



5    **“IMPROVEMENTS IN OR RELATING TO A SAFETY  
ARRANGEMENT FOR A VEHICLE”**

**THIS INVENTION** relates to a safety arrangement for a vehicle, and in  
10 particular concerns an improved arrangement for detecting a crash situation and  
controlling at least one safety device, such as an air-bag.

Modern vehicle safety systems typically comprise a main control unit,  
which is the hub of the system. The main control unit comprises one or more  
15 accelerometers to measure the rate of change of velocity of the vehicle, a  
processor operable to perform a decision algorithm on the signals output by the  
accelerometers in order to establish whether a crash situation has occurred and  
implement a crash algorithm to activate one or more safety devices accordingly,  
an energy source, normally in the form of one or more capacitors, storing  
20 sufficient ignition energy to activate the safety device, and an ignition circuit,  
which is controlled by the output of the crash algorithm, and which connects  
the capacitor(s) to the safety device(s) to deploy the safety device(s) upon  
detection of a crash situation. The control unit may also comprise means for  
controlling the communications between the control unit and various external  
25 units, and have a diagnostic function.

Due to the fact that the control unit comprises accelerometers, the  
control unit must be physically located in a part of the vehicle where the sensed  
acceleration will be representative of the acceleration of the vehicle as a whole.

The ideal location for this purpose is the central tunnel of the vehicle, which comprises a ridge running along the centre of the floor of the chassis of the vehicle, and in many known systems the control unit is mounted on an upper surface of the control tunnel, i.e. within the vehicle cabin.

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Due to the number of components contained in the control unit, the control unit is rather large and heavy. It may, therefore, be difficult to allocate sufficient space to the control unit on the central tunnel of the vehicle, which typically also carries other components such as the gear stick.

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In addition, a heavy control unit will generate substantial vibration while the vehicle is moving, and this is likely to comprise the accuracy of the signal output by accelerometers provided therein.

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It is an object of the present invention to alleviate one or more of the above difficulties.

Accordingly, one aspect of the present invention provides a vehicle safety arrangement, the arrangement comprising:

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a sensor unit comprising at least one sensor responsive to acceleration, the sensor unit being located substantially along a central longitudinal line of the vehicle;

an actuator for activating a safety device, the actuator being located remotely from the sensor unit; and

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a control unit located remotely from the sensor unit and from the actuator, the control unit being operable to receive information from the sensor unit and to transmit an actuating command to the actuator to activate the safety device, wherein the control unit comprises no sensors responsive to

acceleration, and the sensor unit comprises a signal processor for sampling data gathered by sensors of the sensor unit.

Preferably, the sensor unit is located on a central tunnel of the vehicle.

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Conveniently, the sensor unit comprises at least two sensors responsive to acceleration, which are configured to measure at least longitudinal and lateral acceleration of the vehicle.

10 Advantageously, the at least one sensor responsive to acceleration is configured to measure vertical acceleration of the vehicle.

Conveniently, the signal processor is operable to transmit the sampled data to the control unit.

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Advantageously, the signal processor is operator to perform a crash algorithm, which causes the signal processor to instruct the control unit to transmit the actuating command to the actuator.

20 Alternatively, the signal processor is operable to receive the output of a decision algorithm, which determines whether the vehicle is in a crash situation.

Preferably, the decision algorithm is performed in the control unit.

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Conveniently, the signal processor is operable to receive data from other remote sensors.

Advantageously, the sensor unit comprises one or more sensors operable to measure an angular velocity of the vehicle around a longitudinal axis thereof.

Preferably, the actuator comprises an ignitor for igniting a charge to  
5 activate the safety device.

Conveniently, the control unit comprises one or more capacitors configured to store sufficient energy to cause the actuator to activate the safety device.

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Advantageously, the discharge of the one or more capacitors comprises the actuation command.

Preferably, the actuator is located in a unit that also comprises a  
15 capacitor configured to store energy to activate the safety device, the capacitor being discharged to activate the safety device in response to the actuation command.

Conveniently, the safety arrangement further comprises at least one left  
20 side sensor on a left side of the vehicle and at least one right side sensor on a right side of the vehicle.

Advantageously, the control unit is connected to a main battery of the vehicle, and supplies power to the sensor unit and the actuator.

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Preferably, the sensor unit has a smaller volume than that of the control unit.

Conveniently, the sensor unit has a volume less than half that of the control unit.

Advantageously, the sensor unit has a smaller mass than that of the control unit.

