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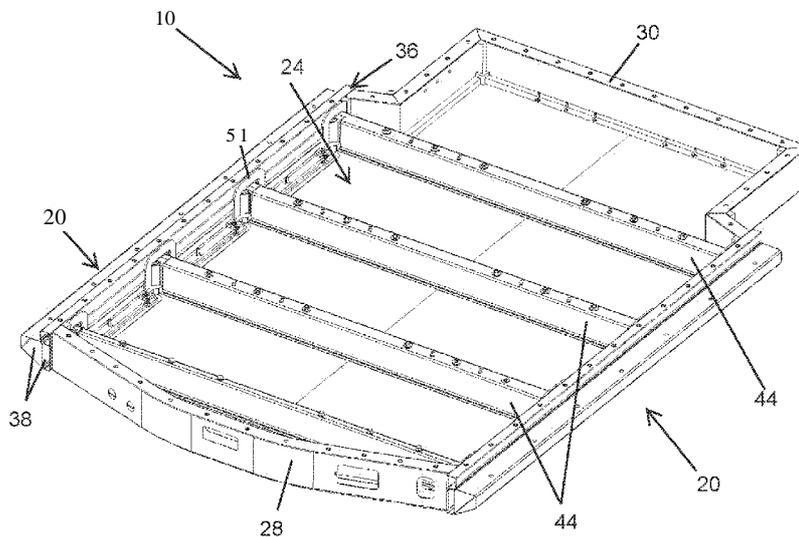


FIG. 3

(57) Abstract: A battery support structure for a vehicle includes a first peripheral member configured to be supported by a longitudinal section of a vehicle frame. A second peripheral member has an end surface that selectively attaches at an inside surface of the first peripheral member to enclose a corner section of a battery containment area. Prior to fixed attachment of the first and second peripheral members, a slip plane is defined between the end surface and the inside surface to adjust the second peripheral member along the first peripheral member to a predefined dimension of the battery containment area.



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BATTERY SUPPORT AND PROTECTION STRUCTURE FOR A VEHICLE

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims benefit and priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) of U.S. provisional application Ser. No. 62/376,135, filed August 17, 2016, which is hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention generally relates to vehicle battery support structures, and more particularly to structural components and protective enclosures for concealing and protecting vehicle electronic components and batteries, such as battery packs or modules or the like for electric and hybrid-electric vehicles.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Electric and hybrid-electric vehicles are typically designed to locate and package battery modules on the vehicle in a manner that protects the batteries from damage when driving in various climates and environments, and also that protects the batteries from different types of impacts. It is also fairly common for vehicle frames to locate batteries in a portion of the frame or sub-structure of the vehicle, such as between the axles and near the floor of the vehicle, which can distribute the weight of the batteries across the vehicle frame and establish a low center of gravity for the vehicle. Similar to other vehicle components, low weight and high strength-to-weight ratio are important properties in battery support structural components.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENT INVENTION

[0004] The present invention provides a vehicle battery support structure or tray that is configured to support and protect battery packs or modules or the like for electric and hybrid-electric vehicles. A side reinforcement member of the battery support structure may form part of a peripheral wall that surrounds the battery containment area and may include a beam adapted to absorb and reduce impact forces delivered to exterior portions of the side reinforcement member. The side reinforcement member and other components of the battery support structure may also be formed with slip planes to provide adjustment points for use prior to welding or fixing the battery support structure to form a battery containment area with precise selected or predefined

dimensional specifications, such as to provide a sealed interior compartment. The side reinforcement member and other components of the battery support structure may also provide load paths for transferring lateral impact forces around the battery containment area and limiting resulting disruption to the supported batteries and containment area.

[0005] According to one aspect of the present invention, a battery support structure for a vehicle includes a first peripheral member configured to be supported by a longitudinal section of a vehicle frame. A second peripheral member has an end surface that selectively attaches at an inside surface of the first peripheral member to enclose a corner section of a containment area. Prior to fixed attachment of the first and second peripheral members, a slip plane is defined between the end surface and the inside surface to adjust the second peripheral member along the first peripheral member to a predefined dimension of the containment area.

[0006] According to another aspect of the present invention, a battery support structure for a vehicle includes a pair of side peripheral members that are configured to attach at longitudinal sections or rails or sills or the like at opposing sides of a vehicle frame. An end peripheral member extends laterally between the side members to generally enclose a front or a rear of a battery containment area. The opposing ends of the end peripheral member selectively attach at inside surfaces of the side peripheral members. Prior to fixed attachment of the end peripheral member at the side members, slip planes are defined between the ends of the end peripheral member and the inside surfaces. The slip planes are configured to longitudinally adjust the end peripheral member relative to the side peripheral members to form the battery containment area with a predefined longitudinal dimension.

[0007] According to yet another aspect of the present invention, a method of forming a battery support structure for a vehicle includes providing a pair of side reinforcement members configured to attach at opposing rocker rails of a vehicle frame. Front and rear members are longitudinally adjusted along slip planes defined between ends of the front and rear member and inside vertical surfaces of the pair of side reinforcement members to a predefined longitudinal distance between the front and rear members. The front and rear member are welded to the pair of side reinforcement member to fix the predefined longitudinal distance between the front and rear members and to form a battery containment area. Optionally, a base plate may be attached along lower surfaces of the pair of side reinforcement members and the front and rear member, such that the base plate spans generally below the side reinforcement members and the front and

rear members to provide a bottom surface of the battery containment area. Also, a plurality of cross members may optionally attach at the pair of side reinforcement members, so as to span laterally between the reinforcement members for lateral impact forces to be transmitted through load paths along the cross members.

[0008] These and other objects, advantages, purposes, and features of the present invention will become apparent upon review of the following specification in conjunction with the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] FIG. 1 is a side elevational view of a battery support structure disposed at a mounting location on a vehicle in accordance with the present invention;

[0010] FIG. 2 is top plan view of the battery support structure and outline of the vehicle shown in FIG. 1, illustrating rocker rails of the vehicle and several battery modules held in the battery support structure in dashed lines;

[0011] FIG. 3 is a front upper perspective view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 1, illustrated separated or detached from a vehicle;

[0012] FIG. 4 is a side elevational view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0013] FIG. 5 is a rear upper perspective view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0014] FIG. 6 is a rear elevational view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0015] FIG. 7 is a front elevational view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0016] FIG. 8 is a top plan view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0017] FIG. 9 is a bottom plan view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0018] FIG. 10 is a lower perspective view of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3;

[0019] FIG. 11 is a lower perspective view of a front corner portion of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 10;

[0020] FIG. 12 is a front elevational view of a front corner portion of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 7, illustrating a rocker rail of a vehicle attached at a side reinforcement member of the battery support structure;

[0021] FIG. 13 is an enlarged upper perspective view of a portion of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3, illustrating a connection interface between cross members and a side reinforcement member;

[0022] FIG. 14 is an enlarged upper perspective view of a front corner portion of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 13;

- [0023] FIG. 15 is a cross-sectional upper perspective view of a portion of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 13, taken at line XV-XV shown in FIG. 14;
- [0024] FIG. 16 is a cross-sectional front elevational view of the portion of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 15;
- [0025] FIG. 17 is a front elevational view of the side reinforcement member shown in FIG. 16;
- [0026] FIG. 18 is an upper perspective view of the side reinforcement members and the front and rear members of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 3, illustrating two slip planes;
- [0027] FIG. 18A is a top plan view of the side reinforcement members and the front and rear members of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 18;
- [0028] FIG. 19 is an upper perspective view of the side reinforcement members and the front and rear members of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 18, illustrating the rear member adjusted along the slip planes to a different position from that shown in FIG. 18;
- [0029] FIG. 19A is a top plan view of the side reinforcement members and the front and rear members of the battery support structure shown in FIG. 19;
- [0030] FIG. 20 is a flow chart of the process of forming a front member of the batter support structure;
- [0031] FIGS. 20A-20C are upper perspective views of the front member at different steps of the forming process shown in FIG. 20;
- [0032] FIG. 21 is a flow chart of the process of forming a side reinforcement member of the batter support structure;
- [0033] FIGS. 21A-21C are upper perspective views of the side reinforcement member at different steps of the forming process shown in FIG. 21;
- [0034] FIG. 22 is a flow chart of the process of forming a rear member of the batter support structure;
- [0035] FIGS. 22A-22D' are upper perspective views of the rear member at different steps of the forming process shown in FIG. 22;
- [0036] FIG. 23 is an exploded upper perspective view the side reinforcement members spaced away from the front and rear members of the batter support structure; and
- [0037] FIG. 24 is an upper perspective view the assembled batter support structure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

[0038] Referring now to the drawings and the illustrative embodiment depicted therein, a vehicle battery support tray or structure 10 is provided for supporting and protecting battery packs or modules or the like, such as for an electric or hybrid-electric vehicle 12 (FIGS. 1 and 2). The battery support structure 10 may be attached or mounted at or near the lower frame or rocker rails 14 of the vehicle 12, so as to locate the battery modules 16 that are contained generally in a central location on the vehicle 12 (FIG. 2), away from probable impact locations, and also in a location that evenly distributes the weight of the battery modules 16 and provides the vehicle with a relatively low center of gravity. It is contemplated that the battery support structure 10 may be disengaged or detached from the rocker rails 14 of the vehicle 12, such as for replacing or performing maintenance on the battery modules 16 or related electrical components. To facilitate this optional disengagement or detachment, the battery support structure 10 can be a modular design with standardized mounting locations capable of disengagement, such as with bolts or releasable fasteners or the like. Also, the battery support structure 10 may be provided with a base plate 18 or panel that is generally unobstructed to form the lowermost undercarriage surface of the vehicle body. Accordingly, the battery support structure 10, such as shown in FIG. 1, may span below the vehicle with a generally thin profile, so as to accommodate various vehicle body types and designs.

[0039] The battery support structure 10 includes side reinforcement members 20 or beams that form side portions or walls of a vehicle battery support structure 10. The side reinforcement members 20 and other components and portions of the battery support structure 10 may be formed with engineered slip planes, such as shown at slip planes 22a, 22b (FIG. 12) along the upper beams 36 of the side reinforcement members 20 and at slip planes 22c, 22d (FIG. 18) at the ends of the front and rear members 28, 30. These slip planes provide adjustment points during the assembly and formation processes, such as to enable the battery support structure 10 to enclose a battery containment area 24 in a sealed manner with precise selected or predefined dimensional specifications. The slip planes 22a-22d are also provided so as not to interrupt or compromise load paths for transferring lateral impact forces around the battery containment area and for limiting disruption to the battery modules 16 supported in the battery containment area.

[0040] The side reinforcement members 20 may be attached to a rocker rail 14 of the vehicle 12 to secure the vehicle battery support structure 10 to the vehicle frame and suspend it away from

the ground surface, such as shown in FIG. 12 at an inboard location that does not substantially come into a line of sight 26 of a person standing outside of the vehicle 12. Accordingly, the illustrated battery support structure 10 may span laterally across the vehicle between the rocker rails 14 and may also extend longitudinally generally between the axles or wheel locations of the vehicle 12, such that lateral impact or collision-related forces may be transmitted from the rocker rails 14 to a side reinforcement member 20 and laterally across the vehicle through load paths along the cross, front, and/or rear members of the battery support structure 10, to thereby prevent damage to the batteries contained in the support structure.

[0041] The battery containment area 24 of the battery support structure 10 is generally bound on four sides, as shown in FIGS. 2 and 3, by the two side reinforcement members 20 and by a front member 28 and a rear member 30 that each extend laterally between the side reinforcement members 20. Ends of the front and rear members 28, 30 engage at a generally vertical inside surface of the side reinforcement members 20, thereby forming slip planes 22c, 22d (FIG. 18) between ends of the front and rear members 28, 30 and the inside surface of the side reinforcement members 20. Thus, prior to fixed attachment of the front and rear members 28, 30 to the side reinforcement members 20, these slip planes 22c, 22d permit longitudinal adjustment of the front and rear members 28, 30 relative to the side reinforcement members 20 to precisely conform to a predefined longitudinal length or dimension of the battery containment area 24. For example, the longitudinal length L_1 of the battery containment area 24, such as shown in FIG. 18A, can be adjusted to a shorter longitudinal length L_2 of the battery containment area 24 by, prior to fixed attachment, adjusting the abutting position of the ends of the rear member 30 on the opposing side members 20 about the generally vertically oriented slip planes 22c, 22d to provide a precise desired longitudinal length of the containment area 24.

[0042] The front and rear members 28, 30 may be formed with a generally consistent rectangular shaped cross section with a fixed height that respectively defines the height of the front and rear portions or walls of the battery containment area 24. The side reinforcement members 20, as illustrated, are formed to provide a height that is substantially identical to the fixed height of the front and rear members 28, 30, such that there is generally a constant height about the peripheral walls of the battery containment area 24. This consistent peripheral wall height provides even or generally flush top and bottom surfaces of the peripheral walls for attaching a top cover or plate at the top surfaces and a bottom cover or base plate 18 at the bottom surfaces, which together

seal the upper and lower portions of the battery containment area. The top cover is generally attached in a manner that is relatively easy to remove while maintaining the sealed battery containment area, such as via bolts or screws or other removable fasteners that may compress a gasket or other sealing member between the top cover and the top surface of the peripheral walls, so as to be able to remove the top cover and access the battery modules or other electric components housed in the battery containment area 24 for replacement, maintenance, or inspection or the like. The illustrated base plate 18 attaches at and spans generally below the side reinforcement members 20 and the front and rear members 28, 30 to provide a bottom surface of the battery containment area 24 and a generally sealed interior lower portion of the battery containment area 24. The base plate 18 may be attached to provide the sealed connection along the bottom surface of the peripheral walls via welding, adhesive, bolts, screws, and/or fasteners or the like. As shown in FIG. 15, the seal between the base plate 18 and the side reinforcement members may be reinforced or supplemented with a sealing agent or sealing material 32, such as an epoxy or silicone sealant or the like.

[0043] To form the side reinforcement members 20 with tight and precise dimensional control, such as for providing the height that is substantially identical to the fixed height of the front and rear members 28, 30, the side reinforcement members 20 may be formed with a base beam 34 and an upper cap or beam 36 that are attached to each other about a vertical slip plane 22a, to allow for vertical adjustment prior to welding or fixed attachment, such as about 2-3 millimeters of adjustable vertical range. As shown in FIG. 14, the base beam 34 is formed from a metal sheet to provide adjacent tubes 38 that include a common center wall 40 and a flange 42 extending upward near the common central wall 40. The upper beam 36 engages along the flange 42 of the base beam 34 to define the substantially vertical slip plane 22a used for vertically adjusting the upper beam 36 relative to the base beam 34 to achieve a selected height of the side reinforcement member 20 that corresponds to the height of the front and rear members 28, 30. It is also contemplated that the side reinforcement members may be formed as a single beam, such as an extruded or pultruded beam or a beam that is roll formed from a single sheet of metal or the like. The metal sheet that may form the base beam 34 of the side reinforcement members 20 may comprise a high strength steel, such as a cold worked martensitic steel.

[0044] Referring again to FIGS. 2-8, the battery support structure 24 also includes cross members 44 that extend laterally to attach between the inside surfaces of the side reinforcement members 20. The cross members 44 span between the side reinforcement members 20 to transmit lateral loads and impact forces through generally linear load paths along the cross members 44 to prevent laterally inward deformation to the side reinforcement members 20 and thus limit disruption to the battery containment area 24. The cross members 44 may be formed to have a height less than the height of the peripheral walls of the battery containment area 24 and instead to have a height that is generally aligned with the base beam 34 of the side reinforcement members 20, such as shown in FIGS. 15 and 16. Accordingly, the upper walls 46 of the cross members 44 may generally align with the upper walls 48 of the base beam 34 to provide a direct load path transmission between these beams.

