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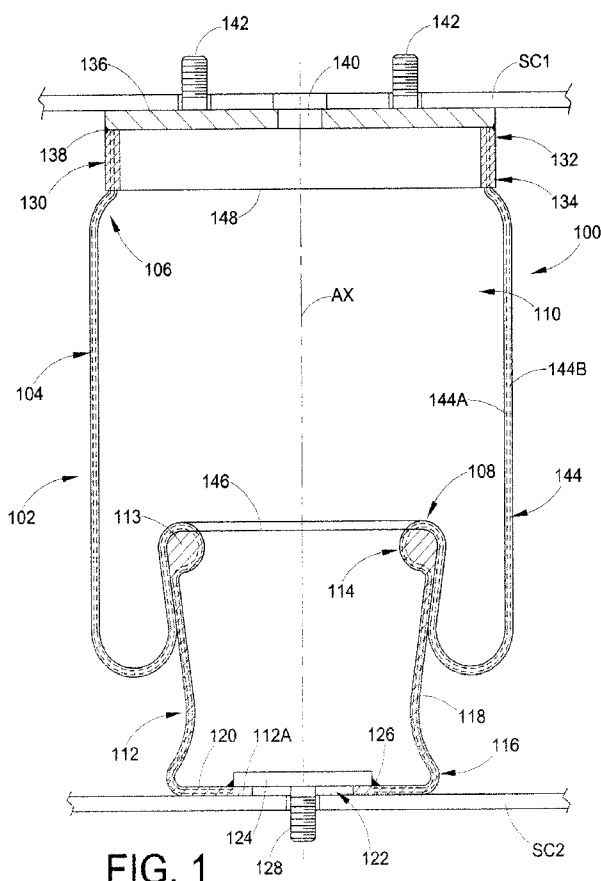
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: SPRING BODY FOR GAS SPRING ASSEMBLY AND METHOD OF FORMING SAME



(57) Abstract: A spring body includes a filament structure formed from at least one length of filament material. An elastomeric wall at least partially defines a spring chamber and includes a first portion of the filament structure. A comparatively-rigid wall includes a second portion of the filament structure. A gas spring assembly that includes such a spring body, as well as a method making a spring body and a method of making a gas spring assembly are also included.



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SPRING BODY FOR GAS SPRING ASSEMBLY AND METHOD OF FORMING SAME

BACKGROUND

[0001] The present disclosure broadly relates to the art of spring devices and, more particularly, to a spring body that includes an elastomeric wall and a comparatively rigid wall with a filament structure extending within at least a portion of the elastomeric and rigid walls. A gas spring device including such a spring body and a method of forming such a spring body are also included.

[0002] Gas spring assemblies of a variety of types and kinds are known and commonly used to support a sprung mass on an unsprung mass, such as supporting a body or chassis of a vehicle on an axle or other wheel-engaging member, for example. One common gas spring construction includes an elastomeric or otherwise flexible wall that is secured between comparatively rigid end members to at least partially form a spring chamber therebetween. Typically, the flexible wall extends between opposing open ends thereof. The end members are typically formed separately from the flexible wall and are then secured to different ones of the open ends using any one of a variety of known mechanical connections.

[0003] Notwithstanding the substantial success and widespread usage of such conventional gas spring constructions, certain areas of improvement in the art of gas spring assemblies still remain. One such area involves the reduction of manufacturing, inventory and assembly costs associated with the production of known gas springs assemblies.

[0004] More specifically, it is common knowledge that the flexible wall of conventional gas spring constructions is normally formed from a material (e.g., rubber) that is different from the material (e.g., metal or rigid plastic) that is used to form the end members of such conventional gas spring constructions. As such, these parts are manufactured separately from one another and then connected together to form the gas spring assembly. In assembling the components, a rigid mechanical connection (e.g., roll-crimp, swage or threadably secured component) is normally utilized to form and maintain a substantive fluid-tight seal between the flexible wall and each of the end members. However, it has been recognized that costs associated with manufacturing

and inventorying such individual components, as well as those costs associated with the assembly thereof, undesirably increase the overall cost of producing such gas spring assemblies.

[0005] Additionally, in many conventional gas spring constructions, the opposing end members are themselves often formed from dissimilar materials (e.g., one end member from metal and one end member from plastic). In such arrangements, different mechanical connections are commonly used for securement of each end member. Thus, the aforementioned costs may be further increased as the complexity of the gas spring assembly increases relative to more basic constructions.

[0006] Accordingly, it is believed desirable to develop a gas spring body for use in forming a gas spring assembly that overcomes the foregoing and other disadvantageous qualities and/or characteristics.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

[0007] A gas spring body in accordance with the present disclosure is provided that includes a filament structure formed from at least one length of filament material. The filament structure has a longitudinally-extending axis formed between opposing ends. A flexible wall at least partially defines a spring chamber and includes inner and outer wall surfaces. The flexible wall is formed from a quantity of elastomeric material and a first portion of the filament structure such that the first portion of the filament structure is disposed in the flexible wall between the inner and outer surfaces thereof. A substantially-rigid wall includes inner and outer wall surfaces. The substantially-rigid wall is formed from a quantity of comparatively-rigid material and a second portion of the filament structure such that the second portion of the filament structure is disposed in the substantially-rigid wall between the inner and outer wall surfaces thereof.

[0008] A gas spring body according to the foregoing paragraph, wherein the flexible wall defines a first portion of the spring chamber and the rigid wall defines a second portion of the spring chamber that is in fluid communication with the first portion of the spring chamber.

[0009] A gas spring body according to either of the two foregoing paragraphs, wherein said first portion of said filament structure is disposed between said opposing

ends and spaced axially inwardly therefrom with said second portion of said filament structure disposed axially outwardly from said first portion and including one of said opposing ends said substantially-rigid wall is a first substantially-rigid wall and said gas spring body further comprises a second substantially-rigid wall formed from a quantity of comparatively-rigid material and a third portion of said filament structure, said third portion of said filament structure disposed axially outwardly from said first portion of said filament structure in a direction opposite said second portion thereof, and said second substantially-rigid wall including inner and outer surfaces with said third portion of said filament structure disposed in said second substantially-rigid wall between said inner and outer wall surfaces thereof.

[0010] A gas spring body according to the foregoing paragraph, wherein the first and second substantially-rigid walls are formed from a common material.

[0011] A gas spring assembly in accordance with the present disclosure is provided that includes a first end member, a second end member spaced from the first end member and an elastomeric wall disposed between the first and second end members about a longitudinal axis extending therebetween. The elastomeric wall at least partially forms a spring chamber. A filament structure is formed from at least one length of filament material. The filament structure is disposed about the axis and has longitudinally spaced first and second ends. A first portion of the filament structure is disposed along at least a portion of the first end member and a second portion of the filament structure is disposed along at least a portion of the elastomeric wall.

[0012] A gas spring assembly wherein a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed between the elastomeric and first rigid wall portions to at least partially form the spring chamber.

[0013] A method of forming a gas spring body in accordance with the present disclosure is provided that includes generating a filament structure from at least one length of filament material. The filament structure has a longitudinally-extending axis and first and second axially-spaced ends. The method also includes forming a flexible wall of the gas spring body from a quantity of elastomeric material and a first portion of the filament structure. The flexible wall at least partially defines a spring chamber and includes opposing wall surfaces with the first portion of the filament structure disposed

between the opposing wall surfaces and operative to reinforce the flexible wall of the gas spring body. The method further includes forming a rigid wall from a quantity of substantially-rigid material and a second portion of the filament structure. The rigid wall includes opposing wall surfaces with the second portion of the filament structure disposed between the opposing wall surfaces and operative to reinforce the rigid wall of the gas spring body.

