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(72) Inventor: **Murray, Ian**
Swinley
Wigan, Lancashire WN1 2AY (GB)

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

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(71) Applicant: **IGT-UK Limited**
Lancashire OL7 0QQ (GB)

(54) **Entertainment machines**

(57) A coin-operated entertainment machine is operable by a player to play a game after a predetermined game-play stake value has been credited. If the game results in a predetermined winning outcome, a prize is awarded to the player. A limit is imposed on total stake value in a playing session. When the limit is reached the

player can continue to play further games for a predetermined period of time without requiring credit of further stake value. The limit may be a time period which may periodically re-commence on a rolling basis. The machine may be of the kind with which combinations of symbols are selected with rotatable reels (9).

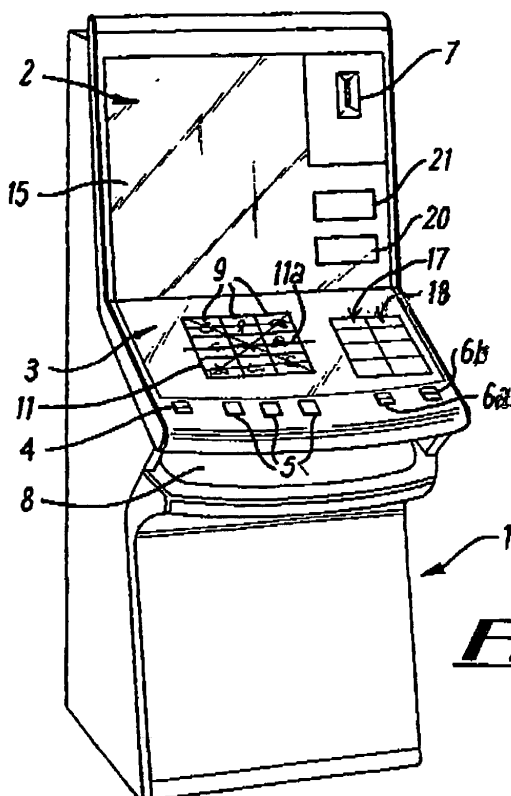


FIG. 1

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to player-operable coin-operated entertainment machines, that is, to a machine which is operable for playing a game after actuation by a stake value whether provided by one or more coins, tokens, notes or through use of a credit or debit card, or by any other means of establishing or crediting monetary value.

[0002] With such machines monetary prizes may be awarded in the event that games are played which result in predetermined winning outcomes. Accordingly, in a playing session in which multiple successive games are played, the player may win or lose monetary value, taking into account the balance of stake value expended and any prizes awarded.

[0003] With a view to controlling player losses, machines are known with which a limit is imposed on the maximum stake value per game, and also on the total loss within a rolling one hour playing session, whereby on reaching the total loss limit the machine cannot be played for the remainder of that one hour playing session. This means however that the player appeal of the machine may be much reduced. The player may reach the total loss limit well before the end of the one hour playing session whereby entertainment derived from playing games may be much reduced, and the limit imposed on the game play stake value prevents the player from deriving compensatory or alternative entertainment from trying to obtain a large win before reaching the total loss limit.

[0004] An object of the present invention is to reduce or offset such loss of player entertainment value as a consequence of imposed limits on playing session losses.

[0005] According to the invention therefore there is provided a player-operable coin-operated entertainment machine with which a predetermined stake value is required for actuation of the machine for playing a game, and a prize is awarded in the event that a predetermined winning game outcome is attained, and wherein a limit is imposed on total stake value expended by the player in a playing session of successive said games characterised in that on reaching the said expended stake value limit at least one further said game can be played without requiring actuation of the machine by said predetermined stake value.

[0006] With this arrangement, the player can continue to derive entertainment from playing the machine even though the expended stake value limit has been reached.

[0007] The arrangement may be such that, on reaching the limit, actuation of the machine for playing a game may require a stake value which is reduced relative to the stake value required prior to reaching the limit. Alternatively, no stake value at all may be required i.e. one or more further games can be played free of any stake value.

[0008] Only one said further game may be made avail-

able with the reduced or eliminated stake value. Alternatively multiple games may be made available, determined e.g. by an overall limit of number of games and/or playing session time. Alternatively or additionally other availability factors e.g. such as a random factor may apply.

[0009] The (or each) further game may give rise to award of a prize in the event that a predetermined winning game outcome is attained, and this may be effected on the same basis as is the case with games played before reaching the expended stake value limit.

