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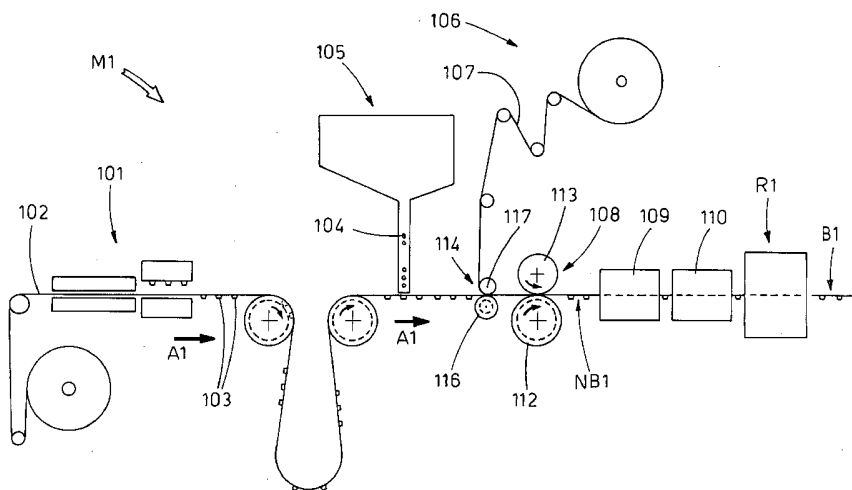
— as to the applicant's entitlement to claim the priority of the
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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: BLISTERING MACHINE FOR PRODUCING BLISTER PACKS



(57) Abstract: A Blistering machine (M1) for producing blister packs (B1) has a production line, which includes consecutively: at least one thermoforming station (101) of a first continuous band (102) of thermoformable material, in order to define a blister band (102) with blisters containing products (104); a station (105) for feeding the products (104) and filling the blister band (102); a feeding station (106) of a second band (107), feeding continuously the second band (107) over the blister band (102) filled with the products (104); a closing station (108), where the first blister band (102) is sealed by the second band (107) to obtain a blister pack band (NB1), the closing station (108) including two opposite rollers (112, 113); and a cutting station (R1), in which the blister pack band is cut into respective blister packs (B1). The production line extends, at least beginning from the products feeding station (105), along a continuous feeding path (A1), substantially horizontal. Tension means (114) are situated upstream of the closing station (108), along the path (A1), to cooperate with the rollers (112, 113) of the closing station (108), to perform a selected tension on at least the first band (102).



For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

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BLISTERING MACHINE FOR PRODUCING BLISTER PACKS**FIELD OF THE INVENTION**

The present invention relates to a blistering machine for
5 producing blister packs.

In particular, the invention is advantageously applied in
the production of blister packs containing pharmaceutical
products, such as tablets, capsules, pills, pellets and
the like, to which the following description will refer
10 without losing its general character.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

At present, a known blistering machine M for producing
blister packs, according to Figure 1 (prior art)
15 includes: a station 1, in which a first continuous band 2
of thermoformable material (e.g. PVC) is thermoformed to
define a blister band with blisters 3 containing products
4, the blister band 2 being fed continuously along a
determined feeding path A having a varying course; a
20 station 5 for feeding products 4, having a unit for
filling each blister 3 with a relevant product 4; a
station 6 for feeding a second continuous band 7 (e.g.
aluminium), feeding continuously the second continuous
band 7 over the blister band 2 filled with the products
25 4; a station 8 for closing the first blister band 2 with
the second band 7 by heat-sealing, in order to obtain a
continuous blister pack band NB.

Downstream of the closing station 8, along the feeding
path A with varying route, there is also a station 9,
30 where the continuous blister pack band NB is stamped or
punched, and a station 10, where the continuous blister

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pack band NB is pre-cut, to define pre-cut lines on the continuous blister pack band NB.

Afterwards, the continuous blister pack band NB with the pre-cut lines is divided, e.g. by cutting in a cutting station R, to define a plurality of single blister packs B.

Downstream of the cutting station R, the single blister packs B are withdrawn and fed to a boxing unit C, to be packaged in suitable boxes in known way.

10 Generally, the closing station 8 has two opposed rollers linked to each other, that is it includes a first, driving lower and recessed roller, that is having circumferential grooves 12a for housing blisters 3 with products 4, and a second roller 13, situated opposite and
15 above the driving roller 12 and provided with heating means, to heat and pressure join the two bands 2 and 7, as they are placed one over the other.