[0014] A method of manufacturing a gas spring assembly in accordance with the present disclosure is provided that includes generating a filament structure from at least one length of filament material. The filament structure has a longitudinally-extending central axis. The filament structure extends about the axis and extends longitudinally between opposing first and second structure ends. The method also includes forming a first rigid wall over a first portion of the filament structure. The first rigid wall is operative to at least partially form a first end member of the gas spring assembly and includes an inner wall surface and an outer wall surface. The method further includes forming an elastomeric wall over at least a second portion of the filament structure. The elastomeric wall at least partially defines a spring chamber and an open end opposite the first rigid wall. The method also includes forming a substantially fluid-tight seal between the first rigid wall and the elastomeric wall. The method further includes enclosing the spring chamber to form a substantially fluid-tight volume within the gas spring assembly.

[0015] A method according to the foregoing paragraph, enclosing said spring chamber wherein includes providing a second end member, and securing the second end member along the open end of the elastomeric wall such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed therealong.

[0016] A method according to the foregoing paragraph, further comprising forming a second rigid wall over a third portion of the filament structure and forming a substantially fluid-tight seal between the second rigid wall and the elastomeric wall, the second rigid wall being disposed adjacent the elastomeric wall opposite the first rigid wall.

[0017] A method according to the foregoing paragraph, wherein securing the second end member along the open end of the elastomeric wall includes securing the second

end member on the second rigid wall and forming the substantially fluid-tight seal therewith.

[0018] A method according to any one of the foregoing four paragraphs, wherein forming a first rigid wall includes providing an end wall and securing the end wall along the first rigid wall such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed therewith.

[0019] A method according to any one of the foregoing five paragraphs, wherein forming the elastomeric wall is performed prior to forming the first rigid wall and forming the substantially fluid-tight seal is performed at substantially the same time as forming the first rigid wall.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0020] FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional side view of one exemplary embodiment of a gas spring assembly in accordance with the present novel concept.

[0021] FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional side view of another exemplary embodiment of a gas spring assembly in accordance with the present novel concept.

[0022] FIG. 3 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the gas spring assembly shown in Detail 3 of FIG. 2.

[0023] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional side view of a further exemplary embodiment of a gas spring assembly in accordance with the present novel concept.

[0024] FIG. 5 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the gas spring assembly shown in Detail 5 of FIG. 4.

[0025] FIG. 6 is a flowchart illustrating one exemplary method of forming a gas spring assembly in accordance with the present novel concept.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0026] Turning, now, to the drawings, wherein the showings are for the purpose of illustrating exemplary embodiments of the present disclosure and which are not intended as a limitation of the same, gas spring assemblies that include a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure are shown in FIGS. 1-5. Broadly, a spring body according to the present disclosure includes an elastomeric wall (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) and at least one

comparatively rigid wall (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) as well as a filament structure that extends into or is otherwise disposed within at least a portion of the elastomeric wall and at least a portion of the at least one rigid wall.

[0027] As with conventional gas spring assemblies, a gas spring assembly that includes a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure will generally include opposing end members that are suitable for abuttingly engaging associated structural components, such as spaced structural components **SC1** and **SC2** which are shown in FIG. 1, for example. Accordingly, the one or more rigid walls of a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure can take the form of or otherwise be used as end members of a gas spring assembly. Alternately, one or more additional elements, components and/or structures can be secured or otherwise attached to the at least one rigid wall for use in forming an end member of a gas spring assembly. As an example, one rigid wall of a gas spring assembly could take the form of or otherwise operate as an end closure of a gas spring assembly. The rigid wall could then be received on and suitably secured to an additional component, such as an otherwise convention piston, for example, to at least partially form the gas spring assembly. Additionally, it will be appreciated that the associated structural components can be of any suitable type, kind and/or construction, such as, for example, spaced-apart components of a vehicle or vehicle suspension system.

[0028] With reference to FIG. 1, one exemplary embodiment of a gas spring assembly **100** is shown that includes a spring body **102** in accordance with the present disclosure. The spring body includes an elastomeric or otherwise substantially flexible spring wall **104** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that extends generally longitudinally between first and second elastomeric wall ends **106** and **108** such that a central axis **AX** can be established therebetween. Elastomeric wall section **104** extends circumferentially about axis **AX** and at least partially defines a spring chamber **110**. Spring body **102** also includes a first rigid wall **112** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that is disposed along second elastomeric wall end **108** and extends between opposing

first and second rigid wall ends **114** and **116** with second elastomeric wall end **108** and first rigid wall end **114** being adjacent one another.

[0029] In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 1, first rigid wall **112** includes a side wall portion **118** that extends generally longitudinally along axis **AX**. First rigid wall **112** also includes an end wall portion **120** that extends approximately transverse to axis **AX**. Additionally, an opening **122** is provided in end wall portion **120** and a first cover or end plate **124** is disposed within spring chamber **110**. The cover can be positioned along end wall portion **120** across opening **122** and secured to the end wall portion in a manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith, such as by using a welded joint **126**, for example. One or more securement devices and/or features can be provided on or along first rigid wall **112** in any suitable manner. For example, a threaded stud **128** can be affixed to or otherwise extend from along first end plate **124** and project through an associated structural feature, such as structural component **SC2**, for example, for receiving a complimentary securement device, such as a threaded nut (not shown), for example.

[0030] As discussed above, a spring body according to the present disclosure can optionally include more than one rigid wall portion. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 1, spring body **102** is shown as including a second rigid wall **130** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that is disposed along first elastomeric wall end **106** and extends between opposing third and fourth rigid wall ends **132** and **134** with first elastomeric wall end **106** and second rigid wall end **134** being adjacent one another.

[0031] Unlike first rigid wall **112**, second rigid wall **130** is not operative as an end member of the gas spring assembly that would be capable of engaging an associated structural component, such as structural component **SC1**, for example. Rather, second rigid wall **130** forms an open end of spring body **102**. A second cover or end plate **136** is positioned across the open end of the spring body and can be secured to second rigid wall **130** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween, such as by using a welded joint **138**, for example. The second cover plate is shown as including a suitable fluid passage **140** for communication of pressurized gas and/or other fluids to and from spring chamber **110**. Additionally, one or more securement

devices and/or features can be provided on or along second end plate **136** in any suitable manner. For example, threaded fasteners **142** can be affixed to or otherwise provided along second end plate **136** and extend through an associated structural member, such as structural component **SC1**, for example, for receiving a complimentary securement device, such as a threaded nut (not shown), for example.

[0032] Additionally, a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure also includes a filament structure that extends within at least a portion of the elastomeric wall section and within at least a portion of at least one rigid wall section. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 1, a filament structure **144** is disposed within elastomeric wall section **104** and extends respectively from the first and second elastomeric ends **106** and **108** into first and second rigid wall sections **112** and **130**. As shown in FIG. 1, filament structure **144** extends the full length of elastomeric wall section **104** as well as the full length of second rigid wall section **130**. However, filament structure **144** is shown in FIG. 1 as extending only partially along first rigid wall section **112**, such that an unreinforced portion **112A** is formed near opening **122**.

[0033] Filament structure **144** can be of any suitable type, kind, construction and/or configuration, and can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials that are capable of forming a filament structure for reinforcing at least portions of the spring body. For example, filament structure **144** can be formed from any number of one or more filaments that are wound, laid or otherwise disposed in any suitable configuration, arrangement, shape and/or having any desired profile, such as a plurality of filaments laid in two or more cross-biased plies **144A** and **144B** or a single filament wound in a geodesic pattern, for example. As another example, the filament structure could optionally include one or more overlapping portions or filament structure seams extending longitudinally or otherwise along the filament structure. Additionally, the one or more filaments that are used to form the filament structure can be of any suitable type, construction and/or material, such as monofilament polymeric strands, braided cotton yarn or bundled carbon fibers, for example. Furthermore, such one or more filaments could optionally be coated or otherwise treated, such as, for example, to improve adhesion with the elastomeric and/or rigid material. For example, the filament material could be rubber coated, such that upon applying a layer of rubber over the filament

material improved adhesion between the various layers could result during and/or after vulcanization, for example.

