



(11) **EP 2 211 317 A2**

(12) **EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION**

(43) Date of publication:
28.07.2010 Bulletin 2010/30

(51) Int Cl.:
G07F 17/34 (2006.01)

(21) Application number: **10275002.3**

(22) Date of filing: **14.01.2010**

(84) Designated Contracting States:
**AT BE BG CH CY CZ DE DK EE ES FI FR GB GR
HR HU IE IS IT LI LT LU LV MC MK MT NL NO PL
PT RO SE SI SK SM TR**
Designated Extension States:
AL BA RS

(30) Priority: **17.01.2009 GB 0900792**

(71) Applicant: **Barcrest Group Limited**
Ashton-under-Lyne,
Lancashire OL7 0QQ (GB)

(72) Inventors:
• **Phillips, Joe**
Mottram, Cheshire SK14 6JL (GB)
• **Gerrard, Peter**
Huddersfield, Yorkshire HD7 5UF (GB)

(74) Representative: **Slattery, David Austin**
Wilson Gunn
Blackfriars House
The Parsonage
5th Floor
Manchester M3 2JA (GB)

(54) **Entertainment machine with supplementary play feature**

(57) An entertainment machine according to the present invention comprises: a main display device for use in playing a main game, and at least one supplementary play feature; a player control for selecting operation of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature in place of an available main game; and a credit monitoring means for determining the credit level established for play **characterised in that** the player control is operable in response to the established credit level such that the (or at least one) supplementary play feature available for selection varies in response to the established credit level.

With this arrangement enhanced opportunities for player entertainment arise in so far as the player can choose to implement a supplementary play feature at the start of a game as an alternative to the usual procedure of playing a main game followed by a supplementary play feature as and when made available. Furthermore, the supplementary play feature made available may be varied in nature or operation to ensure compliance with local requirement and/or ease of implementation and thus an attractive wager for a player.

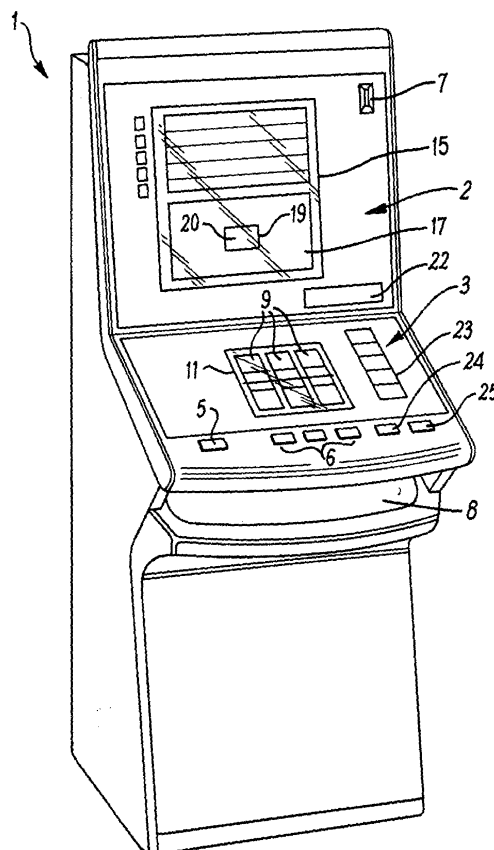


FIG 1

EP 2 211 317 A2

Description

[0001] This invention relates to player-operable entertainment machines, particularly coin-operated amusement with prizes (AWP) machines, such as "fruit" or "poker" machines, of the kind having a main display device operable in play of a main game for displaying a selected combination of symbols at a win zone. As used herein the term coin is intended also to cover tokens, charge or credit cards or any other means of supplying credit or monetary value.

[0002] The main display device of a fruit machine may comprise multiple side-by-side reels which are rotatable about a common horizontal axis within a housing behind a window at the win zone. Each reel has symbols at equally spaced positions around its periphery and the reels can be brought to rest with one symbol on each reel displayed through the window on a win line.

[0003] If the displayed combination of symbols constitutes a predetermined winning combination an award may be made available to the player.

[0004] It is well known to provide a supplementary display or 'feature game' which can be used to enhance the entertainment value of the machine and provide additional or alternative opportunities for winning.

[0005] In particular, it is known to provide a panel having sections which can be selectively illuminated to represent movement from location to location along a trail, particularly along a wraparound trail, which may simulate the playing of a board game.

