembly base 23, and the capstan end plate 28.

[0045] The rope is guided onto the first rotating section 8 by the same guide pulley 7, and is then wrapped in a helical fashion around the assembly, going through each gap between the guide rollers 9. Finally, it is slipped between the tensioning roller 10 and the final stationary section 25, and the tensioner lever 26 is closed. The tensioning roller 10 is pressed against the rope, and is held in place by a latch that keeps the tensioner lever 26 tight against the capstan end plate 28.

[0046] After the tensioning roller 10 is closed and force is thus applied to the last wrap of the rope on the capstan, the device is ready to be used. Using this embodiment, the rope can be fully engaged and disengaged from the device without threading an end through the mechanism.

[0047] A smaller version of this device could use the same sort of helical guide 19 and dynamic friction tensioner 10 to advance unlimited lengths of any sort of tensioning material, and could be particularly useful in the manufacture of cord materials such as steel cable, rope, thread, yarn, dental floss, and electrical conductors.

[0048] A further embodiment not forming part of the invention is illustrated in Figures 12

through 16. In this embodiment, a modified self-tailing mechanism is used as the drum of the rope pulling device. Self-tailing mechanisms can be found on capstan winches installed on sailboats. A normal capstan winch requires the operator to provide a base tension on the free end of the rope, after having wrapped it a number of times around the capstan. This tension is magnified via the capstan effect such that when the capstan rotates, either under human or mechanical power, the taut end of the rope is fed continuously through the capstan winch.

[0049] Self-tailing mechanisms are placed onto the ends of capstan winches to negate a sailor's manual operation of the winch. A self-tailing mechanism will act as the last wrap around a capstan winch, and will provide the initial tension on the free end of the rope that is necessary for the capstan winch to operate. The mechanism consists of two beveled discs forming "jaws," with radial splines. When spring-loaded together along their rotational axis, the jaws form a toothed V into which the rope is squeezed. The spring-loaded force squeezes the toothed jaws against the rope such that when the jaws are rotated along with the capstan winch, a tensile force is imparted on the rope continuously, and the winch operates.

[0050] In the present embodiment not forming part of the invention, a self tailing mechanism can be modified so that it becomes the drum itself and pulls on the rope or other elongate element. That is, by modifying the design of a conventional self tailing mechanism, the use of the capstan winch itself can be negated, and significant loads can be efficiently pulled with reduced complexity and increased performance. The design for this modified self-tailing mechanism benefits primarily from self-help principles: with either increased load on the rope, or increased torque on the jaws, the engagement of the jaws to the rope improves. Thus, the mechanism can pull ropes continuously, irrespective of load.

[0051] This simplified rope pulling mechanism has significant applications. It can altogether replace normal capstan winches, in use on and outside of sailboats. Any means of powered rotation to the jaws will enable rope winching, be it from an electric, pneumatic, hydraulic or internal combustion motor, manual cranking from an operator, or other continuous torque applicator. Additionally, it can handle a wide range of ropes, further enhancing its advantages as a replacement for traditional rope winching mechanisms. This rope pulling mechanism is also particularly well suited for the powered ascent of ropes as discussed above.

[0052] Figure 12 illustrates an exemplary rope pulling device 200 according to this embodiment not forming part of the invention. The device 200 includes a rotational motor 201 from which the pulling motion of the device is derived. A number of different types of motors, such as those discussed above and including two or four stroke internal combustion engines, or ac or dc powered electric motors, could be employed to provide the rotational motion desired for pulling the rope or cable. A motor power source, such as those described above, can also be included that is appropriate to the rotational motor used. These power sources can include gasoline or other petroleum products, a fuel cell, or electrical energy supplied in ac (such as from a power outlet in a typical building) or dc (such as from a battery) form. In the shown preferred embodiment, the rotational motor is a dc electric motor and the motor power source is one or more rechargeable lithium ion batteries.

[0053] The rotational motor 201 can also have speed control and/or a gearbox 202 associated with it to control the speed and torque applied by the rotational motor to the task of pulling a rope. These elements can be integrated into a single, controllable, motor module, be provided as separate modules, or be provided in some combination thereof. Speed control elements can be provided integrally with a dc rotational motor, while a separate, modular gearbox is provided so that the gearing, and thus the speed and torque characteristics of the rope pulling device, can be altered as desired by swapping the gears. A modified self-tailing mechanism 207 is connected to the rotational motor 201, through the gearbox 202. In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the self tailing mechanism 207 includes a pair of rotating self-tailer jaws, and the surface of the rotating self-tailer jaws includes ridges oriented in a forward-spiraling fashion so as to engage the rope with increased force and improved efficacy as either the motor torque is increased, or the load on the rope increases. The jaws may form a barrel having a surface characterized by an anisotropic friction.

[0054] A rope or cable 208 is also referenced in Figure 12. The presently disclosed device is intended to be able to pull any elongate resilient element that can withstand a tension. Cables and ropes are the most common of these.

[0055] The rope pulling device 200 of Figure 12 is further shown two oblique views provided in Fig. 13 and in the side view of Fig. 14. In these figures, rotational motor 201 applies rotational power to the rotating jaws of the self tailing mechanism 207 via gearbox 202. Batteries can be used to apply necessary power to motor 201. A pivoting bar 205, rotating at pivot point 206, with pulleys 203 guides the rope into the jaws, and a guide tooth 204 scoops the rope out of the jaws 207. In particular, rope 208 enters the jaws 207 after circling the end pulley 203. Tension is applied to the rope 208 by the jaws 207 as they rotate. The tension from the jaws 207 and the load on the rope 208 form a second-class lever which pulls the pulley 203 on the rotating bar 205 toward the jaws. Thus, under load, the pivot bar 205 will be held in the closed position as illustrated in the left figure of Figure 13 (the right figure shows the open position). Figure 13 includes a cover at the exit point tooth 204 which, when closed, prevents the rope from being disengaged from the mechanism.

[0056] As indicated by dashed lines in Figs. 13 and 14, a rope 208 can be wrapped around a tensioner pulley 203 before being guided into the rotating jaws 207. The rope continues around the jaws 207 (counter-clockwise as shown in Figure 1), until it exits through the exit guide 212. The exit guide 212 is comprised of a protruded segment 210 on the pivot bar 205 that closes with a stationary portion 209, as shown in FIG. 14, (which doubles as the exit point tooth 204 in this embodiment) and top cover 211. When a load is applied to the rope 208, pulling the pulley 203 and thereby rotating the pivot bar 205 into the closed position, a closed loop is formed around the rope 208, preventing its disengagement from the pulling mechanism while under load. Figure 13 (right side) also includes a view of the mechanism with the pivot bar 205 in the open position, allowing the rope 208 to be engaged by wrapping around the pulley 203, then around the jaws 207, and lastly through the rope exit 212. The pivot bar 205 is closed by applying tension to the rope 208. As will be apparent to one skilled in the art, the

presently disclosed rope pulling mechanism can accommodate ropes of varying diameter and/or length, and can engage all such ropes without the need to thread a free end through the mechanism. Once activated, the rope pulling mechanism can pull the rope 208 through the device in the direction indicated by the solid arrows in Figs. 13 and 14.

[0057] Figure 15 further illustrates an exemplary embodiment not forming part of the invention of the splined discs that comprise the jaws 207. The jaws include ridges 213 that are oriented forward toward the direction of rotation, such that increased back-force on the rope 208 (increased load) or increased torque on the jaws 207 pulls the rope 208 deeper into the V-groove formed by each set of ridges, and thereby the grip force on the rope is increased. In such an embodiment, the jaws 207 and/or ridges 213 can be configured so as to form a barrel having a surface characterized by anisotropic friction, the benefits of which are discussed above.

[0058] The number and configuration of ridges can be modified according to any desired use or function of the device. The embodiment shown includes 12 ridges 213, which provide ample force for the continuous feeding of ropes with up to and beyond about 600 pounds-force of tension. Varying the number of ridges 213 will vary the depth of engagement for a given load. Under some circumstances more ridges 213 may be desired to spread the grip force more evenly around the rope, thereby potentially decreasing deep abrasion to the rope, or alternatively fewer ridges 213 may be employed to achieve even further improved depth of engagement. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that a jaw 207 having any number of ridges 13 is within the spirit and scope of the present invention.

[0059] Figure 16 illustrates an exemplary embodiment not forming part of the invention of the modified self-tailing mechanism described above being configured as a powered rope ascender with the modified self-tailing mechanism being utilized as the rope pulling mechanism. In this embodiment, the motor 201 can supply power to the jaws 207 through the gearbox 202. A clip-in point 214 enables a user to clip the device to a rappelling harness with a standard carabiner or other means. Batteries 215 power the electric motor. A rope input guide 216 guides the rope onto the first pulley 203 for entry. Various other elements can be included in this rope pulling mechanism and/or rope ascender. For example, various components described in other embodiments above can be combined with the presently illustrated embodiment.

[0060] Any embodiment of the design as described above can be used to apply continuous pulling force to flexible tensioning members (strings, ropes, cables, threads, fibers, filaments, etc.) of unlimited length. Also since the design allows for attachment to such a flexible tensioning member without the need of a free end, significant versatility is added. Finally, the design allows for a full range of flexible tensioning members to be utilized for a given rotating jaw 207 diameter, further enhancing the usability of such a pulling device.

[0061] An embodiment forming part of the invention is illustrated by reference to Figures 17 and 18. This embodiment shares a number of features with the previously described

embodiment, and thus shares a number of reference numbers with the previous embodiment when referring to similar elements.

[0062] Figure 17 illustrates an additional embodiment of the modified self-tailing mechanism described above configured for use in a powered ascent device. This configuration can have a simpler construction requiring fewer moving parts. This configuration also provides a specially designed exit point tooth 204 and exit scoop 302. The shape of these components in the configuration shown in Figs. 17 and 18 can provide superior performance of the mechanism when pulling or ascending ropes under load.

[0063] In Figure 17, the rope 208 enters the jaws 207 tangent to their inner diameter, as guided by the guide wall 301 and entry tooth 300. As the jaws rotate forward, in this case clockwise, the forward-swept ridges 213 engage the rope 208 at the entry tooth 300. As the jaws 207 rotate, the rope 208 is pulled along until it is disengaged from the V-grooves by the exit tooth 204 followed by the exit scoop 302, and ultimately exits the mechanism via the rounded exit guide 212. Only the lower half of the jaws 207 is shown in Figure 17 to better illustrate the path of the rope 208 as it enters and exits the jaws 207.

[0064] The geometry of the rope pulling mechanism and its interaction with the rope 208 has a critical impact on pulling efficiency, rope wear, and robustness of the mechanism's engagement on the rope in varied conditions. In this embodiment, the system is designed to achieve exceptionally high clamping force on the rope 208 in its engagement into the jaws 207 to avoid slippage under high loads.