As it can be seen in the machine M of Figure 1, joining of the two bands, which results in the continuous blister pack band NB, occurs in a tangential line between the
20 opposite rollers 12, 13, while an efficient grip while pulling the blister pack band NB is obtained due to the contact of the blister pack band NB along a wide arc defined on the peripheral surface of the driving roller
25 8a. The band NB is driven through a bending roller 11 and along an acute angle section of the feeding path A, downstream of the closing station 8 and defining a loop K.

The idler roller 11, defining the loop K and allowing
30 best grip by the driving roller 12 on the band NB, can also oscillate between different working positions, in order to allow to make up for the continuous feeding of

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the band NB along the path A: this oscillation is necessary, because a continuous feeding of the bands 2 and 7, and consequently of the band NB must match with an operation of the stamping station 9 and the pre-cutting station 10, which in the known blistering machines, occurs in an intermittent way.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The object of the present invention is to propose a blistering machine, whose structure is simpler and more compact with respect to the known blistering machines, described above, which results in a considerable reduction of dimensions.

In particular, an object of the present invention is to simplify the structure and functionality of the bands closing station, so as to increase the production speed of the whole blistering machine.

Another object of the present invention is to improve the structure of the bands closing station, eliminating the possibility of generating damaging curving of the blister band due to the heat joining of the bands.

A further object of the present invention is to improve the structure of the bands closing station, avoiding the contact between the still hot closing band and the products inside the blisters, during the seal joining.

According to the present invention, a blistering machine for producing blister packs includes a production line, which comprises consecutively at least one thermoforming station of a first continuous band of thermoformable material, in order to define a blister band with blisters containing products; a station for feeding said products

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and filling said blister band with the latter; a feeding station of a second band, feeding the second band continuously over said blister band filled with the products; a closing station, where the first blister band is sealed by said second band to obtain a blister pack band, said closing station including two opposite rollers; and a cutting station, in which said blister pack band is cut into respective blister packs; the machine being characterized in that said production line extends, at least beginning from said products feeding station, along a continuous feeding path, substantially horizontal, and in that tension means are situated upstream of said closing station, along said path, to cooperate with said rollers of said closing station, to perform a determined tension on at least the first band.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The technical features of the invention, according to the above objects, are clearly understood from the contents of the claims below, and the advantages of the invention will be better seen from the following detailed description, with reference to the enclosed figures, which show a preferred embodiment, as a pure, not limiting example, in which:

- 25 - Figure 1 is a schematic, perspective view of a known blistering machine (Prior Art);
- Figure 2 is a schematic front view of a preferred embodiment of the blistering machine proposed by the present invention;
- 30 - Figure 3 is a front, partially sectional view, with some parts removed for sake of clarity, of a

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preferred embodiment of a work station forming an integrating part of the blistering machine schematized in Figure 2;

- 5 - Figure 4 is a detailed lateral view of a particular of the work station of Figure 3, with some parts removed; and
- Figure 5 is a lateral, section view of a working group, being a part of the work station of Figures 3 and 4.

10

BEST MODES OF CARRYING OUT THE INVENTION

With reference to Figure 2, the reference M1 indicates generally a blistering machine proposed by the present invention, for producing blister packs containing
15 products, preferably pharmaceutical.

For simplicity of the description and clarity of the comparison between the machine M1 proposed by the invention and the machine M of the prior art, the constituent elements of the machine M1 shown in Figure 2
20 will be described and indicated with reference numbers defined by the same reference numbers (where present and where it is possible) used for describing the machine M, summed to the base number 100: therefore, the number 101 indicates the thermoforming station of the machine M1,
25 which corresponds to the number 1 indicating the thermoforming station of the blistering machine M of the prior art, and so on.

Thus, the blistering machine M1 is defined by a production line including a station 101, where a first
30 continuous band 2 of thermoformable material (e.g. PVC) is thermoformed, so as to obtain a blister band 102 with

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blisters 103 containing products 104; the blister band 102 being fed in a substantially continuous way along a predetermined feeding path A1; a station 105 for feeding the products 104 having a unit for filling each blister 5 103 with a relative product 104; a feeding station 106 of a second band 107 (e.g. aluminium), feeding the second band continuously over the blister band filled with the products; a closing station 108, where the first blister band is closed by the second band 107 by heat sealing, to 10 obtain a continuous blister band NB1.

Downstream of the closing station 108, along the linear feeding path A, there is also at least one station 109, where the continuous blister pack band NB1 is stamped or punched, and preferably, a station 110, where the 15 continuous blister band NB1 is pre-cut, to define pre-cut lines on the continuous blister pack band NB1.