[0006] Play is transferred from the main reels to the trail of the feature game on a random or predetermined basis and illumination of the panel sections may then be effected by, or in correspondence with, a rotatable subsidiary feature reel, or otherwise, representing the spin of a reel or roll of a dice or other selection.

[0007] Awards or award possibilities may be made available to the player in dependence on the location on the trail to which play has progressed.

[0008] Other supplementary play features, which provide the player with a different or supplementary winning opportunity, or the possibility of increasing the value of an attained award, are also well known. In particular it is known to provide a gamble feature whereby for example the player operates a control to arrest movement up and down a 'ladder' as indicated by illumination of successive steps, so that an increased or decreased award is attained depending on the step finally selected. Also known is to provide the player with one or more free spins of the reels, thus providing the possibility of obtaining additional awards.

[0009] These known supplementary play features are provided in association with the main game and therefore have a limited involvement in the provision of player entertainment.

[0010] In GB 2349494 this problem was addressed by a gaming machine provided with a player control for selecting operation of a supplementary play feature in place

of an available main game. This provides a significant level of improvement in player entertainment by enabling the main game to be bypassed. In some instances, being able to pass directly to a supplementary game feature may cause difficulties in compliance with local gaming laws, with implementation of the supplementary game feature or, in consequence of either of these, difficulties in providing an attractive wager for a player.

[0011] An object of the present invention is to provide enhanced possibilities for player entertainment derived from supplementary play features that at least partly alleviates or overcomes the above problems.

[0012] According to the invention therefore there is provided an entertainment machine having: a main display device for use in playing main game, and at least one supplementary play feature; a player control for selecting operation of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature in place of an available main game; and a credit monitoring means for determining the credit level established for play **characterised in that** the player control is operable in response to the established credit level such that the (or at least one) supplementary play feature available for selection varies in response to the established credit level.

[0013] With this arrangement enhanced opportunities for player entertainment arise in so far as the player can choose to implement a supplementary play feature at the start of a game as an alternative to the usual procedure of playing a main game followed by a supplementary play feature as and when made available. Furthermore, the supplementary play feature made available may be varied in nature or operation to ensure compliance with local requirement and/or ease of implementation and thus an attractive wager for a player.

[0014] The operation of the player control may vary by varying the value of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature or by varying the (or at least one) supplementary play feature available for selection. The value variation may occur in any one or more of: the permitted start value, permitted stake value, permitted plays, permitted award value or permitted award multipliers.

[0015] The gaming machine may further comprise indicator means for indicating to a player the possible variations of supplementary play feature value and/or supplementary play features available. The indicator means may comprise a visual display unit such as an LCD, LED display or similar. The indicator means may additional or alternatively comprise audio output means.

[0016] Most preferably the machine is a coin-operated machine and a predetermined level of credit value has to be established for play of a main game. There may be the possibility of accumulating credit by multiple coin insertions and/or by transfer from credit value awards. Operation of the player control of the present invention may act to decrement such accumulated credit value, the control being available for operation whenever the established credit value meets a predetermined condition.

[0017] Where the supplementary play feature oper-

ates on a start value, such as the gamble feature which acts to increase or decrease a start value, this value may be equal to the above mentioned game-playing unit of credit value, or it may be calculated on some other basis. Provision may be made for player selection of the start value e.g. by multiple operation of the player control to effect multiple transfer of existing established units of credit value e.g. to the start stake of the gamble feature. The indicator means may provide indications of the credit value required to obtain a particular value of supplementary play feature or may provide indications of the permitted start value of the supplementary play feature.

[0018] In different embodiments the predetermined condition for the established credit value may be that the credit value is above a predetermined level, below a predetermined level, within a predetermined range or equal to a predetermined value. This provides for the machine to require a minimum credit value to initiate the operation of the player control if so desired and also provides for the machine to prevent operation of the supplementary play feature with a start value that could result in an award outside the legally permitted maximum in a particular location or for a particular type of machine. If the potential award value for a given start value that could result in an award outside the legally permitted maximum in a particular location or for a particular type of machine, selection of the supplementary play feature with such a start value may result in a change of machine mode such that such awards may be won. This functionality may only be enabled if it is legally permitted. For instance, a player may be able to play the main game for a stake of say £1 (here the machine may be classified as a B3 game for UK legal purposes) and may wish to play the supplementary feature for a stake of say £30 (here the machine may be classified as a B2 game for UK legal purposes). Assuming the machine is sited in a suitable location, the machine may change mode between B2 compliant mode and B3 compliant mode as required.