[0065] As discussed previously, the depth of engagement of the rope in the V-grooves is dictated by the forward torque of the jaws 207 or the backward pull of the load on the rope, as well as the number of ridges, their profile geometry, and their degree of bevel. In this embodiment, all parameters have been adjusted to create an extremely secure grip on the rope during operation. Thus, it is critical to engage and more importantly to disengage the rope from the jaws with minimal damage, since under the high pinch force exerted by the jaws 207, the rope can be susceptible to very high shear forces during disengagement.

[0066] To guide the rope into the jaws, it can be seen in Figure 17 that the guide wall 301 and entry tooth 300 are aligned tangentially to the inner diameter 303 of the jaws 207. Thus, when the rope feeds into the mechanism, the ridges 213, also tangent to the inner diameter of the jaws 207, engage the rope at a right angle and then sweep forward, engaging the rope more deeply as the jaws 207 rotate. The orthogonal engagement is optimal to start, since the depth of engagement in the jaws' V-grooves is partly dependent on the rope's resistance to compression. When a V-groove is pressed orthogonally onto the rope, the rope is in its weakest orientation to resist, and the depth of engagement is deepest for a given load or torque. As the jaws rotate, the angle of engagement of the V-groove on the rope 208 transitions from orthogonal to axial. When pinched tightly enough in the V-groove, the rope cannot slip, and thus the rotation of the jaws pulls the rope and the load.

[0067] Because the rope 208 is engaged with high force in the V-grooves of the jaws 207, significant force is required to disengage the rope. The force to disengage the rope is provided by the exit tooth 204, which in this embodiment has been carefully shaped and aligned tangentially to the inner diameter of the jaws 207. A helpful feature of the rope's efficient disengagement under load is that the exit tooth 204 is shaped in an arc tangent to the inner diameter of the jaws 303 such that the tooth 204 disengages the rope first from the deepest point in the V-grooves where the clamping forces are highest. As the jaws 207 continue to rotate, the exit tooth widens and curves outward toward where force on the sheath is minimal for the last stage of disengagement. Finally the sweep of the exit scoop 302 follows the arc of the exit tooth 204, and the rope 208 continues peeling out of the jaws 207. At the last point where the rope 208 is still engaged in the V-groove, the groove engagement on the rope has rotated fully forward, and the jaws 207 are applying only forward-pulling force axially down the rope.

[0068] Figure 18 shows a preferred embodiment of the mechanism forming part of the invention with a top cover plate 304, pulley 203, and rope guide 216 installed. The rope 208 enters the rope guide 216, which is configured such that the rope can be engaged in the mechanism at any point along the rope's length. After passing around the guide pulley 203, the rope 208 is guided into the jaws 207, which rotate continuously to feed rope through the system. The rope exits through the exit point 212. Because the rope's engagement depth in the jaws 207 is partially dependent on the load on the rope 208, under no-load conditions if the jaws 207 rotate, occasionally a 'bubble' may form in the rope and move forward until the rope disengages from the jaws. Thus in a preferred embodiment, a housing cover 305 serves as shroud to constrain the rope 208 such that bubbles cannot form when the mechanism is operated with the rope unloaded. The cover 305 also serves as a safety shield that prevents foreign objects from being pulled through the mechanism.

[0069] A person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that the embodiments described in figures 17 and 18 above are not the only configurations that can employ the principles of the invention. The system and method described above, utilizing circumferential gripping of a rotating drum while pulling with a free end of a tensioning member can be practically employed in other configurations. While certain features and aspects of the illustrated embodiments provide significant advantages in achieving one or more of the objects of the invention and/or solving one or more of the problems noted in conventional devices, any configuration or placement of various components, for example, motor, battery, gearbox, and rotating drum/guide assembly with relation to one another could be deployed by a person of ordinary skill within the scope of the invention.

[0070] The presently disclosed embodiments of a modified self-tailing mechanism, can solve many problems associated with using current lifting and pulling technology, including but not limited to: accommodating multiple types and diameters of flexible tensioning members, being able to attach to the flexible tensioning member without threading a free end through the device, providing a smooth continuous pull, providing a device which itself can travel up or along a rope, to provide a mechanism to grip and pull a rope effectively irrespective of load, to

provide a device which can let out or descend a taut flexible tensioning member at a controlled rate with a range of loads, and to provide a device and method that is usable in and useful for recreation, industry, emergency, rescue, manufacturing, military, and other applications.

[0071] A person skilled in the art will appreciate further features and advantages of the invention based on the above-described embodiments. For example, specific features from any of the embodiments described above as well as those known in the art can be incorporated into the presently disclosed embodiments in a variety of combinations and subcombinations. Accordingly, the presently disclosed embodiments are not to be limited by what has been particularly shown and described.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

Cited references

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Patent documents cited in the description

- [US6488267B](#) **[0006]**
- [US5402985A](#) **[0008]**

P a t e n t k r a v

1. Indretning (200) til trækning i et elastisk aflangt element (208), omfattende:
en omdrejningsmotor (201) med en udgang;

5 en drejetromle (207), som er forbundet med udgangen af omdrejningsmotoren, hvor drejetromlen har to kontaktflader til det aflange element, hvilke kontaktflader er anbragt i form af et V, hvor hver af de to kontaktflader til det aflange element omfatter en flerhed af radiale kiler og er udformet til at udsætte det elastiske aflange element for en spænding, hvor, når omdrejningsmotoren dre-

10 jer drejetromlen, drejetromlen derved kontinuerligt trækker i det elastiske aflange element gennem indretningen;

en føringsmekanisme, som fører det elastiske aflange element op på, rundt om mindst et afsnit af omkredsen, og væk fra drejetromlen, hvor føringsmekanismen omfatter en indgangstand (300), som fører det elastiske aflange element op på tromlen i en retning, som er i det væsentlige tangent til en indre diameter (303) af tromlen, og føringsmekanismen endvidere omfatter en ud-

15 gangstand (204), der fører det elastiske aflange element væk fra tromlen i en retning, som er i det væsentlige tangent til en indre diameter af tromlen,

kendetegnet ved, at udgangstanden leder det elastiske aflange element til en udgangsøseskovl (302), der hvælver sig til en ønsket udgangsbane for det elastiske aflange element.

20

2. Indretning ifølge krav 1, hvor den mindst ene kontaktflade til det aflange element af drejetromlen er **kendetegnet ved** anisotropisk friktion.

25

3. Indretning ifølge krav 1, hvor de radiale kiler er anbragt i en spiralformet fremadretning, således at forøget belastning på det elastiske aflange element resulterer i et forøget indgreb mellem tromlen og det elastiske aflange element.

4. Indretning ifølge krav 3, hvor de radiale kiler tilvejebringer en anisotropisk friktionsvirkning på den mindst ene kontaktflade til det aflange element.

30

- 5.** Indretning ifølge krav 1, hvor den mindst ene af kontaktfladerne til det aflange element omfatter en flerhed af kiler, der er spiralformet i fremadretningen.
- 5 **6.** Indretning ifølge krav 5, hvor begge kontaktflader til det aflange element omfatter en flerhed af kiler, der er spiralformet i fremadretningen.
- 10 **7.** Indretning ifølge krav 6, hvor kontaktfladerne til det aflange element og de radiale kiler er anbragt således, at en forøget belastning på det elastiske aflange element resulterer i et forøget indgreb mellem tromlen og det elastiske aflange element.
- 15 **8.** Indretning ifølge krav 5, hvor indgangstanden er udformet således, at et elastisk aflangt element, der føres op på tromlen ved hjælp af tanden, vil gå i indgreb med mindst en kile, mens kilen er i det væsentlige ortogonal til det elastiske aflange element.
- 20 **9.** Indretning ifølge krav 1, hvor føringsmekanismen endvidere omfatter en husafdækning, som i det væsentlige begrænser positionen af det elastiske aflange element fra en indgang til føringsmekanismen til en udgang fra føringsmekanismen.

