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[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: FLEXIBLE SLEEVE, GAS SPRING ASSEMBLY AND METHOD

(57) Abstract: A flexible sleeve dimensioned for securement to an associ-
ated end member for an associated gas spring assembly includes a flexible
wall. An annular reinforcement member is embedded within the flexible
wall. A retainment element that includes an element surface is disposed
along the flexible wall such that at least the element surface is outwardly
exposed. At least one gas spring piston, at least one gas spring assembly
and at least one method are also included.

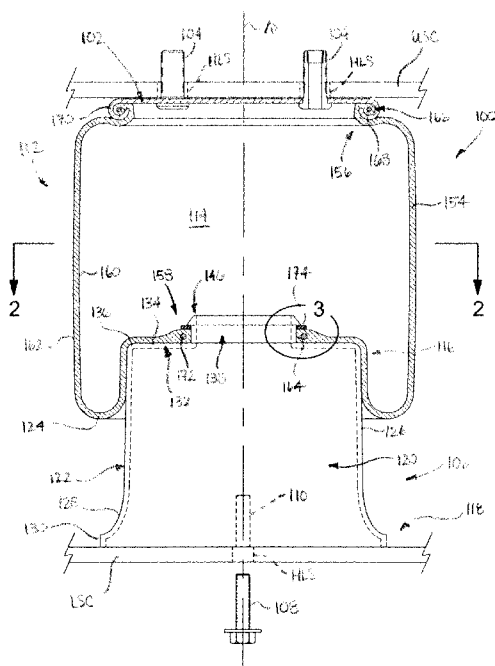


FIG. 1



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FLEXIBLE SLEEVE, GAS SPRING ASSEMBLY AND METHOD

BACKGROUND

[0001] The subject matter of the present disclosure broadly relates to the art of spring devices and, more particularly, to a flexible sleeve that has an inside surface and includes a retainment element disposed along the inside surface of the flexible sleeve for abuttingly engaging an associated end member. The subject matter of the present disclosure also relates to a gas spring assembly and a method of assembling a gas spring that includes such a flexible sleeve.

[0002] The subject matter of the present disclosure may find particular application and use in conjunction with suspension systems of wheeled vehicles, and may be described herein with reference thereto. However, it is to be appreciated that the subject matter of the present disclosure is also amenable to other applications and environments, and that the specific uses shown and described herein are merely exemplary. For example, the subject matter of the present disclosure could be used in support structures, height adjusting systems and actuators associated with industrial machinery, components thereof and/or other such equipment.

[0003] Wheeled motor vehicles of most types and kinds include a sprung mass, such as a body or chassis, for example, and an unsprung mass, such as two or more axles or other wheel-engaging members, for example, with a suspension system disposed therebetween. Typically, a suspension system will include a plurality of spring devices as well as a plurality of damping devices that together permit the sprung and unsprung masses of the vehicle to move in a somewhat controlled manner relative to one another. Movement of the sprung and unsprung masses toward one another is normally referred to in the art as jounce motion while movement of the sprung and unsprung masses away from one another is commonly referred to in the art as rebound motion.

[0004] In many applications and uses associated with wheeled motor vehicles, the suspension system of the vehicle is adapted and arranged such that there are substantially no operating conditions, during normal usage, under which the plurality of spring devices would be tensioned or otherwise undergo a tension load. That is, the configuration and/or use of conventional suspension systems is such that the spring devices are not tensioned under during rebound motion and are generally used in compression under normal operating conditions. In such operating

environments, it is possible to utilize a gas spring assembly that has a simplified construction and minimal retention of the flexible wall on the piston of the gas spring assembly in the direction opposite that associated with normal use.

[0005] As a more-specific example, a construction can be used in which an open end of the flexible wall thereof is "snapped-on" or otherwise press-fit onto the piston of the gas spring assembly. It will be appreciated that such "snap-on" constructions can result in lower cost gas spring assemblies, at least in part, because a reduced number of components can be used and also because simplified assembly and other manufacturing techniques can be employed.

[0006] This "snap-on" interengagement between the open end of the flexible wall and a portion of the piston normally provides sufficient retention for handling and installation purposes. It will be recognized, however, that such constructions are often deemed to be poorly suited for applications in which the gas spring assembly could be stretched or otherwise placed in tension, as this could generate an undesirable separation between the flexible wall and the piston of the gas spring assembly.

[0007] It is believed desirable to develop a gas spring piston, as well as a gas spring assembly and method of assembly including the same, that are capable of providing improved retention of the flexible wall on the gas spring piston during use of the gas spring assembly under tension conditions and/or overcoming other disadvantages of known constructions while maintaining a relatively low cost of manufacture and ease of assembly.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

[0008] One example of a gas spring sleeve in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is dimensioned for securement between associated first and second end members of an associated gas spring assembly can include a flexible wall having a longitudinal axis. The flexible wall can extend circumferentially about the axis and can extend longitudinally between opposing first and second open ends. The flexible wall can include an inside surface, an outside surface and a first end surface that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along the first open end. An annular reinforcement member can be substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall adjacent the first open end such that the reinforcement member is disposed within the flexible wall in spaced relation to the

inside surface, the outside surface and the first end surface. A retainment element having an element surface can be disposed along the flexible wall adjacent the first open end such that the element surface is exposed along one of the inside surface, the outside surface and the first end surface of the flexible wall.

[0009] Another example of a flexible sleeve in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is dimensioned for securement to an associated end member for an associated gas spring assembly can include a flexible wall having a longitudinal axis and extending circumferentially about the axis. The flexible wall can include an inside surface that is adapted to at least partially define a spring chamber, an outside surface opposite the inside surface, and an end surface disposed adjacent an open end of the flexible wall. An annular reinforcement member can be substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall adjacent the open end. At least one retainment element can be included and can include an element surface. The at least one retainment element can be disposed along at least one of the inside surface, the outside surface and the end surface of the flexible wall such that the element surface is at least partially exposed along the flexible wall.

[0010] One example of a gas spring assembly in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure can include a first end member. A second end member can be spaced from the first end member and can have a longitudinal axis. The second end member can extend longitudinally between opposing first and second ends. The second end member can include a first side wall extending circumferentially about the axis and generally longitudinally between the first and second ends. A first end wall can be disposed along the first end and can extend circumferentially about the axis in generally transverse relation to the first side wall. A second side wall can extend circumferentially about the axis and can extend from the first end wall in a direction generally opposite the second end of the second end member. The second side wall can include a radially outwardly-extending retainment ridge that at least partially defines a shoulder surface disposed in facing relation to the first end wall. A flexible sleeve can extend between longitudinally-spaced first and second open ends. The first open end of the flexible sleeve can be secured to the first end member and the second open end of the flexible sleeve can be secured to the second end member such that a spring chamber is at least partially defined therebetween. The flexible sleeve can include a flexible wall extending circumferentially about the axis and extending longitudinally between the

first and second open ends. The flexible wall can include an inside surface, an outside surface and a first end surface extending between and connecting the inside and outside surfaces along the second open end. An annular reinforcement member can be substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall adjacent the second open end such that the reinforcement member is disposed within the flexible wall in spaced relation to the inside surface, the outside surface and the first end surface thereof. A retainment element having an element surface can be disposed along the flexible wall adjacent the second open end such that the element surface is exposed along at least one of the inside surface, the outside surface and the first end surface of the flexible wall. The second open end of the flexible wall and the retainment element can be received on the second end member such that the first end surface of the flexible wall is in abutting engagement with the second side wall of the second end member and such that the outside surface of the flexible wall is disposed toward the first end wall of the second end member with the inside surface of the flexible wall and the exposed element surface being disposed toward the shoulder surface of the retainment ridge.

