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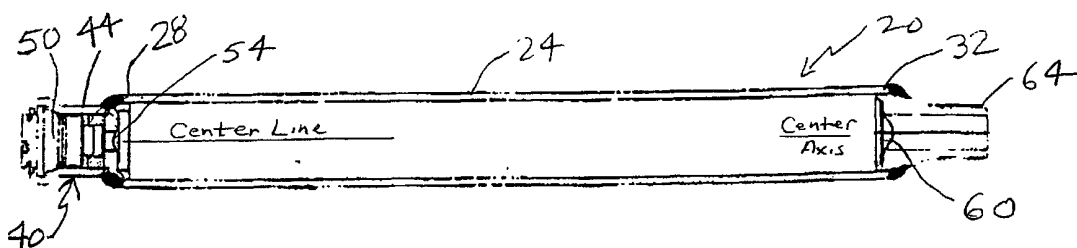
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(54) Title: VEHICLE INFLATOR FOR GENERATING SHOCK WAVE THAT OPENS BURST DISC



(57) Abstract: An inflator from which gas is released using a shock wave is provided. The inflator includes an inflator housing that contains stored gas. A first end of the inflator housing has an initiator assembly connected thereto and with a burst disc being adjacent a second end thereof. The burst disc opens when the burst pressure thereof is exceeded by a reflected shock wave. Upon escape from the inflator housing, the stored gas and any other gas that is generated are supplied to an air bag or other inflatable at a relatively cooler temperature.

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VEHICLE INFLATOR FOR GENERATING SHOCK WAVE THAT OPENS BURST DISC

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to an inflator having stored gas used to inflate an inflatable and, in particular, to stored gas exiting an inflator due to rupturing a burst disc using a shock wave.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

10 Inflators are used in vehicles to inflate air bags or other inflatables. Hybrid inflators are widely utilized for such a purpose and include a stored gas. The gases output by a conventional hybrid inflator are relatively hot to inflate the air bag with sufficient pressure. Sufficient inflation pressure could also be achieved with a cooler gas, but it has been found in conventional air bag applications (i.e., frontal air bags) that too cool a gas results in
15 significant penalties for weight, size and cost due to the greater number of gas moles required (for frontal air bags, the required number of gas moles is approximately inversely proportional to the gas absolute temperature). To achieve hotter inflation gases, it is common to include sufficient propellant or other gas generating material in the hybrid inflator having the stored gas.

20 After activation of such a conventional hybrid inflator, it becomes necessary to release the inflation gases (propellant and stored gases) from the inflator housing. This is typically accomplished by opening or rupturing a burst disc. In one embodiment of prior art hybrid inflators, the generated heat and pressure of the inflation gases cause the rupturing or opening of the burst disc. When the pressure inside the inflator housing exceeds the burst
25 pressure of the burst disc, it opens to release these inflation gases. The hot inflation gases used to open the burst disc complement the usual objective of providing relatively hot gases to the inflatable upon their release from the inflator housing.

 With respect to vehicle usage, inflators, particularly hybrid inflators, have been located in different sections or areas of the vehicle. These inflators include a passenger side
30 inflator, a driver side inflator and a side impact inflator. In addition, curtain inflators have been devised or proposed for locating along the side of the vehicle above the windows. Because curtain inflators are usually located at a significant distance (over one meter) from the curtain air bag, there is great heat loss from the hot gas to the walls of the long conduit to the curtain air bag. Further, curtain air bags are often desired to remain inflated for a

longer period of time (e.g., 7 seconds or more, in contrast to the about .1 second for frontal air bags). Accordingly, a curtain inflator requires much cooler gas than frontal air bags.

It would be advantageous therefore to devise an inflator that inflates an inflatable with relatively cooler gas at a low cost and with fewer parts. The stored gas in the inflator must
5 also be released by opening a burst disc when the inflator is activated.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with the present invention, an inflator is provided for inflating an air bag or other inflatable. The inflator has particular utility where it is desirable or acceptable
10 to deliver a relatively cooler gas. The inflator includes an inflator housing having a rupturable burst disc or other appropriate outlet member. Stored gas contained in the inflator is able to escape from or exit the burst disc after it is opened or ruptured. The stored gas is primarily comprised of an inert gas, such as a mixture of argon and helium in a preferred embodiment. The burst disc is to be opened without a projectile or other comparable
15 mechanical parts. The burst disc is opened by exceeding the burst pressure of the disc using pressure from a shock wave that is developed when the inflator is activated.