DRAWINGS

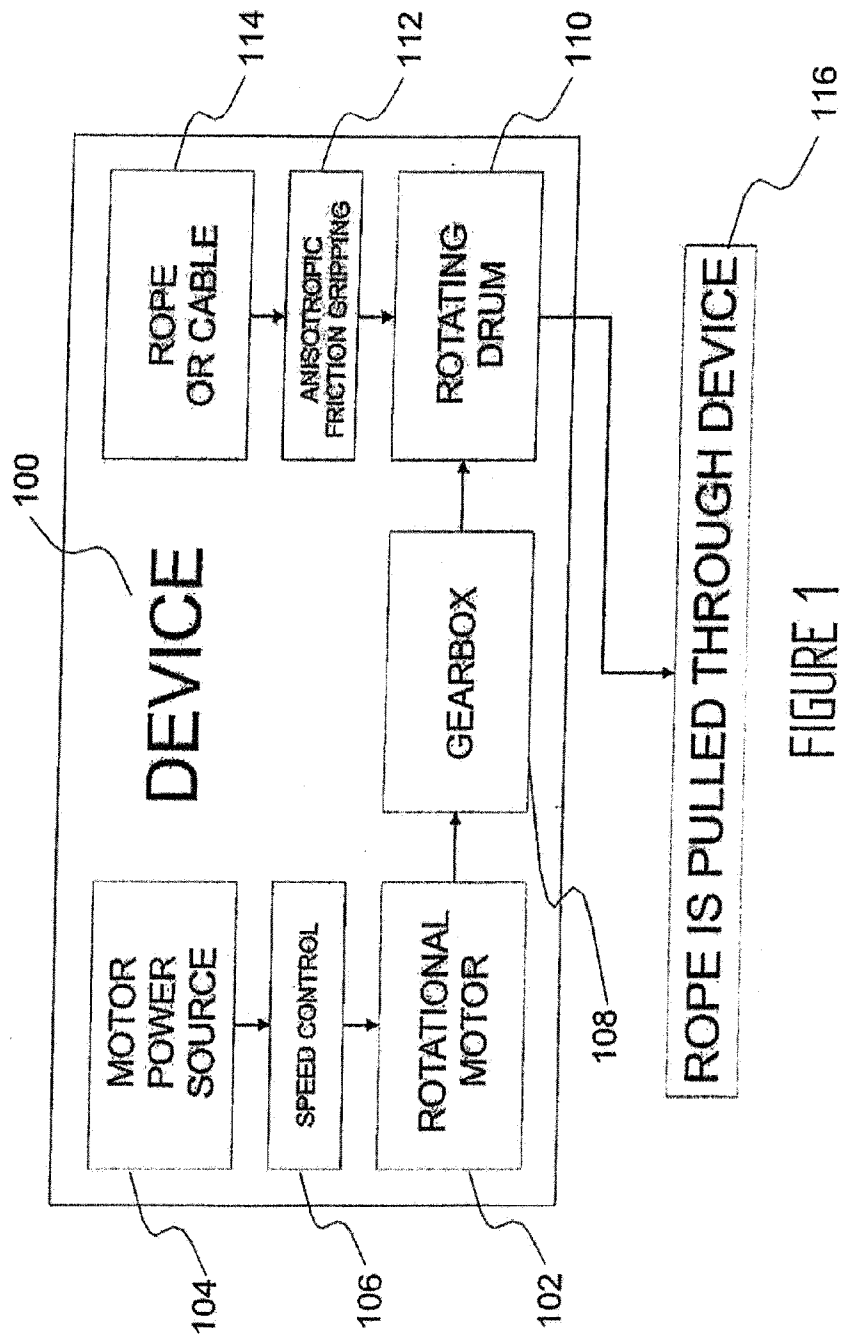
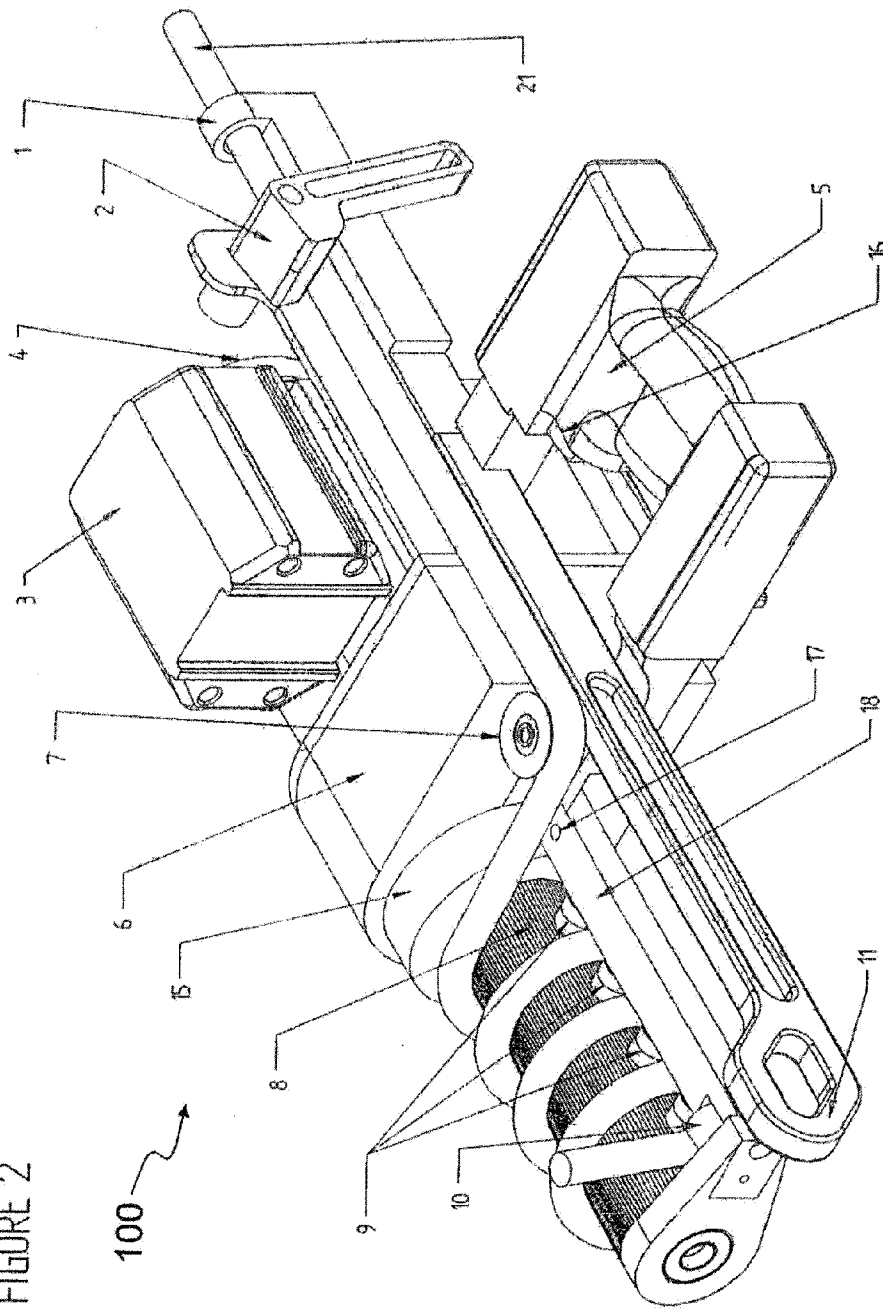
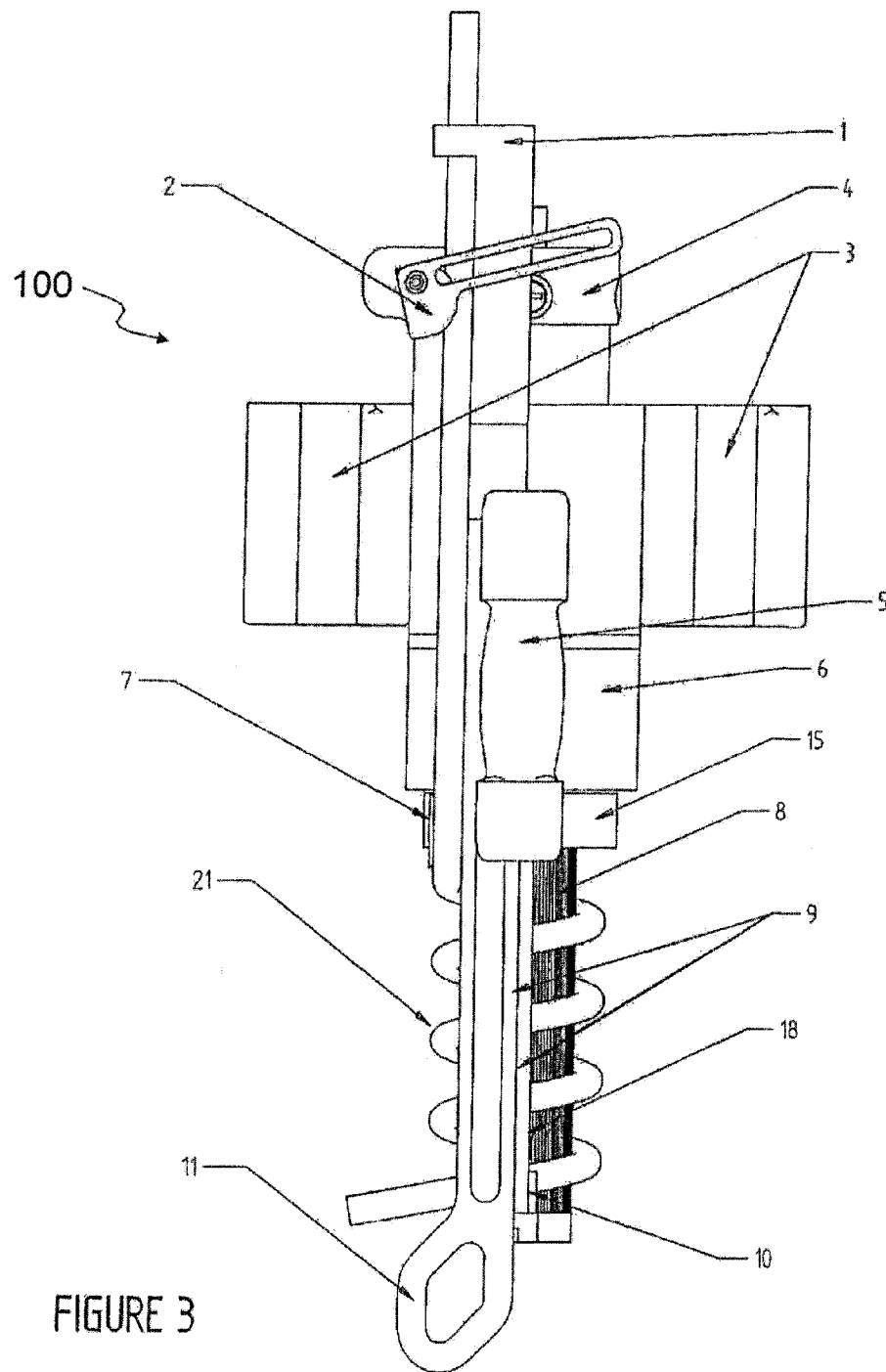
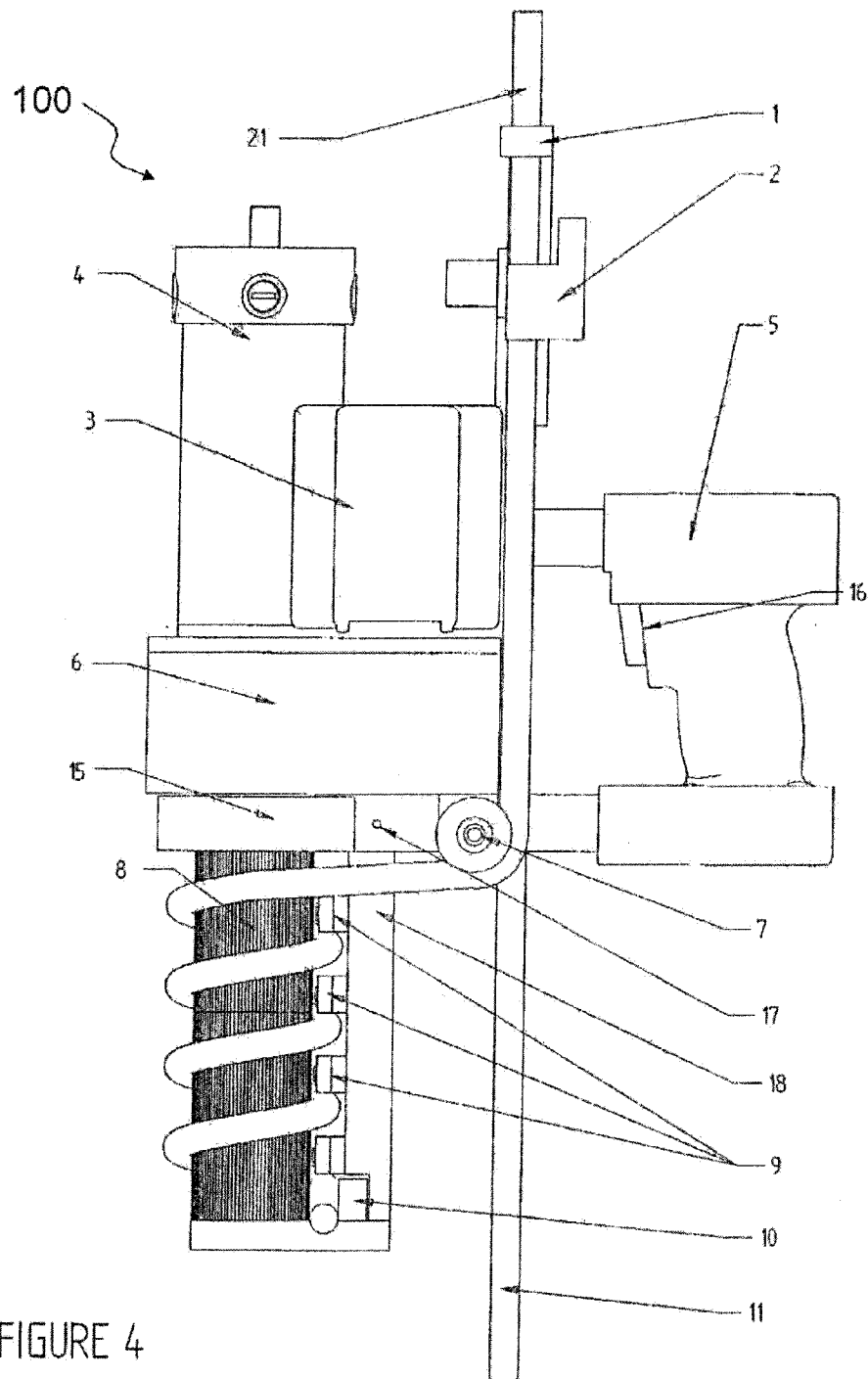