[0011] One example of a method of assembling a gas spring in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure can include providing a flexible sleeve having a longitudinal axis and extending between longitudinally-spaced first and second open ends. The flexible sleeve can include a flexible wall extending circumferentially about the axis and extending longitudinally between the first and second open ends. The flexible wall can include an inside surface, an outside surface and a first end surface extending between and connecting the inside and outside surfaces along the second end. An annular reinforcement member can be substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall adjacent the second open end such that the reinforcement member is disposed within the flexible wall in spaced relation to the inside surface, the outside surface and the first end surface thereof. The method can also include providing a retainment element that has an element surface and positioning the retainment element along the flexible wall adjacent the second open end such that the element surface is exposed along at least one of the inside surface, the outside surface and the first end surface of the flexible wall. The method can further include providing a first end member and securing the first end member across the first open end of the flexible sleeve. The method can also include providing a second end member that includes a first side wall extending

circumferentially about the axis and generally longitudinally between the first and second ends. The second end member can also include a first end wall disposed along the first end and extending circumferentially about the axis in generally transverse relation to the first side wall. The second end member can further include a second side wall that extends circumferentially about the axis and extends from the first end wall in a direction generally opposite the second end of the second end member. The second side wall can include a radially-outwardly extending retainment ridge at least partially defining a shoulder surface disposed in facing relation to the first end wall. The method can further include positioning the second open end of the flexible wall and the retainment element along the first end of the second end member. The method can also include urging the second open end of the flexible wall and the retainment element in a longitudinal direction onto the second end member until the flexible wall and the retainment element are displaced over the retainment ridge and at least a portion of the outside surface abuttingly engages the first end wall of the second end member with the inside surface of the flexible wall and the exposed element surface of the retainment element are disposed in facing relation to the shoulder surface of the second end member.

[0012] Another method of assembling a gas spring in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure can include providing a flexible sleeve that includes a flexible wall and a reinforcement member. The flexible wall can have an open end with the reinforcement member substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall adjacent the open end. The method can also include providing at least one retainment element that includes an element surface and positioning the at least one retainment element along the open end of the flexible wall such that the element surface is at least partially exposed therealong. The method can further include providing an end member having a longitudinal axis and including an end wall, a side wall projecting longitudinally from the end wall and a retainment ridge projecting radially outwardly from the side wall. The retainment ridge can include a shoulder surface disposed in facing relation to the end wall and an outer peripheral edge. The method can also include positioning the open end of the flexible wall and the at least one retainment element adjacent the retainment ridge of the end member. The method can further include urging the open end of the flexible wall and the at least one retainment element along the retainment ridge such that at least the open end is forced over the outer peripheral edge of the retainment ridge and such that at least

the flexible wall abuttingly engages at least one of the end wall and the side wall of the end member.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0013] FIG. 1 is a side view, in partial cross section, of one example of a gas spring assembly that includes a flexible sleeve in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0014] FIG. 2 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 1 taken from along line 2-2 thereof.

[0015] FIG. 3 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 1 and 2 identified in Detail 3 of FIG. 1.

[0016] FIG. 4 is a top view, in partial cross section, of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 1-3 identified in Detail 4 of FIG. 2.

[0017] FIG. 5 is an exploded cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIG. 3 prior to assembly.

[0018] FIG. 6 is a side view, in partial cross section, of another example of a gas spring assembly that includes a flexible sleeve in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0019] FIG. 7 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 6 taken from along line 7-7 thereof.

[0020] FIG. 8 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 6 and 7 identified in Detail 8 of FIG. 6.

[0021] FIG. 9 is a top view, in partial cross section, of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 6-8 identified in Detail 9 of FIG. 7.

[0022] FIG. 10 is an exploded cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIG. 8 prior to assembly.

[0023] FIG. 11 is a side view, in partial cross section, of a further example of a gas spring assembly that includes a flexible sleeve in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0024] FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 11 taken from along line 12-12 thereof.

[0025] FIG. 13 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 11 and 12 identified in Detail 13 of FIG. 11.

[0026] FIG. 14 is a top view, in partial cross section, of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 11-13 identified in Detail 14 of FIG. 12.

[0027] FIG. 15 is a top view, in partial cross section, of an alternate embodiment of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 11-14.

[0028] FIG. 16 is an exploded cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIG. 13 prior to assembly.

[0029] FIG. 17 is a side view, in partial cross section, of still another example of a gas spring assembly that includes a flexible sleeve in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0030] FIG. 18 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 17.

[0031] FIG. 19 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 17 and 18 identified in Detail 19 of FIG. 17.

[0032] FIG. 20 is a top view, in partial cross section, of the portion of the flexible sleeve and piston in FIGS. 17-19 identified in Detail 20 of FIG. 18.

[0033] FIG. 21 is a side view, in partial cross section, of one example of a gas spring assembly that includes a piston assembly in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0034] FIG. 22 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 21.

[0035] FIG. 23 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston assembly in FIGS. 21 and 22 identified in Detail 23 of FIG. 21.

[0036] FIG. 24 is a top view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston assembly in FIGS. 21-23 identified in Detail 24 of FIG. 22.

[0037] FIG. 25 is an exploded cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston assembly in FIG. 23 prior to assembly.

[0038] FIG. 26 is a side view, in partial cross section, of another example of a gas spring assembly that includes a piston in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0039] FIG. 27 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 26.

[0040] FIG. 28 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIGS. 26 and 27 identified in Detail 28 of FIG. 26.

[0041] FIG. 29 is a top view, in partial cross section, of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIGS. 26-28 identified in Detail 29 of FIG. 27.

[0042] FIG. 30 is a side view, in partial cross section, of a further example of a gas spring assembly that includes a piston in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure.

[0043] FIG. 31 is a cross-sectional top view of the gas spring assembly in FIG. 30.

[0044] FIG. 32 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIGS. 30 and 31 identified in Detail 32 of FIG. 30.