[0019] The indicator means may be operable to indicate to a player the predetermined maximum or minimum credit value, the predetermined value range or the predetermined value. The indicator means may further be operable in particular embodiments to indicate that a change of operation mode is possible and/or has occurred.

[0020] The supplementary play feature implemented by the player control may be a feature game, a gamble feature, additional plays or any other suitable supplementary feature or combination of features. There may be multiple supplementary play features. Where there are multiple supplementary play features the arrangement may be such that the player control implements one of these as selected on a predetermined basis or on a random or pseudo random basis or at the choice of the player. In some embodiments where there are multiple supplementary play features some or all of these features may be only available via the main game or via selection using the player control.

[0021] A winning outcome of the supplementary play feature may result in an award to the player in the usual way e.g. by payout or transfer to accumulated credit value which can be used for further game play.

5 **[0022]** Most preferably the entertainment machine is an 'amusement with prizes' (AWP) machine particularly of the fruit machine or poker machine kind using actual (or simulated) rotatable reels as mentioned above. The supplementary play feature may be provided using electrome-
10 tromechanical means or a simulated video display.

[0023] The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

15 Figure 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of one form of an entertainment machine according to the invention;

Figure 2 is a block circuit diagram of the machine; and

20 Figure 3 is a schematic illustration of an alternative embodiment of the machine.

[0024] Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 shows a fruit machine having a floor-standing box shaped housing 1
25 having a front wall which includes upper and lower glass panels 2, 3, a number of operating buttons 5, 6, 24, 25, a coin slot 7 and a payout opening 8.

[0025] Within the housing 1 there are three axially aligned reels 9 having say 20 symbols at regularly spaced
30 positions around their peripheries. The reels 9 are axially rotatable and are driveably connected to respective stepper motors 10. The reels 9 are arranged behind a window 11 defined by a printed region of the lower glass panel 3. Each reel 9 can be arrested by the respective stepper
35 motor 10 in any of 20 stopping positions in which one symbol is in precise registration with a horizontal win line in the centre of the window 11 and two further symbols are visible above and below the win line.

[0026] The stepper motors 10 are connected to a microprocessor-based control unit 12. This unit is also connected to a coin-mechanism 13, a pay-out mechanism 14 and the buttons 5, 6, 24, 25.
40

[0027] In use, the player inserts coins into the coin mechanism 13 through the slot 7 sufficient to generate credit for one or more games. The credit established by inserting coins is determined by a credit monitoring means 12a, which is further operable to determine the credit level after play of one or more games or the receipt of one or more awards. The amount of credit is shown
45 on an LED or LCD display 22 and the machine is actuated so that a main game can now be played. The main game commences after a start button 5 has been pressed and the reels 9 spin and then come to rest so as to select a combination of symbols displayed on the win line. The displayed symbol combination is assessed by the control unit 12 and a win indication is given in the event that the combination is of a predetermined winning nature.
50

[0028] The control buttons 6 can be used to perform

'hold' or 'nudge' functions, when made available to the player, so that the player can seek to influence the outcome of a game, in conventional manner.

[0029] The upper panel 2 is a transparent glass panel and within this there is a printed display region 15, which can be back-illuminated with a bank of lamps 16, and which provides a conventional supplementary feature game.

[0030] As shown, this feature game comprises a wrap-around trail 17 comprising a series of printed sections marked with decoration, information and symbols. Of course it is possible that alternative feature games may be provided, in particular multiple different feature games may be provided if a video screen is provided.

[0031] In the centre of the trail there is a printed window behind which an auxiliary feature reel 20 is rotatable. The reel 20 has around its periphery the numbers 1 to 12 corresponding to the values which can be selected with two dice. The reel 20 can be rotated with a stepper motor 21, controlled by the control system 12, and brought to rest with one of the numbers shown through the window 19.

[0032] Play can progress around the trail 17 by successive back illumination of the sections simulating movement through a number of steps corresponding to the number selected with the feature reel 20.

[0033] Play transfers to the trail 17 from the main game in the usual way on a random or predetermined basis, e.g. when predetermined transfer symbols on the main reels 9 are selected on the win line or otherwise.