FIGURE 2







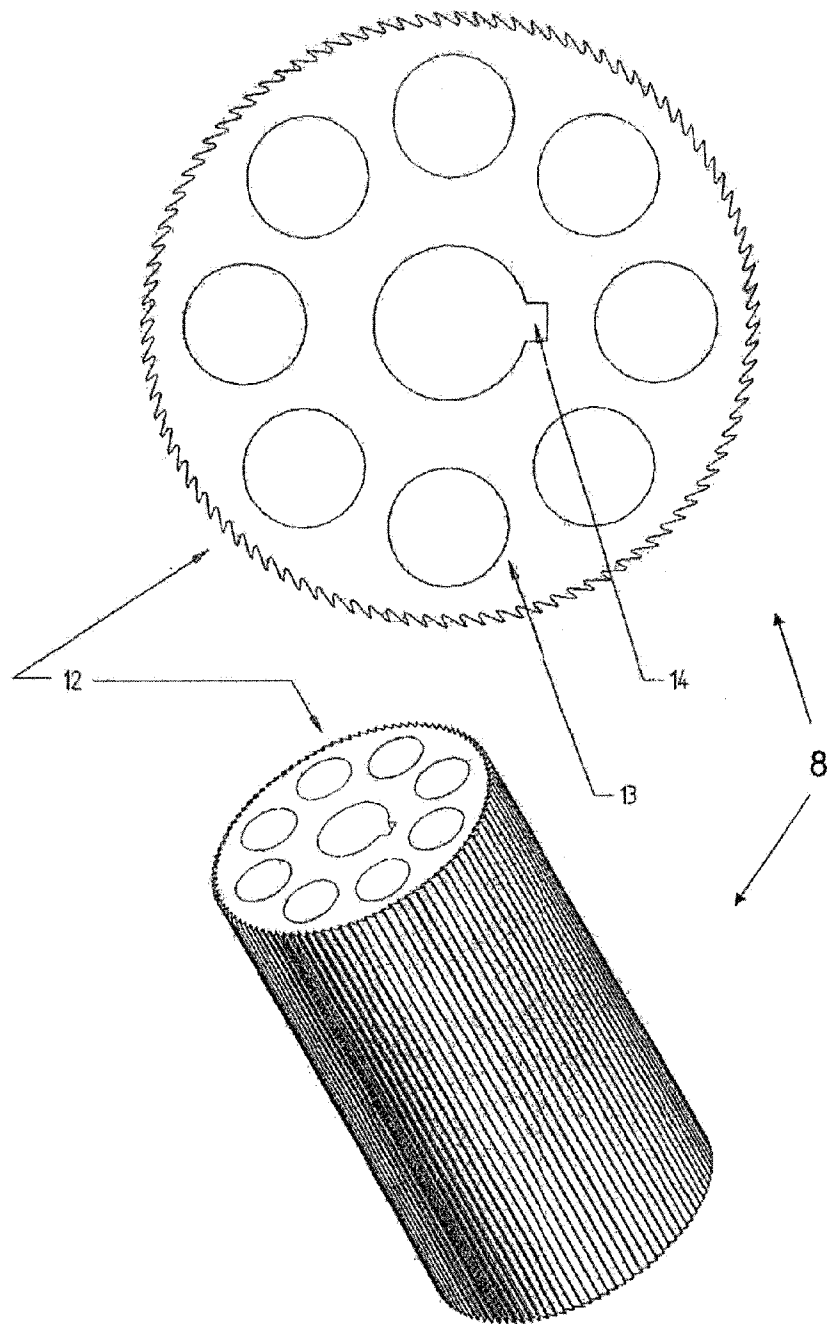
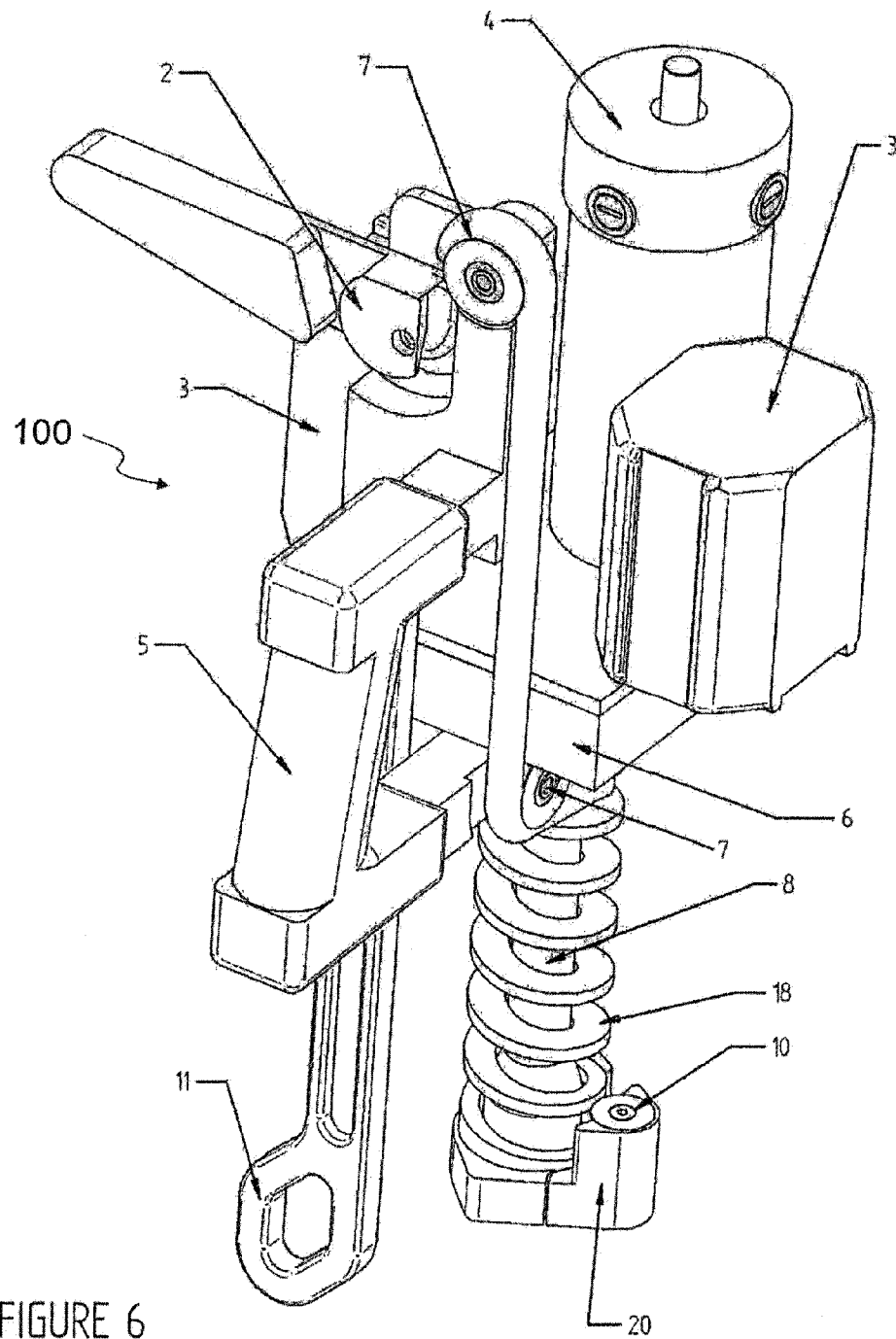