[0045] FIG. 33 is a top view, in partial cross section, of the portion of the flexible wall and piston in FIGS. 30-32 identified in Detail 33 of FIG. 31.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0046] Turning, now, to the drawings wherein the showings are for the purpose of illustrating examples of the subject matter of the present disclosure and which are not intended as a limitation of the same, FIG. 1 illustrates one example of a gas spring assembly **100** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **100** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **102**, for example, that is adapted for securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **104** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[0047] Gas spring **100** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston **106**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and that is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **108** to extend through mounting

hole **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **110**, for example.

[0048] Gas spring **100** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **112** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **114** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 1-5, piston **106** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **116** and a second or lower end **118**. First end **116** is adapted to receive and form a substantially fluid-tight seal with an open end of flexible sleeve **112**. Second end **118** of piston **106** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston **106** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **108** and threaded passage **110** in combination with one another, for example.

[0049] Piston **106** includes a piston body **120** and can also, optionally, include one or more additional components and/or elements, such as one or more threaded inserts, for example. The piston body has a first or outer side wall **122** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **116** and **118**. In use, a portion of flexible sleeve **112** forms a rolling-lobe **124** that is displaced along first side wall **122** as the gas spring undergoes changes in overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **122** is merely exemplary in that the same includes a first portion **126** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **128** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **130** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[0050] Piston body **120** also includes a first or upper end wall **132** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to axis **AX** and/or a portion of first side wall **122**. Additionally, first end wall **132** is shown in FIG. 1 as including an approximately planar portion **134** that transitions into first side wall **122** at a curved or shoulder portion **136**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **132** can take any suitable shape, form and/or

configuration. For example, shoulder portion **136** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **134** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **132** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **122** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **132** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **122**, such as is shown in FIGS. 1, 3 and 5, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[0051] As shown in FIGS. 1-5, piston body **120** further includes a second or inner side wall **138** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **132** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **138** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **140** and **142** (FIG. 5). Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured. Additionally, second side wall **138** projects from first end wall **132** in a direction generally opposite second end **118** of piston body **120** and terminates at a second end wall **144** (FIG. 5), which is shown as being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[0052] Piston body **120** also includes a retainment ridge **146** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and projects radially-outwardly from second side wall **138**. As identified in FIG. 5, retainment ridge **146** includes an outermost edge **148**, a shoulder surface **150** and an outer surface **152**. Shoulder surface **150** extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and radially outwardly from outer surface **142** of second side wall **138** to outermost edge **148**. Additionally, shoulder surface **150** is disposed in facing relation to first end wall **132** and extends radially outwardly in generally transverse relation, as previously defined, to second side wall **138**. While shoulder surface **150** is shown as being substantially continuous, it will be appreciated that a discontinuous or segregated arrangement could alternately be used in which a plurality of circumferentially-spaced shoulder portions are provided. Furthermore, outer surface **152** extends generally circumferentially around axis **AX**

and is oriented along retainment ridge **146** in a direction facing radially outwardly and away from first end wall **132**. Outermost edge **148** has a maximum cross-sectional dimension, which is identified in FIG. 3 by reference dimension **D1**.

[0053] Piston body **120** can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials for providing the desired strength and retention properties of piston **106**. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use in forming the piston body can include fiber-reinforced thermoplastics, such as glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polypropylene and glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polyamide, for example, and high-strength (unfilled) thermoplastics, such as polyester, polyethylene and other polyether-based materials or any combination thereof, for example.

[0054] In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 1-5, flexible sleeve **112** includes a flexible wall **154** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **156** and **158**. Flexible wall **154** includes an inside surface **160** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **114** and an outside surface **162** that abuttingly engages piston **106**. As can be better seen in FIGS. 3 and 5, flexible wall **154** also includes an end surface **164** that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **158**.

[0055] First open end **156** can be secured on or along first end member **102** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, as shown in FIG. 1, flexible sleeve **112** can include a mounting bead **166** formed along first open end **156** that can, optionally, include an annular reinforcement member **168**, such as a bead wire, for example, substantially fully embedded therein with first end member **102** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **170**.

[0056] It will be appreciated that flexible wall **154** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown), for example. Typically, one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies and one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies will be used together and formed from a common elastomeric material, such as a synthetic rubber, a natural rubber or a thermoplastic elastomer. In other cases, however, a combination of two or more different materials or two or more grades of the same material could be used. In either case, the elastomeric material or materials from which the plies are formed will

have certain material and/or mechanical properties, such as a hardness property, for example.

[0057] Flexible sleeve **112** also includes an annular reinforcement member **172**, such as a bead wire, for example, that is substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **158**. In a preferred arrangement, annular reinforcement member **172** is an endless ring that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and is substantially fully encapsulated by flexible wall **154** along second open end **158**. As such, it will be recognized that reinforcement member **172** is spaced inwardly into flexible wall **154** from inside surface **160**, outside surface **162** and end surface **164**. Commonly, annular reinforcement members, such as reinforcement member **172**, for example, are formed from a material having a substantially higher tensile strength than the elastomeric material forming the flexible wall. Examples of suitable materials include metals, such as steel, for example, and thermoplastics, such as fiber-reinforce thermoplastics and high-strength (unreinforced) thermoplastics, such as have been described above in connection with piston body **120**, for example.

[0058] Additionally, gas spring assembly **100** can include a retainment element **174** that is disposed adjacent inside surface **160** of flexible wall **154** along second open end **158**. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 1-5, retainment element **174** is provided separately from flexible wall **154** and is not integrated with or otherwise embedded therein. However, retainment element **174** can, optionally, be adhered or otherwise secured to the flexible wall, such as may be beneficial for handling and/or assembly purposes, for example. For example, a flowed-material joint, such as is represented by dashed line **JNT** in FIG. 3, could be used to secure the retainment element on or along the flexible wall.

[0059] In use, the retainment element can function, at least in part, to provide resistance to shear forces, such as are represented by arrows **SHR** (FIG. 3) as well as resistance to rotation of the flexible wall around a circumferential axis **AXC** of reinforcement member **172**, as indicated by arrow **RT** (FIG. 3). In this manner, the retainment element can assist in reducing deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **158** of flexible wall **154** while under tension load conditions, such as may act or attempt to separate flexible sleeve **112** from the second end member (e.g., piston **106**). It will be appreciated that retainment element **174** can be of any

size, shape, configuration and/or arrangement that may be suitable for performing or otherwise providing the foregoing or other functions, benefits and/or features.

[0060] In the exemplary embodiment shown herein, retainment element **174** takes the form of an annular ring that extends circumferentially about axis **AX** and has an approximately rectangular cross sectional shape. As stated above, however, it is to be understood that the approximately rectangular cross-sectional shape is merely exemplary and that any other suitable cross-sectional shape could alternately be used, such as circular, oval, square, trapezoidal or parallelogram, for example. Additionally, retainment element **174** can take the form of either an endless annular ring or can take the form of a split ring having two ring end walls, which are represented in FIG. 4 by dashed lines **175**.