[0034] An elastomeric wall, such as elastomeric wall section **104**, for example, and one or more rigid walls, such as rigid wall sections **112** and **130**, for example, can be formed from any material or combination of materials that are suitable for providing the desired performance characteristics of the respective wall sections. Thus, a single material could be used with the different wall sections having varying thicknesses and/or other geometric features or characteristics to provide the desired variations in performance. Additionally, or in the alternative, different materials could be used for the different wall sections. For example, elastomeric wall section **104** can be formed from any suitable elastomeric or otherwise substantially flexible material, such as natural rubber, synthetic rubber or a flexible thermoplastic elastomer. Rigid wall sections **112** and **130** could then be formed from any one or more comparatively rigid materials, such as one or more comparatively rigid thermoplastics or thermoplastic elastomers, for example.

[0035] In one exemplary combination of materials, the elastomeric wall can be formed from a material having a flexural modulus of less than approximately 10,000 psi and the one or more comparatively rigid walls can be formed from one or more materials that have a flexural modulus of greater than approximately 20,000 psi. For example, the elastomeric wall section could be formed from a less-stiff elastomeric polyurethane resin, and one or more of the comparatively rigid walls could be formed from a more-stiff elastomeric polyurethane resin. It will be appreciated, however, that any other material, combinations of materials and/or variations in wall shape and/or configuration could alternately be used.

[0036] A spring body in accordance with the present disclosure, such as spring body **102**, for example, at least partially forms a spring chamber, such as spring chamber **110**, for example. As such, it is desirable for any seams or connections between adjacent wall sections, such as seams **146** and **148**, which are respectively formed between elastomeric wall section **104** and rigid wall sections **112** and **130**, to form or establish a substantially fluid-tight seal between the adjacent wall sections. It will be appreciated that such a substantially fluid-tight seal can be formed in any suitable

manner. For example, such adjacent wall sections can be positioned in proximity to or abutting engagement with one another and a sealing compound, such as a sealant, adhesive and/or epoxy, for example, could be disposed along the proximal or abutting areas to form a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween. As another example, the wall sections could be formed from a common family of materials (e.g., two different grades of the same polymeric material) with one wall section being molded (or otherwise formed) onto another wall section, such that the complimentary materials melt together during the molding process (or other operation) to thereby adhere the materials together and form a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween.

[0037] Additionally, it will be appreciated that in some cases it may be desirable to ensure that the elastomeric wall section of the spring body is not flexed or otherwise deflected beyond a given minimum bend radius. It will be recognized that any such minimum bend radius will vary from application-to-application depending upon a variety of factors and/or criteria, such as materials, wall construction and/or usage, for example. In cases in which it is desirable to maintain the filament structure of the spring body (e.g., filament structure **144** of spring body **102**) approximately equal to or larger than a given minimum bend radius, a radius-maintaining feature or component can be included on or along the spring body or can be separately provided. In the exemplary embodiment shown, rigid wall section **112** includes a radius-maintaining bead **113** disposed along first rigid end **114**. As shown in FIG. 1, filament structure **144** extends radially-inwardly along radius-maintaining bead **113** such that a minimum radius can be maintained in the filament structure as the same transitions through seam **148** and into and along elastomeric wall portion **104**. It will be appreciated, however, that the embodiment shown is merely exemplary and that any other suitable arrangement and/or configuration could alternately be used.

[0038] Gas spring assembly **100** is shown in FIG. 1 as being of a rolling lobe-type configuration in which second end plate **136** is operative as one end member of the gas spring assembly and first rigid wall **112** is operative as a second end member or piston of the gas spring assembly. Thus, as shown in FIG. 1, elastomeric wall portion **104** is adapted to roll along side wall portion **118** of first rigid wall **112** in an otherwise generally conventional manner during use in operation. It will be appreciated, however, that in

another exemplary embodiment, the first rigid wall could take the form of a different end structure, such as an end closure, for example, and that a suitable end member, such as an otherwise conventional piston, for example, could be separately provided and secured on or along the first rigid wall.

[0039] Another exemplary embodiment of a gas spring assembly **200** that includes a spring body **202** in accordance with the present disclosure is shown in FIG. 2. Spring body **202** includes an elastomeric wall **204** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that extends generally longitudinally between first and second elastomeric wall ends **206** and **208**, such that a central axis **AX** can be established therebetween. Elastomeric wall section **204** extends circumferentially about axis **AX** and at least partially defines a spring chamber **210**. Spring body **202** also includes a rigid wall **212** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that is disposed along second elastomeric wall end **208** and which extends between opposing first and second rigid wall ends **214** and **216** with second elastomeric wall end **208** and a first rigid wall end **214** being adjacent one another. Optionally, a radius-maintaining feature or component can be included on or along the gas spring assembly and/or the spring body thereof, as discussed above. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS 2 and 3, a radius-maintaining bead **213** is provided along rigid wall end **214**.

[0040] Spring body **202** differs from spring body **102**, discussed above, in that only one rigid wall is included in spring body **202**. As such, first elastomeric wall end **206** of elastomeric wall section **204** forms an opening **218** that is suitable for receiving or otherwise engaging an associated end member, such as an end plate **220**, for example. Thus, first elastomeric wall end **206** can be secured to an associated end member in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, a retaining member **222** can be provided along first elastomeric wall end **206** and can be radially-inwardly deformed to secure the elastomeric wall section along end plate **220**. Additionally, the associated end member can optionally include any other suitable features or components. For example, end plate **220** can include a fluid passage **224** extending therethrough that is suitable for permitting fluid communication with spring chamber **210**. End plate **220** can also include one or more securement devices or

features, such as threaded studs **226**, for example, for securing the gas spring assembly on or along an associated structural component, such as structural component **SC1** in FIG. 1, for example.

[0041] Rigid wall **212** includes a side wall portion **228** that extends generally longitudinally along axis **AX** and an end wall portion **230** that extends approximately transverse to axis **AX**. Rather than including an opening, such as is shown in FIG. 1, for example, end wall portion **230** of rigid wall section **212** can form a closed end of the spring body and can optionally include one or more securement features, such as a threaded hole **232**, for example, which can be supported thereon or integrally-formed thereinto.

[0042] As discussed above with regard to spring body **102**, spring body **202** also includes a filament structure that extends within at least a portion of the elastomeric wall section and within at least a portion of at least one rigid wall section. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIG. 2, a filament structure **234** is disposed within elastomeric wall section **204** and extends from second elastomeric end **208** into rigid wall section **212**. As shown in FIG. 2, filament structure **234** extends the full length of elastomeric wall section **204** but extends only partially along the length of rigid wall section **212**, such that an unreinforced portion **212A** is formed near threaded hole **232**.

[0043] Additionally, as discussed above with regard to filament structure **144**, filament structure **234** can be of any suitable type, kind, construction (e.g., with or without overlaps or filament structure seams) and/or configuration, and can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials that are capable of forming a filament structure for reinforcing at least portions of the spring body. What's more, filament structure **234** can be formed from any number of one or more filaments that are wound or otherwise disposed in any suitable arrangement, shape or having any desired profile, such as a plurality of filaments laid in two or more cross-biased plies **234A** and **234B** (FIG. 3) or a single filament wound in a geodesic pattern, for example. Additionally, the one or more filaments that are used to form the filament structure can be of any suitable type, construction and/or material, such as monofilament polymeric strands, braided cotton yarn or bundled carbon fibers, for example. Furthermore, such

one or more filaments could optionally be coated or otherwise treated, such as to improve adhesion with the elastomeric and/or rigid material, for example.