[0045] As further shown in FIGS. 13-15, the cross members 44 attach at the inside vertical surfaces of the side reinforcement members 20 and may attach with additional support provided with brackets 50. Also, a sealing agent or sealing material 51 (FIG. 3), such as an epoxy or silicone sealant or the like, may be provided around the brackets 50 and/or at other seams at or along the side reinforcement members 20 or other components within the battery containment area to reinforce the seal along the inside wall surface of the side reinforcement members 20.

[0046] With respect to the side reinforcement members 20, the base beam 34, such as shown in FIG. 17, may be formed from a metal sheet to provide adjacent tubes 38 that include a common center wall 40 disposed in a generally vertical orientation. In doing so, lateral portions 58, 60 of the metal sheet that extend from opposing sides of the common center wall 40 are bent generally simultaneously in the same rotational direction to attach respectively at an upper end 40a and a lower end 40b of the common center wall 40 (FIG. 17). The outer lateral portion 58 of the metal sheet extends outward (relative to the vehicle and the battery support structure) from the upper end 40a of the center wall 40 to provide the outer upper wall 48a that is generally perpendicular to the vertical center wall 40. The outer lateral portion 58 is bent downward from the outer upper wall 48a to define the outward outside wall 62a of the base beam 34 having a generally vertical orientation and then bent inward at a downward angle to form an angled lower wall 64a. The angled lower wall 64 then attach the free edge 58a of the outer lateral portion 58 at the radiused corner formed at the lower end 40b of the center wall 40. It is also contemplated that the free edge may be bent upward into the interior volume of the outer tube 38a and attached at

the center wall 40. Further, it is contemplated that the cross-sectional shape of the outer tube 38a may be altered from the illustrated embodiment shown in FIG. 17.

[0047] As further illustrated in FIG. 17, the inner lateral portion 60 of the metal sheet extends inward (relative to the vehicle and the battery support structure) from the lower end 40b of the center wall 40 to provide an inner bottom wall 64b of the side reinforcement beam that is generally perpendicular to the vertical center wall 40. The inner lateral portion 60 is bent upward from the inner bottom wall 64b to define the opposing outside wall 62b of the base beam 34 having a generally vertical orientation. At an upper portion of the outside wall 62b, the metal sheet is bent toward the center wall 40 to form an inner upper wall 48b that attaches at the radiused corner formed at the upper end 40a of the center wall 40. The inner lateral portion 60 of the metal sheet that attaches at the upper end 40a of the common center wall 40 includes a free edge 60a that extends upward near the common center wall beyond the attachment with the upper end 40a of the center wall 40 to provide the flange 42 along an upper portion of the base beam 34. Accordingly, the flange 42 extends longitudinally along the length of the base beam 34. It is conceivable that the flange 42 may be angled from the vertical orientation and/or may attach at the outer upper wall 48a or lower on the common center wall 40. Further, it is contemplated that the cross-sectional shape of the inner tubes 38b may be altered from the illustrated embodiment shown in FIG. 17.

[0048] The side reinforcement member 20, as illustrated in FIG. 17, may also include an upper beam 36 that attaches along the flange 42 of the base beam 34, where a slip plane 22a is defined along the flange 42. Prior to welding the upper beam 36 to the flange 42, the upper beam 36 may be vertically adjusted relative to the base beam 34 about the slip plane 22a to provide a selected height of the overall side reinforcement member 20 that corresponds to the height of the front and rear members 28, 30 of the vehicle battery support structure 10. Specifically, the upper beam 36 includes a transverse cross section with an inverted U-shape with a first leg 36a that engages the flange 42 to define a first slip plane 22a and a second leg 36b that engages the outside wall 62b to define a second slip plane 22b substantially parallel to the first slip plane 22a. The upper beam 36 is then vertically adjusted relative to the base beam 34 about the first and second slip planes 22a, 22b to a selected height between a top surface of the upper beam 36 and a bottom surface of the base beam 34 that is configured to correspond to the fixed height of the peripheral walls or otherwise ensure that the peripheral walls of the battery support structure 10

have a the fixed height capable of forming a sealed interface with the base plate 16. Upon achieving the precise selected height, the upper beam 36 may be attached, such as by welding along the first and second legs of the upper beam to the flange an outer sidewall 62b of the base beam 34 at the selected height.

[0049] In the illustrated embodiment, the first and second legs 36a, 36b of the upper beam 36 include bend radii at a top section 36c of the upper beam 36 that interconnects the first and second legs 36a, 36b. The bend radii of the upper beam 36 is smaller than the bend radii formed in the base beam 34 to provide the substantially planar top surface of the top section 36c of the upper beam 36 with a larger surface area for attaching the top cover. The top surface of the top section 36c also aligns with top surfaces of the front and rear members 28, 30. To allow the tighter bend radiuses at the upper beam 36, the upper beam 36 may comprise a metal material having a tensile strength of at most about 1000 MPa and more preferably about 900 MPa, while the base beam 34 may comprise a metal material having a tensile strength of at least about 1100 MPa and more preferably about 1500 MPa. Also, the second leg 36b is shown being longer than to the first leg 36a to extend down to the side surface of the outer sidewall 62b. The upper end of the outer sidewall 62b includes a slight outward bend or recessed area 66 having a depth substantially equal to the thickness of the metal sheet for engaging the second leg 36b and substantially aligning it with the mid and lower portions of the outer sidewall 62b. In the illustrated embodiment, the thickness is approximately 1 millimeter, but it is contemplated that the thickness may vary from between about 0.5-3 millimeters. Thus, the upper beam 36 is attached over the inner tube 38b, such that the outer tube 38a is configured to attach at a rocker rail of a vehicle.

[0050] Referring now to FIGS. 20-24, exemplary illustrations are provided of an assembly process for the subassembly components that together form the peripheral sidewalls or cell of the battery support structure 10. More specifically, as illustrated in the flow chart in FIG. 20, the front member 28 is a subassembly component that may initially be provided at step 84 as a roll formed beam 70, such as shown in FIG. 20A, having a generally rectangular cross sectional shape. The roll formed beam 70 may then be bent in a secondary step 86, such as to provide two bends along the beam 70a, such as shown in FIG. 20B, which results in a forward protruding curvature. It is also contemplated that a sweep station or bending station may be provided at an end of a roll former line to provide these bends or an alternative bend or bends in the beam prior

to the beam being cut to a desired length. At step 88, holes are laser cut with a conventional laser and ends of the beam 70b are trimmed, such as shown in FIG. 20C, to provide the precise angle for providing a front member (FIG. 24) that attaches to the side reinforcement beams 20 at a precise position on the slip planes 22c, 22d to provide the precise longitudinal length that generally corresponds with the shape of the vehicle and its battery packaging envelope.

[0051] With reference again to the formation of a side members 20, as shown in FIG. 21, an exemplary flow chart is provided that shows the process of assembling one embodiment of a side member 20. At step 90, the base beam 34 may be roll formed, such as in the configuration shown and described above in reference to FIG. 17. Also at step 90, the cap or upper beam 36 is formed to correspond to the attachment points on the base beam 34, such as shown in FIG. 21. At step 92, upper surfaces of the base beam 34 and upper beam 36 may be laser cut to provide holes 78 for inserting riv nuts 76, which may be used as attachment points, such as for the rocker rails and additional components, such as the top cover. At step 94, the upper beam 36 may be adjusted about the slip planes 22a, 22b, as described above, and once precisely positioned, laser welded together to provide a side reinforcement member 20, such as shown in FIG. 21C.

[0052] Further, as shown in FIG. 22, an exemplary flow chart is provided that shows the process of forming a rear member 30 subassembly component. At step 96, a roll formed beam 72a may be provided having a generally rectangular cross sectional shape, such as shown in FIG. 22A. The roll formed beam 72a, as step 98, may then be trimmed with a laser to provide notches along the beam 72b at the desired bending points that correspond to the shape and desired angular bends of the final rear member 30, such as shown in FIG. 22B and in more detail in FIG. 22B'. Specifically, the notches may remove material along three of the four walls, where the remaining wall portion may be the bending point and the top and bottom walls have angular cutouts that correspond to the desired angular transitions. Also, the notches at the top and bottom walls may include interlocking features 74 to provide a more stable welding joint. After the notches are formed, at step 100, the beam is bent at the bend points to close the notches along the beam 72c, such as shown in FIG. 22C and in more detail in FIG. 22C. Accordingly, once the beam is bent, the closed notches are welded, such as by using a laser welding process with or without filler wire or powered metal deposition, the beam 72c is fixed in its bent configuration. At step 102, ends of the beam 72d are trimmed to provide the precise angle for attaching the ends to the side reinforcement beams 20 and to provide the precise length that generally corresponds with the

width of the vehicle. Also, as shown in FIGS. 22D and 22D', riv nuts may also be inserted along the beam 72d to provide attachment points for additional components, such as the top cover.

[0053] In an additional embodiment, the rear member 30 may be a subassembly component that is made from separate pieces of a beam, such as five separate pieces of a roll formed beam, where the pieces may be laser cut to include the appropriate angle, such as to form miter joints between each piece of the rear member 30. After the angles are cut or otherwise formed on each separate piece of the beam, the joints are closed and attached together, such as by using a laser welding process with or without filler wire or powered metal deposition. Once the pieces are assembled and welded to form the rear member 30, the ends may be trimmed to provide the precise angle for attaching the ends to the side reinforcement beams 20 and to provide the precise length that generally corresponds with the width of the vehicle. Again with this embodiment, riv nuts 76 or other fasteners may also be inserted along hole 78 cut in the rear member 30 to provide attachment points for additional components, such as the top cover.

[0054] Referring now to the assembly of the battery support structure 10, such as shown in FIGS. 23 and 24, where a pair of side reinforcement members 20 are provided to attach at opposing rocker rails of a vehicle frame. Front and rear members 28, 30 may also be provided, and prior to fixed attachment with the side members 20, longitudinally adjusted along the slip planes 22c, 22d (FIG. 18-19A) defined between ends of the front and rear member 28, 30 and inside vertical surfaces of the pair of side reinforcement members 20 to a predefined longitudinal length or distance between the front and rear members 28, 30. Upon making the adjustment to the select longitudinal dimension, the front and rear members 28, 30 may be welded to the pair of side reinforcement members 20 to fix the predefined longitudinal distance between the front and rear members 28, 30 and to form a battery containment area 24. The base plate 18 may then be attached along lower surfaces of the pair of side reinforcement members 20 and the front and rear members 28, 30, such that the base plate 18 may span generally below the side reinforcement members 20 and the front and rear members 28, 30 to provide a bottom surface of the battery containment area 24. The cross members 44 may also be attached at and span laterally between the pair of side reinforcement members 20, such that lateral impact force may be transmitted through load paths along the plurality of cross members 44 to limit disruption to the battery containment area 24.

[0055] As also shown in FIGS. 11 and 22, the side reinforcement member has holes 78, 80 that are laser cut with a conventional laser. The holes 78 may be used, as shown in FIG. 12, for a bolt 82 or other fastener or the like to engage a rocker rail 14 of the vehicle frame. Accordingly, the other larger holes 80 may be used for a tool to access the bolts 82 or other fastener upon engagement or disengagement. Also, several different attachment techniques and configurations may be used to permanently or releasably secure the battery support structure to a vehicle frame, such as below a floor of the vehicle and generally between the axles. Further, with respect to the general installation or attachment or formation, the steps discussed herein may be performed in various different sequences from those discussed to result in engaging, disengaging, or forming the battery support structure or components thereof.

[0056] For purposes of this disclosure, the terms "upper," "lower," "right," "left," "rear," "front," "vertical," "horizontal," and derivatives thereof shall relate to the invention as oriented in FIG. 1. However, it is to be understood that the invention may assume various alternative orientations, except where expressly specified to the contrary. It is also to be understood that the specific devices and processes illustrated in the attached drawings, and described in this specification are simply exemplary embodiments of the inventive concepts defined in the appended claims. Hence, specific dimensions and other physical characteristics relating to the embodiments disclosed herein are not to be considered as limiting, unless the claims expressly state otherwise.

[0057] Changes and modifications in the specifically described embodiments may be carried out without departing from the principles of the present invention, which is intended to be limited only by the scope of the appended claims as interpreted according to the principles of patent law. The disclosure has been described in an illustrative manner, and it is to be understood that the terminology which has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation. Many modifications and variations of the present disclosure are possible in light of the above teachings, and the disclosure may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

CLAIMS

1. A battery support structure for a vehicle, said battery support structure comprising:
a first peripheral member configured to be supported by a longitudinal section of a vehicle frame;
a second peripheral member having an end surface that selectively attaches at an inside surface of the first peripheral member to enclose a corner section of a containment area; and
wherein, prior to fixed attachment of the first and second peripheral members, a slip plane is defined between the end surface and the inside surface to adjust the second peripheral member along the first peripheral member to a predefined dimension of the containment area.
2. The battery support structure of claim 1, wherein the second peripheral member comprises one of a front wall and a rear wall of the containment area, such that the slip plane adjusts a length of the containment area defined by the respective front or rear wall.
3. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, further comprising a cross member attached at and extending laterally inward from the inside surface of the first peripheral member, wherein the cross member is configured for a lateral impact force to be transmitted through a load path along the cross member to limit disruption to the containment area.
4. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, wherein the first peripheral member comprises an outer side wall of the containment area, and wherein the second peripheral member extends laterally from the first peripheral member.
5. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, further comprising a base plate attached at and spanning generally below the first and second peripheral members to provide a bottom surface of the containment area.
6. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, wherein the inside surface of the first peripheral member comprises a substantially planar portion that is oriented upright.

7. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, wherein the first peripheral member comprises a beam formed from a single metal sheet to provide adjacent tubes that include a common center wall extending longitudinally along the first peripheral member.

8. The battery support structure of claim 7, wherein an upper wall and the common center wall of the beam are generally aligned and configured for a lateral impact force to be transmitted through load paths along at least one of the upper wall and the common center wall to the second peripheral member.

9. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, wherein the second peripheral member includes a swept curvature along a length of the second peripheral member that is configured to correspond with a shape of the corresponding vehicle.

10. The battery support structure of any of the preceding claims, wherein the second peripheral member comprises a hollow beam having at least two sharp bends that are each formed by a notch disposed at a desired bending point, wherein each notches removes material along at least three walls of a cross section of the hollow beam to define a remaining wall portion as the bending point, and wherein top and bottom walls of the cross section of the hollow beam have angular cutouts that are configured to be closed about the bending point to provide the desired angle of the sharp bends.

11. A battery support structure for a vehicle, said battery support structure comprising:
a pair of side peripheral members configured to attach at longitudinal sections at opposing sides of a vehicle frame;

an end peripheral member extending laterally between the side members to generally enclose one of a front or a rear of a battery containment area;

wherein opposing ends of the end peripheral member selectively attach at inside surfaces of the side peripheral members; and

wherein, prior to fixed attachment of the end peripheral member at the side members, slip planes are defined between the ends of the end peripheral member and the inside surfaces, and wherein the slip planes are configured to longitudinally adjust the end peripheral member

relative to the side peripheral members to form the battery containment area with a predefined longitudinal dimension.

12. The battery support structure of claim 11, further comprising a base plate attached at and spanning generally below the side peripheral members and the end peripheral member to provide a bottom surface of the battery containment area.

13. The battery support structure of claims 11 or 12, wherein the end peripheral member comprises one of a front wall and a rear wall of the containment area, such that the slip plane adjusts a length of the containment area defined by the respective front or rear wall.

14. The battery support structure of any of claims 11-13, further comprising a plurality of cross members attached at and extending laterally between the inside surfaces of the side peripheral members, wherein the cross members are each configured for a lateral impact force to be transmitted through a load path along the respective cross member to limit crush into the containment area.

15. The battery support structure of any of claims 11-14, wherein the inside surfaces of the side peripheral members each comprise a substantially vertical planar portion that engages the end peripheral member.