FIGURE 5



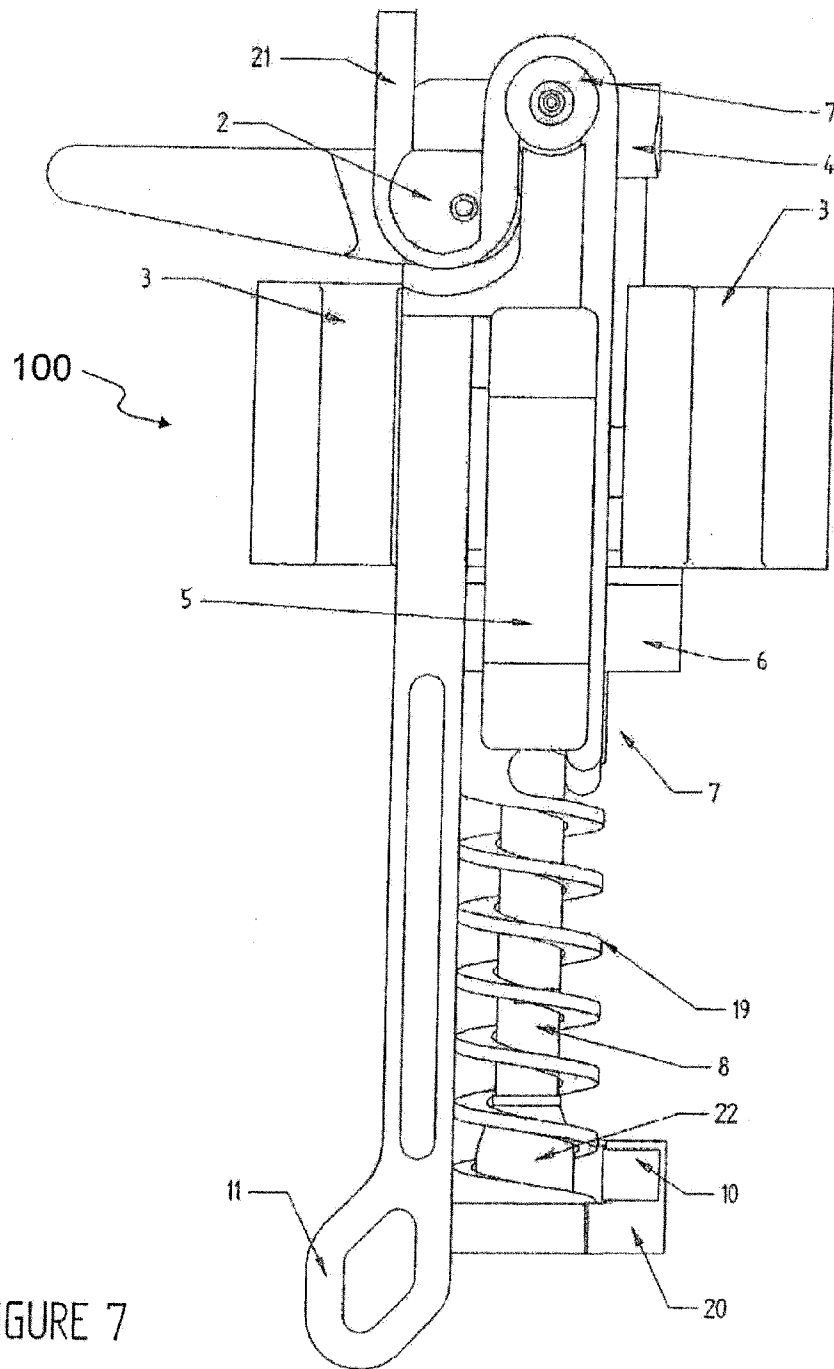
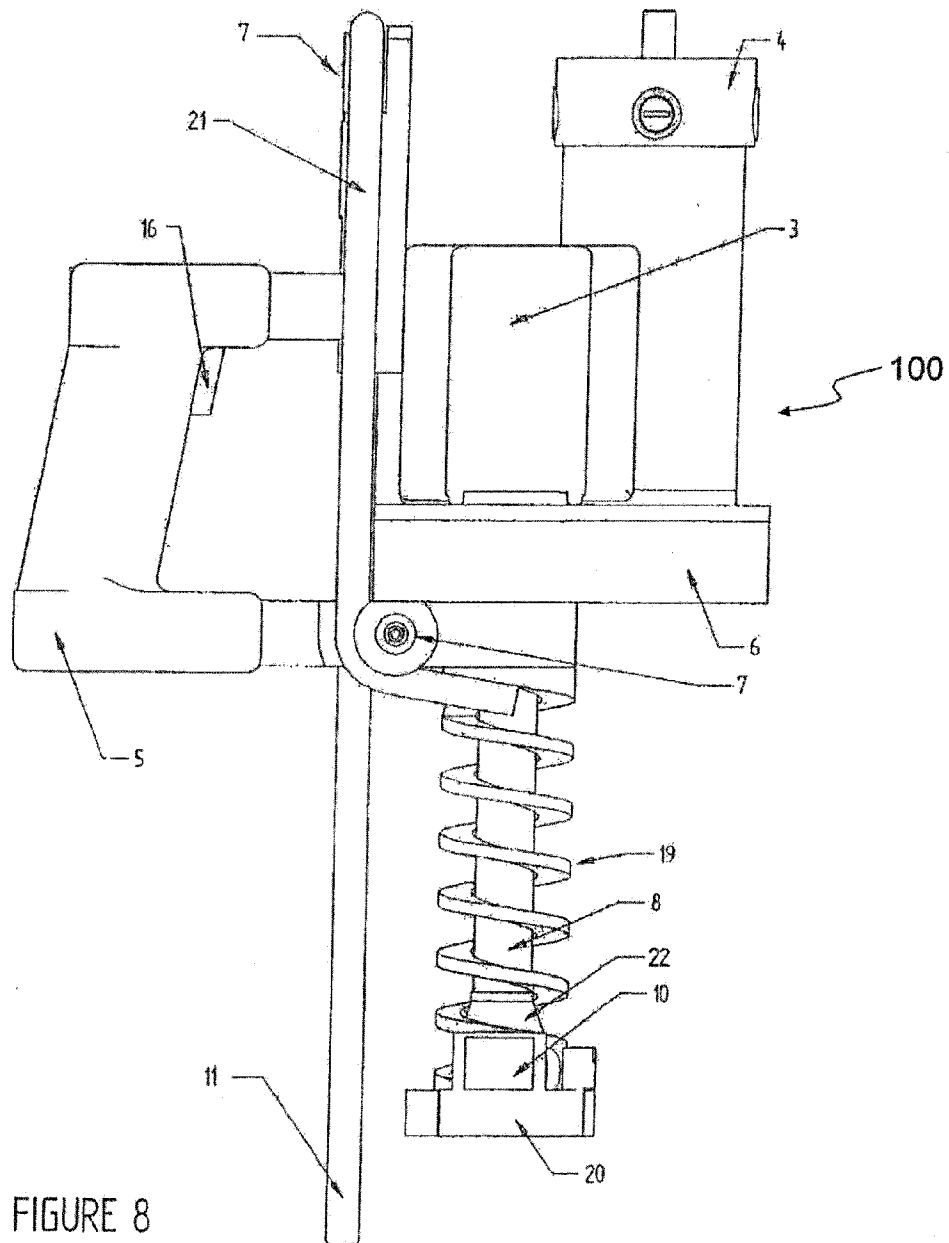