[0044] As has been also discussed above with regard to spring body **102**, spring body **202** can be formed from any material or combination of materials that are suitable for providing the desired performance characteristics of the respective wall sections. Thus, a single material could be used with the different wall sections having varying thicknesses and/or other geometric features or characteristics to provide the desired variations in performance. Additionally, or in the alternative, different materials could be used for the different wall sections.

[0045] Gas spring assembly **200** is shown in FIG. 2 as being of another embodiment of a rolling lobe-type gas spring. In the exemplary embodiment shown, end plate **220** is operative as one end member of the gas spring assembly and rigid wall **212** is operative as a second end member or piston of the gas spring assembly. Gas spring assembly **200**, however, is shown in FIG. 2 in an extended position, rather than the having the elastomeric wall portion disposed along the side wall portion, as is shown in FIG. 1, for example.

[0046] FIG. 3 illustrates a seam or connection between adjacent wall sections, such as seam **236** between end **208** of elastomeric wall section **204** and end **214** of rigid wall section **212**, for example. It will be appreciated that FIG. 3 is also representative of the exemplary seams or connections between the adjacent wall sections in the embodiment of FIG. 1. Accordingly, as discussed above with regard to seams **146** and **148**, for example, it is desirable to form or otherwise establish a substantially fluid-tight seal between the adjacent wall sections of a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure. Again, it will be appreciated that such a substantially fluid-tight seal can be formed or otherwise provided in any suitable manner. For example, such adjacent wall sections could be formed in approximately abutting engagement with one another and a sealing compound, such as a sealant, adhesive and/or epoxy, for example, could be disposed along the approximately abutting areas to form a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween. As another example, the wall sections could be formed from a common family of materials (e.g., two different grades of the same polymeric material) with one wall section being molded (or otherwise formed) onto another wall section, such that the

complimentary materials melt together during the molding process (or other operation) to thereby adhere the materials together and form a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween.

[0047] Still another exemplary embodiment of a gas spring assembly **300** that includes a spring body **302** in accordance with the present disclosure is shown in FIGS. 4 and 5. Generally, gas spring assembly **300** is similar to gas spring assembly **100** in that both exemplary embodiments are shown as including an elastomeric wall disposed generally between opposing rigid walls with a filament structure extending into at least a portion of the elastomeric wall and at least a portion of at least one of the rigid walls. Gas spring assembly **300** differs from gas spring assembly **100**, however, in that gas spring **300** is of a convoluted bellows-type construction rather than of a rolling lobe-type construction, as will be apparent to one of skill in the art.

[0048] As shown in FIGS. 4 and 5, spring body **302** includes an elastomeric wall **304** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that extends generally longitudinally between first and second elastomeric wall ends **306** and **308**, such that a central axis **AX** can be established therebetween. Elastomeric wall section **304** extends circumferentially about axis **AX** and at least partially defines a spring chamber **310**. As mentioned above, gas spring assembly **300** is of a convoluted bellows-type construction that includes an elastomeric wall having at least one convolution formed therealong. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS 4 and 5, elastomeric wall **304** of spring body **302** is shown as including convolutions **312** and **314** disposed between wall ends **306** and **308** with an intermediate portion **316** having a reduced diameter formed between the convolutions. Optionally, a bead wire **318** or other similar feature or component can be disposed along elastomeric wall **304** between the convolutions.

[0049] Spring body **302** also includes a first rigid wall **320** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that is disposed along first elastomeric wall end **306** such that elastomeric wall **304** and first rigid wall **320** at least approximately abut one another along first elastomeric wall end **306**. Spring body **302** further includes a second rigid wall **322** (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) that is disposed along second elastomeric wall end

308 such that elastomeric wall **304** and second rigid wall **322** at least approximately abut one another along second elastomeric wall end **308**.

[0050] As discussed above with regard to other embodiments, it is desirable for any seams or connections between adjacent wall sections, such as a seams **324** and **326** which are respectively formed between elastomeric wall section **304** and rigid wall sections **320** and **322**, to form or establish a substantially fluid-tight seal between the adjacent wall sections. It will be appreciated that such a substantially fluid-tight seal can be formed in any suitable manner. For example, such adjacent wall sections can be proximal to or in abutting engagement with one another and a sealing compound, such as a sealant, adhesive and/or epoxy, for example, could be disposed along the proximal or abutting areas to form a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween. As another example, the wall sections could be formed from a common family of materials (e.g., two different grades of the same polymeric material) with one wall section being molded (or otherwise formed) onto another wall section, such that the complimentary materials melt together during the molding process (or other operation) to thereby adhere the materials together and form a substantially fluid-tight seal therebetween.

[0051] As has also been discussed with regard to other exemplary embodiments, the rigid wall sections can include features suitable for operation of the rigid wall sections as end members of a gas spring assembly. Alternately, one or more additional components and/or elements can be included for use as an end member of the gas spring assembly. In the exemplary embodiment shown, rigid wall section **320** includes an opening **328** formed therethrough. As such, an additional structural component, such as a cover or end plate **330**, for example, can be included for use as an end member for engaging an associated structural component, such as structural component **SC1** in FIG. 1, for example. In the exemplary embodiment shown, end plate **330** is positioned across opening **328** in rigid wall section **320** and can be secured thereto in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith, such as by using a welded joint **332**, for example. End plate **330** can optionally include one or more additional features and/or components, such as a fluid passage **334** formed therethrough for permitting fluid communication with spring chamber **310**, for example.

Additionally, end plate **330** can optionally include one or more securement features, such as threaded studs **336**, for example.

[0052] With regard to the opposing end member of gas spring assembly **300**, second rigid wall section **322** forms a closed end of the spring body. As such, the second rigid wall section is adapted to operate as an opposing end member. One of more additional features or elements can optionally be included on or along second rigid wall section **322**. For example, a threaded hole **338** can be included, such as may be suitable for receiving a threaded fastener (not shown) for securement of the second rigid wall section on or along an associated structural component, such as structural component **SC2** of FIG. 1, for example.

[0053] As discussed above with regard to spring body **102**, spring body **302** also includes a filament structure that extends within at least a portion of the elastomeric wall section and within at least a portion of at least one rigid wall section. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 4 and 5, a filament structure **340** is disposed within elastomeric wall section **304** and extends from first and second elastomeric ends **306** and **308** into rigid wall section **320** and **322**, respectively. As shown in FIGS. 4 and 5, filament structure **340** extends the full length of elastomeric wall section **304** but extends only partially along the length of rigid wall sections **320** and **322**, such that unreinforced portions **320A** and **322A** are respectively formed therealong. In alternate embodiments, however, the filament structure could optionally extend the fully across or otherwise along the full length or width of one or more of the rigid wall sections. The gas spring assembly or spring body thereof can also optionally include a suitable radius-maintaining feature or component, such as has been discussed above, for example. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS 4 and 5, rigid wall sections **320** and **322** respectively include radius-maintaining beads **321** and **323** disposed along an outer peripheral portion of the wall sections. During use, the elastomeric wall section of the spring body can deflect around such a radius-maintaining feature or component, if provided, to thereby prevent the elastomeric wall section from exceeding the desired minimum bend radius.

[0054] Additionally, as discussed above with regard to filament structure **144**, filament structure **340** can be of any suitable type, kind, construction (e.g., with or

without overlaps or filament structure seams) and/or configuration, and can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials that are capable of forming a filament structure for reinforcing at least portions of the spring body. What's more, filament structure **340** can be formed from any number of one or more filaments that are wound or otherwise disposed in any suitable arrangement, shape or having any desired profile, such as a plurality of filaments laid in two or more cross-biased plies **340A** and **340B** or a single filament wound in a geodesic pattern, for example. Additionally, the one or more filaments that are used to form the filament structure can be of any suitable type, construction and/or material, such as monofilament polymeric strands, braided cotton yarn or bundled carbon fibers, for example. Furthermore, such one or more filaments could optionally be coated or otherwise treated, such as to improve adhesion with the elastomeric and/or rigid material, for example.