16. The battery support structure of any of claims 11-15, wherein the side peripheral members each comprise a beam formed from a single metal sheet to provide adjacent tubes that include a common center wall extending longitudinally along the first peripheral member, and wherein an upper wall and the common center wall of the beam are generally aligned.

17. The battery support structure of any of claims 11-16, wherein the end peripheral member includes a swept curvature along a length of the end peripheral member that is configured to correspond with a shape of the corresponding vehicle.

18. The battery support structure of any of claims 11-17, wherein the end peripheral member comprises a hollow beam having at least two sharp bends that are each formed by a notch disposed at a desired bending point, wherein each notches removes material along at least three walls of a cross section of the hollow beam to define a remaining wall portion as the bending point, and wherein top and bottom walls of the cross section of the hollow beam have angular cutouts that are configured to be closed about the bending point to provide the desired angle of the sharp bends.

19. A method of forming a battery support structure for a vehicle, said method comprising:
providing a pair of side reinforcement members configured to attach at opposing rocker rails of a vehicle frame;

longitudinally adjusting front and rear members along slip planes defined between ends of the front and rear member and inside vertical surfaces of the pair of side reinforcement members to a predefined longitudinal distance between the front and rear members; and

welding the front and rear member to the pair of side reinforcement member to fix the predefined longitudinal distance between the front and rear members and to form a battery containment area.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising:

attaching a base plate along lower surfaces of the pair of side reinforcement members and the front and rear member, such that the base plate spans generally below the side reinforcement members and the front and rear members to provide a bottom surface of the battery containment area.

21. The method of claim 19 or 20, further comprising:

attaching a plurality of cross members at the pair of side reinforcement members, wherein the cross members span laterally between the side reinforcement members for a lateral impact force to be transmitted through load paths along the cross members.

22. The method of any of claims 19-21, wherein the pair of side reinforcement members each are formed by roll forming a base beam from a metal sheet to form adjacent tubes having a

common center wall and lateral portions extending from opposing sides of the common center wall, wherein the lateral portions are bent in the same rotational direction to attach at upper and lower ends of the common center wall and thereby enclose interior volumes of the adjacent tubes on opposing sides of the common center wall.

23. The method of any of claims 19-22, wherein the pair of side reinforcement members each include a flange along an upper portion of the base beam defined by the lateral portion of the metal sheet that attaches at the upper end of the common center wall extending upward from the common center wall.

24. The method of any of claims 19-23, wherein the pair of side reinforcement members each are formed by engaging an upper beam along the flange of the base beam to define a substantially vertical slip plane used for vertically adjusting the upper beam relative to the base beam to achieve a selected height of the side reinforcement member that corresponds to a height of the front and rear members.

25. The method of any of claims 19-24, wherein the upper beam includes bend radius between a top section of the upper beam and a vertical leg that attaches to the flange of the base beam, and wherein the bend radius of the upper beam is smaller than the bend radius of the base beam to provide a substantially planar top surface of the upper beam that aligns with top surfaces of the front and rear members.

26. The method of any of claims 19-25, wherein upper walls of the laterally adjacent tubes of the base beam are generally aligned, such that lateral impact force is transmitted through load paths along the upper walls and to cross members attached at and spanning laterally between the pair of side reinforcement members, thereby limiting disruption to the battery containment area.

27. The method of any of claims 19-26, wherein the base beam comprises a metal material having a tensile strength of at least about 1100 MPa and the front and rear members comprises a metal material having a tensile strength of at most about 1000 MPa.

28. A side reinforcement member for a vehicle battery support structure, said side reinforcement member comprising:

a base beam formed from a metal sheet to provide adjacent tubes that include a common center wall disposed in a generally vertical orientation;

wherein one of the adjacent tubes includes an upper wall that attaches at an upper end of the common center wall and that has a flange extending upward from the common central wall and longitudinally along an upper portion of the base beam;

an upper beam extending along the base beam and having a first leg engaging the flange of the base beam to define a first slip plane and a second leg engaging an outside wall of the base beam to define a second slip plane substantially parallel to the first slip plane; and

wherein the upper beam is configured, prior to being welded to the base beam, to be vertically adjusted relative to the base beam about the first and second slip planes to a selected height between a top surface of the upper beam and a bottom surface of the base beam that is configured to correspond to a height of front and rear reinforcement members of a vehicle battery support structure.

29. The side reinforcement member of claim 28, wherein the flange is substantially vertical and generally parallel with the common center wall.

30. The side reinforcement member of claim 28 or 29, wherein upper walls of the laterally adjacent tubes of the base beam are generally aligned, such that lateral impact force is transmitted through load paths along the upper walls to the front and rear reinforcement members of a vehicle battery support structure.

31. The side reinforcement member of any of claims 28-30, wherein the first and second legs of the upper beam include bend radius at a top section of the upper beam that interconnects the first and second legs.

32. The side reinforcement member of any of claims 28-31, wherein the upper beam includes a transverse cross section with an inverted U-shape.

33. The side reinforcement member of any of claims 28-32, wherein the upper beam is attached over one of the adjacent tubes and the other of the adjacent tubes is configured to attach at a rocker rail of a vehicle.

34. A side reinforcement member for a vehicle battery support structure, said side reinforcement member comprising:

a base beam roll formed from a metal sheet to provide adjacent tubes that include a common center wall and lateral portions of the metal sheet extending from opposing sides of the common center wall and bent in the same rotational direction to attach at upper and lower ends of the common center wall;

wherein the lateral portion of the metal sheet that attaches at the upper end of the common center wall includes a free edge that extends upward from the common center wall to provide a flange along an upper portion of the base beam;

an upper beam engaging along the flange of the base beam to define a substantially vertical slip plane between the upper beam and the base beam; and

wherein the upper beam is configured, prior to being welded to the base beam, to be vertically adjusted relative to the base beam about the slip plane to a selected height between a top surface of the upper beam and a bottom surface of the base beam that is configured to correspond to a height of at least one of a front and a rear reinforcement member of a vehicle battery support structure.

35. The side reinforcement member of claim 34, wherein the lateral portions of the metal sheet attach at the upper and lower ends of the common center wall to substantially enclose the interior volumes of the adjacent tubes.

36. The side reinforcement member of claim 34 or 35, wherein the upper beam includes a transverse cross section with an inverted U-shape.

37. The side reinforcement member of any of claims 34-36, wherein the upper beam includes first and second legs each having bend radius at a top section of the upper beam that interconnects the first and second legs.

38. The side reinforcement member of any of claims 34-37, wherein the first leg attaches at the flange and the second leg attaches at a side surface of one of the adjacent tubes.
39. The side reinforcement member of any of claims 34-38, wherein the other of the adjacent tubes of the base beam is configured to attach at a rocker rail of a vehicle.
40. A method of forming a side reinforcement member for a vehicle battery support structure, said method comprising:
- roll forming a base beam from a metal sheet to form adjacent tubes having a common center wall and lateral portions extending from opposing sides of the common center wall, wherein the lateral portions are roll formed in the same rotational direction to attach at upper and lower ends of the common center wall and thereby enclose interior volumes of the adjacent tubes on opposing sides of the common center wall;
 - wherein the lateral portion of the metal sheet that attaches at the upper end of the common center wall includes a free edge that extends upward from the common center wall to provide a flange along an upper portion of the base beam;
 - providing an upper beam that includes a transverse cross section with an inverted U-shape defining a first leg and a second leg;
 - engaging the first leg along the flange of the base beam to form a first slip plane;
 - engaging the second leg along an outside wall of the base beam to form a second slip plane;
 - vertically adjusting the upper beam relative to the base beam about the first and second slip planes to a selected height between a top surface of the upper beam and a bottom surface of the base beam that is configured to correspond to a fixed height of a reinforcement member of a vehicle battery support structure; and
 - welding the upper beam to the base beam at the selected height along the first and second legs of the upper beam.
41. The method of claim 40, wherein the flange is substantially vertical and generally parallel with the common center wall.

42. The method of claim 40 or 41, wherein upper walls of the laterally adjacent tubes of the base beam are generally aligned, such that lateral impact force is transmitted through load paths along the upper walls to the front and rear reinforcement members of a vehicle battery support structure.

43. The method of any of claims 40-42, wherein the first and second legs of the upper beam include bend radii at a top section of the upper beam that interconnects the first and second legs, and wherein the bend radii of the upper beam is smaller than the bend radii of the base beam to provide the substantially planar top surface of the upper beam with a larger surface.

44. The method of any of claims 40-42, wherein the upper beam includes a transverse cross section with an inverted U-shape.

45. The method of any of claims 40-43, wherein the upper beam is attached over one of the adjacent tubes and the other of the adjacent tubes is configured to attach at a rocker rail of a vehicle.