Afterwards, the continuous blister pack band NB1 with the pre-cut lines is divided, e.g. by cutting in a cutting station R1, to define a plurality of single blister packs 20 B1.

The stamping station 109 and the pre-cutting station 110 are preferably operated to work continuously on the band NB1, driven continuously, because the stamping/cutting means move continuously from and to the blister band NB1 25 and following the band NB1.

Downstream of the cutting station R1, the single blister packs B1 are withdrawn and fed to a boxing unit (known and not shown), to be packaged in suitable boxes in known way.

30 Comparing the machine M1 of Figure 2 of the present invention with the machine M of the prior art shown in Figure 1, it is easily seen that while the path A of the

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machine M has a varying course (note for example curved path at acute angle in a region corresponding to the loop K of the band NB, made by the oscillating bend roller 11), the feeding path A1 of the band 102 in the machine M1 extends horizontally, at least beginning from the station 105 for feeding products 104.

In other words, just a sight allows to understand that the production line of the blistering machine M1 is horizontal, that is it is structured in a simpler and compacter way, and consequently, it reduces considerably dimensions normally occupied by the machine M of the prior art.

According to Figures 3 and 4, the closing station 108 for sealing the band 102 with the band 107 has a couple of rollers 112, 113, which are arranged at the opposite side with respect to the bands 102, 107.

The roller 112, situated at the lower level, is a driving roller having recesses 112a for receiving the blisters 3 of the blister band 102, while the upper roller 113, situated opposite the roller 112 and cooperating therewith, is a heated sealing roller.

In particular, it is to be noted that during the feeding along the horizontal path A1, the driving roller 112 is completely coupled with the blister band 102 in a single line corresponding to a line T of contact with the sealing roller 113.

Still according to Figure 3, upstream of the closing station 108 with respect to the feeding action along the path A1, the machine M1 includes a group 114 for tensioning the bands 102 and 107.

The group 114 allows the pair of bands 102 and 107 to advance horizontally with the best tension, thus allowing

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an efficient mutual joining of the bands 102, 107 in the station 108, without slipping and with the best gripping and driving action on the blisters 103 by the seats 112a of the roller 112, although the band 102 can adhere to the roller 112 only in a region corresponding to the contact line T.

According to Figures 4 and 5, the group 114 includes a pair of rollers 116, 117: the lower roller 116 is a power-driven roller and its cross-section has at least two rings 116a and 116b, holding the edges of the blister band 102.

The roller 116 acts practically as a braking element of the band 102 when it receives a command signal S sent by detecting and control means 115 (Figure 4), aimed at checking the correct matching between the blister 103 and the housing seat 112a made on the driving roller 112.

The upper roller 117 cooperates with the roller 116 and, in its turn, has pressing means 118 (Figure 5), which perform a controlled pressure on the power-driven roller 116: in this way it is possible to change the pressure force against the power-driven roller 116.

Still according to Figure 4, the detecting and control means 115 are arranged in a region corresponding to the driving roller 112 and act in counter-reaction on the tensioning unit 114, so as to allow its activation, that is to generate a braking tension of the band 102, when an erroneous matching seat 112a - blister 113 is detected by means 115.

The means 115 include, preferably but not limiting, an optical sensor 115, situated near the driving roller 112 and acting along the sole seat 112a - blister 103 matching line T.

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The sensor 115 is preferably an laser ray emitter, and the ray is reflected by a photocell 120 only in case of erroneous seat 112a - blister 103 matching.

Consequently, the blistering machine M1 structured in
5 this way reaches the objects, due to a simple and efficient structure of the sealing station 108.

The possibility of performing the sealing in only one line of contact of the two rollers and with the bands situated one over the other horizontally, downstream, as
10 well as upstream of the closing station, allows a high final quality of the blister packs, eliminating undesired curving of the blister packs, and a sealing reliability given by the presence of the tensioning/braking unit, which controls the correct passage of bands in real time.

Moreover, the blistering machine proposed by the present invention, having the above described closing station, can produce blister packs with elongated blisters (e.g. for containing capsules), without the necessity to use, in the closing station, driving rollers of multi-faceted
20 peripheral surfaces, which provoke undesired striations on the blister packs and/or damaging contacts between the products and portions of the closing band still hot after the sealing.

Finally, the products feeding in the blistering machine
25 proposed by the present invention is considerably improved and optimized, eliminating damages to the products, due the continuous feeding of the bands with respect to all the working stations, likewise working continuously.

30 The so conceived invention is susceptible of many changes and variants, all remaining within its inventive concept.

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Moreover, all the details can be substituted by technically equivalent elements.