FIGURE 7



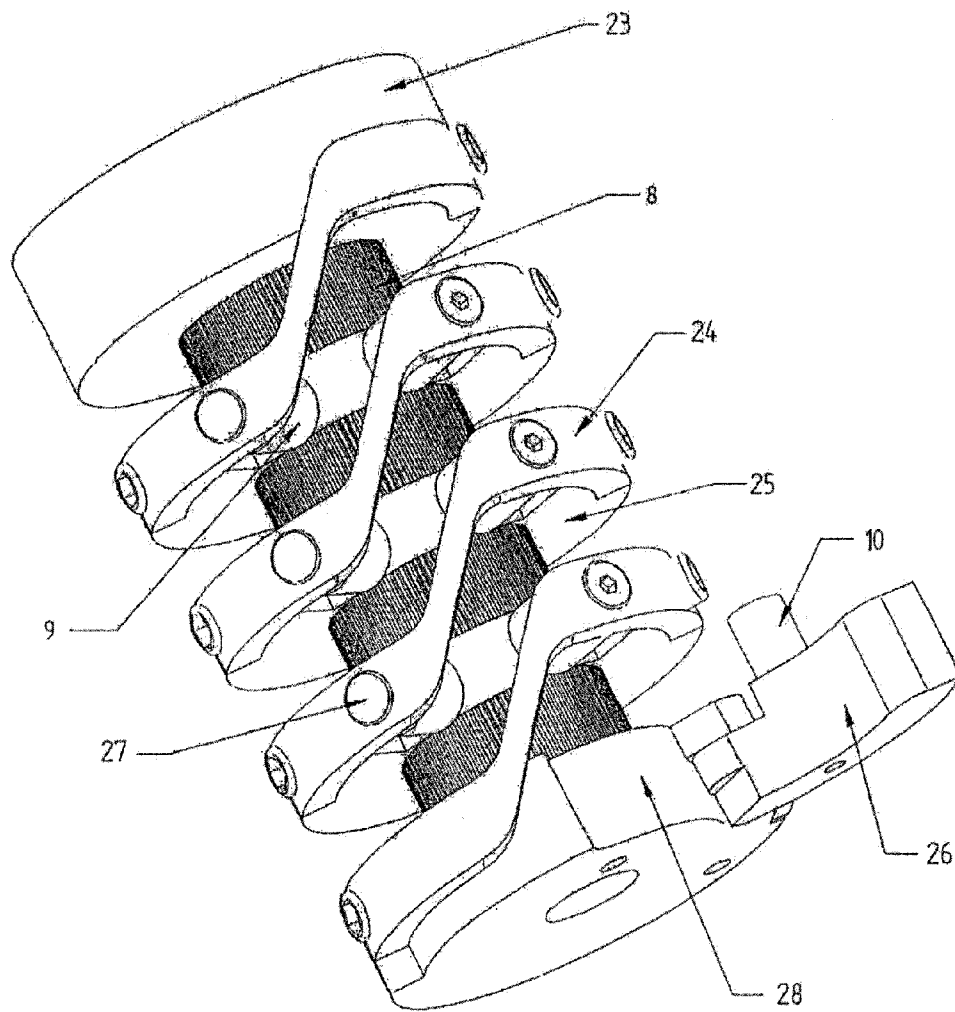
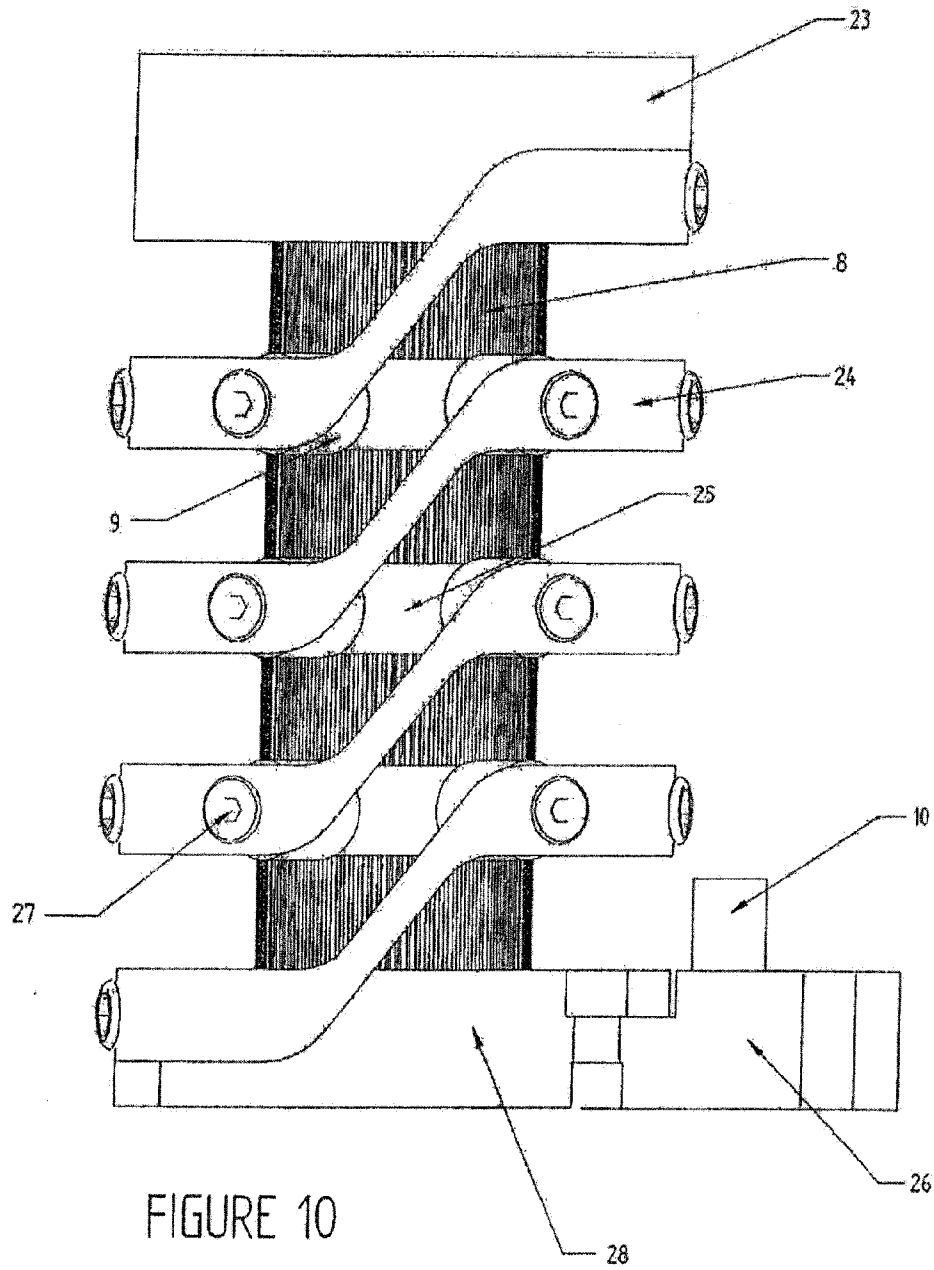
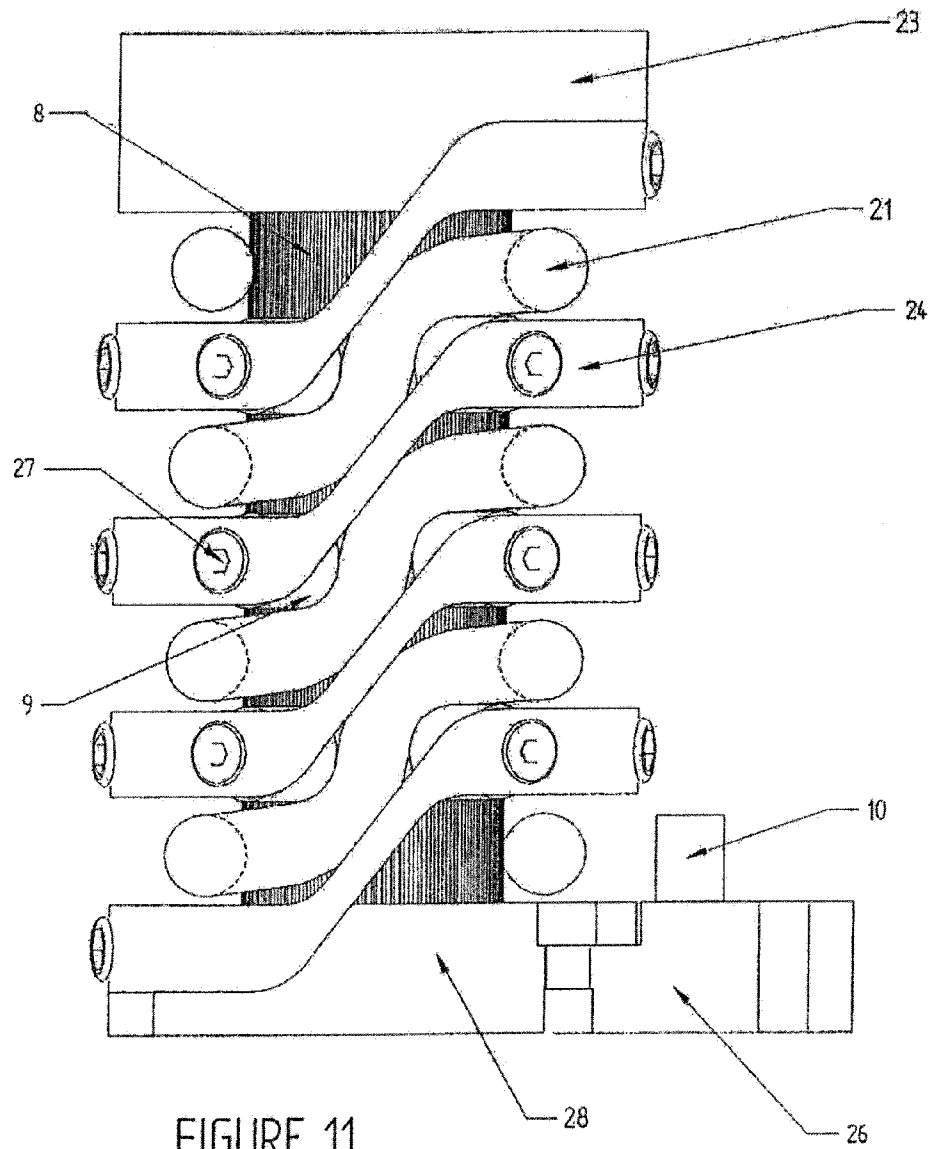