[0010] Prizes may be awarded in a common value to stake value, e.g. a monetary value and the said stake value limit may be determined with reference to the credit balance made up of stake value introduced by the player for playing one or more games and any awarded prize values. It is however also possible for the limit to be applied only to stake value per se.

[0011] On reaching the stake value limit the machine may cease to be actuable with the normal predetermined stake value until a predetermined limitation period of time has elapsed. This limitation period of time, which may be an hour, may run from commencement of a predetermined playing session during which multiple successive games can be played. Such commencement may be determined in any suitable manner. In one embodiment commencement occurs on a rolling basis i.e. restarting after periodic intervals preferably regular, e.g. starting every minute. Other arrangements are also possible, additionally or alternatively, whereby for example commencement may be triggered when a player first starts playing the machine.

[0012] Preferably, said further games with the reduced or eliminated stake values can be played throughout the above mentioned limitation period of time, but not beyond such period.

[0013] With regard to the entertainment machine and the nature of the game played thereon, these may be of any suitable kind.

[0014] In a particularly preferred embodiment the machine is of the so called fruit machine, or poker machine or slot machine kind having a main display device which is operable to display selected combinations of symbols at a win zone on one or more win lines, the said prize, or one said prize, being awarded in the event that one or more such combinations is a predetermined winning combination.

[0015] This main display device may produce a moving display of changing said symbols which then comes to rest to provide a static display of the selected symbol combinations. Thus, the main display device may comprise actual or simulated rotatable symbol-bearing reels.

[0016] There may also be one or more supplementary display devices whereby play can transfer from the main display device to one or more of such supplementary display devices whereby a main game play procedure is effected with the main display device and one or more supplementary game Play procedures are effected on the supplementary display devices giving different or ad-

ditional opportunities for win attainment and prize awards.

[0017] The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic representation of one form of a machine according to the invention; and Figure 2 is a block circuit diagram of the machine.

[0018] Referring to the drawings, these show a fruit machine having a floor-standing box shaped housing 1 having a front wall which includes upper and lower glass panels 2, 3, a number of operating buttons 4, 5, 6a, 6b, a coin slot 7 and a payout opening 8.

[0019] Within the housing 1 there are three axially aligned reels 9 having say 20 symbols at regularly spaced positions around their peripheries. The reels 9 are axially rotatable and are drivably connected to respective stepper motors 10. The reels 9 are arranged behind a window 11 defined by a printed region of the lower glass panel 3. Each reel 9 can be arrested by the respective stepper motor 10 in any of 20 stopping positions in which one symbol is in precise registration with a horizontal win line 11a in the centre of the window 11 and two further symbols are visible above and below the win line. The three reels therefore display a matrix of 3x3 symbols in three columns (i.e. the three reels) and three rows (across the three reels).

[0020] The stepper motors 10 are connected to a microprocessor-based control unit 12. This unit is also connected to a coin-mechanism 13, a payout mechanism 14 and the buttons 4, 5, 6.

[0021] In use, the player inserts coins into the coin mechanism 13 through the slot 7 sufficient to generate credit for one or more games, and the machine is actuated so that a game can now be played. The game commences after a start button 4 has been pressed and the reels 9 spin and then come to rest at random (or pseudo random) so as to select a combination of symbols displayed on the win line 11a. The displayed symbol combination is assessed by the control unit 12 and a win indication is given in the event that the combination is of a predetermined winning nature, as discussed in more detail hereinafter.

[0022] The control buttons 5 can be used to perform 'hold' or 'nudge' functions, when made available to the player, so that the player can seek to influence the outcome of a game, in conventional manner.

[0023] The upper panel 2 is a transparent glass panel having a display region 15, which can be back-illuminated with a bank of lamps 16, and which provides a supplementary game feature such as a track or trail game. In conventional manner, play can transfer from the reels 9 to the display region 15 for example when a transfer symbol appears in the window 11.

[0024] Alongside the window 11 on the lower glass panel there are ladder displays 17, 18 providing a further

supplementary game feature of the conventional 'gamble' kind, using button 6a. The ladder display comprises an area which can be back illuminated with lamps 19 connected to the control system 12.

5 **[0025]** There are also two adjacent digital LED displays 20, 21 exposed on the front panel 2 connected to the control system.

[0026] In order to play a game the player has to establish credit at least equal to the predetermined stake value for a game, say 20 cents. Total credited stake value available to fund game play is shown on one of the LED displays 20. As games are played this display is decremented by 20 cents for each game.