[0055] As has been also discussed above with regard to spring body **102**, spring body **302** can be formed from any material or combination of materials that are suitable for providing the desired performance characteristics of the respective wall sections. Thus, a single material could be used with the different wall sections having varying thicknesses and/or other geometric features or characteristics to provide the desired variations in performance. Additionally, or in the alternative, different materials could be used for the different wall sections.

[0056] One exemplary method of forming a gas spring assembly that includes a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure is illustrated in FIG. 6 as method **400**. The method includes providing a spring body that includes at least one elastomeric wall (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) and at least one rigid wall (which may alternately be referred to herein as a wall portion and/or wall section) as well as a filament structure that extends into or is otherwise disposed within at least a portion of the elastomeric wall and at least a portion of the at least one rigid wall, as is generally indicated by reference number **402** in FIG. 6. Generally, the elastomeric wall will at least partially define a spring chamber within the spring body and the spring body will typically include at least one opening or open end.

[0057] Method **400** also includes providing at least one end member or other end closing component, such as one or more of covers or end plates **124**, **136**, **220** and/or **330**, for example, that is suitable for enclosing an open end of the spring body, as is generally indicated by reference number **404**. Method **400** further includes securing the end member along the open end of the spring body to enclose a spring chamber that is at least partially defined by the spring body, as is generally indicated by reference number **406**. It will be appreciated that such an action of securing an end member can include any suitable actions, processes and/or operations, such as forming a weld joint or forming a mechanical (e.g., threaded or crimped) or adhesive connection. Method **400** can also optionally include additional actions directed toward the production of a final gas spring assembly, as is generally indicated by reference number **408**. Such optional actions could include, for example, installing additional components (e.g., gas line connector fittings or securement devices).

[0058] Furthermore, it will be appreciated that any suitable actions, processes, operations and/or methods can be used to form a spring body in accordance with the present disclosure. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIG. 6, action or method **402** includes providing a filament structure, such as filament structure **144**, **234** and/or **340**, for example, as is generally indicated by reference number **410**. Method **402** also includes forming at least one rigid wall along the filament structure, as is generally indicated by item number **412**. Method **402** can optionally include forming one or more additional rigid walls along the filament structure, such as along an opposing end thereof, for example, as is generally indicated by item number **414**. Furthermore, method **402** includes forming a wall along the filament structure that is elastomeric or otherwise substantially more flexible than the one or more rigid walls, as is generally indicated by item number **416**. It will be appreciated that any suitable arrangement of rigid and elastomeric walls can be used, such as by positioning walls adjacent to one another or in abutting engagement to one another, for example. Method **402** also includes forming a substantially fluid-tight seal between adjacent, proximal and/or abutting areas of the walls, as is generally indicated by reference number **418**. It will be appreciated that such an action of sealing or forming a seal can include any suitable processes or operations, such as, for example, by molding the walls in abutting

engagement with one another or by forming a seal therebetween using a flowable material, such as an adhesive, epoxy or polymeric resin, for example.

[0059] As used herein with reference to certain elements, components, structures (e.g., “first end member” and “second end member”) and/or actions, numerical ordinals merely denote different singles of a plurality and do not imply any order or sequence unless specifically defined by the claim language. Additionally, the term “gas” is used herein to broadly refer to any gaseous or vaporous fluid. Most commonly, air is used as the working medium of suspension systems and the components thereof, such as those described herein. However, it will be understood that any suitable gaseous fluid could alternately be used.

[0060] While the subject novel concept has been described with reference to the foregoing embodiments and considerable emphasis has been placed herein on the structures and structural interrelationships between the component parts of the embodiments disclosed, it will be appreciated that other embodiments can be made and that many changes can be made in the embodiments illustrated and described without departing from the principles of the subject novel concept. Obviously, modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and understanding the preceding detailed description. Accordingly, it is to be distinctly understood that the foregoing descriptive matter is to be interpreted merely as illustrative of the present novel concept and not as a limitation. As such, it is intended that the subject novel concept be construed as including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims and any equivalents thereof.

CLAIMS:

1. A gas spring body comprising:

a filament structure formed from at least one length of filament material, said filament structure having a longitudinally-extending axis formed between opposing ends;

a flexible wall at least partially defining a spring chamber and including inner and outer wall surfaces, said flexible wall formed from a quantity of elastomeric material and a first portion of said filament structure such that said first portion of said filament structure is disposed in said flexible wall between said inner and outer wall surfaces thereof; and,

a substantially-rigid wall including inner and outer wall surfaces, said substantially-rigid wall formed from a quantity of comparatively-rigid material and a second portion of said filament structure such that said second portion of said filament structure is disposed in said substantially-rigid wall between said inner and outer wall surfaces thereof.

2. A gas spring body according to claim 1, wherein said flexible wall and said substantially-rigid wall are in abutting engagement with one another with a substantially fluid-tight seal formed therebetween.

3. A gas spring body according to claim 1, wherein said first portion of said filament structure is disposed between said opposing ends and spaced axially inwardly therefrom with said second portion of said filament structure disposed axially outwardly from said first portion and including one of said opposing ends.

4. A gas spring body according to claim 1, wherein said substantially-rigid wall is a first substantially-rigid wall and said gas spring body further comprises a second substantially-rigid wall formed from a quantity of comparatively-rigid material and a third portion of said filament structure, said third portion of said filament structure disposed axially outwardly from said first portion of said filament structure in a direction opposite said second portion thereof, and said second substantially-rigid wall including inner and outer surfaces with said third portion of said filament structure disposed in said second substantially-rigid wall between said inner and outer wall surfaces thereof.

5. A gas spring assembly comprising:

a first end member;

a second end member spaced from said first end member;

a elastomeric wall disposed between said first and second end members about a longitudinal axis extending therebetween, said elastomeric wall at least partially forming a spring chamber; and,

a filament structure formed from at least one length of filament material, said filament structure disposed about said axis and having longitudinally-spaced first and second ends, a first portion of said filament structure being embedded within at least a portion of said first end member and a second portion of said filament structure being embedded within at least a portion of said elastomeric wall.

6. A gas spring assembly according to claim 5, wherein said first end member includes a first rigid wall portion at least partially embedded therein having said first portion of said filament structure.

7. A gas spring assembly according to claim 6, wherein said first end member includes an end plate and said first rigid wall portion, said end plate being disposed across said opening and includes an opening secured to said first rigid wall portion such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed therebetween.

8. A gas spring assembly according to claim 5, wherein said filament structure includes a third portion, and said second end member includes a second rigid wall portion having said third portion of said filament structure at least partially embedded therein.
9. A method of forming a gas spring body, said method comprising:
- a) generating a filament structure from at least one length of filament material, said filament structure having a longitudinally-extending axis and first and second axially-spaced ends;
 - b) forming a flexible wall of said gas spring body from a quantity of elastomeric material and a first portion of said filament structure, said flexible wall at least partially defining a spring chamber and including opposing wall surfaces with said first portion of said filament structure disposed between said opposing wall surfaces and operative to reinforce said flexible wall of said gas spring body; and,
 - c) forming a rigid wall from a quantity of substantially-rigid material and a second portion of said filament structure, said rigid wall including opposing wall surfaces with said second portion of said filament structure disposed between said opposing wall surfaces and operative to reinforce said rigid wall of said gas spring body.
10. A method according to claim 9, wherein generating said filament structure in a) includes winding said filament structure from at least one length of rubber-coated filament material.
11. A method according to claim 10, wherein forming a flexible wall in b) includes applying at least one rubber layer over said filament structure and vulcanizing said at least one rubber layer together with said rubber-coated filament material that forms said filament structure.
12. A method according to claim 9, wherein forming said flexible wall in b) includes molding a quantity of thermoplastic elastomer over said filament structure.