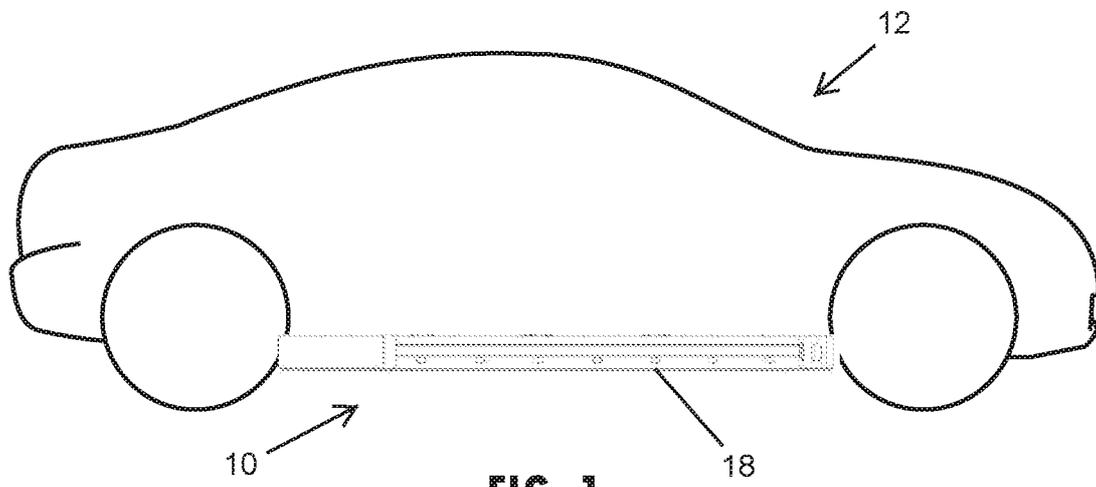


FIG. 1

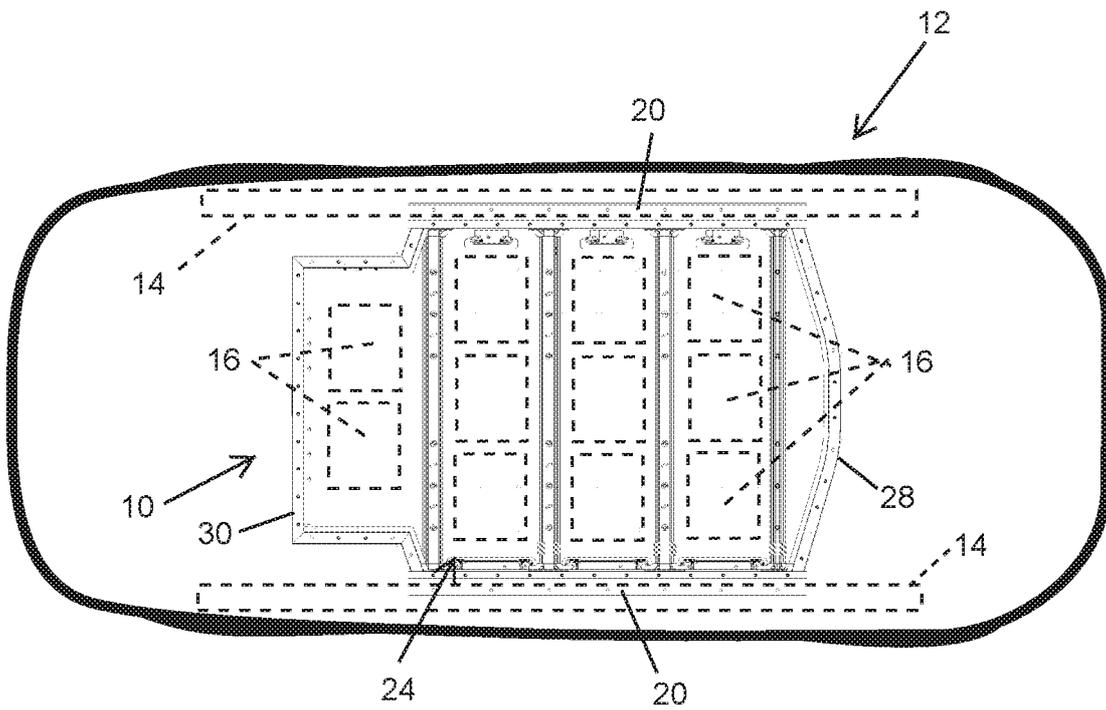


FIG. 2

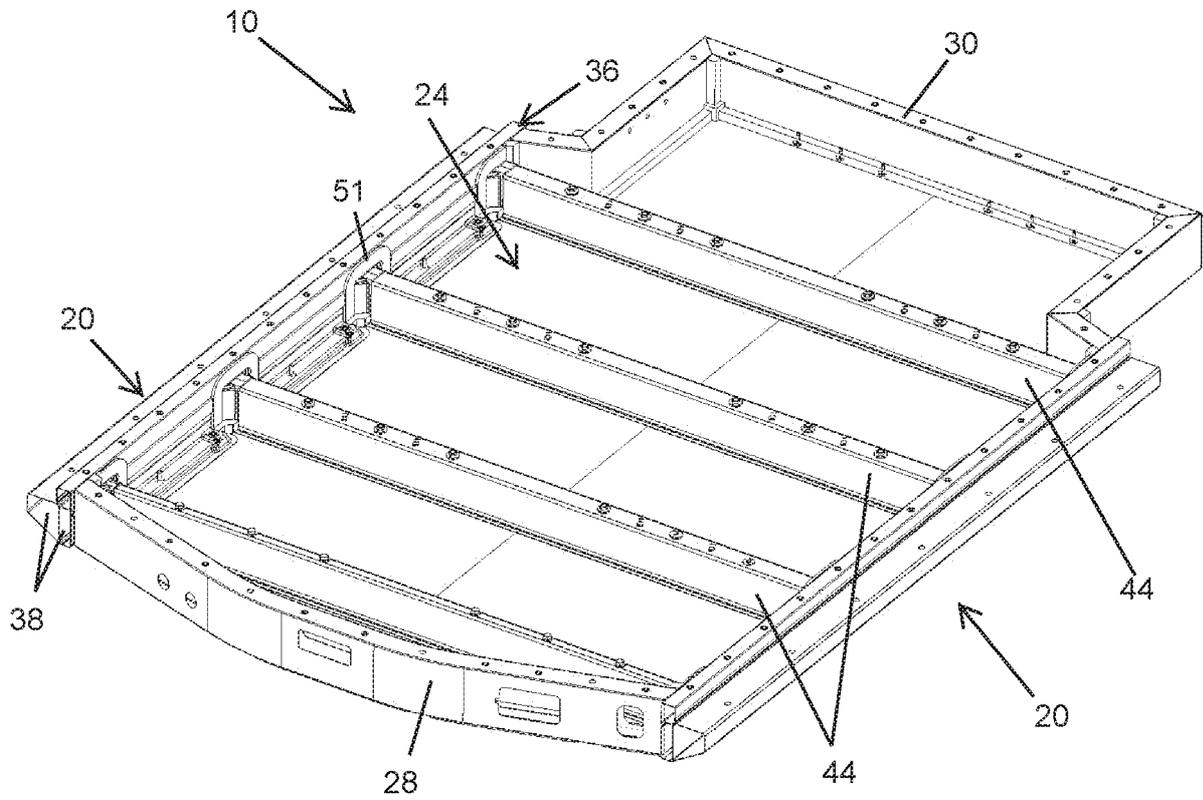


FIG. 3

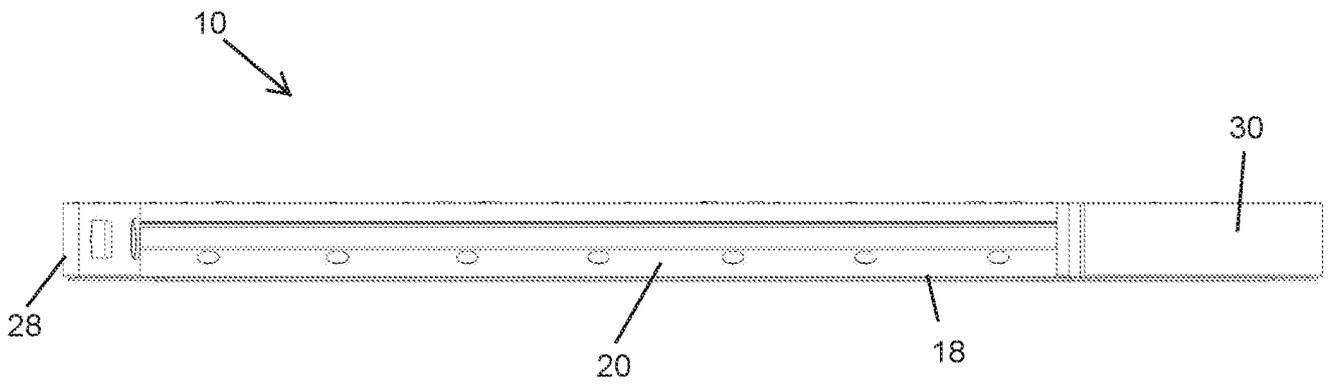


FIG. 4

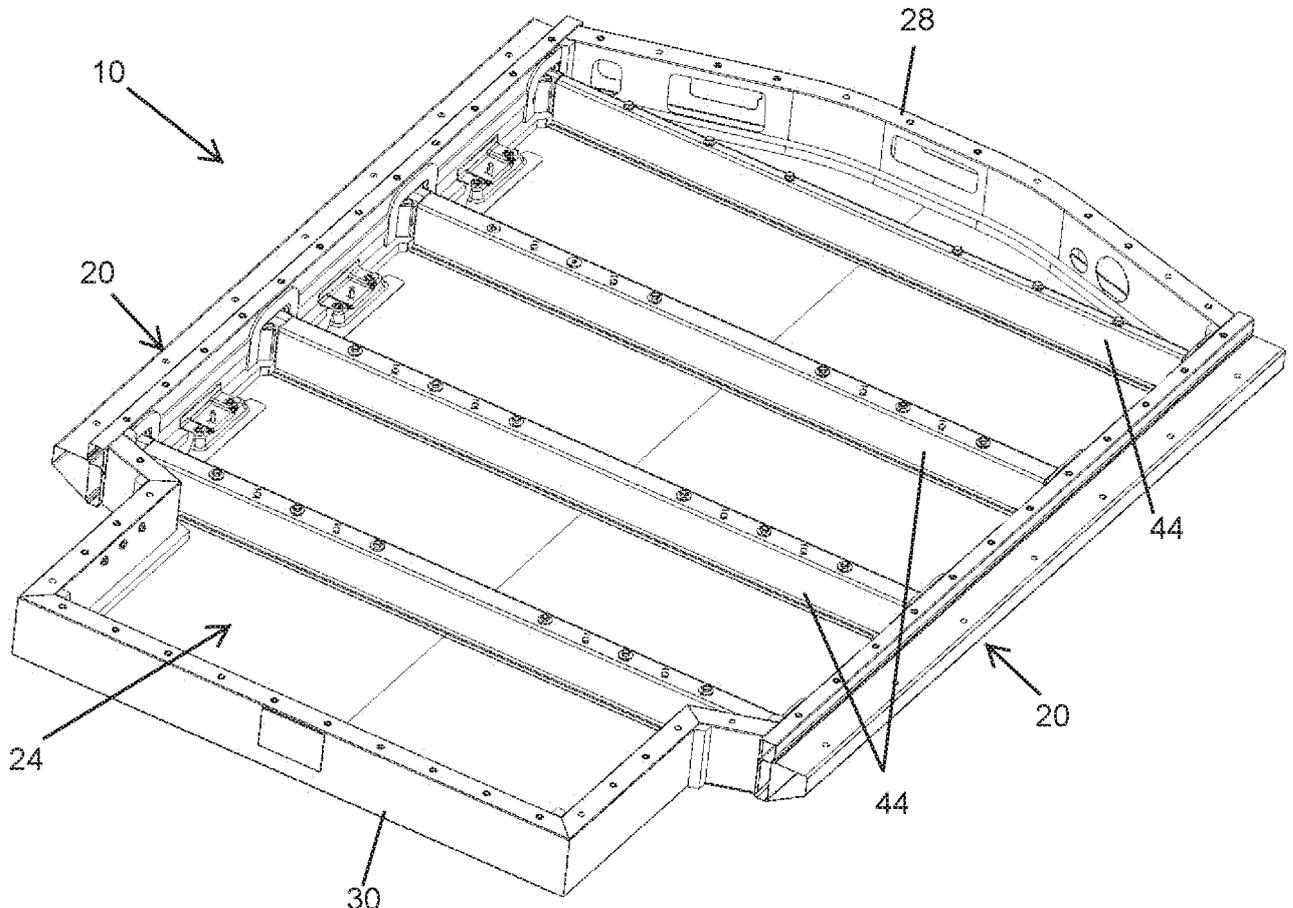


FIG. 5

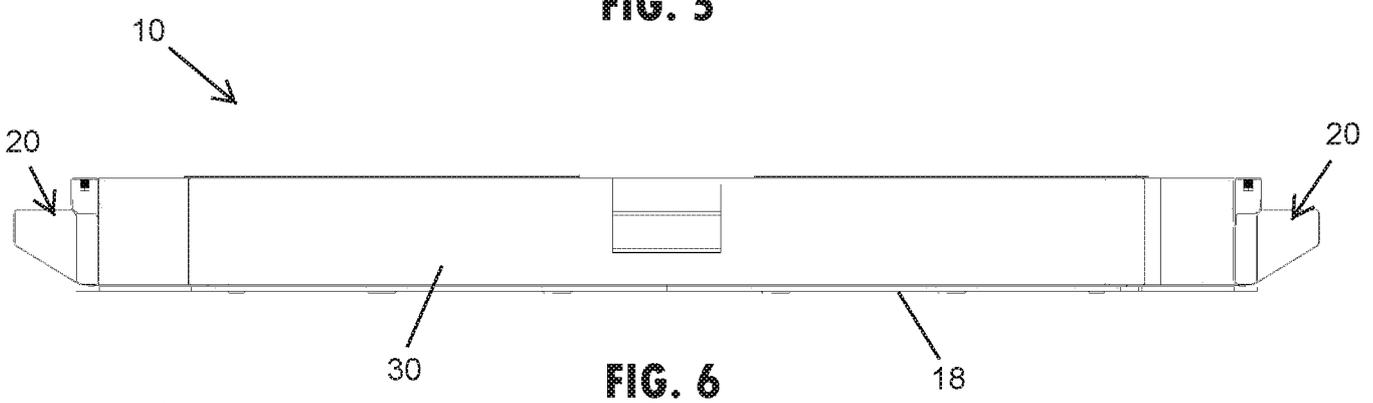


FIG. 6

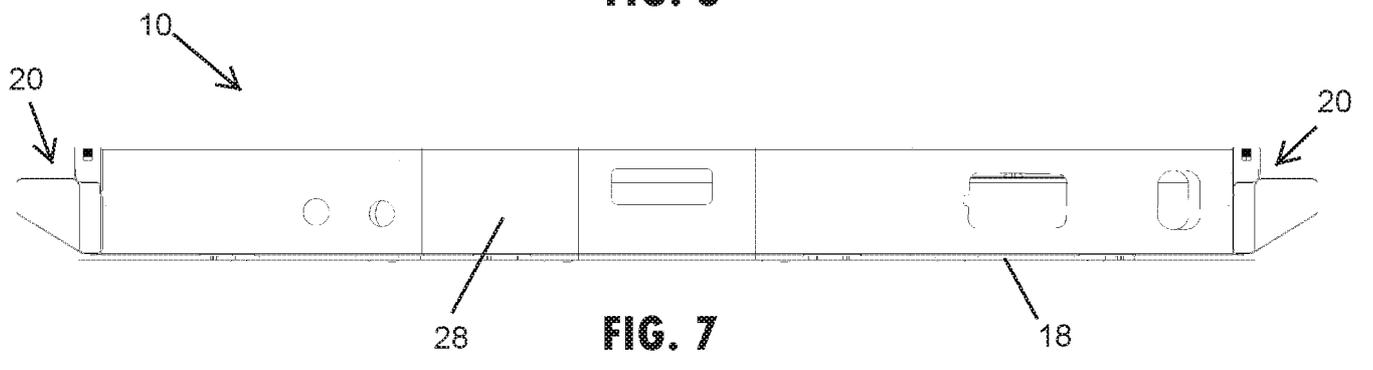
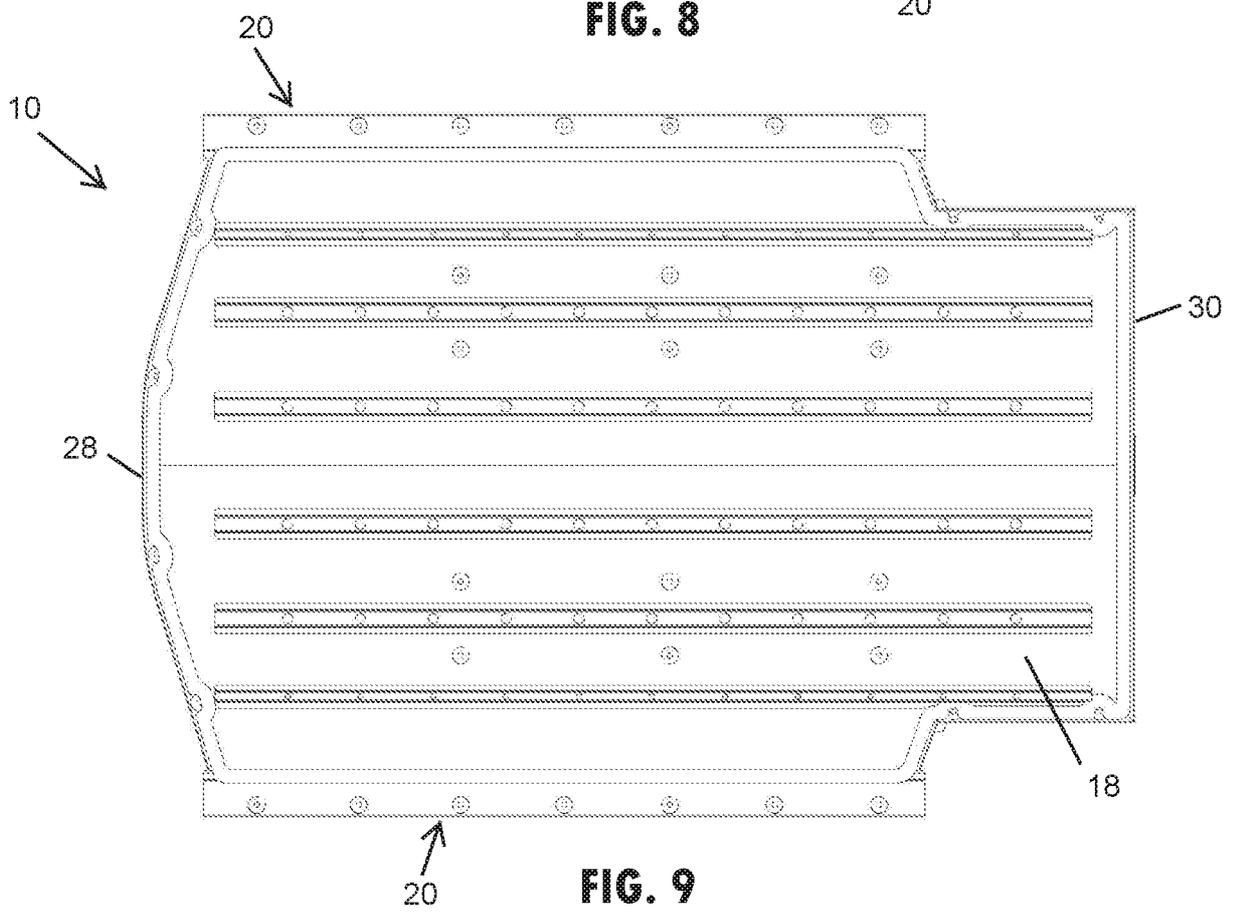
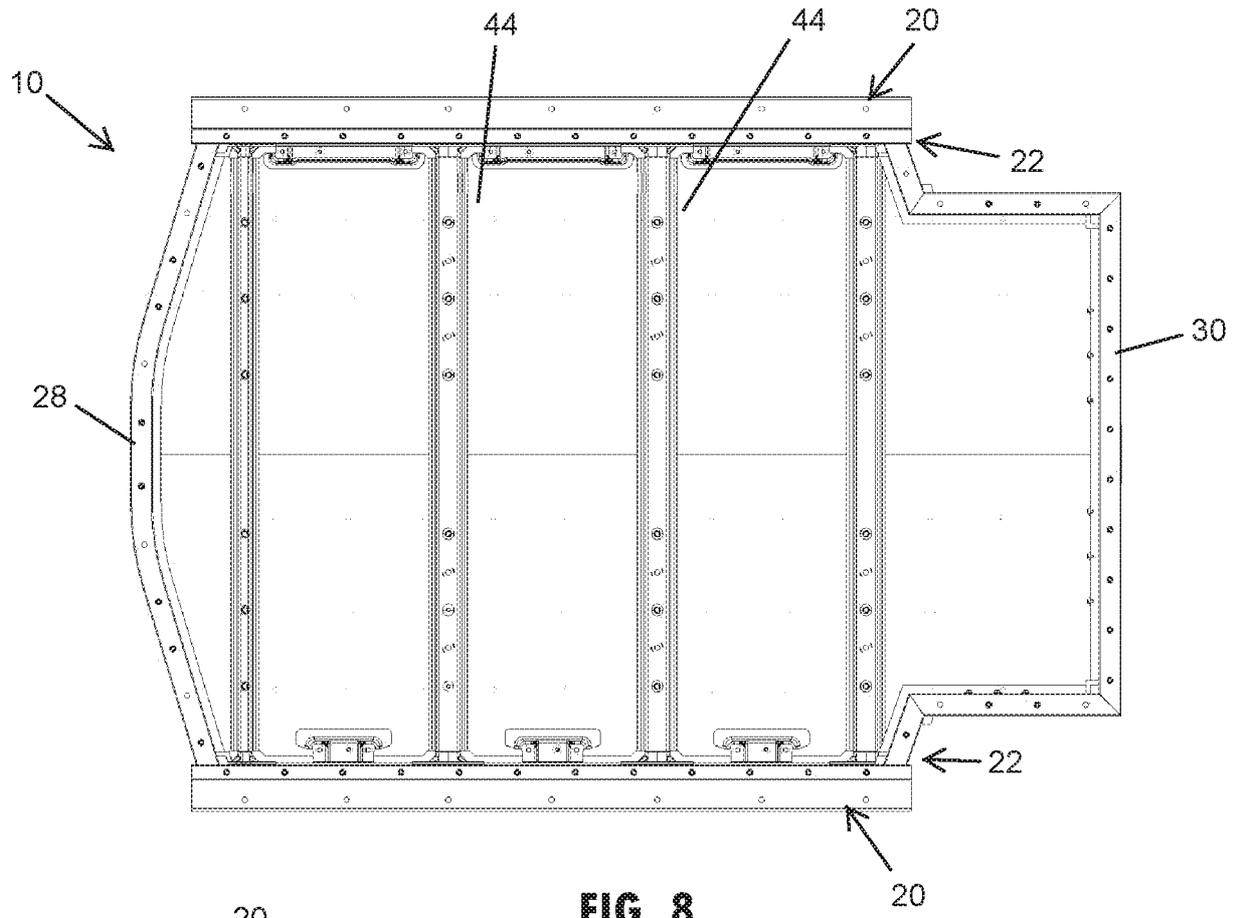