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CLAIMS

1. Blistering machine (M1) for producing blister packs (B1) having a production line, which includes
5 consecutively: at least one thermoforming station (101) of a first continuous band (102) of thermoformable material, in order to define a blister band (102) with blisters containing products (104); a station (105) for feeding said products (104) and filling said blister band
10 (102) with the latter; a feeding station (106) of a second band (107), feeding continuously the second band (107) over said blister band (102) filled with said products (104); a closing station (108), where said first blister band (102) is sealed by said second band (107) to
15 obtain a blister pack band (NB1), said closing station (108) including two opposite rollers (112, 113); and a cutting station (R1), in which said blister pack band is cut into respective blister packs (B1); the machine being characterized in that said production line extends, at
20 least beginning from said products feeding station (105), along a continuous feeding path (A1), substantially horizontal, and in that tension means (114) are situated upstream of said closing station (108), along said path (A1), to cooperate with said rollers (112, 113) of said
25 closing station (108), to perform a determined tension on at least said first band (102).

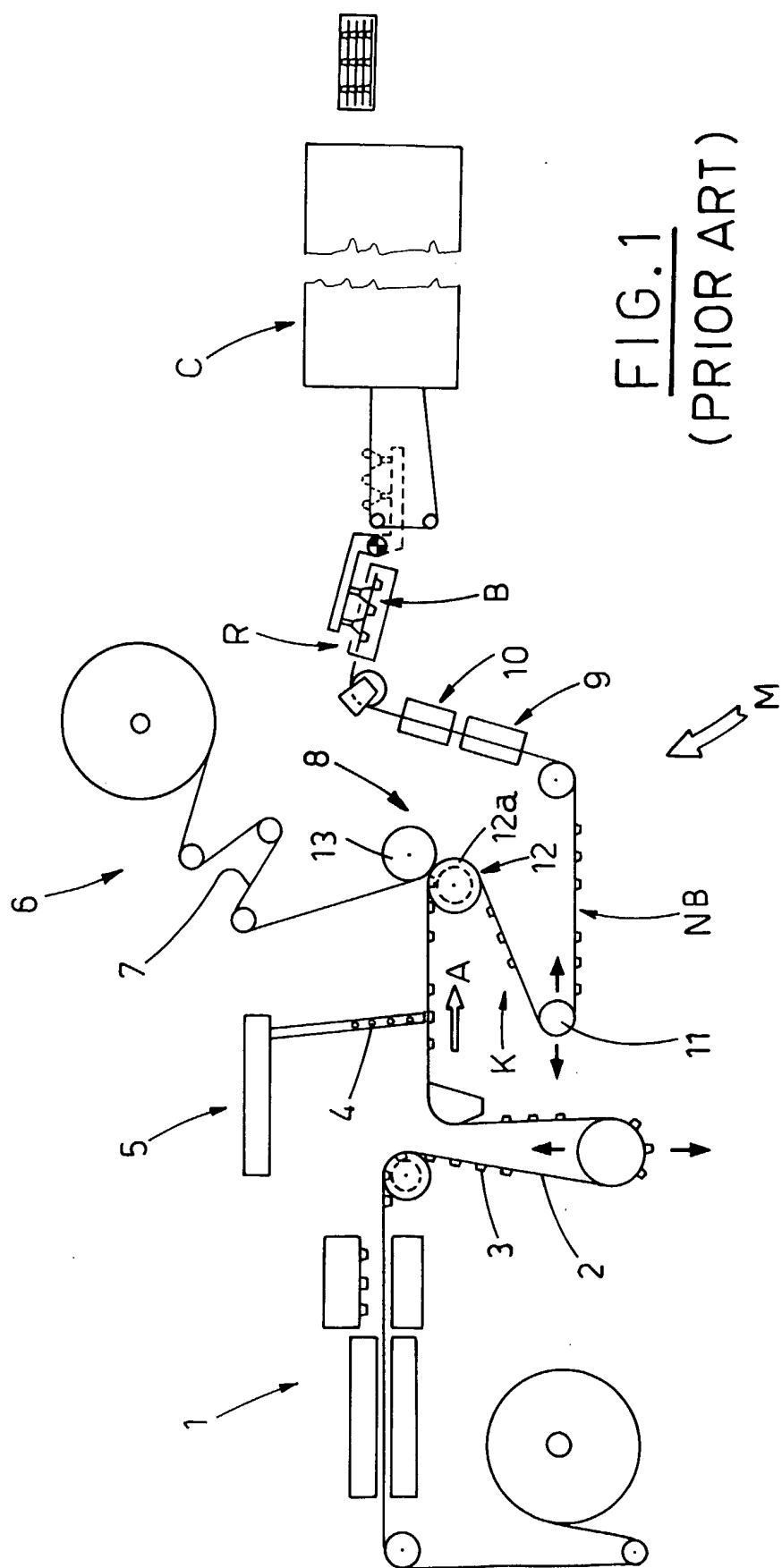
2. Machine, as claimed in claim 1, characterized in that said tension means (114) include a pair of rollers (116, 117), facing each other and situated on the opposite
30 sides of at least said first blister band (102), at least one roller (116) of said rollers (116, 117) being a