13. A method according to claim 9, wherein forming said rigid wall in c) includes molding a quantity of substantially rigid polymeric material over said filament structure, said substantially rigid polymeric material being selected from a group consisting of fiber-reinforced plastic and high-strength unreinforced plastic.

14. A method of manufacturing a gas spring assembly, said method comprising:

a) generating a filament structure from at least one length of filament material, said filament structure having a longitudinally-extending central axis, and said filament structure extending about said axis and longitudinally between opposing first and second structure ends;

b) forming a first rigid wall over a first portion of said filament structure, said first rigid wall operative to at least partially form a first end member of said gas spring assembly and including an inner wall surface and an outer wall surface;

c) forming an elastomeric wall over a second portion of said filament structure, said elastomeric wall at least partially defining a spring chamber and an open end opposite said first rigid wall;

d) forming a substantially fluid-tight seal between said first rigid wall and said elastomeric wall; and,

e) enclosing said spring chamber to form a substantially fluid-tight volume within said gas spring assembly.

15. A method according to claim 14, wherein e) includes forming a second rigid wall over a third portion of said filament structure and forming a substantially fluid-tight seal between said elastomeric wall and said second rigid wall, said second rigid wall operative as said second end member of said gas spring assembly.

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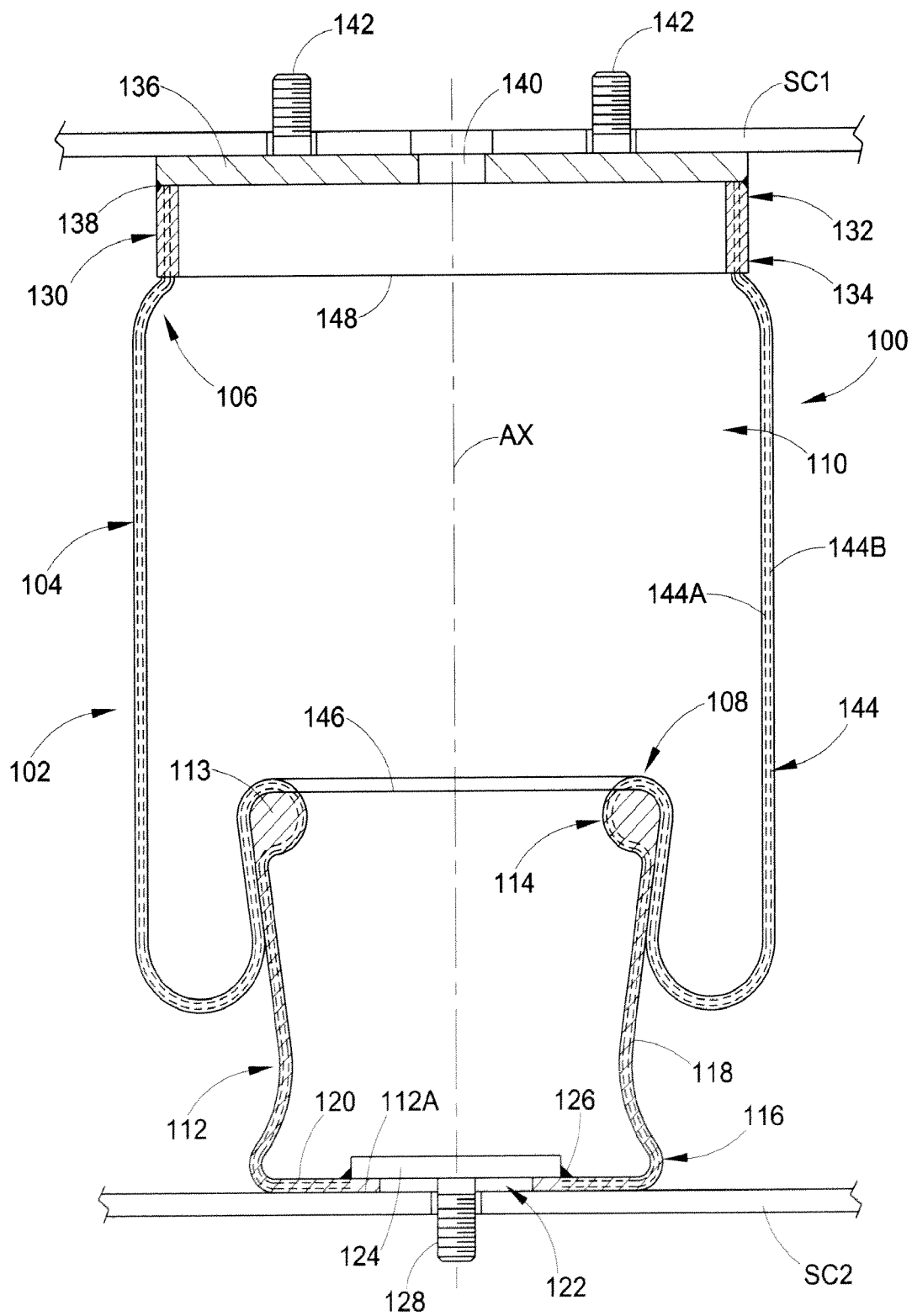
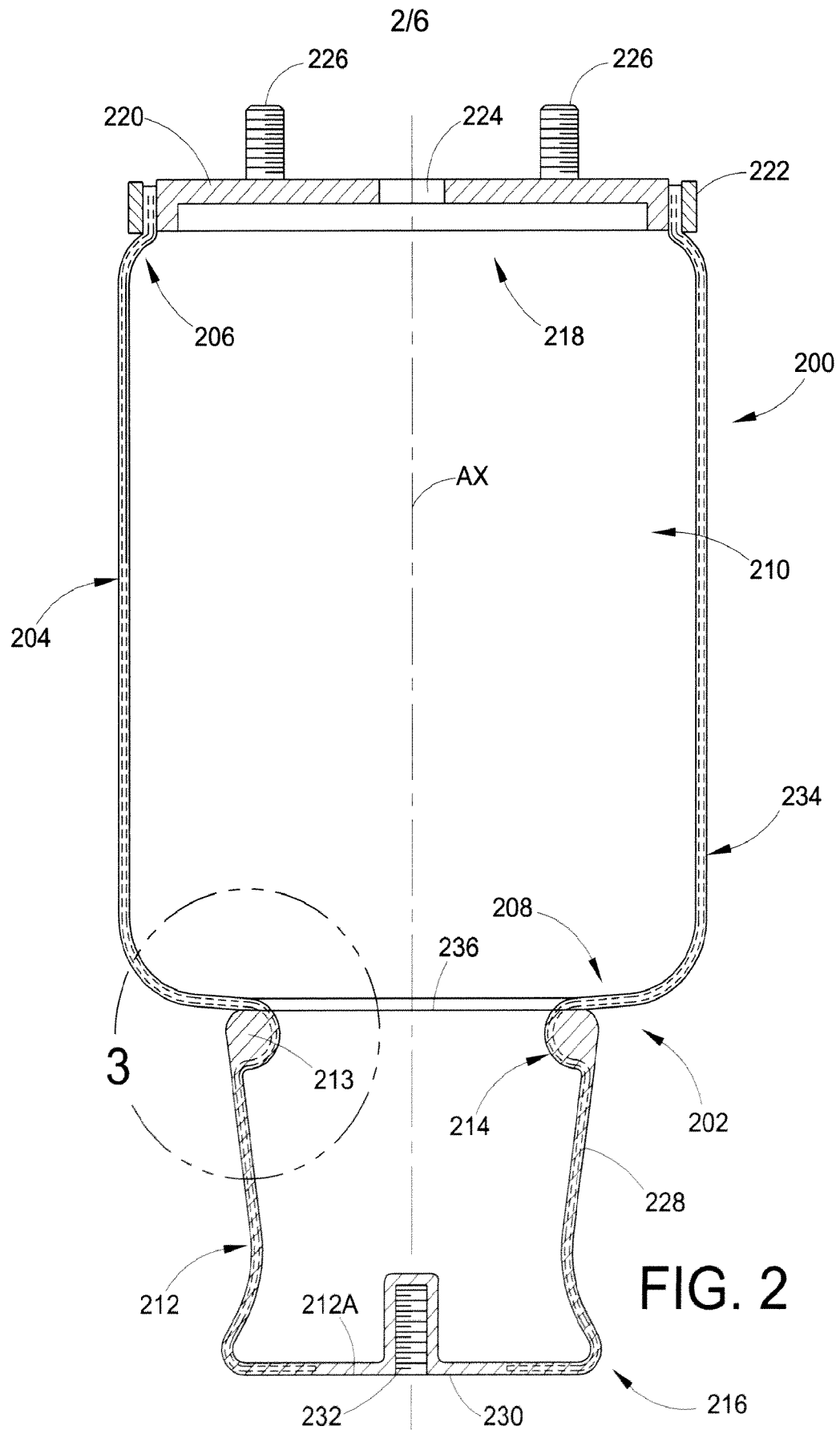