10 **[0027]** When a predetermined winning combination of symbols is obtained in the window 11, on the central win line 11a, or possibly on the horizontal win line above or below this line 11a and/or on the diagonal lines of the matrix, a corresponding prize is made available to the player. This prize is in the form of monetary value depending on the nature of the winning combination and may be up to say a maximum of 2 Euros in the case where the stake value has a maximum of say 20 cents.

15 **[0028]** The monetary value of the attained prize may be shown on the other LED display 21, and may be accumulated with any existing monetary value total already shown on this display 21, by incrementing the digital display 21.

20 **[0029]** By use of the button 6b the player may have the options of obtaining a pay out of the displayed monetary value, through the outlet 8, or transferring the monetary value to the stake value display 20 to increase the amount of stake value available for playing games. On occasions the player may first have the option of trying to increase the prize value, or obtain further prizes, with the supplementary game feature on the display 15, or the supplementary game feature using the displays 17, 18.

25 **[0030]** The processor 12 monitors stake value expended for game play over a one hour period and also monitors the monetary value of any prizes awarded during the same period. A current total of these values, i.e. the sum of stake value expended less prize value awarded, is stored by the processor 12 during the one hour period.

30 **[0031]** In the event that this total reaches a predetermined loss limit, say 90 Euros, before the end of the one hour period, operation of the machine now changes to a 'free game' basis for the remainder of the period. During this free game period the player can continue to play games but without requiring any stake value. That is, a game can be initiated simply by pressing the start button 4. There is no need for there to be any stake value to be credited, and any stake value which is credited and shown on the display 20 is not affected and in particular is not decremented.

35 **[0032]** At any time during this free game period any credit shown on either display 20, 21 can be returned to the player, in the usual way, as a pay out through the outlet 8, without affecting the ability of the player to play

free games.

[0033] The free games may be played exactly in like manner to 'normal' games played with stake value as described above, and thus any win will result in monetary prize award value being awarded to the player.

[0034] Alternatively, the arrangement may be such that free games are played on a different basis e.g. such that wins are less likely or prize value is lower or the like.

[0035] This free game period continues until the original one hour period has expired. Machine operation then reverts to the 'normal' operation requiring stake value to be credited before a game can be played.

[0036] The one hour period during which the machine monitors the total of stake value and prize award value is a one hour period from a series of rolling one hour periods started every minute. That is, every minute the processor 12 starts to time a respective one hour period and stores the current total value in a respective memory storage area for that respective one hour period. Machine operation switches to the 'free play' basis whenever the loss limit is reached in any one one hour period and is continued until the end of that one hour period, or to the end of the earliest relevant one hour period if multiple overlapping such periods have all reached the limit. Timing of rolling one hour periods recommences at the end of the free play period.

[0037] With this arrangement despite the imposition of an overall hourly loss limit, and notwithstanding the limit imposed on maximum stake value per game, entertainment value and hence player interest can be maintained continuously.

[0038] It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment, which are described by way of example only.

Claims

1. A player-operable coin-operated entertainment machine with which a predetermined stake value is required for actuation of the machine for playing a game, and a prize is awarded in the event that a predetermined winning game outcome is attained, and wherein a limit is imposed on total stake value expended by the player in a playing session of successive said games **characterised in that** on reaching the said expended stake value limit at least one further said game can be played without requiring actuation of the machine by said predetermined stake value.
2. An entertainment machine according to claim 1 **characterised in that** play of said at least one further said game is free of any stake value.
3. An entertainment machine according to claim 1 or 2 **characterised in that** multiple further said games

are made available.

4. An entertainment machine according to any of claims 1 to 3 **characterised in that** the (or each) further said game gives rise to an award of a prize in the event that a predetermined winning game outcome is attained.
5. An entertainment machine according to any one of claims 1 to 4 **characterised in that** the said prize or prizes are awarded in a common value to stake value and the said stake value limit is determined with reference to stake value introduced by the player for playing one or more games and any awarded prize values.
6. An entertainment machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 **characterised in that** on reaching the said limit the machine ceases to be actuable for playing a game with the said predetermined stake value until a predetermined limitation period of time has elapsed.
7. An entertainment machine according to claim 6 **characterised in that** the limitation period of time runs from commencement of a predetermined playing session during which multiple successive games can be played.
8. An entertainment machine according to claim 7 **characterised in that** the said commencement occurs on a rolling basis, re-starting after periodic intervals.
9. An entertainment machine according to claim 8 **characterised in that** the periodic intervals are regular.
10. An entertainment machine according to any one of claims 1 to 9 which is of the kind having a main display device which is operable to display selected combinations of symbols at a win zone on one or more win lines, the said prize, or one said prize, being awarded in the event that one or more such combinations is a predetermined winning combination.