[0061] As identified in FIG. 5, retainment element **174** can extend longitudinally between opposing first and second side surfaces **176** and **178**. Retainment element **174** is also shown as including an inside surface **180** that has a cross-sectional inside dimension **D2** (FIG. 3) and an outside surface **182** that has a cross-sectional outside dimension **D3** (FIG. 3). It will be recognized from FIG. 3 that inside dimension **D2** is shown as being less than outside dimension **D1** of retainment ridge **146** and that outside dimension **D3** of the retainment element is greater than outside dimension **D1** of the retainment ridge.

[0062] Additionally, it will be appreciated that retainment element **174** can be formed from any material or combination of materials that may be suitable for providing resistance to shear forces and/or resistance to rotation to thereby reduce deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **158** of flexible wall **154**, as described above. Examples of such materials can include metal, such as aluminum or steel, for example, plastic, such as fiber-reinforced thermoplastics and high-strength (unreinforced) thermoplastics, for example, rubber, such as natural and/or synthetic rubber, for example, as well as composite materials that can include one or more of the foregoing and/or other materials.

[0063] During assembly, second open end **158** of flexible sleeve **112** can be positioned adjacent outer surface **152** of retainment ridge **146**. The flexible wall can then be urged, pressed or otherwise forced over the retainment ridge, as is represented by arrow **AR1** in FIG. 5, and into abutting engagement with one or more of first end wall **132** and/or second side wall **138** of piston body **120**. Retainment element **174** can then be positioned adjacent the outer surface of retainment ridge

146, as is represented by arrow **AR2** in FIG. 5, and urged, pressed or otherwise forced over the retainment ridge and into abutting engagement with at least one of inside surface **160** of flexible wall **154** and shoulder surface **150** of retainment ridge **146**. In an alternate arrangement, the flexible wall and retainment element could be urged, pressed or otherwise forced over the retainment ridge during a common action.

[0064] FIGS. 6-10 illustrate another example of a gas spring assembly **200** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **200** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **202**, for example, that is adapted for securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **204** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[0065] Gas spring **200** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston **206**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and that is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **208** to extend through mounting hole **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **210**, for example.

[0066] Gas spring **200** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **212** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **214** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 6-10, piston **206** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **216** and a second or lower end **218**. First end **216** is adapted to receive and form a substantially fluid-tight seal with an open end of flexible sleeve **212**. Second end **218**

of piston **206** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston **206** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **208** and threaded passage **210** in combination with one another, for example.

[0067] Piston **206** includes a piston body **220** and can also, optionally, include one or more additional components and/or elements, such as one or more threaded inserts, for example. The piston body has a first or outer side wall **222** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **216** and **218**. In use, a portion of flexible sleeve **212** forms a rolling-lobe **224** that is displaced along first side wall **222** as the gas spring undergoes changes in overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **222** is merely exemplary in that the same includes a first portion **226** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **228** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **230** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[0068] Piston body **220** also includes a first or upper end wall **232** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to axis **AX** and/or a portion of first side wall **222**. Additionally, first end wall **232** is shown in FIG. 6 as including an approximately planar portion **234** that transitions into first side wall **222** at a curved or shoulder portion **236**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **232** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, shoulder portion **236** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **234** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **232** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **222** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **232** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **222**, such as is shown in FIGS. 6, 8 and 10, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range

of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[0069] As shown in FIGS. 6-10, piston body **220** further includes a second or inner side wall **238** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **232** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **238** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **240** and **242** (FIG. 10). Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured. Additionally, second side wall **238** projects from first end wall **232** in a direction generally opposite second end **218** of piston body **220** and terminates at a second end wall **244** (FIG. 10), which is shown as being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[0070] Piston body **220** also includes a retainment ridge **246** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and projects radially-outwardly from second side wall **238**. As identified in FIG. 10, retainment ridge **246** includes an outermost edge **248**, a shoulder surface **250** and an outer surface **252**. Shoulder surface **250** extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and radially outwardly from outer surface **242** of second side wall **238** to outermost edge **248**. Additionally, shoulder surface **250** is disposed in facing relation to first end wall **232** and extends radially outwardly in generally transverse relation, as previously defined, to second side wall **238**. While shoulder surface **250** is shown as being substantially continuous, it will be appreciated that a discontinuous or segmented arrangement could alternately be used in which a plurality of circumferentially-spaced shoulder portions are provided. Furthermore, outer surface **252** extends generally circumferentially around axis **AX** and is oriented along retainment ridge **246** in a direction facing radially outwardly and away from first end wall **232**. Outermost edge **248** has a maximum cross-sectional dimension, which is identified in FIG. 8 by reference dimension **D4**.

[0071] Piston body **220** can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials for providing the desired strength and retention properties of piston **206**. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use in forming the piston body can include fiber-reinforced thermoplastics, such as glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polypropylene and glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polyamide, for example, and high-

strength (unfilled) thermoplastics, such as polyester, polyethylene and other polyether-based materials or any combination thereof, for example.

[0072] In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 6-10, flexible sleeve **212** includes a flexible wall **254** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **256** and **258**. Flexible wall **254** includes an inside surface **260** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **214** and an outside surface **262** that abuttingly engages piston **206**. As can be better seen in FIGS. 8 and 10, flexible wall **254** also includes an end surface **264** that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **258**.

[0073] First open end **256** can be secured on or along first end member **202** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, as shown in FIG. 6, flexible sleeve **212** can include a mounting bead **266** formed along first open end **256** that can, optionally, include an annular reinforcement member **268**, such as a bead wire, for example, substantially fully embedded therein with first end member **202** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **270**.

[0074] It will be appreciated that flexible wall **254** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown), for example. Typically, one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies and one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies will be used together and formed from a common elastomeric material, such as a synthetic rubber, a natural rubber or a thermoplastic elastomer. In other cases, however, a combination of two or more different materials or two or more grades of the same material could be used. In either case, the elastomeric material or materials from which the plies are formed will have certain material and/or mechanical properties, such as a hardness property, for example.

[0075] Flexible sleeve **212** also includes an annular reinforcement member **272**, such as a bead wire, for example, that is substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **258**. In a preferred arrangement, annular reinforcement member **272** is an endless ring that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and is substantially fully encapsulated by flexible wall **254** along second open end **258**. As such, it will be recognized that reinforcement member **272** is

spaced inwardly into flexible wall **254** from inside surface **260**, outside surface **262** and end surface **264**. Commonly, annular reinforcement members, such as reinforcement member **272**, for example, are formed from a material having a substantially higher tensile strength than the elastomeric material forming the flexible wall. Examples of suitable materials include metals, such as steel, for example, and thermoplastics, such as fiber-reinforce thermoplastics and high-strength (unreinforced) thermoplastics, such as have been described above in connection with piston body **220**, for example.