The inflator also includes an initiator assembly having an initiator with an initiator charge that includes one or more active ingredients or compositions. When the initiator charge is ignited, the shock wave is generated, which increases the pressure associated with
20 the stored gas at least, at any one instance in time, at certain areas or portions along the length of the inflator housing. The initiator assembly is typically located at a first end of the inflator housing, although it could extend into the inflator housing, e.g. up to a majority or greater of the length of the inflator housing or the stored gas in the inflator housing. The burst disc is positioned relatively more adjacent to a second end of the housing. The stored gas can be
25 contained between the initiator assembly and the burst disc. In order that the shock wave be effectively used to rupture the burst disc when the inflator is activated, the inflator housing is free of any barrier or other obstruction that would render ineffective the shock wave that is generated by the initiator assembly and which must travel through the stored gas in the inflator housing to the burst disc and the second end of the inflator housing.

30 It is also desirable that a geometric relationship or desired arrangement of inflator parts be provided involving the initiator assembly and the burst disc. In particular, the initiator having the initiator charge can be defined as including a center line that extends

through the center of the initiator charge and continues towards the second end of the inflator housing. The burst disc can also be defined as having a center axis that passes through its center. It is preferred that the center line of the initiator and the center axis of the burst disc be aligned or co-axial. Any offset between this center line and the center axis is preferably less than .25 of the inner diameter of the inflator housing and, more preferably, no greater than .20 of the inner diameter of the inflator housing. Any such offset is defined along a distance substantially perpendicular to the center line.

A further desirable geometric restraint relates to the distance between the burst disc and the initiator charge. This distance should be at least twice the inner diameter of the inflator housing, which diameter is essentially the same as the diameter of the shock wave.

In a preferred embodiment, all of the active composition or ingredients useful in generating the shock wave for opening the burst disc are part of the initiator charge. Such active material, when the inflator is activated, causes an increase in pressure of the stored gas, at least along certain areas or portions of the inflator housing at any instance in time. In another embodiment, additional active ingredient or composition (e.g. propellant) is provided in the inflator housing and is activated after the initiator charge is ignited. Regardless, the generated shock wave is used in opening the burst disc and it is not opened due to heated gas having essentially the same pressure throughout the inflator housing. This is a conventional way of opening the burst disc by exceeding the burst pressure thereof. In contrast, all of the active material of the present invention has a total weight that, in the absence of the shock wave generated to open the burst disc, has insufficient caloric output to raise the pressure of the gas in the inflator to open or rupture the burst disc. With respect to more specifics concerning the weight of the active material, the weight is a function of a number of factors or parameters, namely: the pressure of the undisturbed or quiescent stored gas, the inner diameter of the inflator housing, the speed of sound in the undisturbed stored gas, the burn time of the initiator charge and any other propellant or active material provided with the inflator at the pressure of the undisturbed stored gas, and the effective impetus of the initiator charge plus one or more active materials that could be present as part of the inflator.

With regard to operation of the inflator, when the initiator charge is ignited, it produces a shock wave that moves from the first end of the inflator housing and through the unobstructed inflator housing having the stored gas to the burst disc and the second end of the inflator housing. At an instance in time before the shock wave, for example, reaches the

burst disc, the pressure along the length of the housing depends upon the presence of the shock wave. For example, when the shock wave has traveled about one-half the length of the inflator housing, the pressure at this mid-portion of the inflator housing is greater than the gas pressure between about this mid-portion and the burst disc. The pressure differential is based on the difference in pressure between the pressure due to the shock wave and the pressure of the undisturbed or quiescent gas. By way of example, the pressure of the gas due to the shock wave might be 6,000 psi, while the undisturbed pressure of the gas might be 4,500 psi. After the shock wave reaches the burst disc, it is reflected therefrom. Upon reflection from the burst disc, a pressure is created between the burst disc and the shock wave. This created pressure is greater than the burst pressure of the burst disc thereby opening or rupturing it. After opening, the inflation gases in the inflator housing due to the stored gas and the gas generated by the activation of the initiator charge and/or other propellant escape through the opened burst disc.