[0034] The player can then operate the start button 5 or another feature button to cause the feature reel 20 to rotate and select a number which causes play to progress along the trail 17 to a selected section at which a symbol on the section is back illuminated.

[0035] In the event that the main game results in a winning combination of symbols on the win line 11, and/or the feature game results in selection of a winning section or sections of the trail 17, an award may be made available to the player and on a random or pseudo random basis the player may be given an opportunity of gambling the award.

[0036] As shown there is a gamble ladder 23 having steps corresponding to successively increasing values starting with zero or a low value. The steps are rapidly back illuminated (with lamps 16a) in sequence when the gamble feature is actuated and a gamble button 24 can then be pressed to arrest the sequential illumination on one of the steps. The gambled award is then increased (or decreased) to the value corresponding to the illuminated step.

[0037] Also possible, either directly from the main game or from either the trail or the bonus ladder, is the award of one or more free spins of reels 9. As in normal game operation, the free spins may each result in an award being made available to the player or transfer to feature game or gamble feature. The number of free spins awarded may be indicated on digital display 22.

[0038] There is a further button 25 on the front of the machine which can be used as a selector button.

[0039] Whenever the machine has been provided with sufficient credit, as monitored by the credit monitoring means 12a and as thereby shown on the digital display 22, the player has the option to operate the selector button 25 as an alternative to starting a main game, as described above, by pressing the start button 5.

[0040] When the selector button 25 is pressed, instead of starting a main game, play transfers directly to the feature game or to the gamble feature or provides one or more free spins. The arrangement may be such that the machine operating system determines whether it is the feature game or the gamble feature to which play transfers or whether one or more free spins are provided. Alternatively the player may be able to choose e.g. by pressing the button 25 an appropriate number of times, or otherwise, to make a selection.

[0041] If play transfers directly to the feature game, the player can then play the feature game in the usual way and possibly obtain an award. In particular, the player may play the feature game with a stake equal to the amount of credit required to transfer directly to the feature game.

[0042] If play transfers directly to the gamble feature, the player can gamble an amount equal to the credit value required to play a main game, or any other appropriate amount, and possibly obtain an increased value of credit. In particular, the player may play the gamble feature with a stake equal to the amount of credit required to transfer directly to the gamble feature.

[0043] If one or more free spins are provided, the free spins may each result in an award being made available to the player or transfer to feature game or gamble feature. The player may be required to provide a particular credit value to obtain the free spins.

[0044] In some cases, for instance with direct transfer to the feature game or the gamble feature, gambling using the credit value required to transfer to directly to the feature game or gamble feature could result in awards larger than permitted by local legislation or by the machine category. In such circumstances, the selector button 25 will not enable direct transfer. Alternatively, the selector button 25 will enable direct transfer but will also change the machine operation mode. This might for instance cause the machine to operate as a UK category B2 machine rather than a B3 machine.

[0045] The value of the feature game, gamble feature or free spins may vary with the amount of credit value required to enable the transfer. For instance, with the award of free spins, the player may be offered the opportunity of obtaining, say, 2 free spins for a first credit value, 5 free spins for a second larger credit value and 10 free spins for a third still larger credit value. In a further alternative, the player may be offered the opportunity to obtain, say, 2 free spins and a x2 multiplier on all win values for a first value and 2 free spins and a x5 multiplier on all win values for a second larger credit value. In further

embodiments it may be possible to provide a range of options including different numbers of free spins and different award multiplier values.

[0046] The functionality described above may alternatively be implemented in a machine 101 having simulated features provided on one or more display areas 102, 103 as is illustrated in figure 3a. In this example the machine 101 is provided with a main game based on simulated reels 109 on the lower display area 103, the upper display area 102 being reserved for game information and for implementing a feature game. The display areas 102, 103 are touch sensitive and provide simulated control buttons 105 for playing the main game and a credit display 122. As in the embodiment of figures 1 and 2, the machine 101 provides a selector button 125 which operates to transfer play to the feature game, gamble feature or as shown to allow a player to obtain free spins. The button 125 is operable to display the credit value required to obtain the free spins. Of course, should the button be operable to provide an alternative transfer such as the feature game or gamble feature, this and the credit value required could be displayed thereon.