[0076] Additionally, one example of a gas spring assembly in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure can include a retainment element that is partially embedded within the flexible wall such that at least a portion of one surface of the retainment element is outwardly exposed along a surface of the flexible wall, such as along one or more of the inside surface, the outside surface and/or the end surface, for example. In the exemplary arrangement shown, gas spring assembly **200** includes a retainment element **274** that is partially embedded within flexible wall **254** along inside surface **260** adjacent second open end **258**. Retainment element **274** can function, at least in part, to provide resistance to shear forces, such as are represented by arrows **SHR** (FIG. 8) as well as resistance to rotation of the flexible wall around a circumferential axis **AXC** of reinforcement member **272**, as indicated by arrow **RT** (FIG. 8). In this manner, the retainment element can assist in reducing deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **258** of flexible wall **254** while under tension load conditions, such as may act or attempt to separate flexible sleeve **212** from the second end member (e.g., piston **206**). It will be appreciated that retainment element **274** can be of any size, shape, configuration and/or arrangement that may be suitable for performing or otherwise providing the foregoing or other functions, benefits and/or features.

[0077] In the exemplary embodiment shown herein, retainment element **274** takes the form of an annular ring that extends circumferentially about axis **AX** and has an approximately rectangular cross sectional shape. As stated above, however, it is to be understood that the approximately rectangular cross-sectional shape is merely exemplary and that any other suitable cross-sectional shape could alternately be used, such as circular, oval, square, trapezoidal or parallelogram, for example. Additionally, retainment element **274** can take the form of either an endless annular

ring or can take the form of a split ring having two ring end walls, which are represented in FIG. 9 by dashed lines **275**.

[0078] As identified in FIG. 10, retainment element **274** can extend longitudinally between opposing first and second side surfaces **276** and **278**. Retainment element **274** is also shown as including an inside surface **280** that has a cross-sectional inside dimension **D5** (FIG. 8) and an outside surface **282** that has a cross-sectional outside dimension **D6** (FIG. 8). It will be recognized from FIG. 8 that inside dimension **D5** is shown as being less than outside dimension **D4** of retainment ridge **246** and that outside dimension **D6** of the retainment element is greater than outside dimension **D4** of the retainment ridge.

[0079] Flexible sleeve **212** and retainment element **274** differ from the arrangement previously described in that retainment element **274** is partially embedded within flexible wall **254** of flexible sleeve **212**. For example, the first surface of the retainment element can be entirely embedded within the flexible wall and at least one of the inside and outside surfaces can be at least partially embedded within the flexible wall. In the arrangement shown in FIGS. 6-10, first surface **276** as well as inside and outside surfaces **280** and **282** are substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall material that forms flexible wall **254**. Second side surface **278** is shown as being approximately aligned with inside surface **260** and substantially free of the flexible wall material. As such, at least a portion of second side surface **278** can, in the present embodiment, directly abuttingly engage shoulder surface **250** of retainment ridge **246**.

[0080] Optionally, one or more features can be provided to assist in securing retainment element **274** on or along the flexible wall. In the arrangement shown in FIGS. 6-10, retainment element **274** includes a plurality of holes or passages **284** that extend through the retainment element and are circumferentially spaced from one another around the retainment element. A quantity of flexible wall material can be forced through passages **284** during assembly of flexible sleeve **212** and cured along second side surface **278** to form attachment elements **286**. Optionally, some amount of the flexible wall material can extend beyond outside surface **282** and onto second side surface **278**, as is represented by dashed line **288** in FIG. 9. Additionally, or in the alternative, some amount of the flexible material can also extend beyond inside surface **280** and onto second side surface **278**, as is represented by dashed line **290** in FIG. 9. It will be appreciated that such additional

material may be used to assist in securing retainment element **274** on or along the flexible wall in addition to, or as an alternative to, passages **284** and attachment elements **286**.

[0081] Additionally, it will be appreciated that retainment element **274** can be formed from any material or combination of materials that may be suitable for providing resistance to shear forces and/or resistance to rotation to thereby reduce deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **258** of flexible wall **254**, as described above. Examples of such materials can include metal, such as aluminum or steel, for example, plastic, such as fiber-reinforced thermoplastics and high-strength (unreinforced) thermoplastics, for example, rubber, such as natural and/or synthetic rubber, for example, as well as composite materials that can include one or more of the foregoing and/or other materials.

[0082] During assembly, second open end **258** of flexible sleeve **212** can be positioned adjacent outer surface **252** of retainment ridge **246**. Flexible wall **254** together with retainment element **274** that is partially embedded therein can then be urged, pressed or otherwise forced over the retainment ridge, as is represented by arrow **AR3** in FIG. 10, and into abutting engagement with one or more of first end wall **232** and/or second side wall **238** of piston body **220**.

[0083] FIGS. 11-16 illustrate a further example of a gas spring assembly **300** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **300** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **302**, for example, that is adapted for securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **304** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[0084] Gas spring **300** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston **306**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and that is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be

appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **308** to extend through mounting hole **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **310**, for example.

[0085] Gas spring **300** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **312** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **314** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 11-16, piston **306** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **316** and a second or lower end **318**. First end **316** is adapted to receive and form a substantially fluid-tight seal with an open end of flexible sleeve **312**. Second end **318** of piston **306** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston **306** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **308** and threaded passage **310** in combination with one another, for example.

[0086] Piston **306** includes a piston body **320** and can also, optionally, include one or more additional components and/or elements, such as one or more threaded inserts, for example. The piston body has a first or outer side wall **322** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **316** and **318**. In use, a portion of flexible sleeve **312** forms a rolling-lobe **324** that is displaced along first side wall **322** as the gas spring undergoes changes in overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **322** is merely exemplary in that the same includes a first portion **326** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **328** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **330** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[0087] Piston body **320** also includes a first or upper end wall **332** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to axis **AX** and/or at least a portion of first side wall **322**. Additionally, first end wall **332**

is shown in FIG. 11 as including an approximately planar portion **334** that transitions into first side wall **322** at a curved or shoulder portion **336**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **332** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, shoulder portion **336** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **334** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **332** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **322** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **332** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **322**, such as is shown in FIGS. 11, 13 and 16, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[0088] As shown in FIGS. 11-16, piston body **320** further includes a second or inner side wall **338** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **332** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **338** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **340** and **342** (FIG. 16). Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured. Additionally, second side wall **338** projects from first end wall **332** in a direction generally opposite second end **318** of piston body **320** and terminates at a second end wall **344** (FIG. 16), which is shown as being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[0089] Piston body **320** also includes a retainment ridge **346** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and projects radially-outwardly from second side wall **338**. As identified in FIG. 16, retainment ridge **346** includes an outermost edge **348**, a shoulder surface **350** and an outer surface **352**. Shoulder surface **350** extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and radially outwardly from outer surface **342** of second side wall **338** to outermost edge **348**. Additionally, shoulder surface **350** is disposed in facing relation to first end wall **332** and extends radially outwardly in generally transverse relation, as previously defined, to second side wall **338**. While shoulder surface **350** is shown as being substantially continuous, it will be

appreciated that a discontinuous or segmented arrangement could be used in which a plurality of circumferentially-spaced shoulder portions are alternately provided. Furthermore, outer surface **352** extends generally circumferentially around axis **AX** and is oriented along retainment ridge **346** in a direction facing radially outwardly and away from first end wall **332**. Outermost edge **348** has a maximum cross-sectional dimension, which is identified in FIG. 13 by reference dimension **D7**.