Based on the foregoing summary, a number of important advantages and features result from this novel inflator. The inflator of the present invention can supply relatively cooler gas to an air bag or other inflatable. The temperature of this relatively cooler gas could be increased by including additional propellant that is not part of the initiator charge. With respect to releasing the gas in the inflator housing, the burst disc can be opened using a shock wave, particularly the reflected shock wave. The amount by weight of the active material that is ignited in opening the burst disc can be reduced since a shock wave, not propellant-produced heated gas and resulting pressure, causes the rupturing of the burst disc. Relatedly, the cost associated with the parts and assembly of the inflator are reduced in view of the relative straightforward design, including the preferred geometric constraints involving the initiator, the burst disc and unobstructed space therebetween within the inflator housing.

Additional advantages of the present invention will become readily apparent from the following discussion, particularly when taken together with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 illustrates a longitudinal view of an inflator of the present invention before activation;

Fig. 2 is a diagram illustrating pressure of the gas in the inflator as a function of the distance along the inflator before the inflator is activated;

Fig. 3 diagrammatically illustrates a shock wave generated in the inflator about .25 millisecond after activation thereof;

Fig. 4 is a diagram illustrating pressure of gas in the inflator as a function of the distance or length of the inflator housing at about .25 millisecond after activation of the inflator;

Fig. 5 is similar to Fig. 3 except diagrammatically illustrating the shock wave at about .5 millisecond after activation;

Fig. 6 is a diagram similar to Fig. 4 except illustrating pressure as a function of distance or length along the inflator housing at about .5 millisecond after activation of the inflator;

Fig. 7 is also similar to Fig. 3 except that it diagrammatically illustrates the shock wave at about .6 millisecond after activation and with the burst disc just being opened by the reflected shock wave; and

Fig. 8 is a diagram also similar to Fig. 4 except that it illustrates gas pressure in the inflator housing as a function of the distance or length of the inflator housing at about .6 millisecond having a pressure sufficient to open the burst disc by means of the reflected shock wave.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

With reference to Fig. 1, an inflator 20 is illustrated for inflating an air bag or other inflatable located in a vehicle. The inflator 20 includes an elongated inflator housing 24 having a first or initiator end 28 a second or outlet end 32. The inflator 20 includes an initiator assembly 40 joined to the inflator housing 24 by crimping, welding or other suitable attachment. The initiator assembly 40 is used in initiating the activation of the inflator 20 by which inflation gases are released into the air bag or other inflatable. The initiator assembly 40 receives an ignition signal that triggers the initiator assembly 40 and subsequently results in release of the stored gas, as will be subsequently explained. The initiator assembly 40 can be a conventional design that includes an adapter 44 that is connected the inflator housing 24 and an initiator 50 that contains an initiator charge that is ignited when the ignition signal is received. The inflator 20 also includes at the initiator end 28, in the illustrated embodiment, an inlet member or disc 54 that is opened when the initiator charge is ignited and allows the shock wave generated by the activation of the

initiator charge to travel along the length of the inflator housing 24. The inlet member 54 is opened in a conventional manner using the initiator charge and opens substantially independently of the shock wave or, at least, is not opened primarily by the shock wave.

With regard to the inflator housing 24, it contains stored gas that will constitute at least significant portions, if not substantially all, of inflation gas that is to be used to fill the inflatable. The stored gas can include one inert gas or, alternatively, can include a number of gas constituents, which can be a combination of one or more inert gases, oxygen, nitrogen and/or air. The one or more inert gases can include argon, neon, xenon and helium. Preferably, the stored gas contains a majority by weight of a mixture of argon and helium.

Any oxygen gas is preferably no greater than about 20% by weight.

Adjacent the second end 32 of the inflator housing 24 or at least downstream of at least a majority of the stored gas or a majority of the length of the inflator housing 24, an outlet member or burst disc 60 is provided. Before activation, the stored gas is contained by the outlet member 60, inflator housing 24, inlet member 54 and various weldments. When the inflator 20 is activated, the burst disc 60 is caused to open or rupture due to the generated shock wave. When opened, the inflation gas or gases are able to escape through the ruptured burst disc 60 to a diffuser or other outlet unit 64 of the inflator 20 from which the inflation gas or gases are carried to the inflatable. The burst disc 60 has a burst pressure associated with it. In one embodiment, the burst pressure of the burst disc is 8200 psi, which means that, when it is subjected to such a pressure or greater, the burst disc 60 ruptures to allow the inflation gas or gases to escape from the inflator housing 24.