[0047] In order to prevent accidental selection or, if a choice of different transfers or different values of transfers is possible, following actuation of the selection button 125 one or more additional selection buttons 125a may be provided. The additional selection buttons 125a are shown in figure 3b.

[0048] With the arrangements described above, the player is provided with increased opportunities, and hence enhanced entertainment, since the player has the option of playing a main game followed possibly by the feature game and/or gamble, or of playing the feature game and/or the gamble instead of the main game and the still further possibility of selecting an appropriate value feature game or gamble when either playing in sequence or when transferring.

[0049] It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only.

Claims

1. An entertainment machine having: a main display device for use in playing a main game, and at least one supplementary play feature; a player control for selecting operation of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature in place of an available main game; and a credit monitoring means for determining the credit level established for play **characterised in that** the player control is operable in response to the established credit level such that the (or at least one) supplementary play feature available for selection varies in response to the established credit level.

2. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 1

wherein the player control is operable to vary any one or more of: the permitted start value, permitted stake value, permitted plays, permitted award value or permitted award multipliers of the (or at least one) supplementary play feature.

3. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the player control is operable to vary the (or at least one) supplementary play feature available for selection.

4. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the entertainment machine further comprises indicator means for indicating to a player the possible variations of supplementary play feature value and/or supplementary play features available.

5. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 4 wherein the indicator means comprises a visual display unit, being an LCD or LED display.

6. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 4 or claim 5 wherein the indicator means comprises audio output means.

7. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the entertainment machine is a coin-operated machine and a predetermined level of credit value has to be established for play of a main game and wherein there is the possibility of accumulating credit by multiple coin insertions and/or by transfer from credit value awards.

8. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 7 wherein operation of the player control acts to decrement such accumulated credit value, the control being available for operation whenever the established credit value meets a predetermined condition.

9. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the supplementary play feature implemented by the player control is a feature game, a gamble feature, or an additional play.

10. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the supplementary play feature is a gamble feature which acts to increase or decrease a start value and wherein the start value is either: equal to the predetermined level of credit value; or can be selected by the player.

11. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 10 wherein the start value is selected by multiple operation of the player control to effect multiple transfer of existing established units of credit value to the start value of the supplementary play feature.

12. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding

ing claim when dependent either directly or indirectly upon claim 4 wherein the indicator means provides an indication of the permitted start values of the supplementary play feature.

13. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim when dependent either directly or indirectly upon claim 8 wherein the predetermined condition for the established credit value is that the credit value is above a first predetermined level, below a second predetermined level, within a predetermined range, equal to a predetermined value or is chosen so that the wagers are legally permitted.

14. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 13 when dependent either directly or indirectly upon claim 4 wherein the indicator means is operable to indicate to a player the predetermined maximum or minimum credit value, the predetermined value range or the predetermined value.

15. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the entertainment machine is operable in two or more operation modes and wherein the entertainment machine is operable in a first operation mode during play of the main game and a second operation mode during play of the supplementary play feature.

16. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 1 when dependent either directly or indirectly upon claim 4 wherein the indicator means is further operable to indicate that a change of operation mode is possible and/or has occurred when play switches/is about to switch between the main game and the supplementary play feature.

17. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein there are multiple supplementary play features and wherein the player control implements one of the multiple supplementary play features as selected on a predetermined basis; on a random or pseudo random basis; or at the choice of the player.

18. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 17 wherein some or all of the supplementary play features are only available via the main game or via selection using the player control.

19. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein a winning outcome of the supplementary play feature results in an award to the player by payout or transfer to accumulated credit value.

20. An entertainment machine as claimed in any preceding claim wherein the entertainment machine is an 'amusement with prizes' (AWP) machine of the fruit

machine or poker machine kind using actual (or simulated) rotatable reels.

21. An entertainment machine as claimed in claim 20 wherein the supplementary play feature is provided using electromechanical means or a simulated video display.