[0090] Piston body **320** can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials for providing the desired strength and retention properties of piston **306**. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use in forming the piston body can include fiber-reinforced thermoplastics, such as glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polypropylene and glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polyamide, for example, and high-strength (unfilled) thermoplastics, such as polyester, polyethylene and other polyether-based materials or any combination thereof, for example.

[0091] In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 11-16, flexible sleeve **312** includes a flexible wall **354** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **356** and **358**. Flexible wall **354** includes an inside surface **360** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **314** and an outside surface **362** that abuttingly engages piston **306**. As can be better seen in FIGS. 13 and 16, flexible wall **354** also includes an end surface **364** that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **358**.

[0092] First open end **356** can be secured on or along first end member **302** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, as shown in FIG. 11, flexible sleeve **312** can include a mounting bead **366** formed along first open end **356** that can, optionally, include an annular reinforcement member **368**, such as a bead wire, for example, substantially fully embedded therein with first end member **302** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **370**.

[0093] It will be appreciated that flexible wall **354** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown), for example. Typically, one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies and one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies will be used together and formed from a common elastomeric material, such as a synthetic rubber, a natural rubber or a

thermoplastic elastomer. In other cases, however, a combination of two or more different materials or two or more grades of the same material could be used. In either case, the elastomeric material or materials from which the plies are formed will have certain material and/or mechanical properties, such as a hardness property, for example.

[0094] Flexible sleeve **312** also includes an annular reinforcement member **372**, such as a bead wire, for example, that is substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **358**. In a preferred arrangement, annular reinforcement member **372** is an endless ring that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and is substantially fully encapsulated by flexible wall **354** along second open end **358**. As such, it will be recognized that reinforcement member **372** is spaced inwardly into flexible wall **354** from inside surface **360**, outside surface **362** and end surface **364**. Commonly, annular reinforcement members, such as reinforcement member **372**, for example, are formed from a material having a substantially higher tensile strength than the elastomeric material forming the flexible wall. Examples of suitable materials include metals, such as steel, for example, and thermoplastics, such as fiber-reinforce thermoplastics and high-strength (unreinforced) thermoplastics, such as have been described above in connection with piston body **320**, for example.

[0095] Additionally, gas spring assembly **300** can include a retainment element **374** that is partially embedded within flexible wall **354** along inside surface **360** adjacent second open end **358**. Retainment element **374** can function, at least in part, to provide resistance to shear forces, such as are represented by arrows **SHR** (FIG. 13) as well as resistance to rotation of the flexible wall around a circumferential axis **AXC** of reinforcement member **372**, as indicated by arrow **RT** (FIG. 13). In this manner, the retainment element can assist in reducing deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **358** of flexible wall **354** while under tension load conditions, such as may act or attempt to separate flexible sleeve **312** from the second end member (e.g., piston **306**). It will be appreciated that retainment element **374** can be of any size, shape, configuration and/or arrangement that may be suitable for performing or otherwise providing the foregoing or other functions, benefits and/or features.

[0096] In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 10-14 and 16, retainment element **374** takes the form of an annular ring that extends circumferentially about

axis **AX** and has an approximately rectangular cross sectional shape. As stated above, however, it is to be understood that the approximately rectangular cross-sectional shape is merely exemplary and that any other suitable cross-sectional shape could alternately be used, such as circular, oval, square, trapezoidal or parallelogram, for example. Additionally, retainment element **374** can take the form of either an endless annular ring or can take the form of a split ring having two ring end walls, which are represented in FIG. 14 by dashed lines **375**.

[0097] As identified in FIG. 15, retainment element **374** can extend longitudinally between opposing first and second side surfaces **376** and **378**. Retainment element **374** is also shown as including an inside surface **380** that has a cross-sectional inside dimension **D8** (FIG. 13) and an outside surface **382** that has a cross-sectional outside dimension **D9** (FIG. 13). It will be recognized from FIG. 13 that inside dimension **D8** is shown as being less than outside dimension **D7** of retainment ridge **346** and that outside dimension **D9** of the retainment element is greater than outside dimension **D7** of the retainment ridge.

[0098] Flexible sleeve **312** and retainment element **374** differ from the arrangements previously described in that retainment element **374** is partially embedded within flexible wall **354** of flexible sleeve **312**. Additionally, in the arrangements shown in FIGS. 11-16, first surface **376** as well as outside surface **382** are substantially embedded within the flexible wall material that forms flexible wall **354**. Second side surface **378** is shown as being approximately aligned with inside surface **360** and substantially free of the flexible wall material. Additionally, inside surface **380** is shown as being approximately aligned with end surface **364** and is also substantially free of the flexible wall material. As such, at least a portion of second side surface **378** can, in the present embodiment, directly abuttingly engage shoulder surface **350** of retainment ridge **346**. Furthermore, inside surface **380** can be disposed adjacent outer surface **342** and can, in some cases, abuttingly engage the same.

[0099] An alternate embodiment of flexible sleeve **312** is shown in FIG. 15 and is identified therein as flexible sleeve **312'**. Flexible sleeve **312'** differs from the flexible sleeve described above in that retainment element **374** is replaced by a plurality of retainment elements **374'** that are separate from one another and each of which is partially embedded within the flexible wall. In the exemplary arrangement shown, retainment elements **374'** are disposed in circumferentially spaced relation to one

another along end surface **364** of flexible wall **354**. As such, inside surfaces **380'** of the plurality of retainment elements are at least partially exposed and substantially free of the flexible wall material, as described above. Additionally, second side surfaces **378'** are approximately aligned with inside surface **360** of flexible wall **354** and, as such, are also at least partially exposed and, thus, substantially free of the flexible wall material. Outside surfaces **382'** as well as first side surfaces (not shown) engage the flexible wall material such that the plurality of retainment elements **374'** are partially embedded within flexible wall **354** and have at least two exposed outer surfaces.