FIG. 7



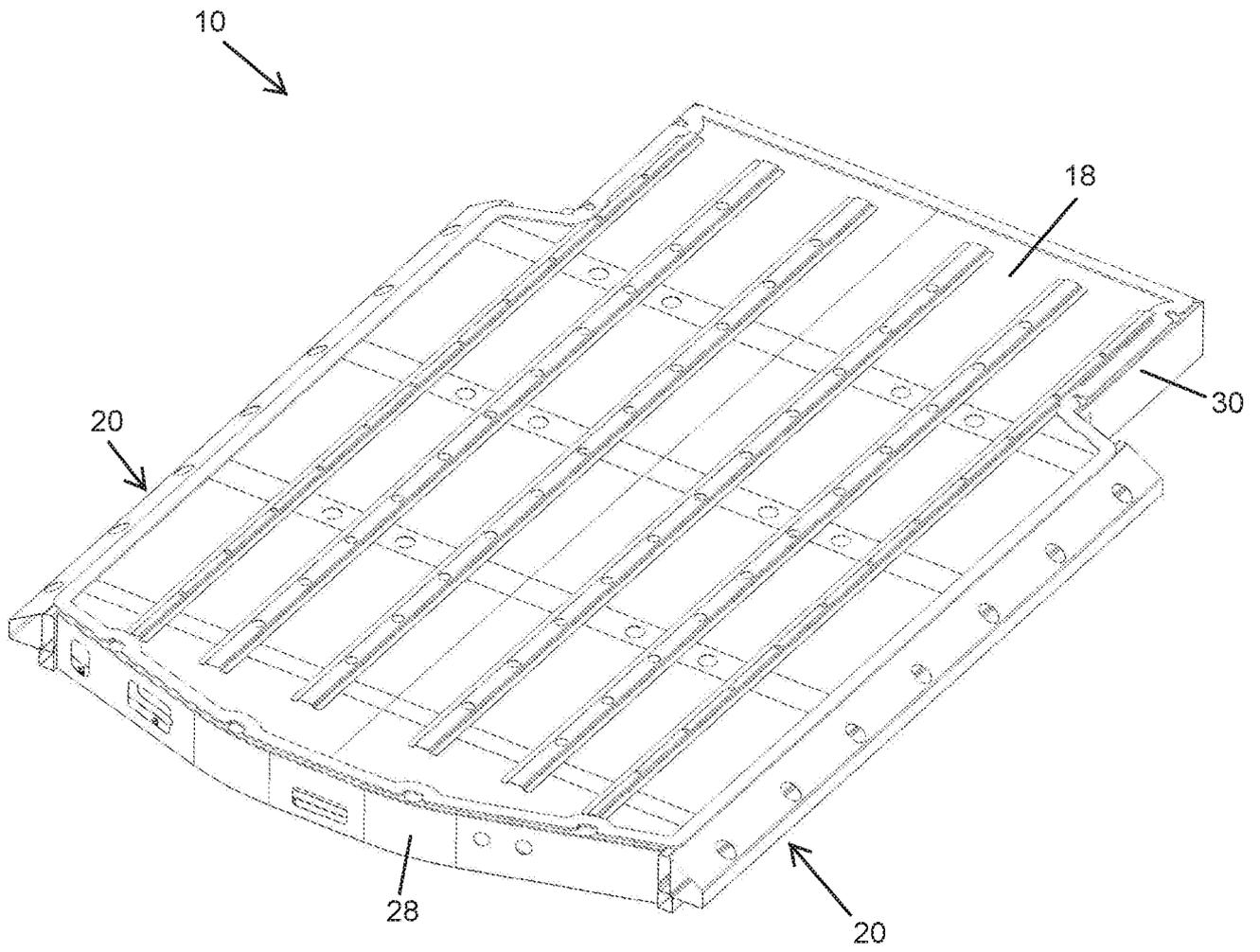


FIG. 10

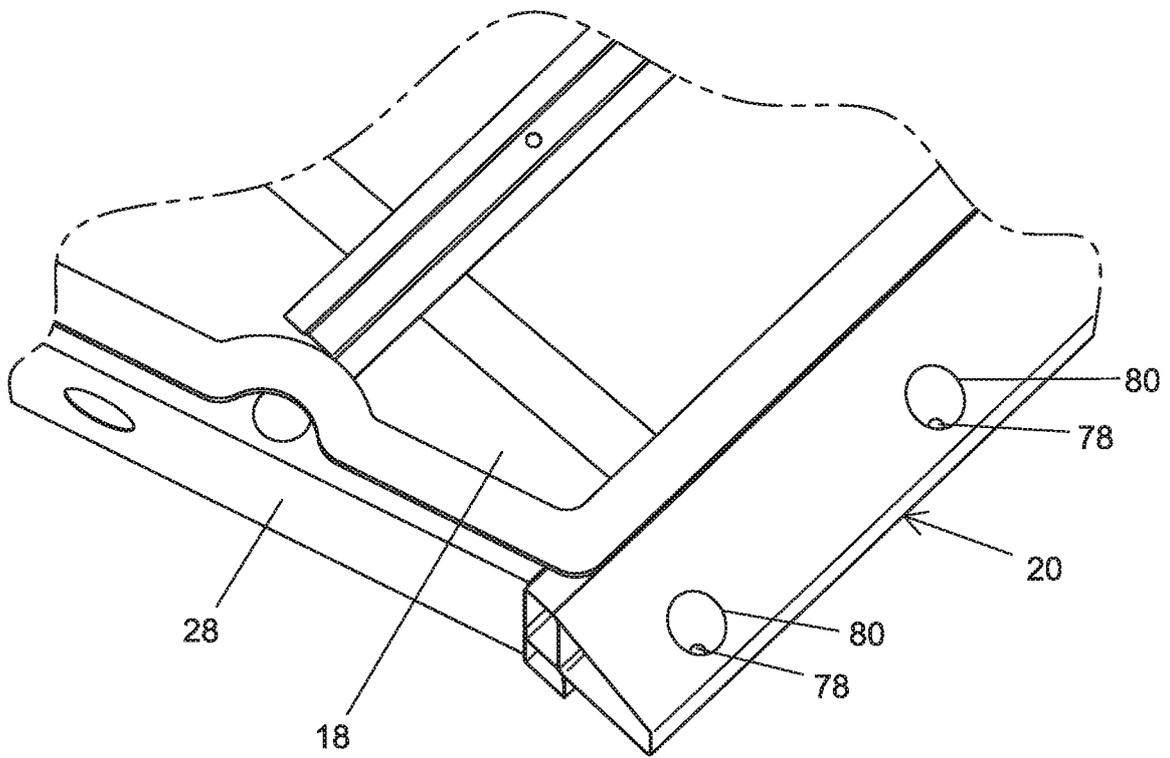


FIG. 11

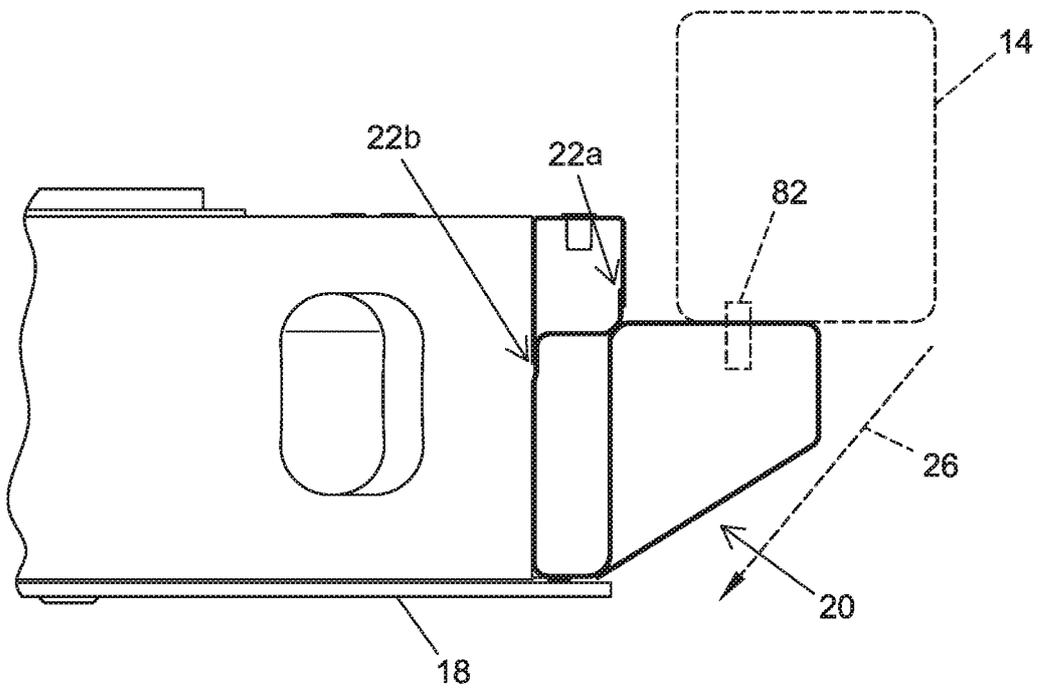


FIG. 12

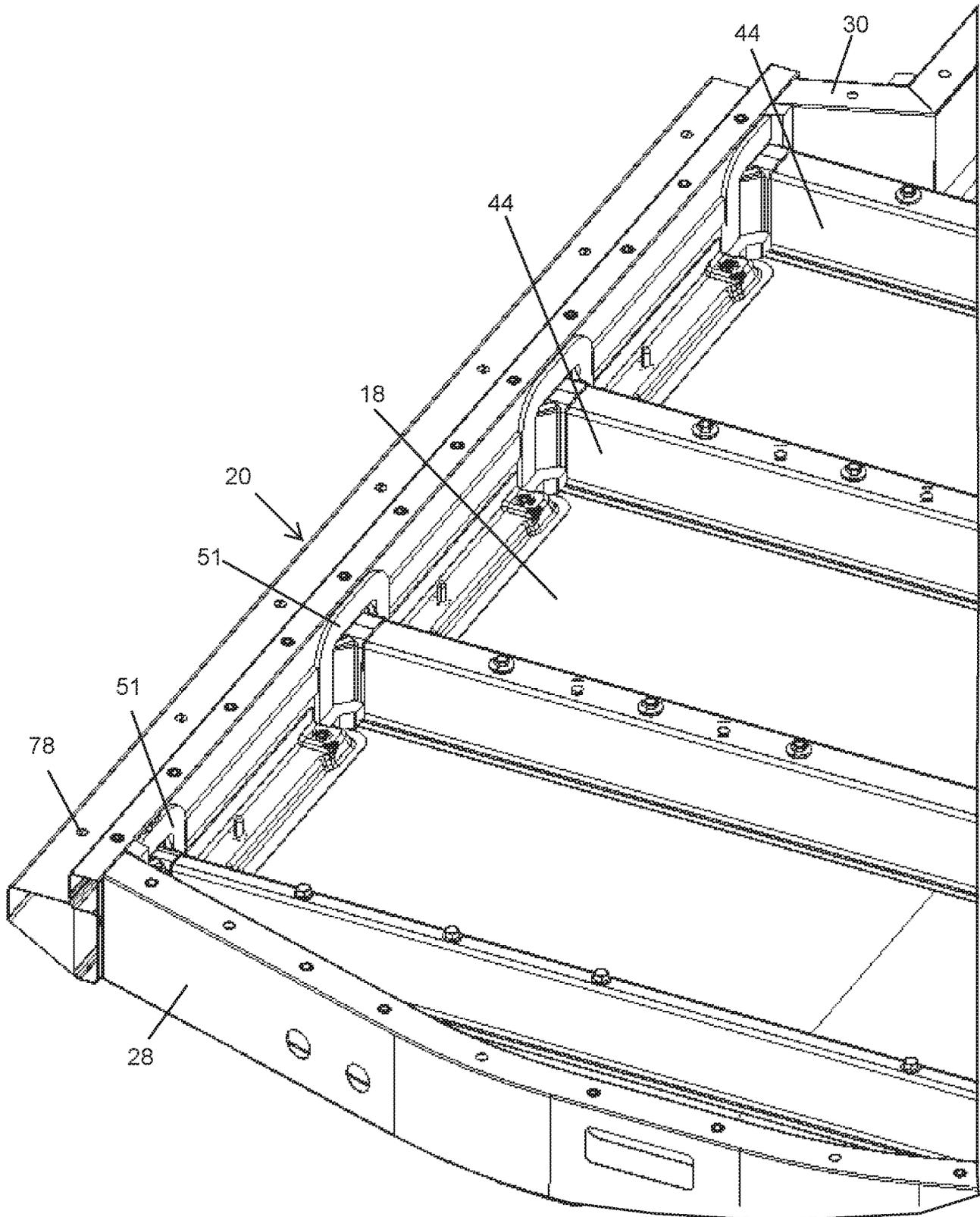