FIGURE 9





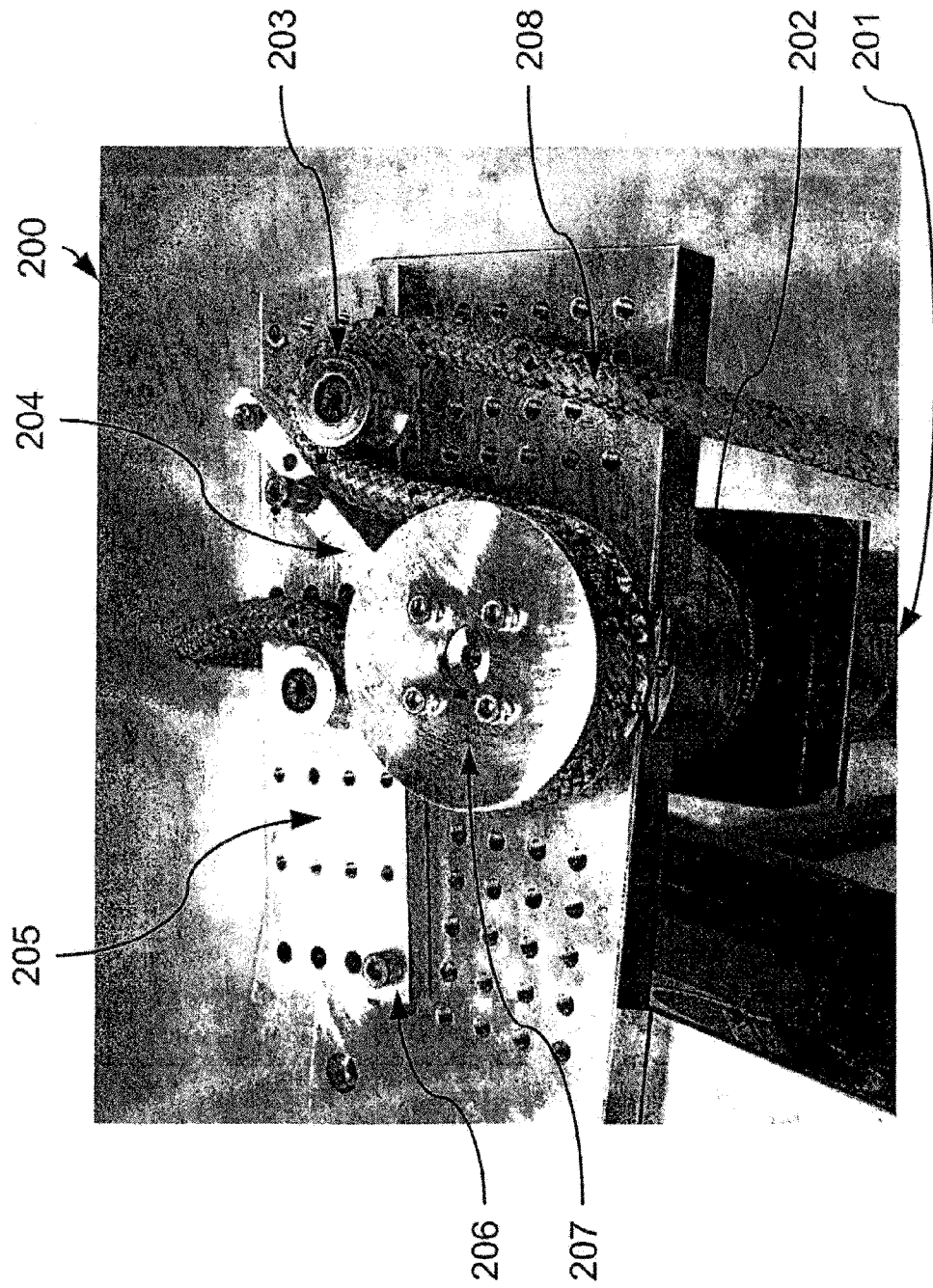


FIGURE 12

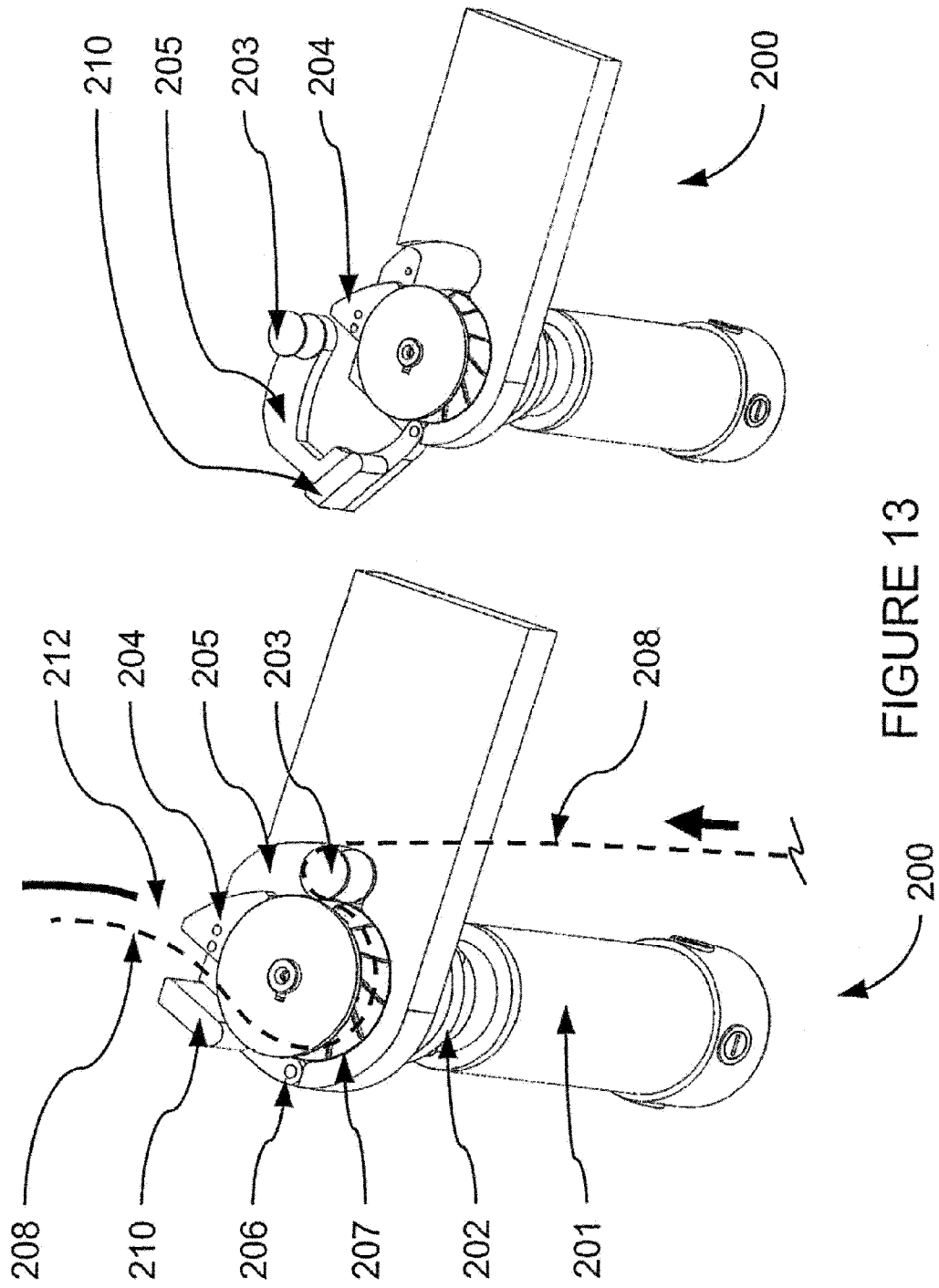
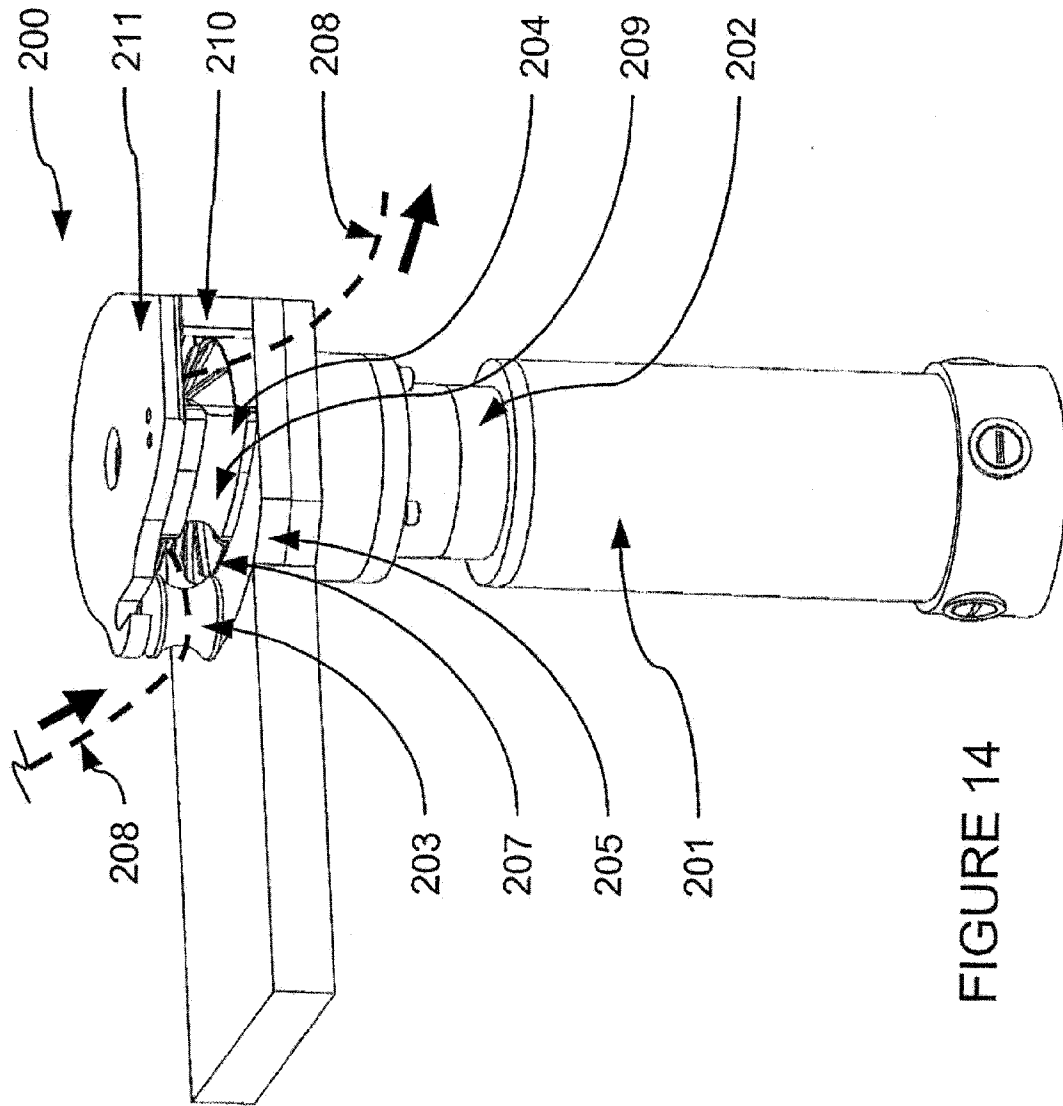