Preferably, the mass of the sensor unit is less than half that of the control unit.

Conveniently, the sensor unit provided on a single microchip.

Advantageously, the sensor unit comprises a processor.

In order that the present invention may be more readily understood, embodiments thereof will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIGURE 1 shows a first safety arrangement embodying the present invention;

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FIGURE 2 shows a second safety arrangement embodying the present invention;

FIGURE 3 shows a third safety arrangement embodying the present invention; and

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FIGURE 4 shows a fourth safety arrangement embodying the present invention.

Referring to Figure 1, a schematic representation of a first safety arrangement 1 embodying the present invention is shown. The first safety arrangement 1 comprises a control unit 2 which has a processor 3. The processor 3 is, as discussed above, operable to apply a decision algorithm to signals received from sensors (described below), to determine from these signals whether a crash situation has occurred. Such algorithms are known in the art.

The control unit 2 further comprises an ignition circuit 4, which is operable to send an actuation command (in this case in the form of an ignition energy pulse) to a safety device of the vehicle, for instance an air-bag, as will be described in more detail below. The ignition circuit 4 is connected to one or more substantial capacitors 5a, which are charged with sufficient energy to activate the safety device, and will transmit of the stored energy to the safety device upon receipt of a trigger signal from the processor 3. Alternatively, the ignition energy could be taken directly from the vehicle battery, although the battery may become disconnected from the safety arrangement 1, which could result in a failure of the safety device to deploy.

Finally, the control unit 2 comprises a voltage regulator 5b, which receives power from the vehicle battery 6, or from an alternative power source, and regulates the voltage for charging the capacitors but could also provide power to the processor 3, and other components of the first safety arrangement 1.

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It will be appreciated that the control unit 2 will be relatively large and heavy, particularly due to the presence of the capacitors and the ignition circuit 4, which normally comprises two switches for each safety device. The

switches are respectively closed in response to an arming signal and to the trigger signal.

The safety arrangement 1 further comprises a sensor unit 7, which  
5 comprises a pair of accelerometers 8,9, one of which is orientated so as to measure longitudinal acceleration  $a_x$  of the vehicle, and the other of which is orientated to measure lateral acceleration  $a_y$  of the vehicle. The sensor unit 7 comprises a signal processor 10, which receives outputs from the accelerometers 8,9 and manipulates the data to be in a suitable form for feeding  
10 to the processor 3 of the central unit 2.

Left and right sensors 11,12 (which may also be accelerometers) are also provided, separately from the sensor unit 7, and the left and right sensors 11,12 are configured to be located on respective left and right hand sides of the  
15 vehicle to provide additional information that may be useful in determining whether or not the vehicle has encountered a crash situation, or in providing information on the type of crash that has occurred.

The safety arrangement 1 also comprises one or more actuators 13, in the  
20 form (in this example) of squibs or other devices such as relays which, upon activation thereof may, by way of example, inflate air-bags and release belt pretensioners.

As discussed above, it is important for the sensor unit 7 to be physically  
25 located on the vehicle in a position where the sensed acceleration will be representative of the acceleration of the vehicle as a whole. Hence, the sensor unit 7 is positioned substantially along a central longitudinal line of the vehicle. In advantageous embodiments of the invention, the sensor unit 7 is located on the central tunnel of the vehicle, and in such embodiments the sensor unit 7

may be directly attached by any suitable means to an upper or lower surface of the central tunnel, or to a covering thereof. The sensor unit 7 may be located within the cabin of the vehicle.

5           However, the control unit 2, which comprises rather heavier components, is located remotely from the sensor unit 7 and indeed may be placed in any suitable location on the vehicle, not necessarily anywhere near the central longitudinal line thereof (e.g. on a different part of the tunnel or behind the dashboard).

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The control unit 2 communicates with the sensor unit 7 over a sensor communication line 14, which may take any suitable form.

15           The remote location of the control unit 2 from the sensor unit 7 means that it is not necessary to house the control unit 2 in the central tunnel of the vehicle, thus alleviating the difficulty discussed above.

20           In addition, the relatively large vibrations that the control unit 2 will undergo during movement of the vehicle will not affect the sensor unit 7, which will therefore provide more reliable data regarding the acceleration of the vehicle.

25           The control unit 2 is also located remotely from the actuator 13, and communicates therewith over an activation communication line 15. As discussed above, the control unit 2 comprises an ignition circuit 4 connected to capacitors 5a charged with sufficient energy to activate the actuator 13 (for instance, to activate one or more ignitors to ignite the squibs), and in this embodiment the activation communication line 15 may simply comprise a

power line, with the control unit 2 initiating activation of the actuator 13 by discharging the capacitors along the power line.