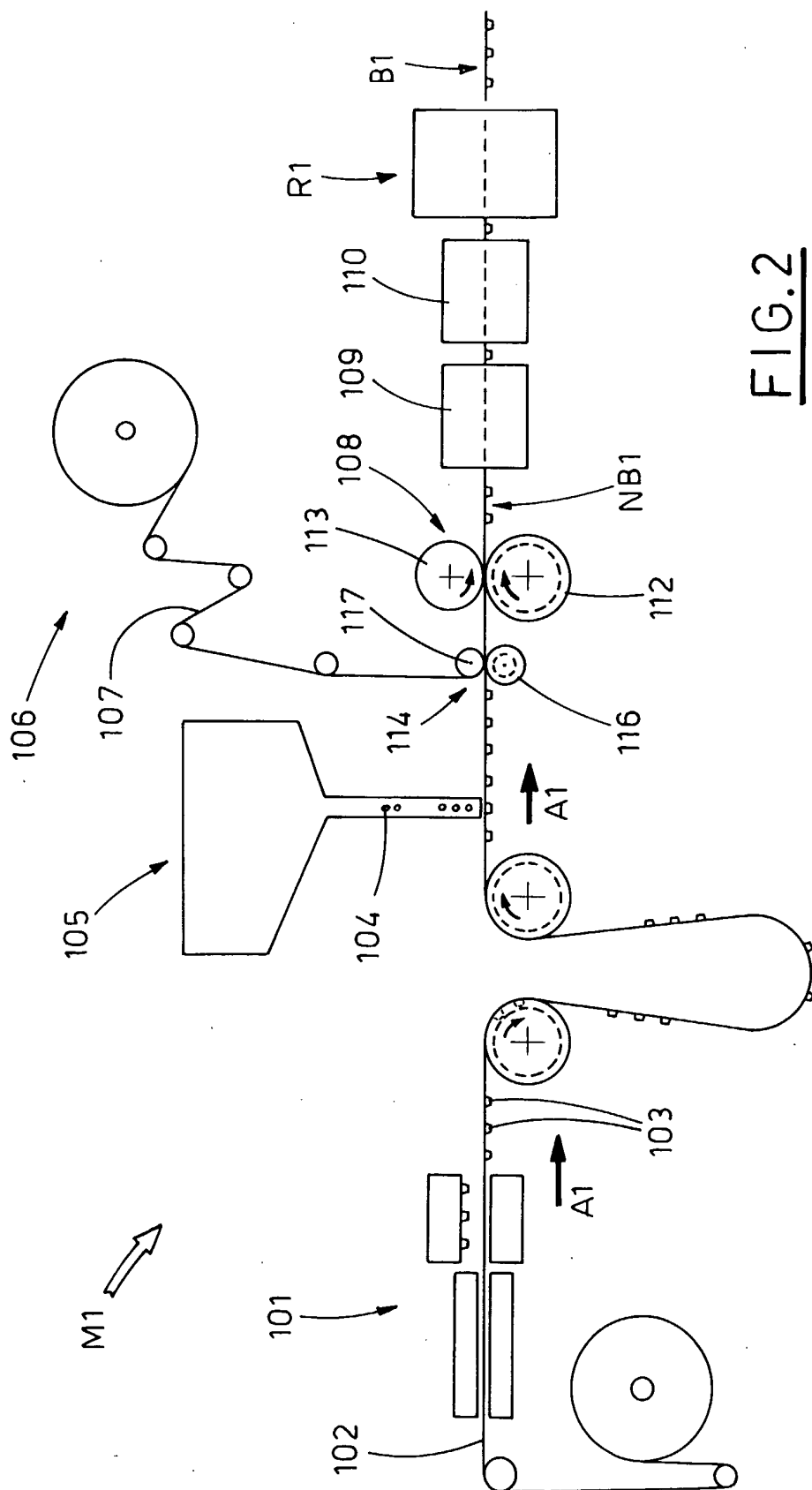
- 12 -

power-driven roller; said pair of rollers (116, 117) performing said tension on at least said first blister band (102), so as to ensure a correct and complete matching along a line (T) determined by at least one
5 blister (103) of said first blister band (102), and a relevant seat (112a) made on the roller (112) of said rollers (112, 113) of said closing station (108).