FIGURE 13



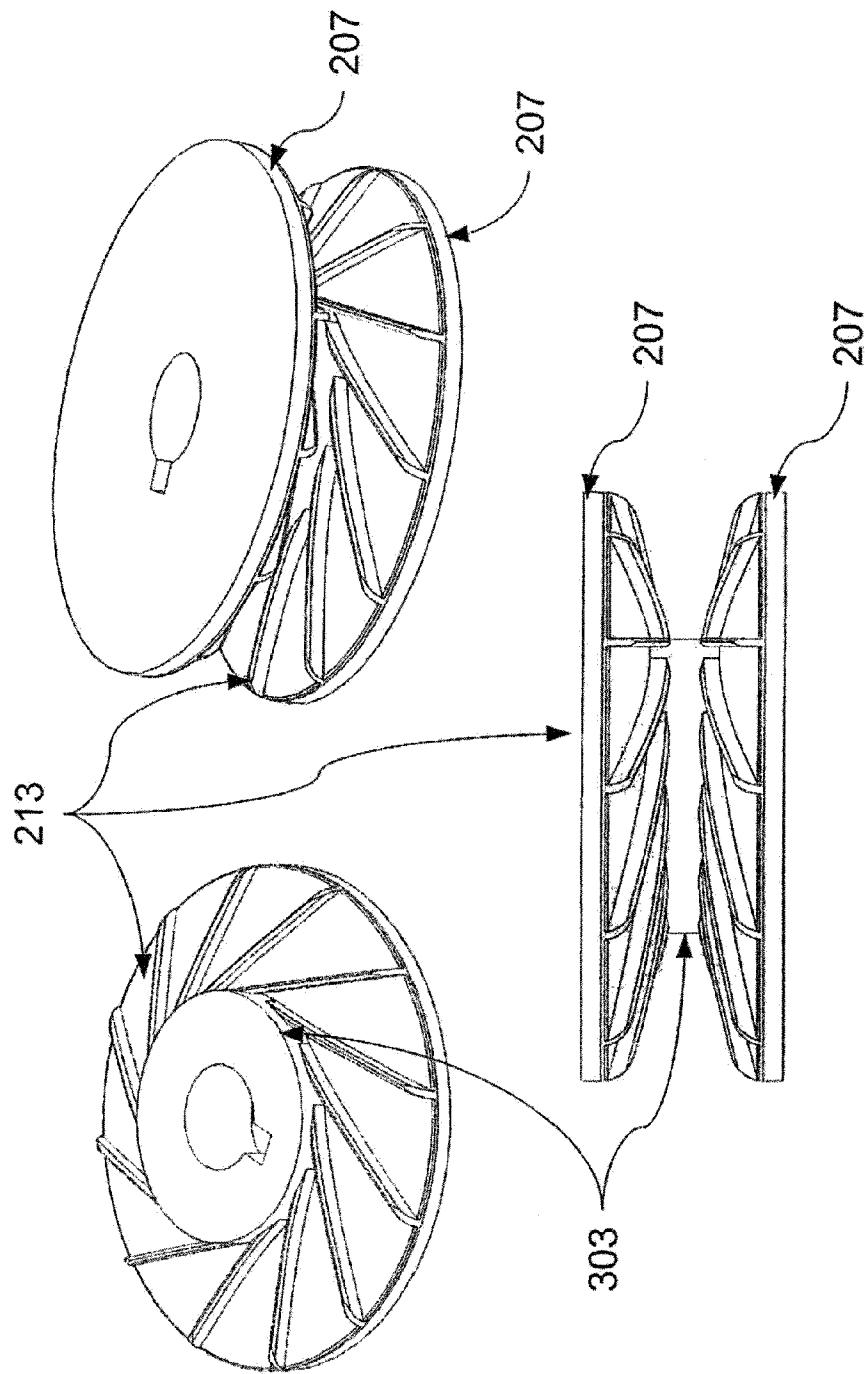


FIGURE 15

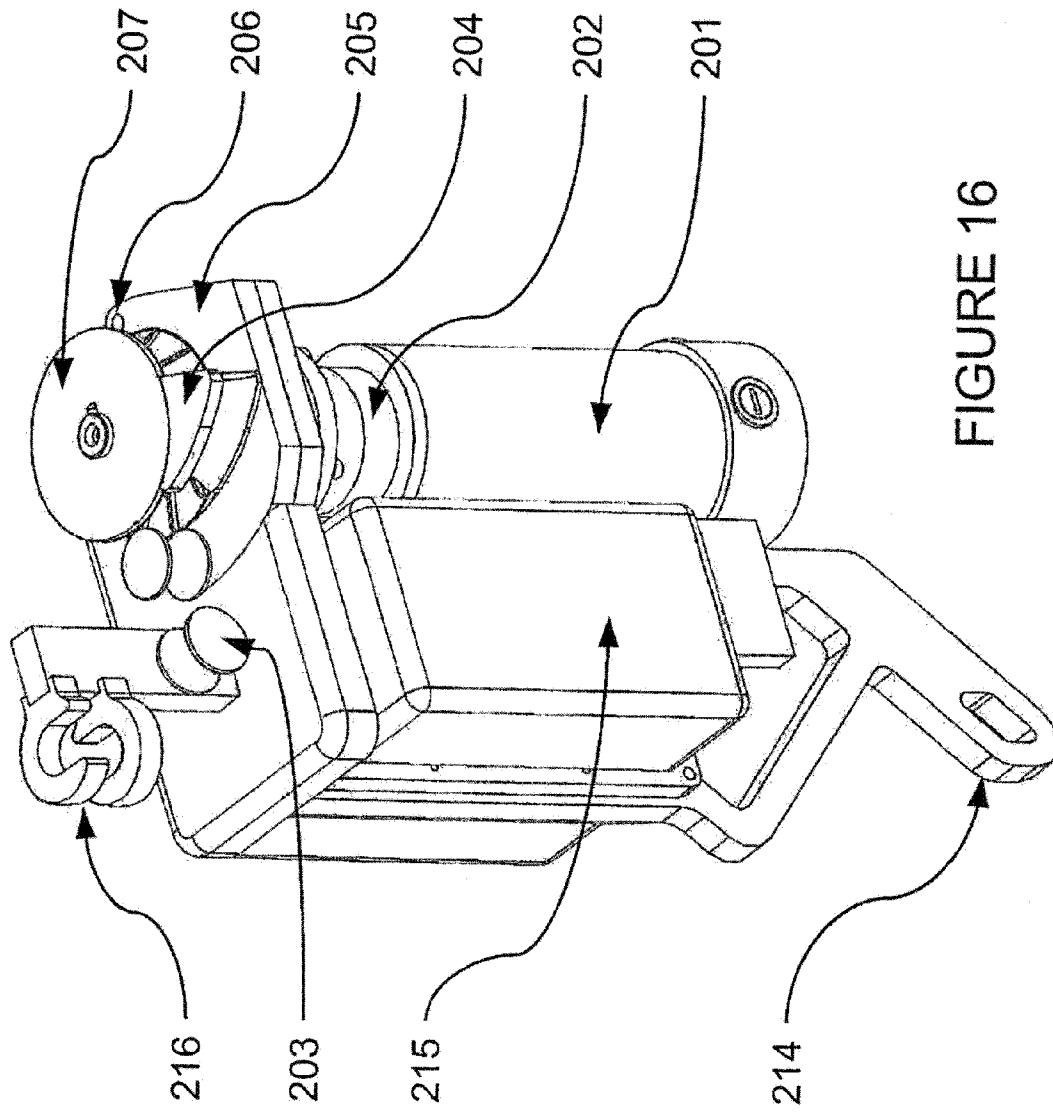


FIGURE 16

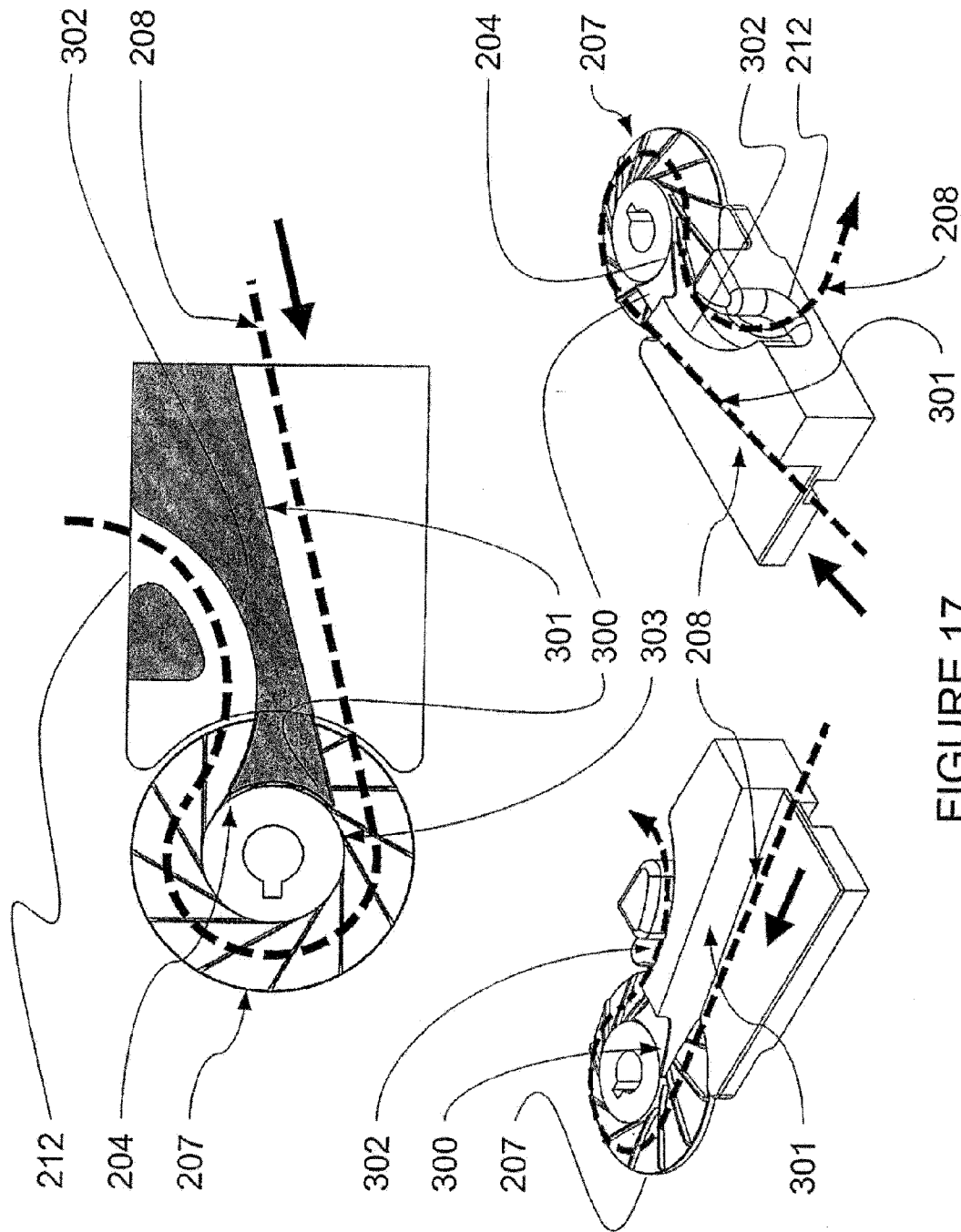


FIGURE 17

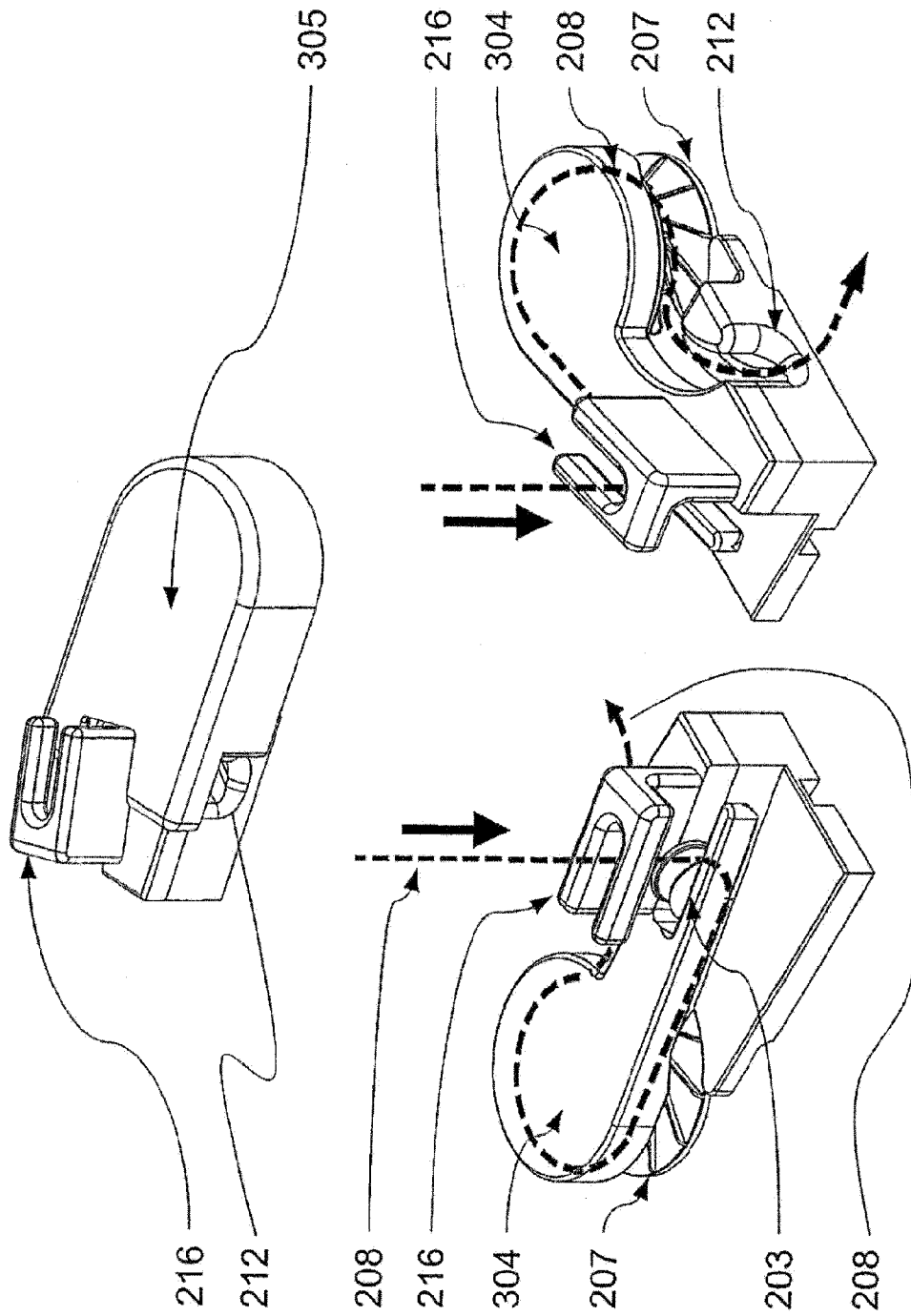


FIGURE 18