FIG. 13

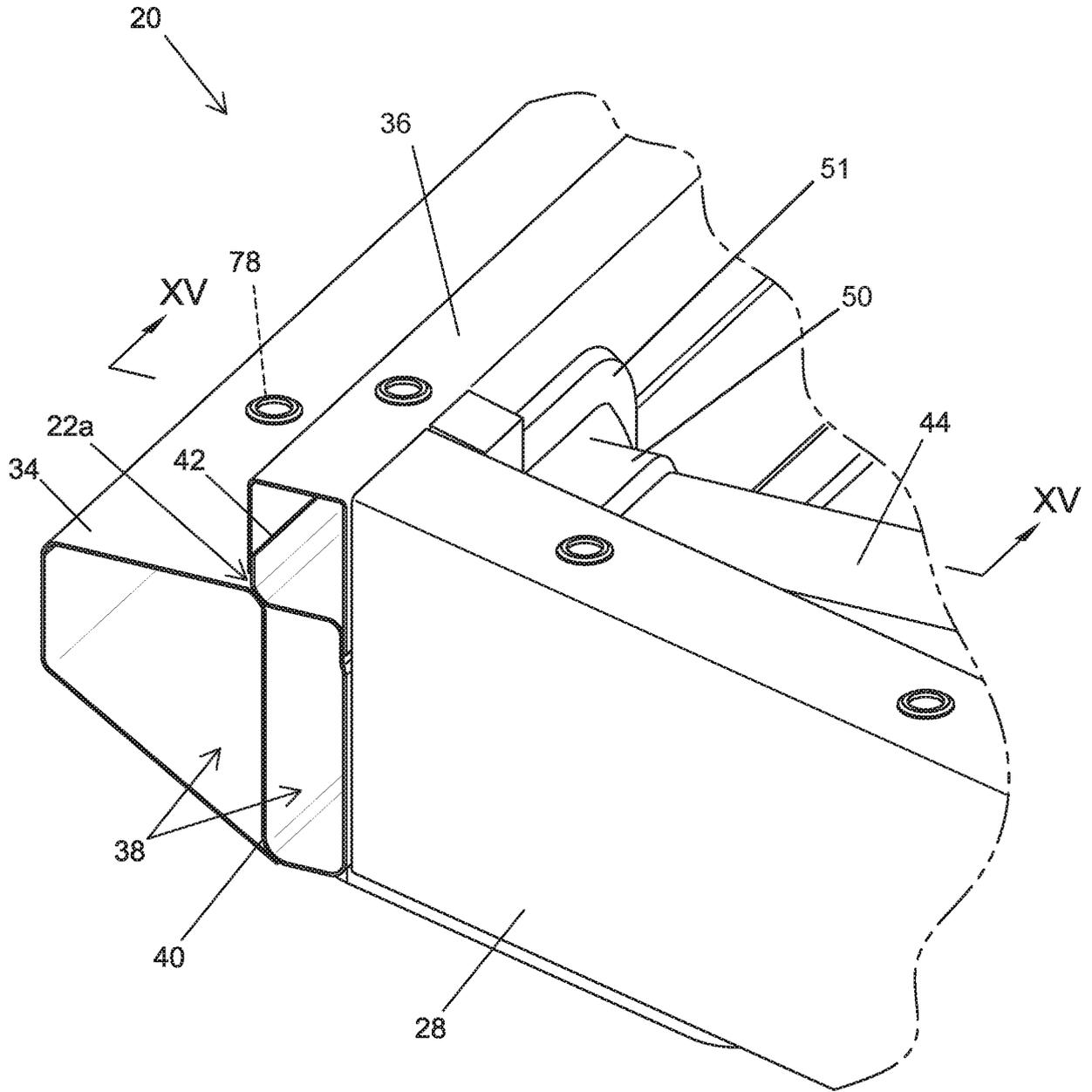


FIG. 14

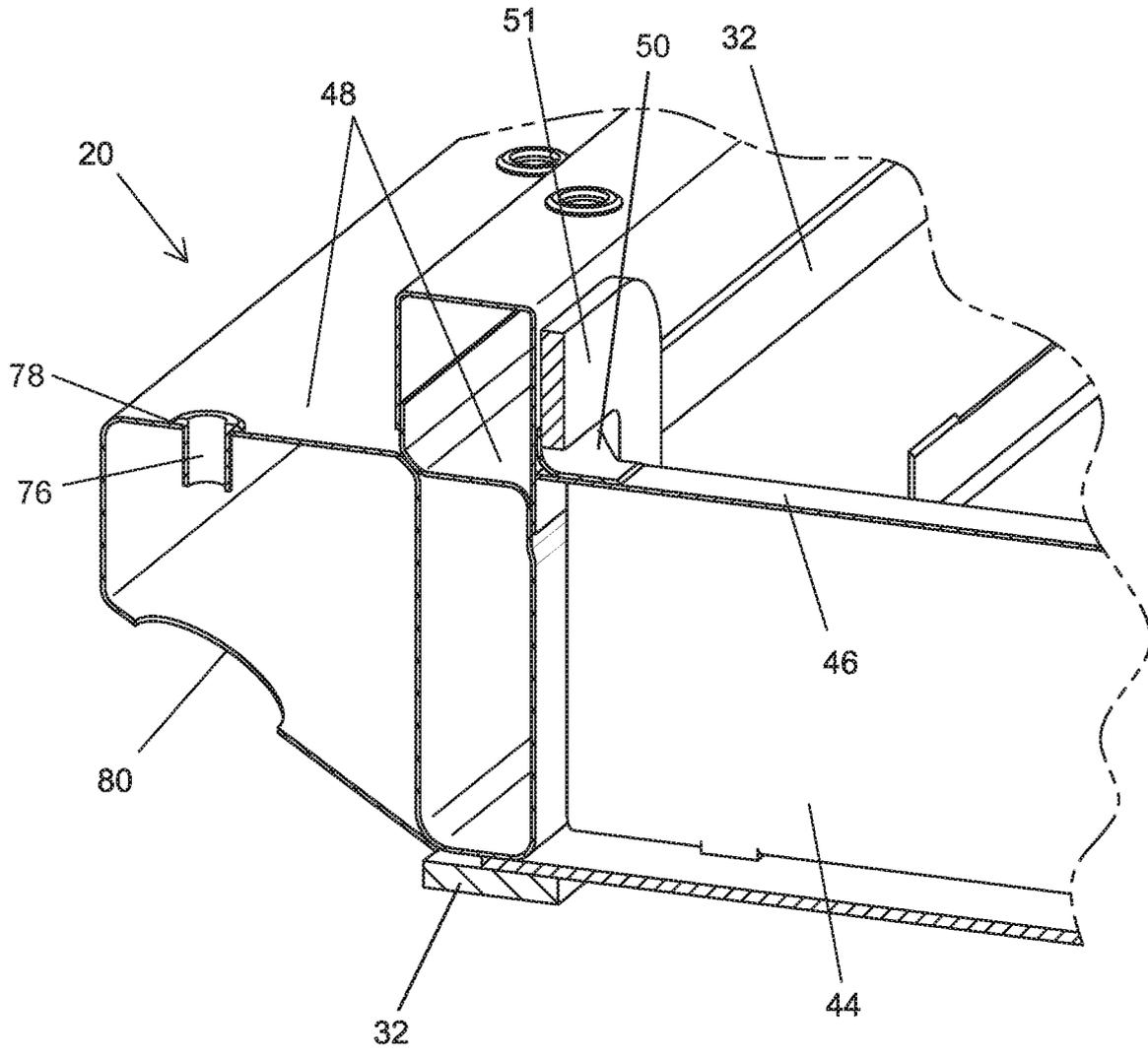


FIG. 15

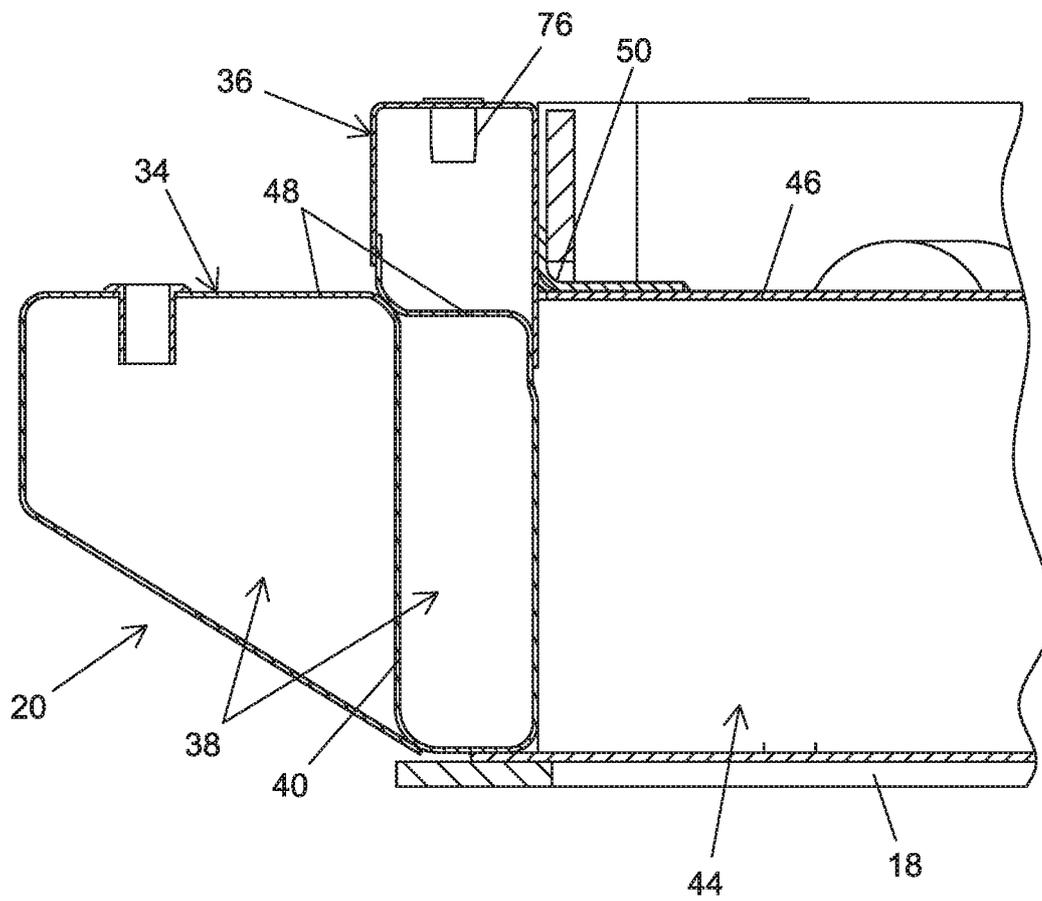
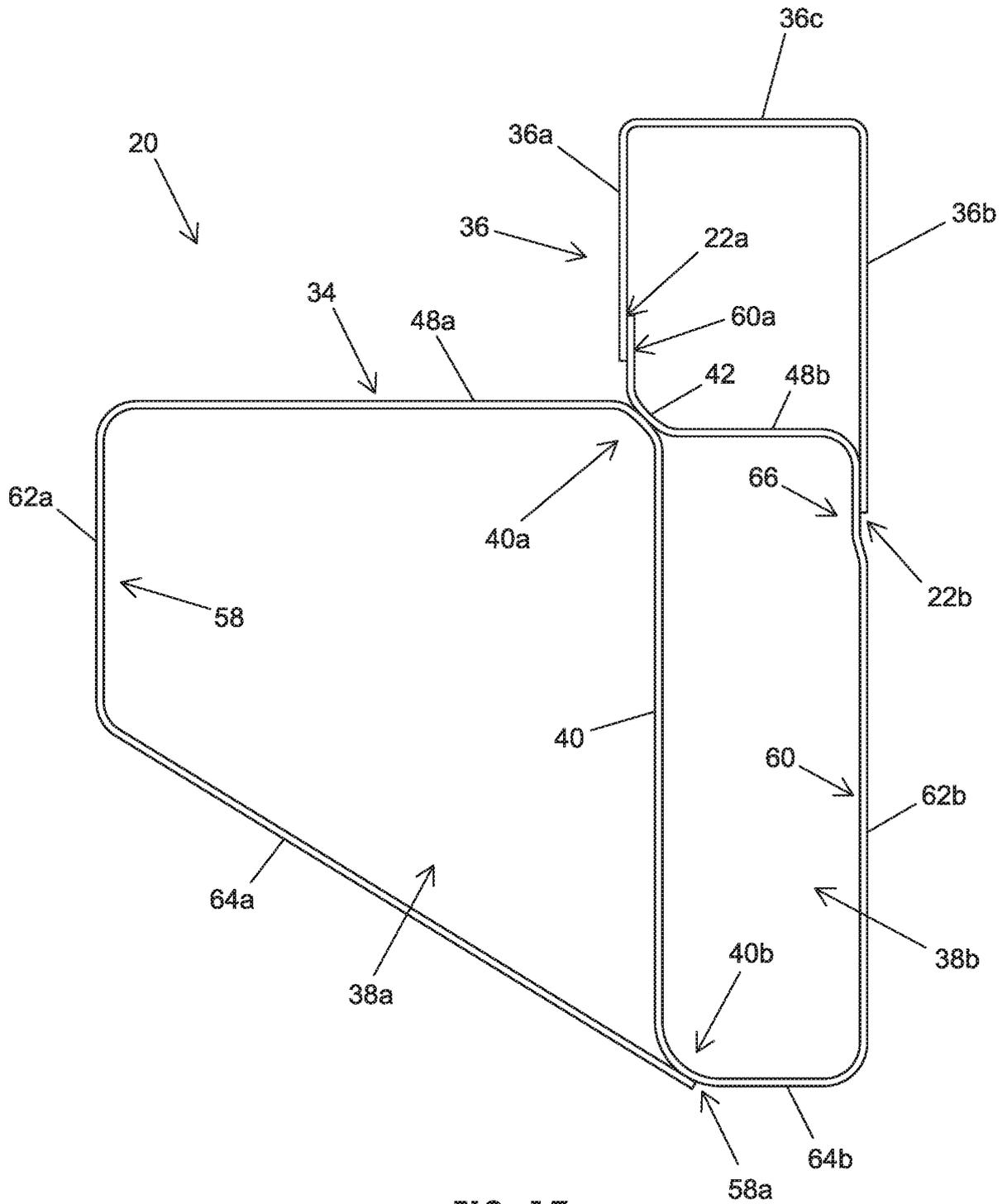