With respect to opening the burst disc 60 by overcoming its associated burst pressure, the initiator charge must have, by weight, at least some, if not all, of an active material or composition responsible for generating the shock wave, which will be used in opening the burst disc 60. Such an active material can be provided with the initiator charge only or, alternatively, such an active material could be provided by the initiator charge together with one or more active ingredients or compositions provided in the inflator housing 24 (e.g. as part of a propellant). Regardless of how provided, the weight of the active material for generating a sufficient shock wave for opening the burst disc 60 is in the range of: .06

pD^2ct/F to $.6pD^2ct/F$, where

p is the pressure of the quiescent or undisturbed stored gas,

D is the inner diameter of the inflator housing 24,

c is the speed of sound in the quiescent or undisturbed stored gas,

t is the burn time of the initiator charge plus any other active material at pressure p, and

5 F is the effective impetus of the initiator charge plus any other one or more active material that might be present or utilized.

Thus it can be understood that of the inert gases, argon and helium offer different advantages. Because the weight of the active material is proportional to the speed of sound
10 (c), it follows more charge (about 3 times) is required if helium is used. On the other hand, expanding from room temperature and high pressure (e.g., 4000 to 9000 psi), argon's temperature is decreased by over 60°C, whereas helium's temperature is actually increased slightly by about 20°C. Thus engineering tradeoffs are required to optimize the mixture of inert gases.

15 With respect to the relationship of inflator parts or inflator geometry, certain geometric constraints are necessary, or at least desirable. The generated shock wave must have sufficient pressure or force associated with it in order to open the rupture disc 60. Consequently, no barrier or other impediment, which would render the shock wave ineffective, should be present between the burst disc 60 and the shock wave generated at the
20 first end 28 of the inflator housing 24. At the very least, there should be no barrier that would affect the shock wave such that it would be insufficient to overcome the burst pressure of the outlet member 60. It is desirable that the initiator 50 be suitably arranged relative to the outlet member 60. The outlet member 60 can be defined as having a center axis that passes through its center. The initiator 50 can be defined as having an initiator center line that
25 passes through the center of the initiator charge and which center line can be extended from the first end 28 to the second end 32 of the inflator housing 24. The inflator housing 24 can also be defined as having an inner diameter. Preferably, any distance from the extended initiator center line, in a direction perpendicular to the length of the inflator housing 24, to the center axis of the burst disc 60 is no greater than about .25 of the inner diameter of the
30 inflator housing 24. Additionally, it is preferred that there be at least a minimum distance between the end of the initiator charge and the outlet member 60. In that regard, such a distance is at least twice the inner diameter of the inflator housing 24. In a preferred embodiment, the shock wave is bounded by the inner walls of the inflator housing. However, a shock waveguide could be employed within the inflator housing.

In one embodiment, the inflator 20 is a curtain inflator containing 1.1 moles of gas, which is stored in the inflator housing 24 at a pressure in the range of 3,000 psi to 10,000 psi, and typically stored at 4,500 psi at 20°C. Such a common pressure of 4500 psi is illustrated graphically in Fig. 2 as a function of or associated with the distance or length of the inflator housing 24 from its first end 28 to its second end 32. As can be understood from Fig. 2, before activation of the inflator, while it is in its undisturbed quiescent state, the gas pressure is the same along each portion or cross-section of the inflator housing 24. Accordingly, the average pressure of the quiescent stored gas (sum of discrete or integrated pressures along the length of the inflator housing divided by the total volume of the stored gas in the inflator housing) is, in this embodiment, 4500 psi. In one embodiment, the stored gas has a composition of 76% argon, 20% oxygen and 4% helium, although pure argon, or pure helium, or pure nitrogen or air or any combination of such non-reactive gases could be used. In accordance with this embodiment, to generate the shock wave, the inflator 20 only needs a single initiator charge containing about 0.25 gram of zirconium and potassium chlorate ($\text{Zr} + \text{KClO}_4$), which is a standard ignition composition. This 0.25 gram of non-detonating material creates a "strong shock", as defined in the field of shock dynamics, which propagates down the length of the inflator housing 24, such as a 270 mm long gas column associated with a typical curtain inflator. In another embodiment, a detonator with less than .25 gram of high explosive could also be used.