It will be appreciated that, with the above arrangement, the volume and mass of the components that are located in the sensor unit 7 on the central tunnel of the vehicle are kept to an absolute minimum, with the larger, more massive components being conveniently located elsewhere in the vehicle in the control unit 2.

Figure 2 shows a second safety arrangement 16 embodying the present invention. Common components between the first safety arrangement 1 discussed above and the second safety arrangement 16 are designated by like reference numerals.

In the second safety arrangement 16, the processing unit 3 in the control unit 2 receives data from the left and right sensors 11,12, and performs signal processing, the output of which is sent to the signal processor 10, which now implements the main crash algorithm and hence decides whether the safety device is to be deployed. The signal processor 10 will, upon receiving a signal from the processing unit 3, perform the crash algorithm, and will (if appropriate) instruct the ignition circuit 4 to send an actuation command to the actuators 13.

The second safety arrangement 16 also comprises a third sensor 17 in the sensor unit 7, this third sensor 17 being positioned to allow measurement of movement of the vehicle around the roll axis (angular velocity,  $\omega_x$ ).

Figure 3 shows a third safety arrangement 18 embodying the present invention, components thereof that are in common with the first safety

arrangement 1 described above being designated by common reference numerals.

The third safety arrangement 18 comprises further sensors 19, which  
5 measure parameters of the car other than the acceleration thereof. For instance, the further sensors 19 may detect whether seat belt buckles are engaged, or may otherwise detect the presence of an occupant in a given seat of the vehicle, for instance by the weight exerted on the seat, or may measure the position of the seat or a part thereof (such as the headrest). The further sensors 19 may also  
10 gather information relating to the speed of the vehicle. The information output by the further sensors 19 is passed to the control unit 2 via an information bus 20, which allows communication between the control unit 2 and any other remote crash sensors (for instance the left and right sensors 11,12) and the actuator 13.

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The information gathered by the further sensors 19 allows the processing unit 3 of the control unit 2 to arrive at a more informed decision regarding whether to activate the safety device. For instance, if the further sensors 19 detect that the passenger seat of the vehicle is unoccupied during a crash, the  
20 control unit 2 may prevent the triggering of a passenger-side air-bag, since this is unlikely to offer protection to the occupants of the vehicle, and may hinder efforts to leave the vehicle, or remove people from the vehicle, following a crash.

25 Also, in the third safety arrangement 18, the sensor unit 7 is provided on a single microchip, and it will be appreciated that this arrangement further reduces the size and mass of the components that are to be located in the central tunnel of the vehicle.

With reference to Figure 4, a fourth safety arrangement 21 embodying the present invention is shown. The fourth safety arrangement 21 is similar to the third safety arrangement 18, however each safety device is provided with a unit comprising a capacitor 5a, an ignition circuit 4 and an actuator 13, and the information bus 20 continuously transmits power from the control unit 2 to the capacitors and other remote units of the arrangement 21, including for instance the sensor unit 7. The bus 20 also transmits the actuation command, now in form of a trigger signal, from the processing unit 3 to the ignition circuits. If an arming switch is used in 4, an arming signal will also be sent. The sensor unit could also comprise a vertical accelerometer 22 to measure vertical acceleration  $a_z$ .

It will be understood that the present invention provides an improved safety arrangement, providing favourable distribution of components around a vehicle, while improving the accuracy with which a crash situation may be detected.

In the present Specification "comprises" means "includes or consists of" and "comprising" means "including or consisting of".

The features disclosed in the foregoing description, or the following Claims, or the accompanying drawings, expressed in their specific forms or in terms of a means for performing the disclosed function, or a method or process for attaining the disclosed result, as appropriate, may, separately, or in any combination of such features, be utilised for realising the invention in diverse forms thereof.