3. Machine, as claimed in claim 2, characterized in that
10 it includes means (115) for detecting and controlling the coupling between said blister (103) and said set (112a) made on said roller (112) of said closing station (108); said detecting and controlling means (115) acting in counter-reaction on said tension means (114), so as to
15 activate the latter, that is to generate a braking tension on said first blister band (102), when said control means (115) detect an erroneous matching said seat (112a) and said blister (103).

20 4. Machine, as claimed in claim 2 and 3, characterized in that the cross-section of said power-driven roller (116) of said tension means (114) has at least two rings (116a, 116b), holding the edges of said first blister band (102), so as to generate a braking tension, in
25 correspondence to a command signal (S) sent by said detecting and control means (115).





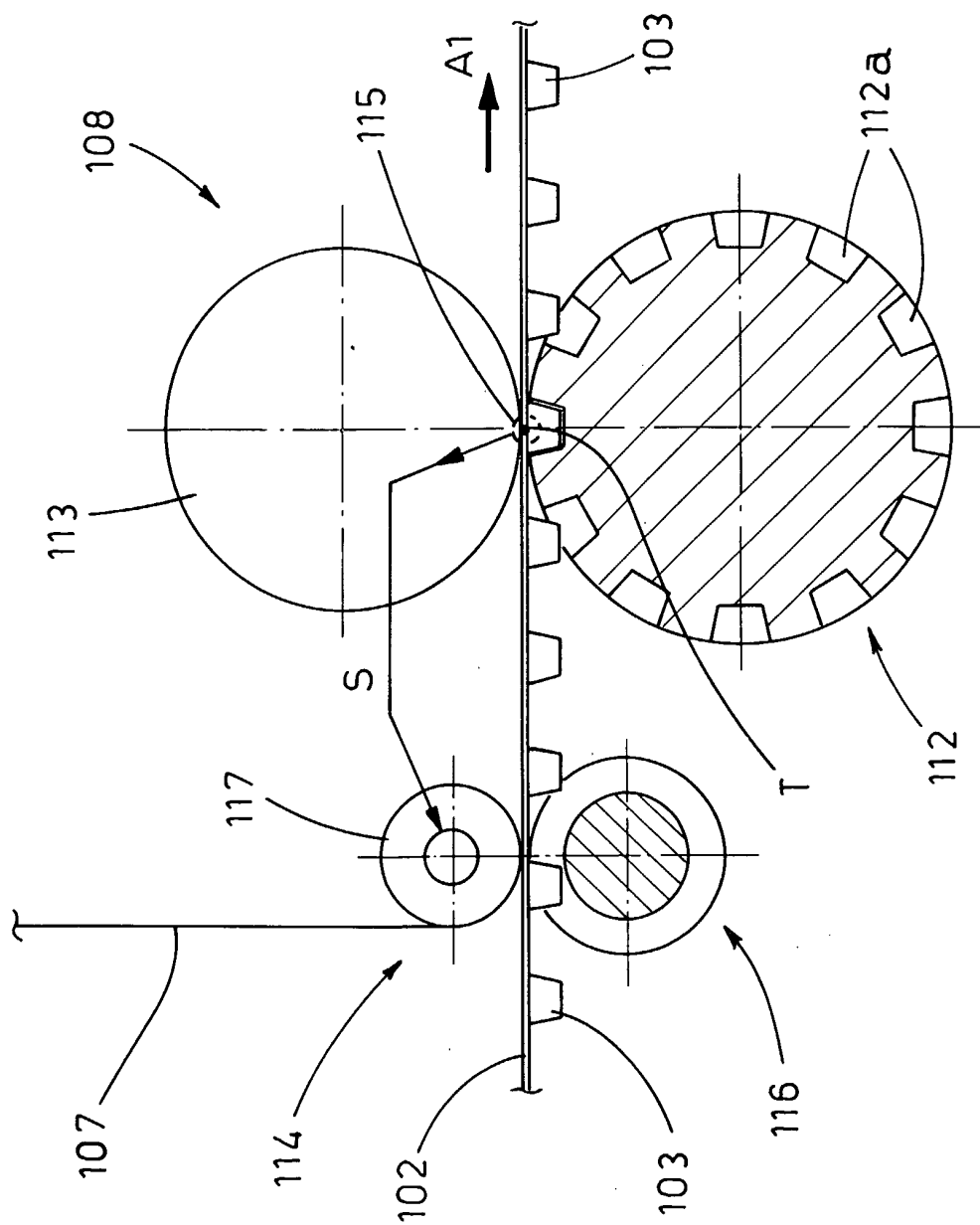
FIG. 3

FIG. 4

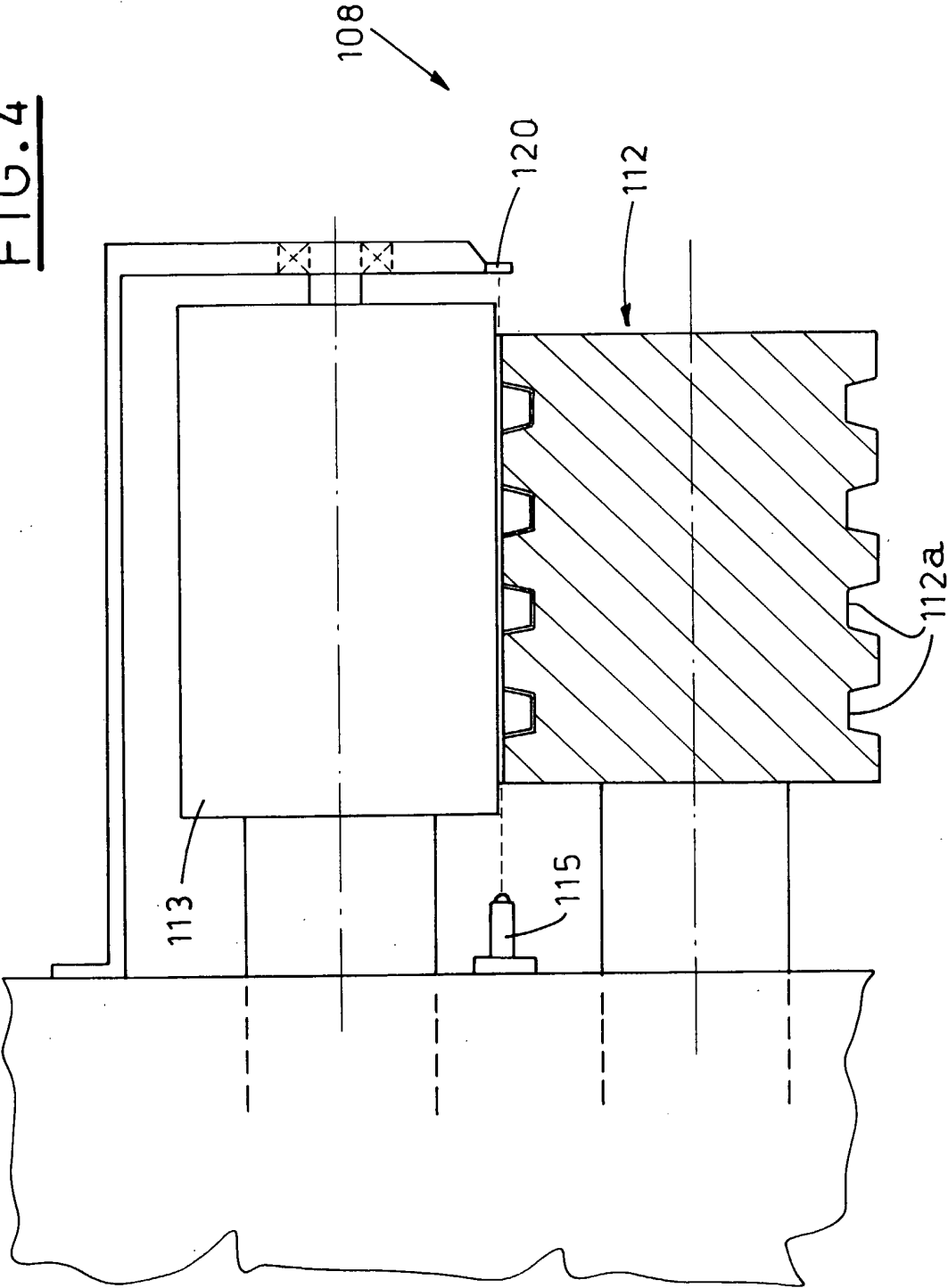
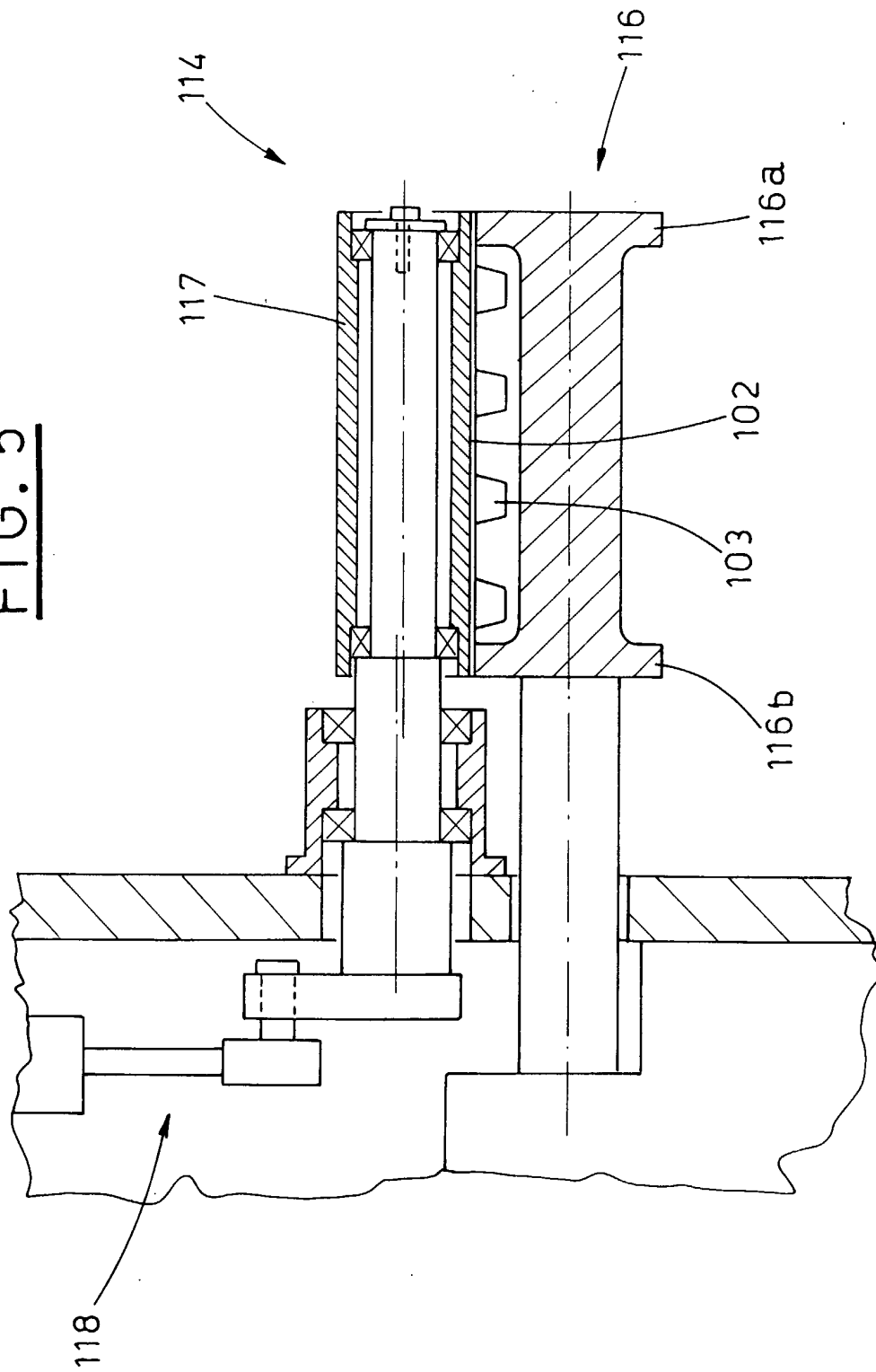


FIG. 5

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
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A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
IPC 7 B65B5/10 B65B9/04 B65B41/18

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
IPC 7 B65B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No
A	DE 201 18 881 U1 (PLANER PHARMA ENGINEERING GMBH) 23 May 2002 (2002-05-23) the whole document -----	1-4
A	DE 39 12 054 A1 (IWK VERPACKUNGSTECHNIK GMBH, 7513 STUTENSEE, DE) 18 October 1990 (1990-10-18) the whole document -----	1-4
A	WO 97/46448 A (I.M.A. INDUSTRIA MACCHINE AUTOMATICHE S.P.A; CONTI, RINO) 11 December 1997 (1997-12-11) the whole document -----	1-4

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International Application No

PCT/IB2005/001261

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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