With reference to Figs. 3-8, there is more discussion concerning the use and operation of the shock wave, upon activation of the inflator 20. Referring to Fig. 3, the inflator 20 has been activated with the triggering of the initiator 50. The initiator disc 54 has been opened due to the ignition of the initiator charge and the force resulting therefrom. At a time of about .25 millisecond after initiator charge ignition, a shock wave has been generated and is traveling along the length of the inflator housing 24 towards its second end 32. As illustrated in Fig. 4, at about mid portions or about one-half the distance or length of the inflator housing 24, different pressures are present in the inflator housing 24, depending upon the travel or location of the generated shock wave. At the designated time ($t = .25\text{ms}$), the gas pressure on one side of the shock wave including the front of the shock wave (second half of the length of the inflator housing 24 from about its mid portions to the second end 32) remains undisturbed at an undisturbed pressure of about 4500 psi. Contrastingly, the gas pressure in the inflator housing 24 between about the first end 28 and the mid portions of the inflator

housing 24 is noticeably different due to the shock wave. In this illustration and embodiment, the pressure at about the mid-portions of the inflator housing 24 at this time is about 6000 psi. Referring next to Fig. 5, the shock wave continues to move along the

length or distance of the inflator housing towards the second end 32 and is graphically illustrated at a time of about .5 millisecond after ignition of the initiator charge. At this time the outlet member 60 has not yet ruptured. More specifically, at about $t = .5\text{ms}$, the shock wave has essentially moved or traveled from the first end 28 of the inflator housing 24 to the second end 32 where it is just about to contact the outlet member 60. As graphically represented by Fig. 6, a noticeable increase in pressure has occurred along at least certain areas of the inflator housing length, with the gas pressure being about 6000 psi immediately adjacent to the burst disc 60 while, again, on the downstream side of the shock wave, along the area or areas immediately upstream of the burst disc 60, the gas pressure remains at the undisturbed pressure of about 4500 psi.

With reference to Fig. 7, the inflator 20 is schematically illustrated at about the time at which the burst pressure of the outlet member 60 is met or exceeded whereby the outlet member 60 is opened or ruptured and inflation gas or gases are able to escape from the inflator housing 24. In this embodiment, this time is about $t = .6\text{ ms}$ after inflator 20 activation and the shock wave has traveled substantially the entire length of the inflator housing 24, although in other embodiments it may not travel as far, such as one-half or less of the length of the inflator housing 24. At about this time, the shock wave has reflected from the outlet member 60 and created a pressure between the outlet member 60 and the shock wave that is greater than the burst pressure of the outlet member 60. In this illustrated embodiment, this pressure is about 9700 psi. It is noted that it is not the initial or direct shock wave that has caused the rupturing of the burst disc 60; rather, the resulting pressure from the reflected shock wave exceeds the burst pressure of the outlet member 60. It is further noted that, at the time the burst pressure of the outlet member 60 is exceeded, the gas pressures along the length or distance associated with the inflator housing 24 are meaningfully less than the pressure exerted on the outlet member 60 by the reflected shock wave. In the illustrated embodiment, such gas pressures along the length of the inflator housing 24 vary from about 4500 psi to about 6000 psi. Stated another way, the average pressure of the stored gas is less than the burst pressure of the outlet member 60, when the outlet member 60 is opened due to the reflected shock wave. The average pressure of the

gas, at the time immediately before the opening of the outlet member 60, is determined by averaging the gas pressure at each of a number of discrete cross-sectional areas of the inflator housing or an integration of such gas pressures.