[00100] It will be appreciated that retainment elements **374** and/or **374'** can be formed from any material or combination of materials that may be suitable for providing resistance to shear forces and/or resistance to rotation to thereby reduce deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **358** of flexible wall **354**, as described above. Examples of such materials can include metal, such as aluminum or steel, for example, plastic, such as fiber-reinforced thermoplastics and high-strength (unreinforced) thermoplastics, for example, rubber, such as natural and/or synthetic rubber, for example, as well as composite materials that can include one or more of the foregoing and/or other materials. It will be appreciated, however, that if metal is used for retainment element **374**, a split ring construction having ring end walls **375** can be used to permit the retainment element and the open end in which the same is embedded to expand a sufficient distance to be received over retainment ridge **346**.

[00101] During assembly, second open end **358** of flexible sleeve **312** can be position adjacent outer surface **352** of retainment ridge **346**. Flexible wall **354** together with retainment element **374** that is partially embedded therein can then be urged, pressed or otherwise forced over the retainment ridge, as is represented by arrow **AR4** in FIG. 16, and into abutting engagement with one or more of first end wall **332** and/or second side wall **338** of piston body **320**.

[00102] FIGS. 17-20 illustrate still another example of a gas spring assembly **400** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **400** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **402**, for example, that is adapted for

securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **404** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[00103] Gas spring **400** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston **406**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **408** to extend through mounting hole **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **410**, for example.

[00104] Gas spring **400** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **412** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **414** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 17-20, piston **406** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **416** and a second or lower end **418**. First end **416** is adapted to receive and form a substantially fluid-tight seal with an open end of flexible sleeve **412**. Second end **418** of piston **406** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston **406** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **408** and threaded passage **410** in combination with one another, for example.

[00105] Piston **406** includes a piston body **420** and can also, optionally, include one or more additional components and/or elements, such as one or more threaded inserts, for example. The piston body has a first or outer side wall **422** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **416** and **418**. In use, a portion of flexible sleeve **412** forms a rolling-lobe **424** that is displaced along first side wall **422** as the gas spring undergoes changes in overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well

understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **422** is merely exemplary in that the same includes a first portion **426** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **428** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **430** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[00106] Piston body **420** also includes a first or upper end wall **432** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to axis **AX** and/or a portion of first side wall **422**. Additionally, first end wall **432** is shown in FIGS. 17 and 19 as including an approximately planar portion **434** that transitions into first side wall **422** at a curved or shoulder portion **436**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **432** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, shoulder portion **436** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **434** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **432** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **422** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **432** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **422**, such as is shown in FIGS. 17 and 19, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[00107] As shown in FIGS. 17-20, piston body **420** further includes a second or inner side wall **438** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **432** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **438** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **440** and **442** (FIG. 19). Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured. Additionally, second side wall **438** projects from first end wall **432** in a direction generally opposite second end **418** of piston body **420** and terminates at a second end wall **444**, which is shown

as being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[00108] Piston body **420** also includes a retainment ridge **446** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and projects radially-outwardly from second side wall **438**. Retainment ridge **446** includes an outermost edge **448**, a shoulder surface **450** and an outer surface **452**. Shoulder surface **450** extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and radially outwardly from outer surface **442** of second side wall **438** to outermost edge **448**. Additionally, shoulder surface **450** is disposed in facing relation to first end wall **432** and extends radially outwardly in generally transverse relation, as previously defined, to second side wall **438**. While shoulder surface **450** is shown as being substantially continuous, it will be appreciated that a discontinuous or segmented arrangement could alternately be used in which a plurality of circumferentially-spaced shoulder portions are provided. Furthermore, outer surface **452** extends generally circumferentially around axis **AX** and is oriented along retainment ridge **446** in a direction facing radially-outwardly and away from first end wall **432**. As shown in FIG. 19, outermost edge **448** has a maximum cross-sectional dimension, which is identified in FIG. 19 by reference dimension **D1**.

[00109] Piston body **420** can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials for providing the desired strength and retention properties of piston **406**. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use in forming the piston body can include fiber-reinforced thermoplastics, such as glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polypropylene and glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polyamide, for example, and high-strength (unfilled) thermoplastics, such as polyester, polyethylene and other polyether-based materials or any combination thereof, for example.

[00110] In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 17-20, flexible sleeve **412** includes a flexible wall **454** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **456** and **458**. Flexible wall **454** includes an inside surface **460** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **414** and an outside surface **462** that abuttingly engages piston **406**. As can be better seen in FIG. 19, flexible wall **454** also includes an end surface **464** that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **458**.

[00111] First open end **456** can be secured on or along first end member **402** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, as shown in FIG. 17, flexible sleeve **412** can include a mounting bead **466**

formed along first open end **456** that can, optionally, include an annular reinforcement member **468**, such as a bead wire, for example, substantially fully embedded therein with first end member **402** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **470**.

[00112] It will be appreciated that flexible wall **454** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown), for example. Typically, one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies and one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies will be used together and formed from a common elastomeric material, such as a synthetic rubber, a natural rubber or a thermoplastic elastomer. In other cases, however, a combination of two or more different materials or two or more grades of the same material could be used. In either case, the elastomeric material or materials from which the plies are formed will have certain material and/or mechanical properties, such as a durometer or hardness property, for example.

[00113] Flexible sleeve **412** also includes an annular reinforcement member **472**, such as a bead wire, for example, that is substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **458**. In a preferred arrangement, annular reinforcement member **472** is an endless ring that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and is substantially fully encapsulated by flexible wall **454** along second open end **458**. As such, it will be recognized that reinforcement member **472** is spaced inwardly into flexible wall **454** from inside surface **460**, outside surface **462** and end surface **464**. Commonly, annular reinforcement members, such as reinforcement member **472**, for example, are formed from a material having a substantially higher tensile strength than the elastomeric material forming the flexible wall. Examples of suitable materials include metals, such as steel, for example, and thermoplastics, such as fiber-reinforce thermoplastics and high-strength (un-reinforced) thermoplastics, such as have been described above in connection with piston body **420**, for example.

[00114] Furthermore, one example of a gas spring assembly in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure can include a retainment element that substantially encapsulated or otherwise substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall such that substantially no portion of the retainment element is outwardly

exposed along a surface of the flexible wall. As shown in FIGS. 17-20, flexible sleeve **412** further includes a retainment element **474** that is encapsulated or otherwise substantially fully embedded within flexible wall **454** along second open end **458**. The retainment element functions, at least in part, to provide resistance to shear forces, such as are represented by arrows **SHR** (FIG. 19) as well as resistance to rotation of the flexible wall around a circumferential axis **AXC** of reinforcement member **472**, as indicated by arrow **RT** (FIG. 19). In this manner, the retainment element can assist in reducing deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **458** of flexible wall **454** while under tension load conditions, such as may act or attempt to separate flexible sleeve **412** from the second end member (e.g., piston **406**). It will be appreciated that retainment element **474** can be of any size, shape, configuration and/or arrangement that may be suitable for performing the foregoing or other functions, benefits and/or features.