FIG. 16



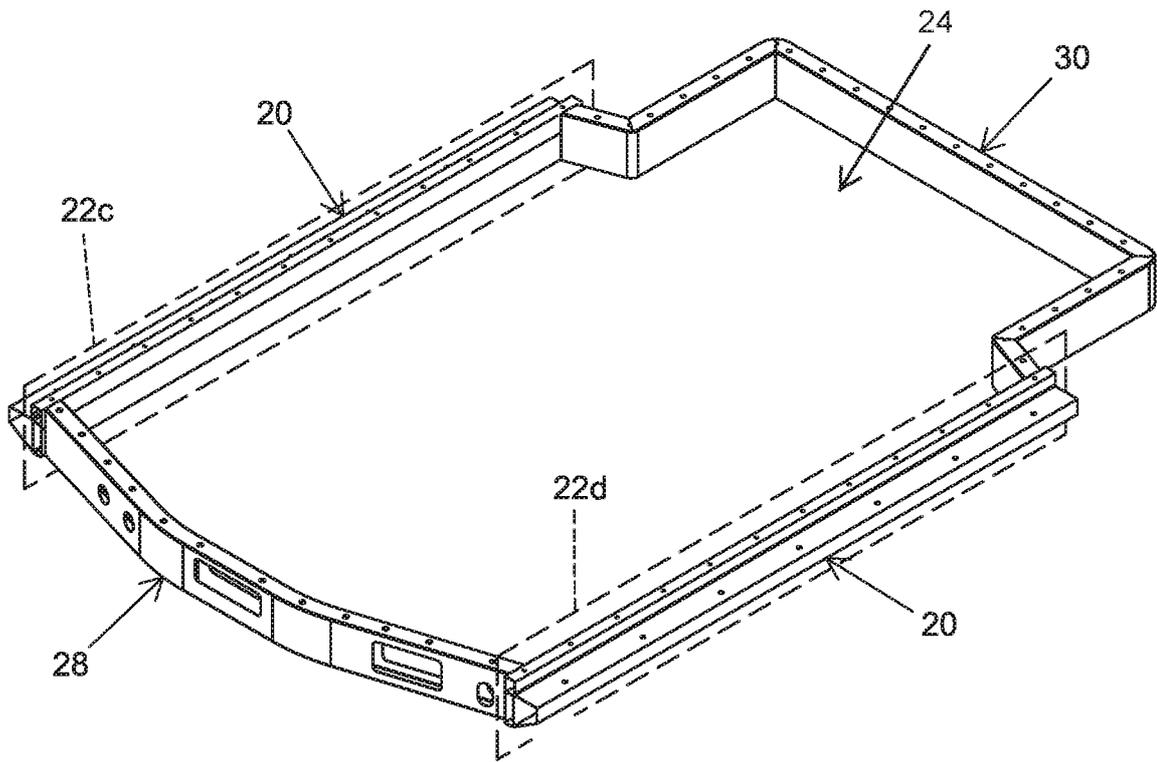


FIG. 18

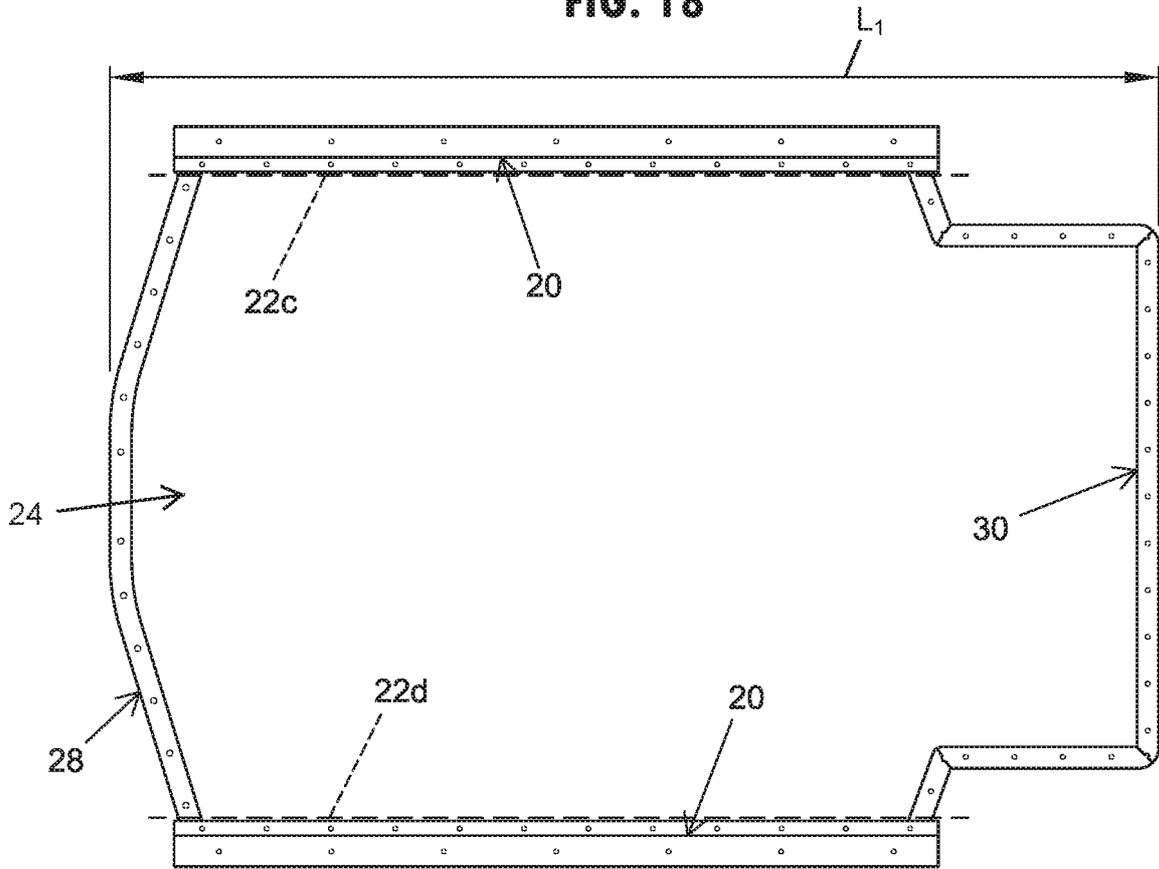


FIG. 18A

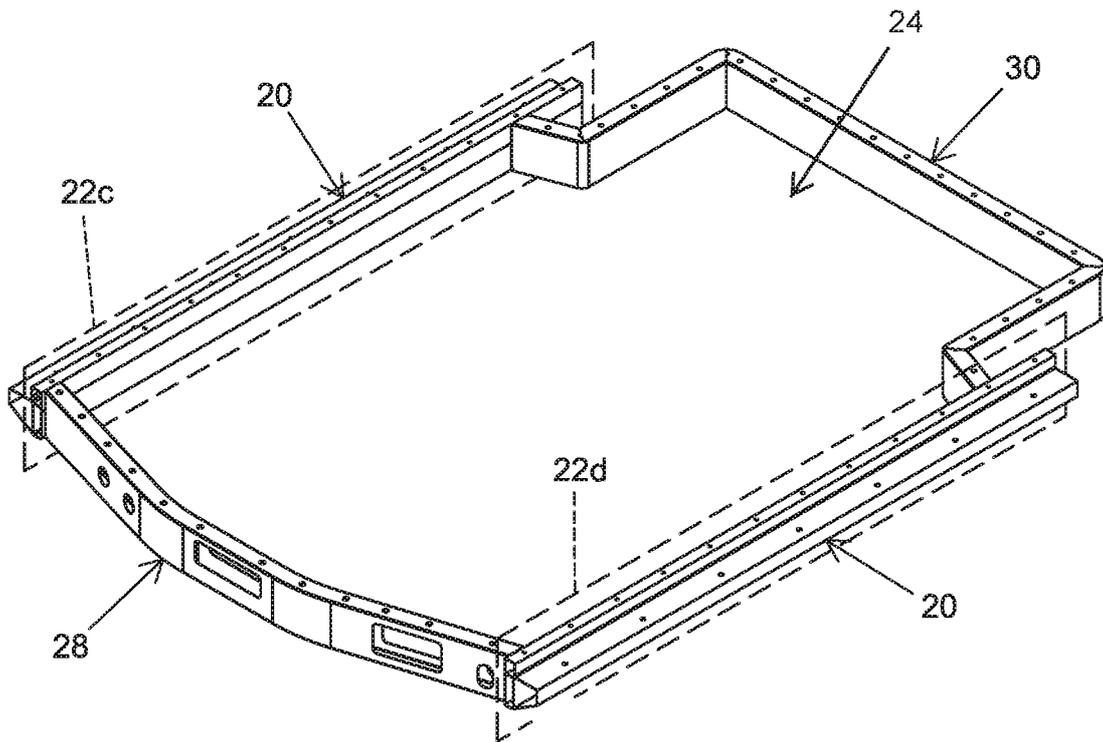


FIG. 19

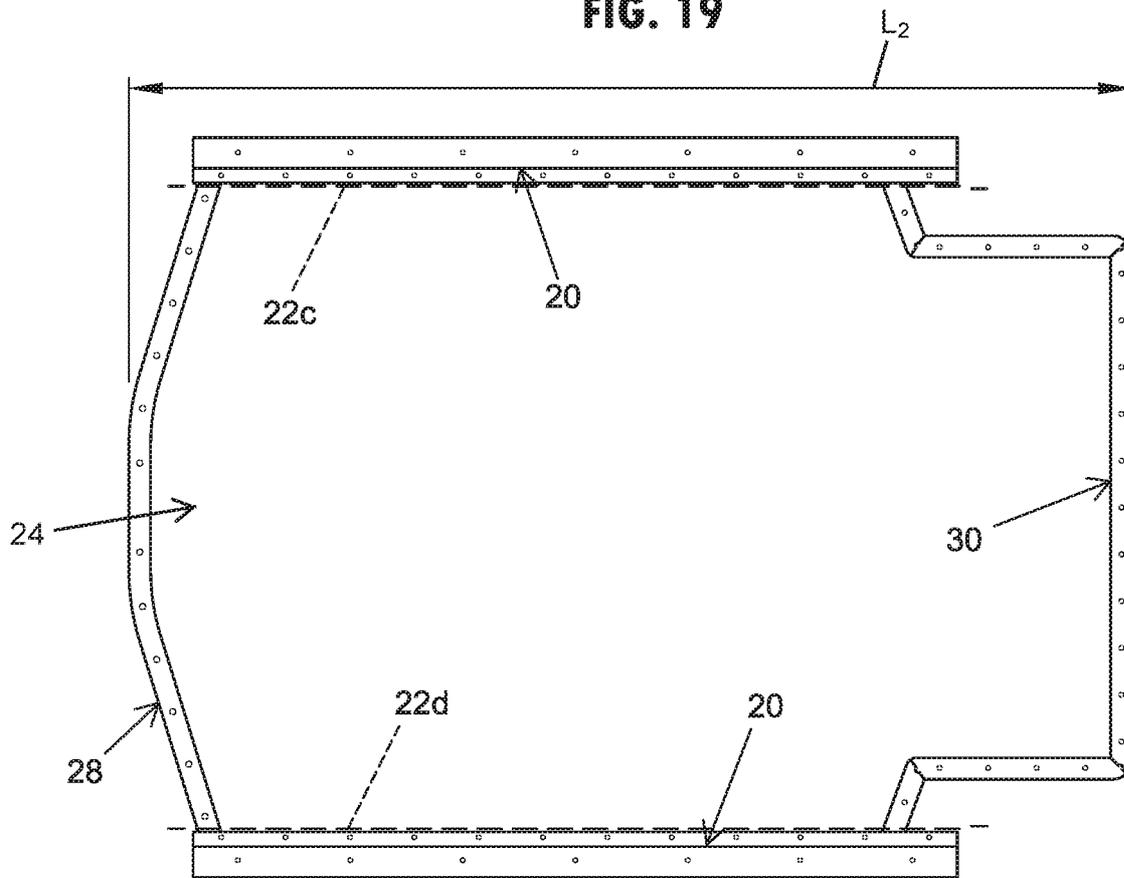


FIG. 19A

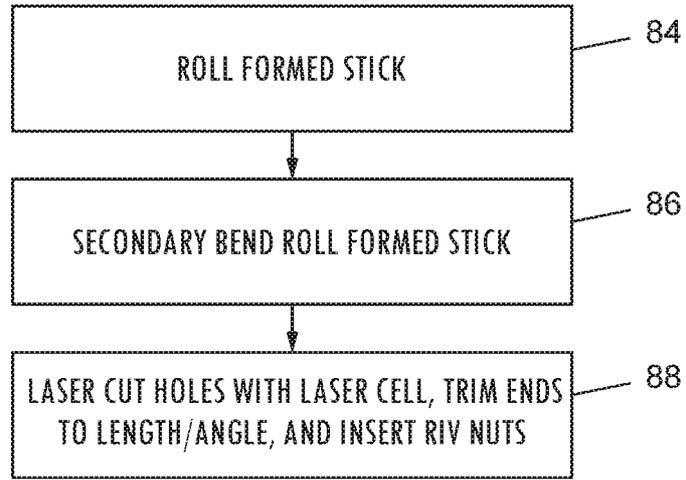


FIG. 20

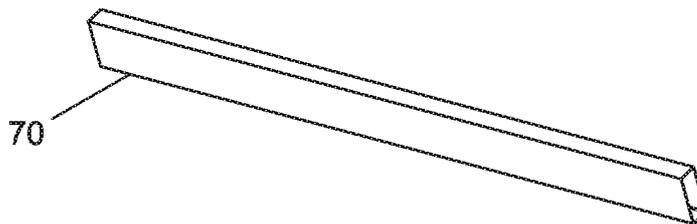


FIG. 20A

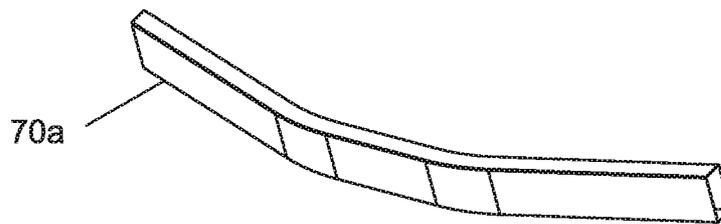


FIG. 20B

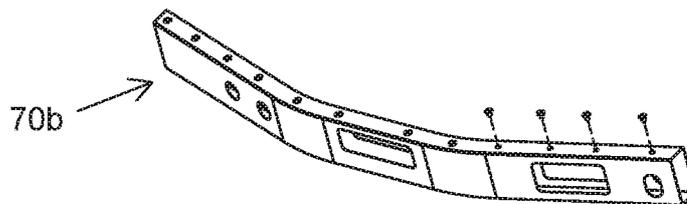


FIG. 20C

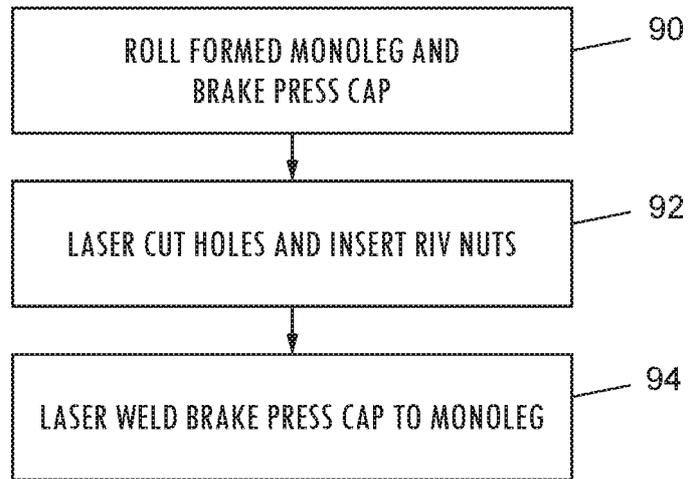


FIG. 21

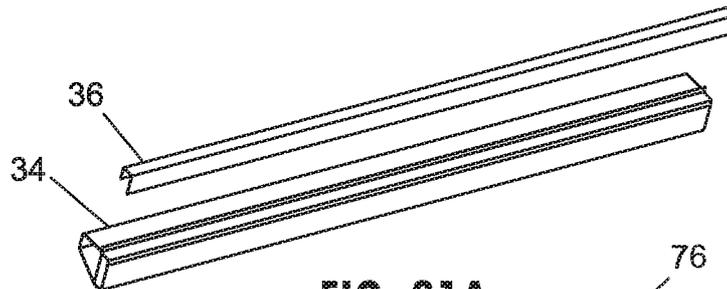


FIG. 21A

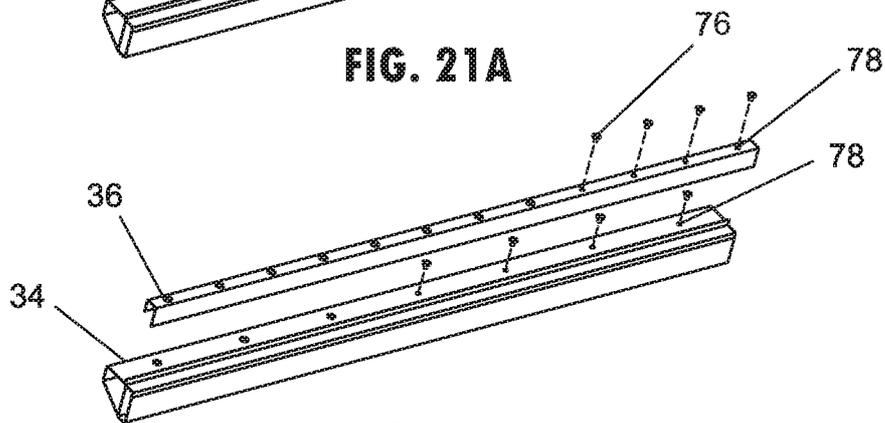


FIG. 21B