As can be appreciated from the description of the shock wave used to open the outlet member 60, unlike conventional inflator designs that rely on uniform pressure throughout the inflator housing to open a burst disc, and which also do not rely on a mechanical device, such as a projectile, to open the burst disc, the use of the shock wave of the present invention does not require a heated gas to create enough pressure throughout the inflator housing, to overcome the burst pressure of the burst disc. Relatedly, the outlet member 60 is caused to rupture or open independently of the volume of the stored gas. That is to say, unlike conventional inflator designs that rely on uniform pressure to exceed the burst pressure of the burst disc and which uniform pressure is achievable only as a function of, among other things, the volume of the stored gas, the present invention relies on a shock wave for exceeding a burst pressure that is not a function of the volume of the stored gas. The inflator also has advantages related to the speed at which a desired pressure is realized in an inflatable to which it supplies inflation gases. In particular, the "time-to-first" gas is less than about 0.5ms for a 143mm long inflator and less than about 1.0ms for a 270mm long inflator. The "time-to-first gas" refers to the time from immediately after the initiator charge is ignited for the pressure in a 1 ft³ tank to reach a pressure of 2kPa (kilopascals), as measured by a SAE Class 60 filter.

EXAMPLE

A curtain inflator having a 270 mm long gas column was devised in which only a single initiator was utilized containing 0.25 gram of Zr+KCLO₄. The undisturbed gas pressure in this curtain inflator was about 4500 psi, with the stored gas being primarily argon and the inflator housing having a 21 mm inner diameter. The outlet member or burst disc has a 8200 psi burst pressure. When this inflator was activated, after reflection, the pressure between the reflected shock wave and the outlet member 60 was sufficient (about 9700 psi) to rupture the burst disc, with adequate margin for functioning at -40°C, assuming a 10% loss of gas due to leakage over a 15 year period. Except in the near vicinity of the shock front, the gas pressure in this inflator was nearly the gas storage pressure. To meet government regulations, the pressure to open the burst disc is typically 1.8 times the 20°C storage

pressure (e.g. 4500 psi). At -40°C and with 10% loss of gas (assuming simulated 15 years of leakage), the 4500 psi storage pressure at 20°C is reduced to 3200 psi, which constitutes the worst case to open the burst disc. The shock wave created by the non-detonating .25 gram of initiator charge travels through the 3200 psi stored gas. Upon reflection at the burst disc a localized 10,000 psi of pressure is generated, which is sufficient to open the burst disc. The traditional or conventional way of opening the burst disc is to heat the entire gas (e.g. 1.1 moles) to a sufficient temperature that the heating gas pressure exceeds the burst strength or pressure (e.g. 8200 psi) of the outlet member. To heat the entire gas at such a temperature requires substantially more energy than to create a localized shock wave. In particular, to heat the entire gas with such standard pyrotechnic materials, such as Zr+KClO₄, B+KNO₃ or PVC+KClO₄ requires over 2 grams.

The foregoing discussion of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. Further, the description is not intended to limit the invention to the form disclosed herein. Consequently, variations and modifications commensurate with the above teachings, within the skill and knowledge of the relevant art, are within the scope of the present invention. The embodiments described hereinabove are further intended to explain the best mode presently known of practicing the invention and to enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention in such or in other embodiments and with various modifications required by their particular application or uses of the invention. It is intended that the appended claims be construed to include alternative embodiments to the extent permitted by the prior art.

What is claimed is:

1. An inflator for inflating an inflatable using stored gas in which an outlet member is opened to release the stored gas, comprising:

an inflator housing containing stored gas and including an outlet member through which said stored gas escapes when said outlet member is opened, said outlet member having a burst pressure; and

an initiator assembly including an initiator with an initiator charge, said initiator charge being ignited when the inflatable is to be inflated using said stored gas;

wherein said stored gas has a quiescent pressure before ignition of said initiator charge and at least first and second average pressures, said first average pressure being greater than said quiescent pressure and being present at a time after ignition of said initiator charge and before said outlet member is opened, with said outlet member being opened while said second average pressure is present and said second average pressure is less than said burst pressure of said outlet member.

2. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said inflator housing has a first end and a second end, said initiator being located upstream of at least a majority of said stored gas and said outlet member being located downstream of at least a majority of said stored gas and in which said initiator charge develops a shock wave when ignited and said outlet member is opened primarily using said shock wave applied thereto.

3. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 2, wherein:

said shock wave, upon reflection from the outlet member, creates a pressure between said outlet member and said shock wave greater than said burst pressure of said outlet member.

4. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 3, wherein:

said shock wave has a front and said first average pressure is present when said shock wave front is at about mid portions of said inflator housing.

5. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said initiator charge has at least a weight in the range of about $.06pD^2ct/F$ to $.6pD^2ct/F$, where p is the pressure of said stored gas in its undisturbed state, D is the inner diameter of said inflator housing, c is the speed of sound in said stored gas in its undisturbed

state, t is the burn time of said initiator charge at pressure p , and F is the impetus of the said initiator charge.

6. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 2, wherein:

said initiator charge causes activation of an active material held by the inflator from which said shock wave is generated, said initiator charge and said active material have at least a combined weight of about $.06pD^2ct/F$ to $.6pD^2ct/F$, where p is the pressure of said stored gas in its undisturbed state, D is the inner diameter of said inflator housing, c is the speed of sound in said stored gas in its undisturbed state, t is the burn time of said initiator charge plus said active material at pressure p , and F is the effective impetus of said initiator charge plus said active material.

7. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 2, wherein:

said initiator charge includes an active material useful in generating said shock wave and a total active material weight of the inflator, including said active material weight of said initiator charge, in the absence of said shock wave directed against said outlet member, has insufficient caloric output to raise said pressure of inflation gas including said stored gas to open said outlet member.

8. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

the inflator has a time-to-first gas parameter associated therewith and in which the time-to-first gas parameter is less than about 0.5ms for a 143mm long inflator and is less than about 1.0ms for a 270mm long inflator, with the time-to-first gas being the time from immediately after igniting said initiator charge for a 1 cubic foot tank to reach 2 kPa, as measured by a SAE class 60 filter.

9. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said initiator charge has a weight of about .25 gram $Zr + KClO_4$, said stored gas has a majority, by weight, of argon at about 4500 psi, said inflator housing has about a 21mm inner diameter and the burst pressure of said outlet member is about 8200 psi.

10. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said stored gas has a volume and in which said outlet member is opened independently of said volume of said stored gas.

11. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

said initiator charge has a center line associated therewith that passes through its center and is extended toward said outlet member, said outlet member having a center axis,

said inflator housing has an inner diameter and in which any offset distance defined between said initiator charge center line and said outlet member center axis is no greater than about .20 of said inner diameter of said inflator housing.

12. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, further including:

5 said inflator housing has an inner diameter, a first end and a second end opposite said first end, said initiator charge being located closer to said first end than to said second end and said outlet member being located closer to said second end than to said first end and with a distance being defined between said outlet member and said initiator charge, with said distance being at least twice said inner diameter of said inflator housing.

10 13. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

 said inflator housing has a length and said initiator charge develops a shock wave when ignited and said outlet member is opened primarily using said shock wave, said shock wave traveling at least about one-half said length of said inflator housing before said outlet member is opened.

15 14. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 1, wherein:

 said inflator housing has a first end and a second end, said first end being adjacent to said initiator and said outlet member being closer to said second end than to said first end, and in which the inflator includes an inlet member that is opened when said initiator charge is ignited and a shock wave is generated that travels in said inflator housing from adjacent
20 to said inlet member to at least said outlet member.

15. An inflator, as claimed in Claim 14, wherein:

 said inlet member is opened substantially independently of said shock wave.

16. A method for inflating an inflatable using an inflator that includes an inflator housing having a length and containing stored gas under pressure, an initiator charge and an
25 outlet member having a burst pressure spaced therefrom, comprising:

 igniting said initiator charge and creating a shock wave using said initiator charge;
 and

 opening said outlet member using said shock wave after said shock wave travels at least one-half said length of said inflator housing.

30 17. A method, as claimed in Claim 16, wherein:

 said opening step is conducted substantially independently of volume of said stored gas.

18. A method, as claimed in Claim 16, wherein:

before said opening step is conducted, said stored gas has a quiescent pressure and at least a first average pressure, with said quiescent pressure being present before said igniting step and said first average pressure being present after said igniting step, said first
5 average pressure being greater than said quiescent pressure.

19. A method, as claimed in Claim 17, wherein:

said stored gas has a second average pressure while said opening step is being conducted and said second average pressure is less than said burst pressure of said outlet member.

10 20. A method, as claimed in Claim 16, wherein:

said opening step is conducted substantially only using said shock wave.

21. A method, as claimed in Claim 16, wherein:

said shock wave passes only through said stored gas before reflecting using said inflator housing and then causing said outlet member to open.

15 22. A method, as claimed in Claim 16, wherein:

said inflator housing is free of any barrier to said shock wave passing between said initiator charge and said outlet member after said igniting step.