**CLAIMS:**

- 5 1. A vehicle safety arrangement, the arrangement comprising:  
a sensor unit comprising at least one sensor responsive to acceleration,  
the sensor unit being located substantially along a central longitudinal line of  
the vehicle;  
an actuator for activating a safety device, the actuator being located  
10 remotely from the sensor unit; and  
a control unit located remotely from the sensor unit and from the  
actuator, the control unit being operable to receive information from the sensor  
unit and to transmit an actuating command to the actuator to activate the safety  
device, wherein the control unit comprises no sensors responsive to  
15 acceleration, and the sensor unit comprises a signal processor for sampling data  
gathered by sensors of the sensor unit.
2. A safety arrangement according to Claim 1, wherein the sensor unit is  
located on a central tunnel of the vehicle.
- 20 3. A safety device according to Claim 1 or 2, wherein the sensor unit  
comprises at least two sensors responsive to acceleration, which are configured  
to measure at least longitudinal and lateral acceleration of the vehicle.
- 25 4. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the at  
least one sensor responsive to acceleration is configured to measure vertical  
acceleration of the vehicle.

5. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the signal processor is operable to transmit the sampled data to the control unit.
6. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the signal processor is operator to perform a crash algorithm, which causes the signal processor to instruct the control unit to transmit the actuating command to the actuator.
7. A safety arrangement according to any one of Claims 1 or 5, wherein the signal processor is operable to receive the output of a decision algorithm, which determines whether the vehicle is in a crash situation.
8. A safety arrangement according to Claim 7, wherein the decision algorithm is performed in the control unit.
9. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the signal processor is operable to receive data from other remote sensors.
10. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the sensor unit comprises one or more sensors operable to measure an angular velocity of the vehicle around a longitudinal axis thereof.
11. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the actuator comprises an ignitor for igniting a charge to activate the safety device.
12. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the control unit comprises one or more capacitors configured to store sufficient energy to cause the actuator to activate the safety device.

13. A safety arrangement according to Claim 12, wherein the discharge of the one or more capacitors comprises the actuation command.
- 5 14. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the actuator is located in a unit that also comprises a capacitor configured to store energy to activate the safety device, the capacitor being discharged to activate the safety device in response to the actuation command.
- 10 15. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, further comprising at least one left side sensor on a left side of the vehicle and at least one right side sensor on a right side of the vehicle.
16. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the control unit is connected to a main battery of the vehicle, and supplies power to the sensor unit and the actuator.
- 15 17. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the sensor unit has a smaller volume than that of the control unit.
- 20 18. A safety arrangement according to Claim 17, wherein the sensor unit has a volume less than half that of the control unit.
19. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the sensor unit has a smaller mass than that of the control unit.
- 25 20. A safety arrangement according to Claim 19, wherein the mass of the sensor unit is less than half that of the control unit.

21. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the sensor unit provided on a single microchip.

5 22. A safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim, wherein the sensor unit comprises a processor.