FIG. 1



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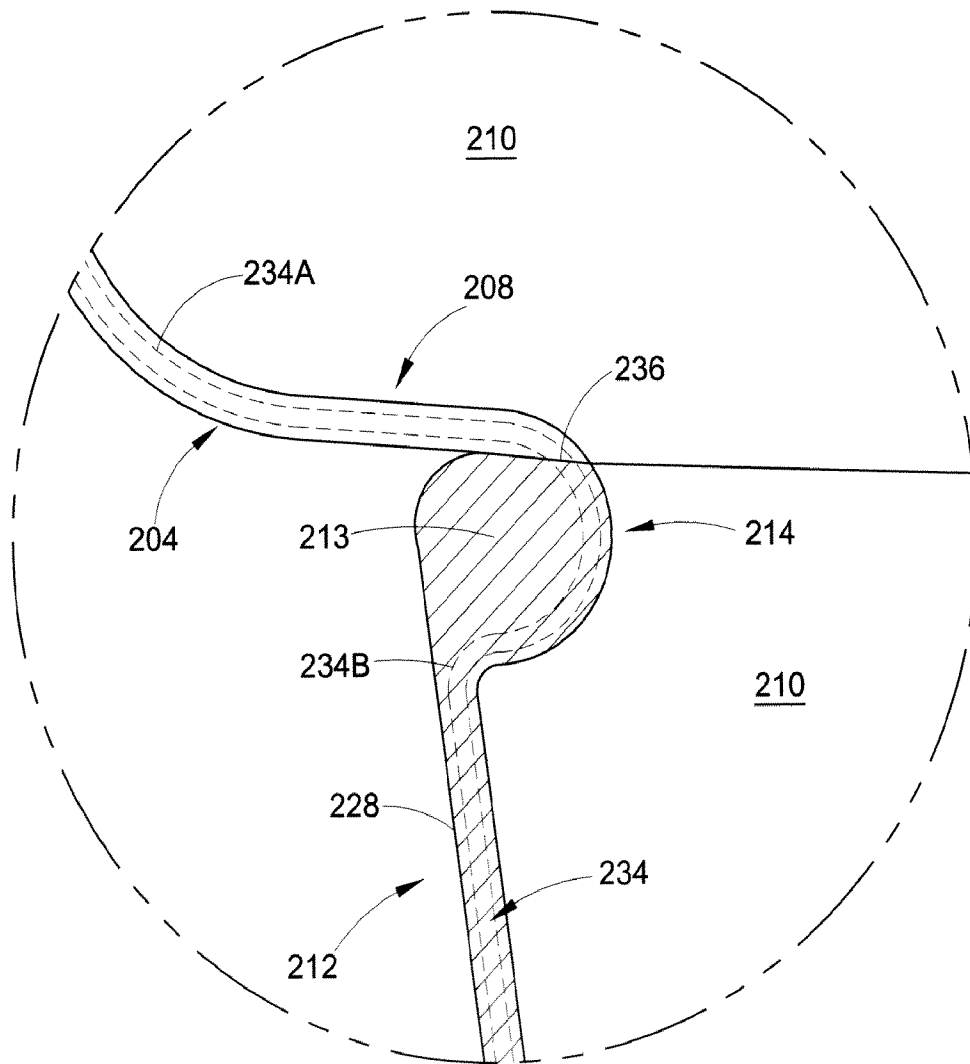


FIG. 3

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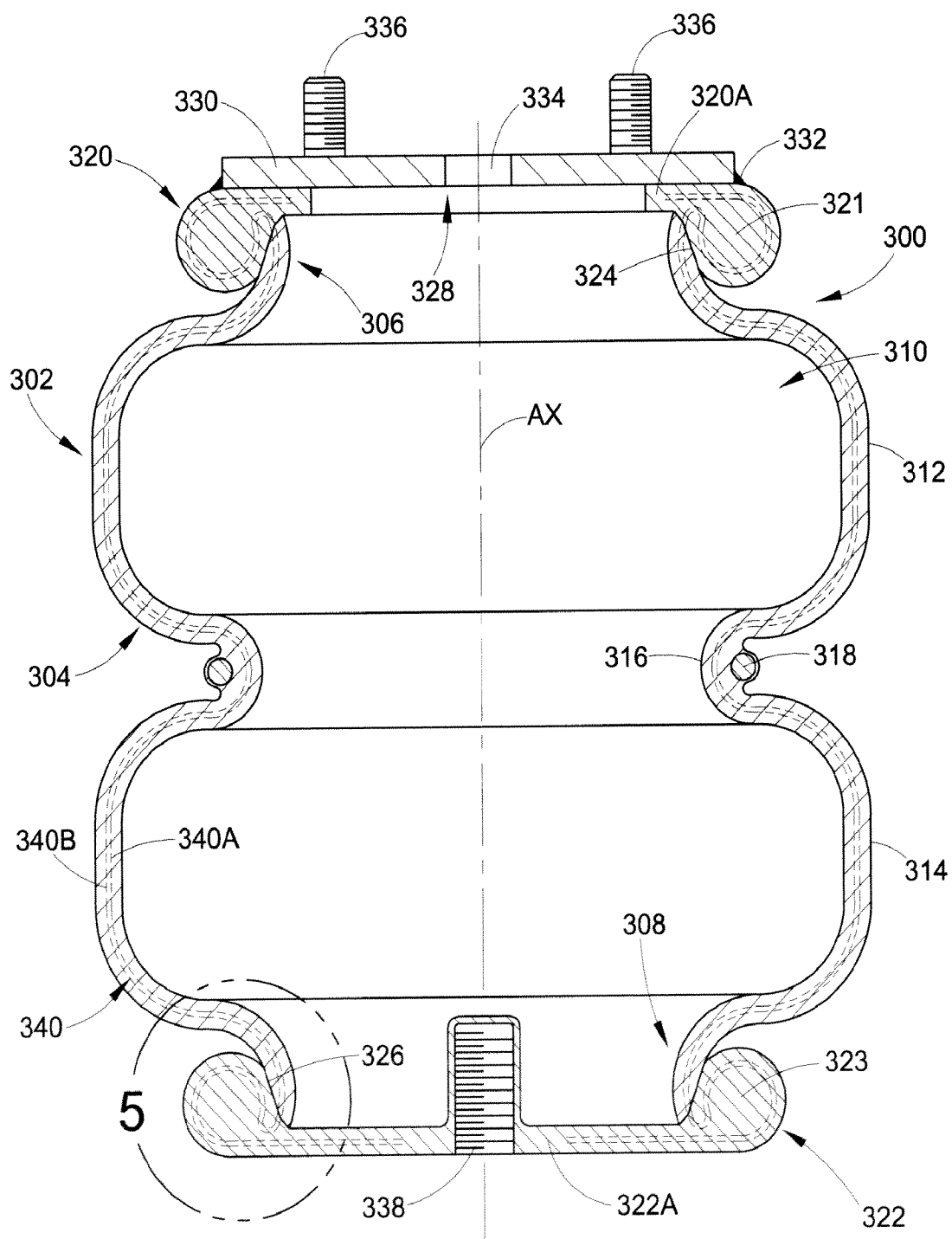