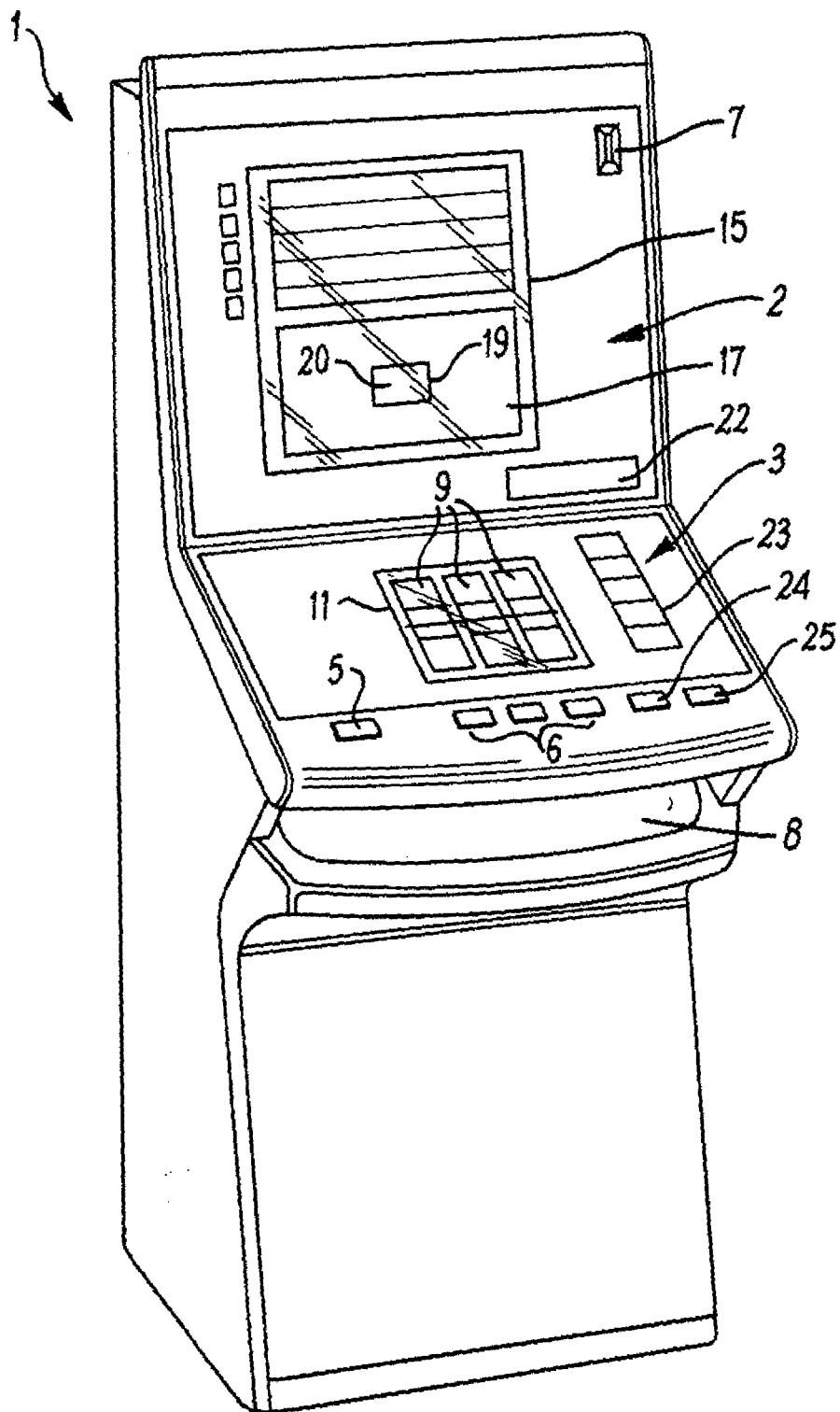


FIG 1

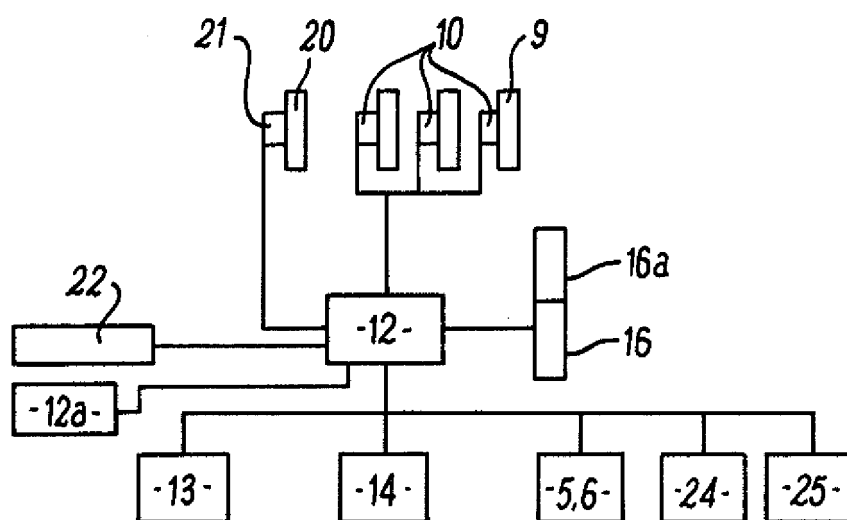
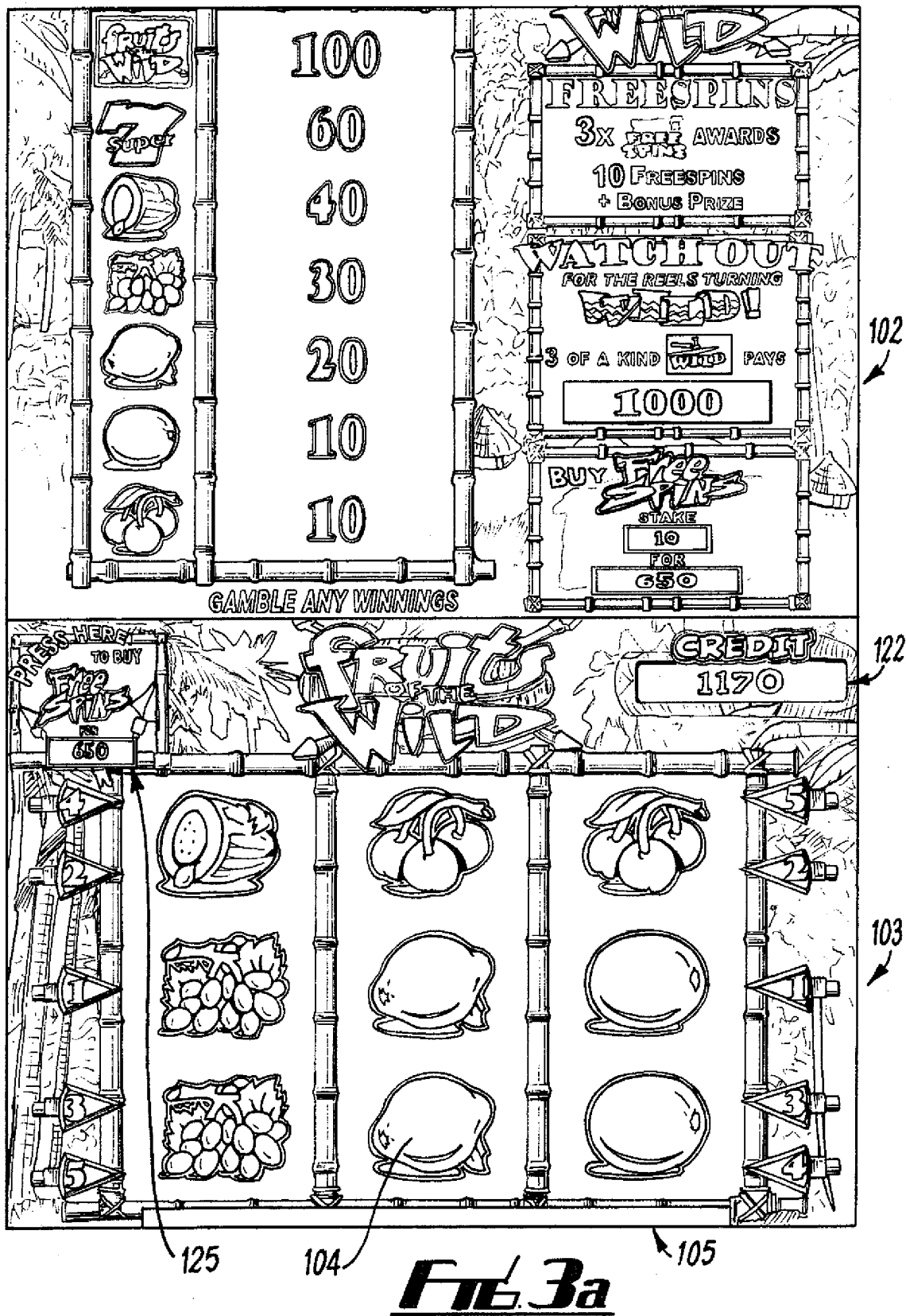
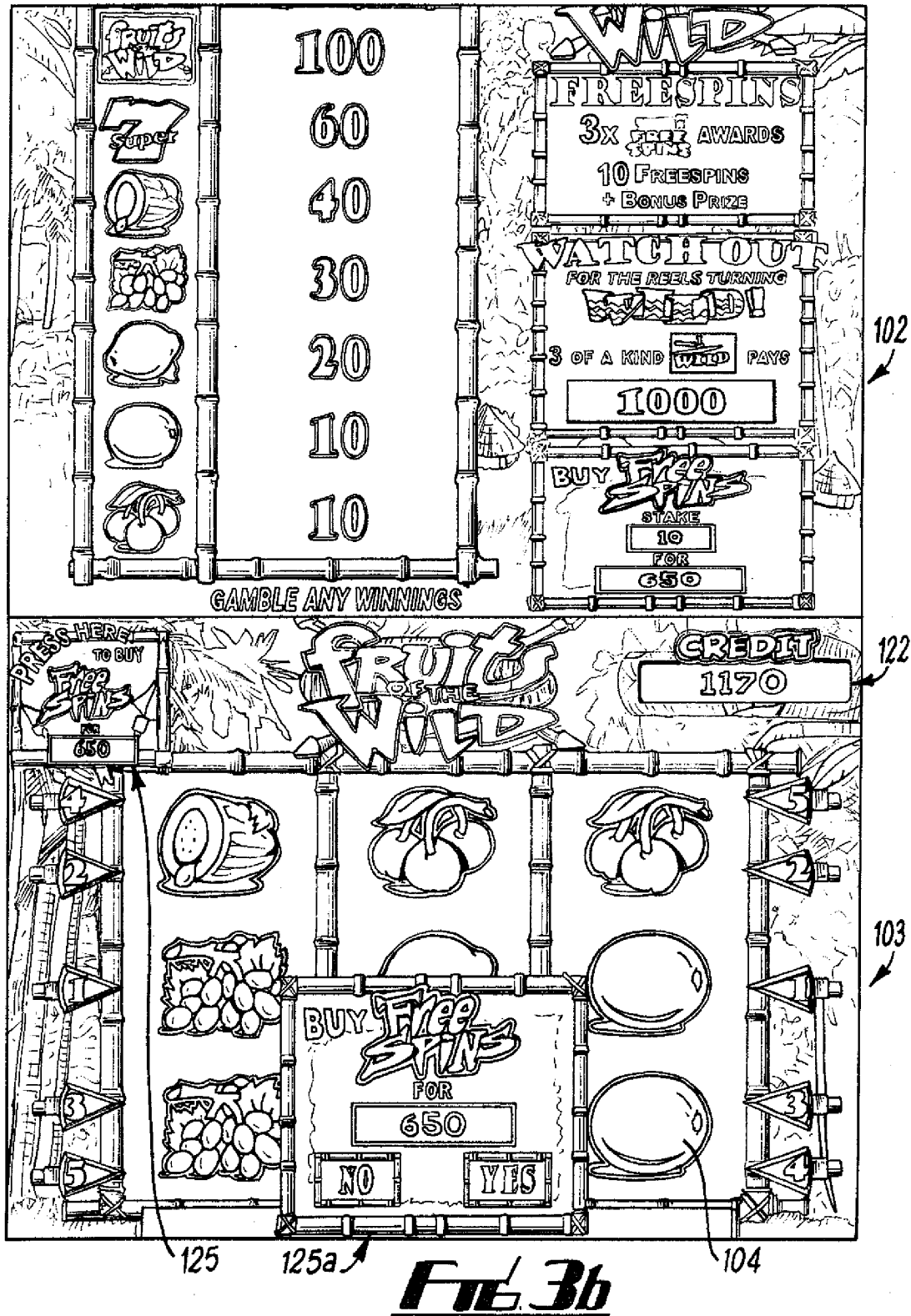


FIG. 2





REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

This list of references cited by the applicant is for the reader's convenience only. It does not form part of the European patent document. Even though great care has been taken in compiling the references, errors or omissions cannot be excluded and the EPO disclaims all liability in this regard.

Patent documents cited in the description

- GB 2349494 A [0010]