23. A vehicle comprising a safety arrangement according to any preceding Claim.

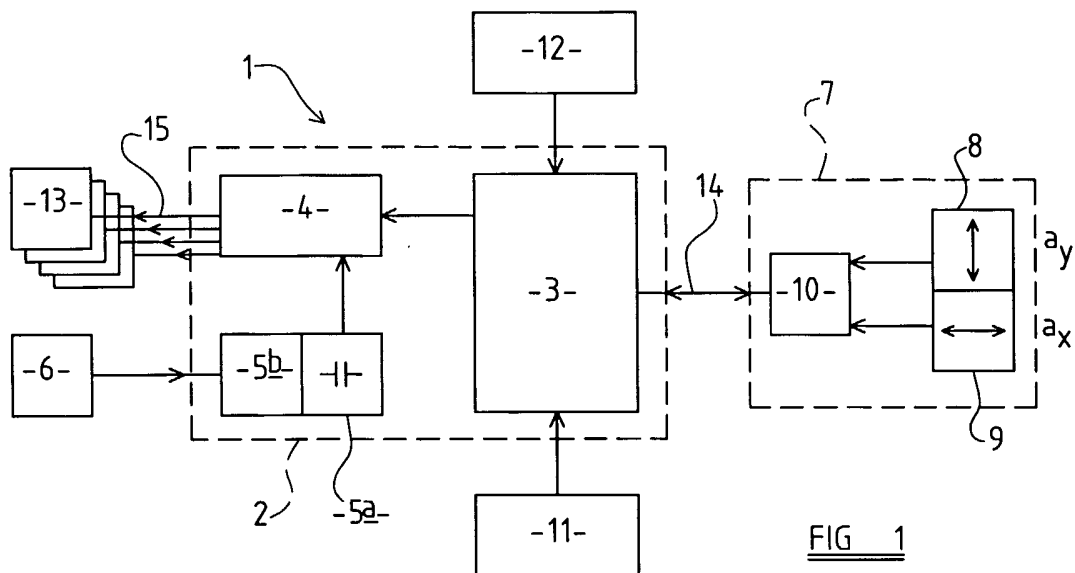


FIG 1

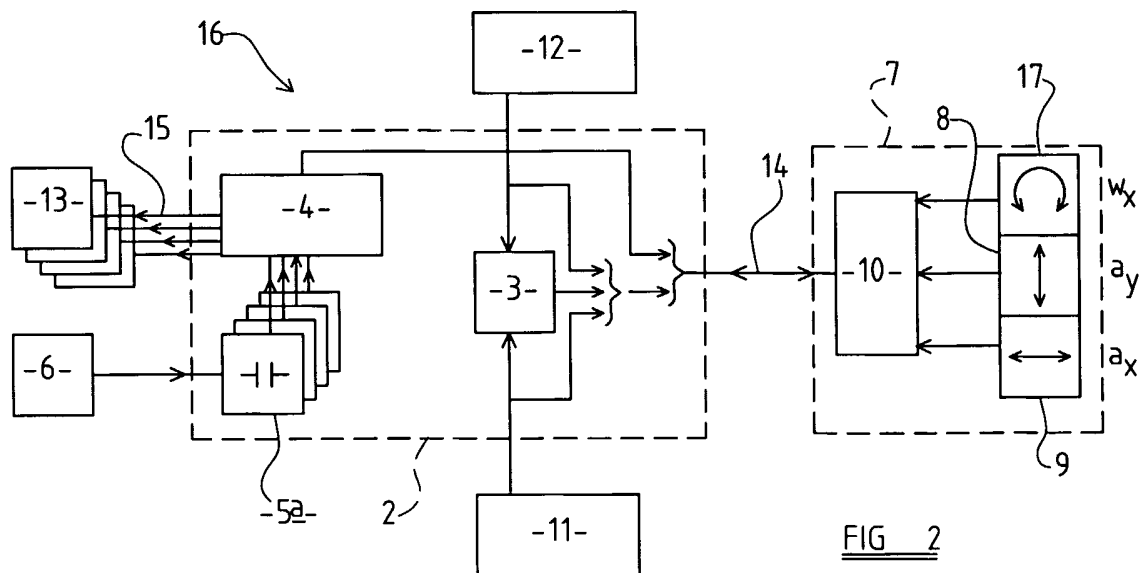


FIG 2

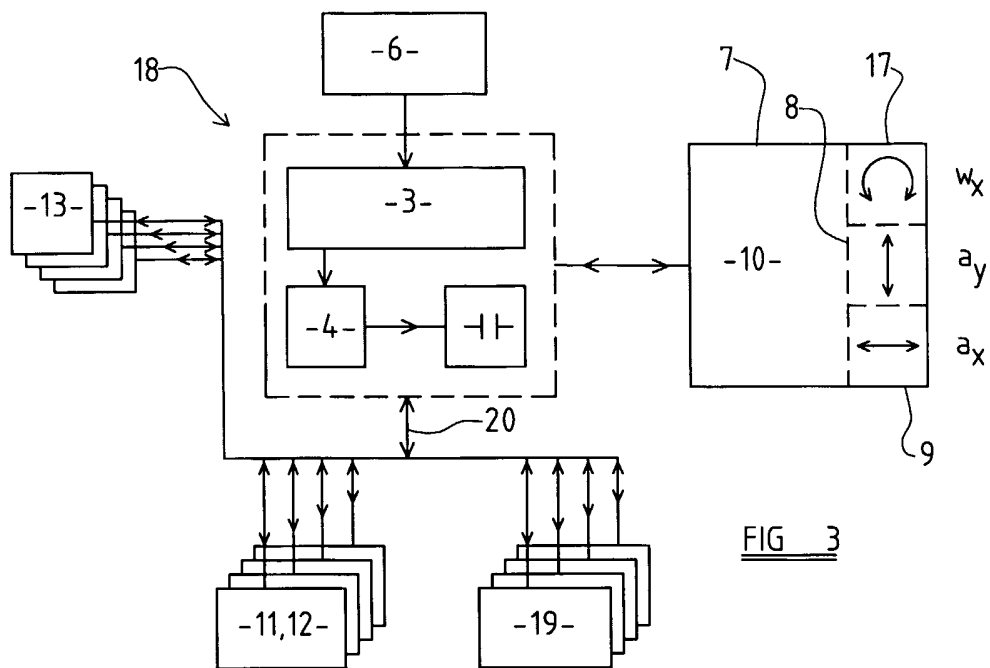


FIG 3

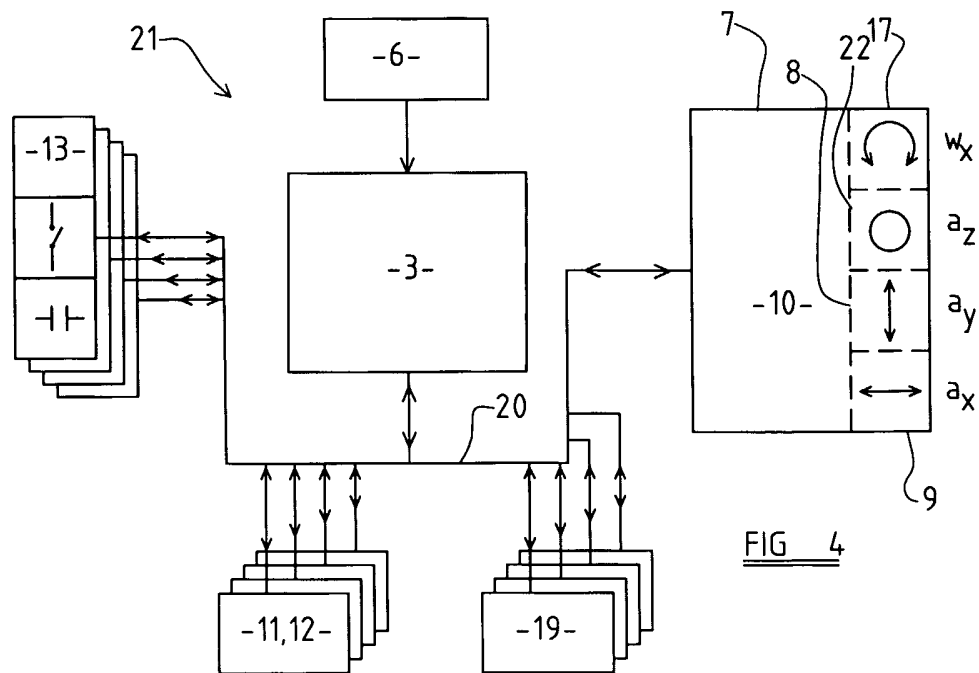


FIG 4

**INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT**

International application No.  
**PCT/SE 2003/001622**

<b>A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER</b>		
<p><b>IPC7: B60R 21/01, G01P 15/00</b> According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC</p>		
<b>B. FIELDS SEARCHED</b>		
Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)		
<p><b>IPC7: B60R, G01P</b></p>		
Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched		
<p><b>SE,DK,FI,NO classes as above</b></p>		
Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)		
<p><b>EPO-INTERNAL, WPI DATA, PAJ, INSPEC</b></p>		
<b>C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT</b>		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5935182 A (CHEK-PENG FOO ET AL), 10 August 1999 (10.08.1999), column 1, line 13 - column 2, line 15 --	1-23
A	US 6032092 A (WALTER LAASER), 29 February 2000 (29.02.2000), column 1, line 7 - column 2, line 63 --	1-23
A	US 6113138 A (STEFAN HERMANN ET AL), 5 Sept 2000 (05.09.2000), column 1, line 8 - column 4, line 67 --	1-23
A	US 6243632 B1 (WALTER JUNG), 5 June 2001 (05.06.2001), column 1, line 15 - column 4, line 19 --	1-23
<input type="checkbox"/> Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> See patent family annex.		
<p>* Special categories of cited documents:</p> <p>"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance</p> <p>"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date</p> <p>"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)</p> <p>"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means</p> <p>"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed</p>		<p>"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention</p> <p>"X" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone</p> <p>"Y" document of particular relevance: the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art</p> <p>"&amp;" document member of the same patent family</p>
Date of the actual completion of the international search		Date of mailing of the international search report
12 January 2004		22-01-2004
Name and mailing address of the ISA/ Swedish Patent Office Box 5055, S-102 42 STOCKHOLM Facsimile No. +46 8 666 02 86		Authorized officer  Antonio Farieta/MN Telephone No. +46 8 782 25 00

**INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT**

Information on patent family members

International application No.

01/12/2003

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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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US 6243632 B1	05/06/2001	DE 19520608 A DE 59602727 D EP 0830271 A,B JP 3140062 B JP 10508814 T WO 9639315 A	12/12/1996 00/00/0000 25/03/1998 05/03/2001 02/09/1998 12/12/1996