FIG. 4

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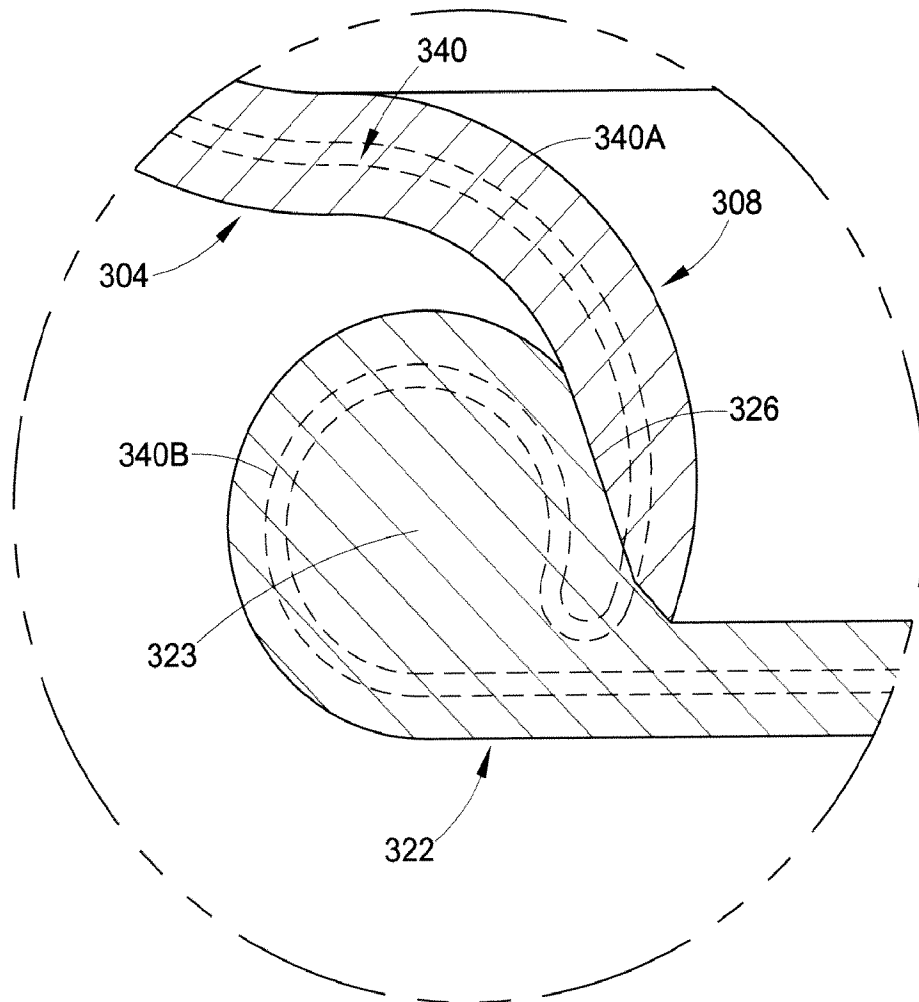


FIG. 5

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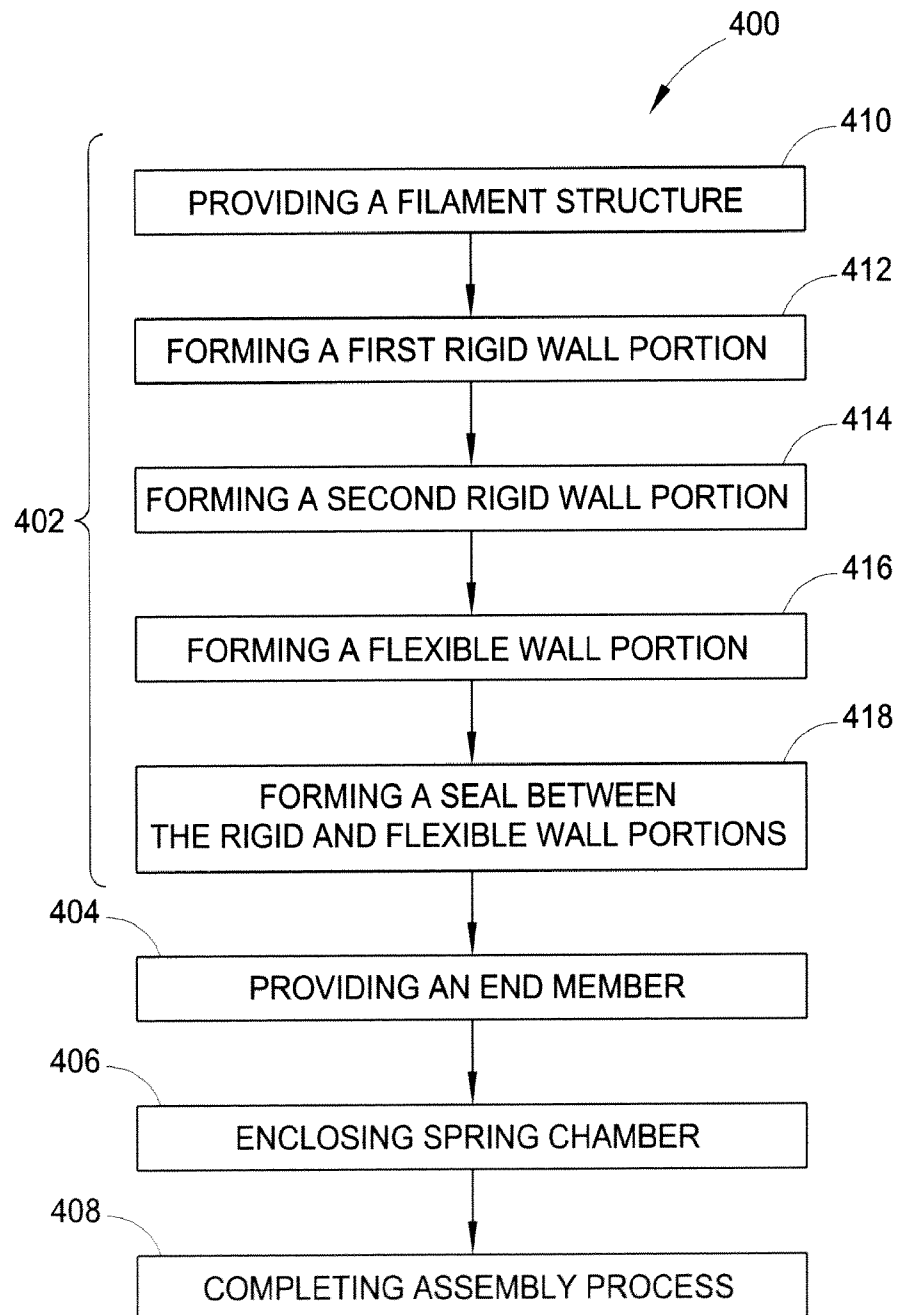


FIG. 6