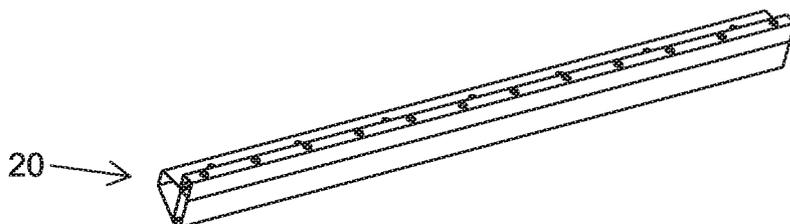


FIG. 21C

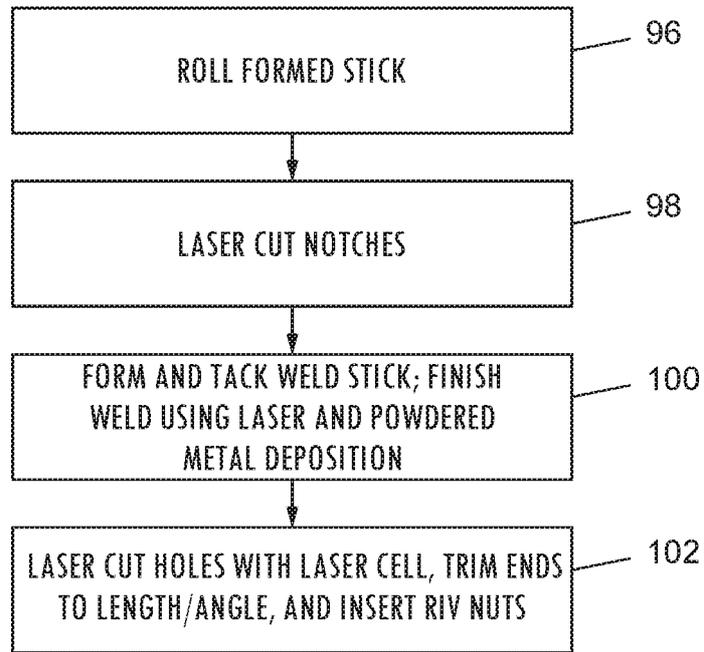


FIG. 22

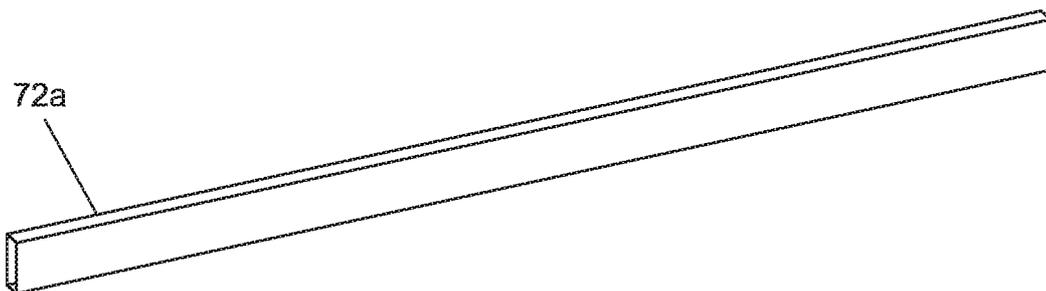


FIG. 22A

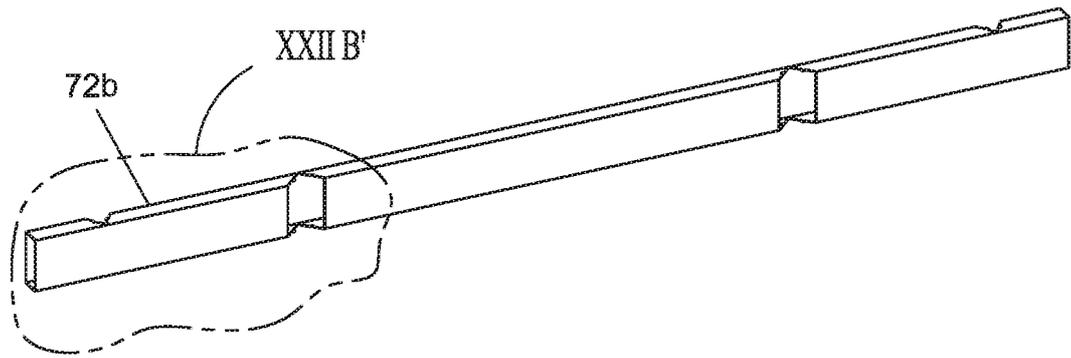


FIG. 22B

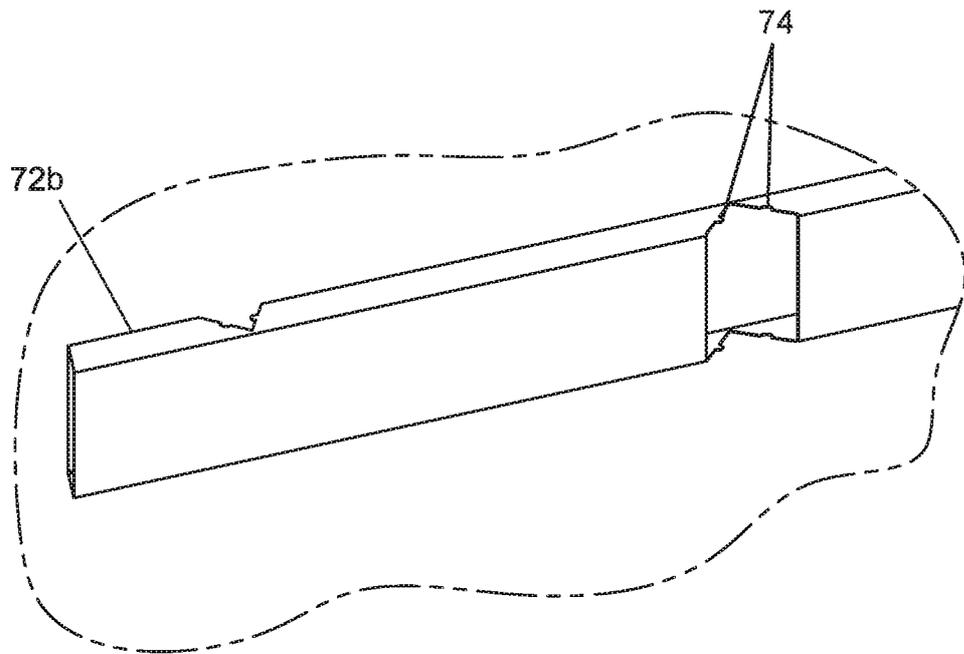


FIG. 22B'

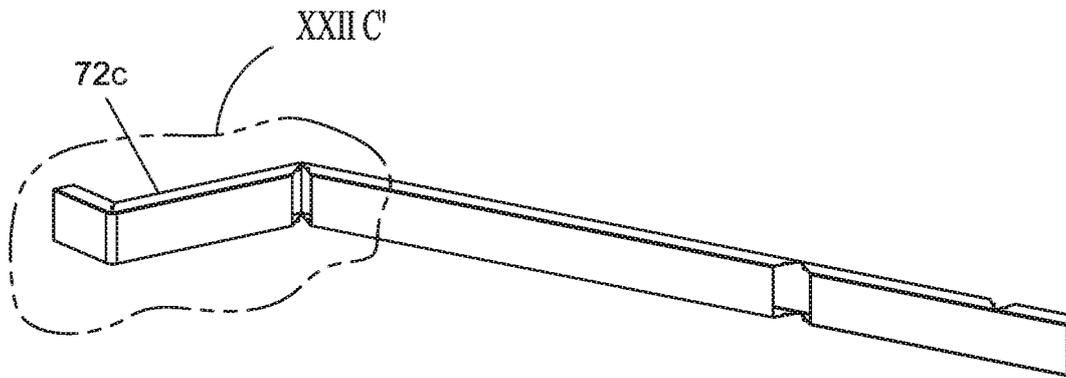


FIG. 22C

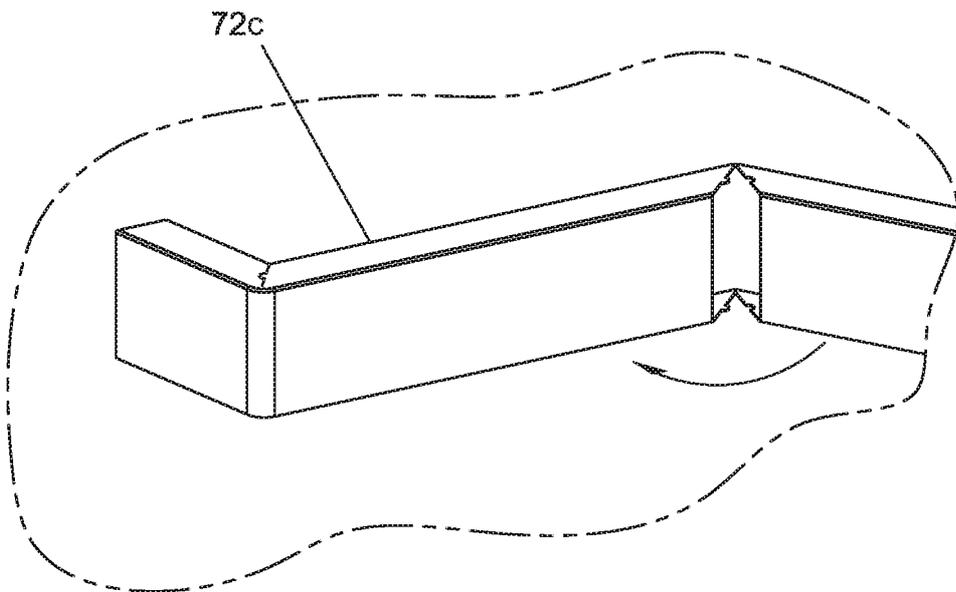


FIG. 22C'

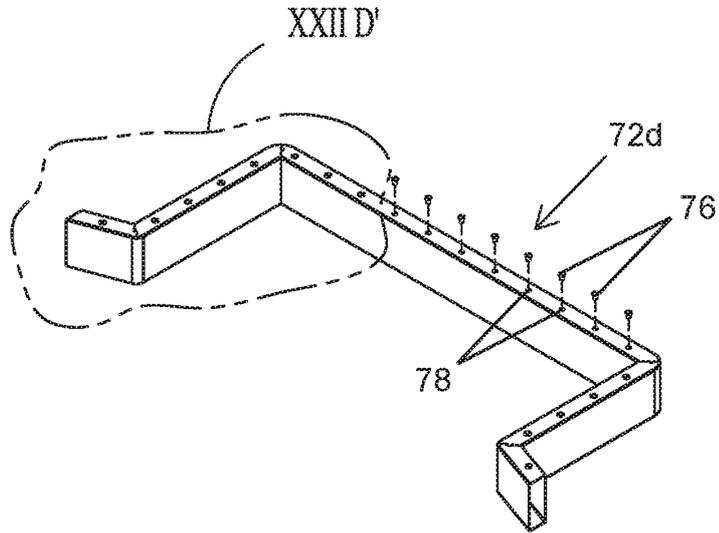


FIG. 22D

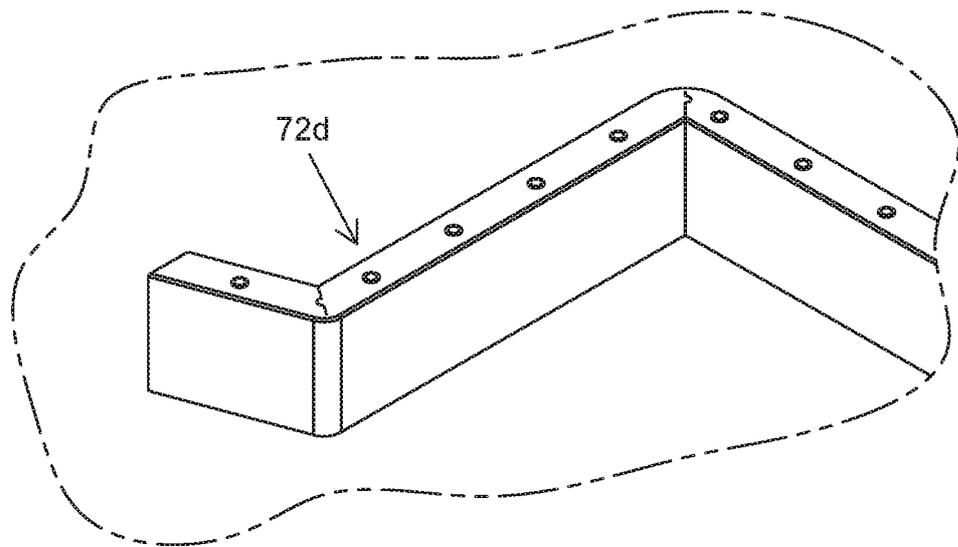


FIG. 22D'

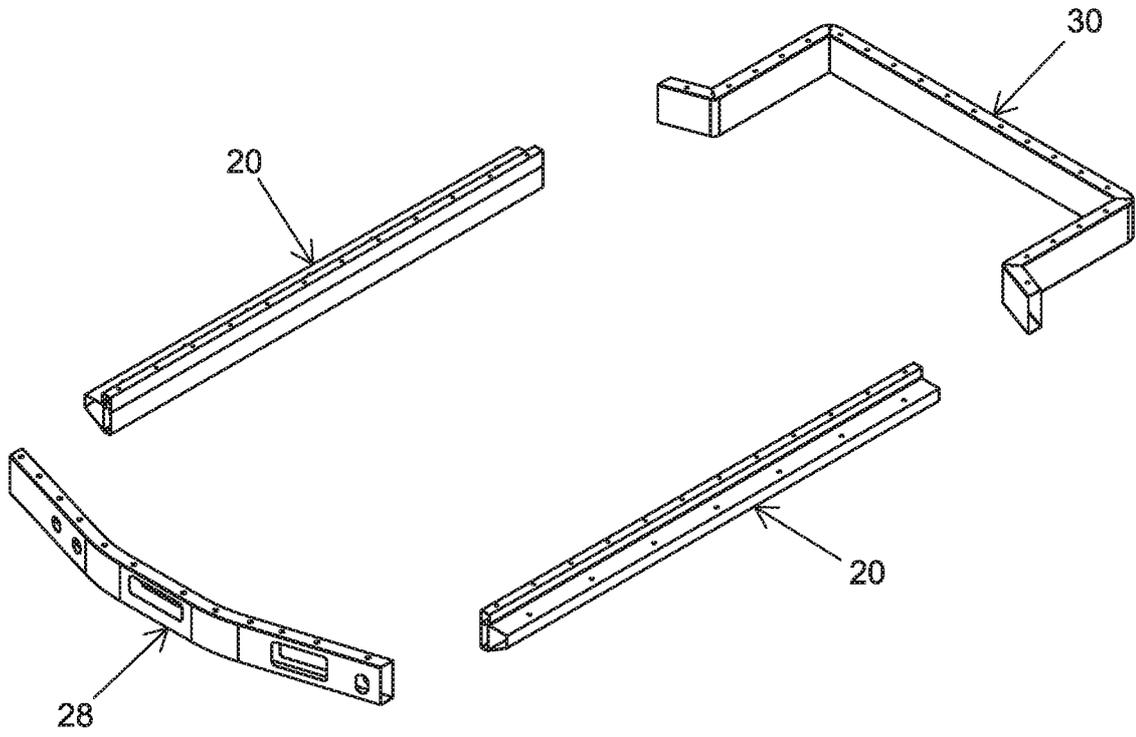


FIG. 23

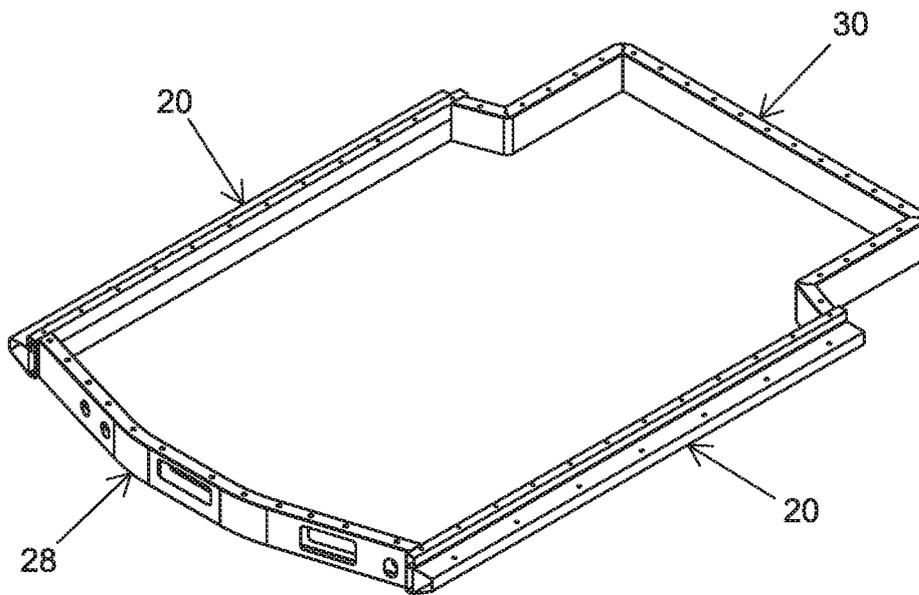


FIG. 24