[00115] In the exemplary embodiment shown herein, retainment element **474** takes the form of an annular ring that extends circumferentially about axis **AX** and has an approximately rectangular cross sectional shape. As stated above, however, it is to be understood that the approximately rectangular cross-sectional shape is merely exemplary and that any other suitable cross-sectional shape could alternately be used, such as circular, oval, square, trapezoidal or parallelogram, for example. Additionally, retainment element **474** can take the form of either an endless annular ring or can take the form of a split ring having two ring end walls, which are represented in FIG. 20 by dashed lines **475**.

[00116] As shown in FIG. 19, retainment element **474** can extend longitudinally between opposing first and second side surfaces **476** and **478**. Retainment element **474** is also shown as including an inside surface **480** that has a cross-sectional inside dimension **D2** and an outside surface **482** that has a cross-sectional outside dimension **D3**. It will be recognized from FIG. 19, that inside dimension **D2** is shown as being less than outside dimension **D1** of retainment ridge **446** and that outside dimension **D3** of the retainment element is greater than outside dimension **D1** of the retainment ridge.

[00117] Additionally, as shown in FIG. 19, retainment element **474** is substantially fully embedded within flexible wall **454** along second open end **458**. As such, the retainment element will be spaced inwardly into the flexible wall in spaced relation to inside surface **460**, outside surface **462** and end surface **464**. As such, the

retainment element is fully encapsulated by the flexible wall and flexible wall material **484**, **486** and **488** is respectively disposed between the retainment element and surfaces **460**, **462** and **464**. Furthermore, retainment element **474** is preferably positioned between reinforcing member **472** and at least one of inside surface **460**, outside surface **462** and/or end surface **464**. In the exemplary embodiment shown, retainment element **474** is disposed between the reinforcing member and inside surface **462**, and is spaced from reinforcement element **472** such that flexible wall material **490** is disposed therebetween. It is to be understood, however, that other arrangements could alternately be used.

[00118] Additionally, it will be appreciated that retainment element **474** can be formed from any material or combination of materials that may be suitable for providing resistance to shear forces and/or resistance to rotation to thereby reduce deflection, deformation and/or yielding of second open end **458** of flexible wall **454**, as described above. As such, retainment element **474** can be formed from a material having certain material and/or mechanical properties, such as hardness or tensile yield strength, for example. In a preferred arrangement, at least one of the materials from which retainment element **474** is formed will be different from one or more of the elastomeric materials used to form flexible wall **454**. In such case, it is anticipated that the differing materials will have different material and/or mechanical properties and, thus, can be selected to provide performance properties and characteristics suitable for providing the functions, benefits and/or features described above.

[00119] As one example, flexible wall **454** could be formed from a first material having a first hardness. Retainment element **474** can then be formed from a second material that is different from the first material and has a second hardness. In the present example, the second hardness of the second material can be greater than the first hardness of the first material. Though not universal, it is well understood that certain materials can have strength and other properties that approximately correlate with increasing and decreasing hardness levels of material. As such, the second hardness level of the second material being greater than the first hardness level of the first material could correspond to the second material having a greater tensile strength property than the tensile strength property of the first material. It will be clearly understood, however, that any other properties and/or characteristics of the materials could alternately be used.

[00120] One method of assembling a gas spring assembly, such as gas spring assembly **400**, for example, can include providing a first end member (e.g., bead plate **402**) and providing a second end member (e.g., piston **406**). The second end member can include an end wall (e.g., first end wall **432**), a side wall (e.g., second side wall **438**) extending from the end wall and a retainment ridge (e.g., retainment ridge **446**) projecting radially outwardly from the end wall. The retainment ridge can include a shoulder surface (e.g., shoulder surface **450**) disposed in facing relation to the end wall and an outer surface (e.g., outer surface **452**). The method can further include providing a flexible sleeve (e.g., flexible sleeve **412**) having opposing open ends (e.g., first and second open ends **456** and **458**) with one of the opposing ends including a retainment element (e.g., retainment element **474**) substantially fully embedded therein. The method can also include securing the first end member across the first open end of the flexible sleeve such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed therebetween. The method can further include positioning an open end (e.g., second open end **458**) of the flexible sleeve adjacent the outer surface of the retainment ridge of the second end member, and urging or otherwise forcing the open end and retainment element over the retainment ridge such that the flexible wall is in abutting engagement with one or more of the end wall and/or side wall of the second end member.

[00121] FIGS. 21-25 illustrate still another example of a gas spring assembly **500** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **500** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **502**, for example, that is adapted for securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **504** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[00122] Gas spring **500** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston assembly **506**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and that is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the

structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **508** to extend through mounting holes **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **510**, for example.

[00123] Gas spring **500** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **512** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **514** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIG. 21, flexible sleeve **512** includes a flexible wall **516** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **518** and **520**. It will be appreciated that flexible wall **516** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown), for example. Additionally, it will be appreciated that first open end **518** can be secured on or along first end member **502** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, flexible sleeve **512** can include a mounting bead **522** formed along first open end **518** that includes an annular reinforcement member **524**, such as a bead wire, for example, embedded therein with first end member **502** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **526**.

[00124] Piston assembly **506** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **528** and a second or lower end **530**. First end **528** is adapted to receive and form a substantially fluid-tight seal with second open end **520** of flexible sleeve **512**. Second end **530** of piston assembly **506** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston assembly **506** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **508** and threaded passage **510**, for example.

[00125] Piston assembly **506** includes a piston body **532** that has a first or outer side wall **534** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **528** and **530**. In use, flexible wall **516** of flexible sleeve **512** forms a rolling-lobe **536** that is displaced along first side wall **534** as the gas spring undergoes changes in

overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **534** is merely exemplary in including a first portion **538** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **540** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **542** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[00126] Piston body **532** also includes a first or upper end wall **544** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to axis **AX** and/or a portion of first side wall **534**. Additionally, first end wall **544** is shown in FIGS. 21, 23 and 25 as including an approximately planar portion **546** that transitions into first side wall **534** at a curved or shoulder portion **548**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **544** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, shoulder portion **548** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **546** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **544** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **534** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **544** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **534**, such as is shown in FIGS. 21, 23 and 25, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[00127] As shown in FIGS. 21, 23 and 25, piston body **532** further includes a second or inner side wall **550** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **544** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **550** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **552** and **554**. Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured. Additionally, second side wall **550** projects from first end wall **544** in a direction generally opposite second end **530** of piston body **532** and terminates at a second end wall **556**, which is shown as

being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[00128] Piston assembly **506** also includes a plurality of retaining elements **558** that are partially embedded within piston body **532** and project axially-outwardly from the piston body in a direction generally away from second end **530**. In one exemplary case, the retaining elements can be disposed in circumferentially-spaced relation to one another around axis **AX**, such as in the arrangement shown in FIGS. 22 and 24, for example.

[00129] Additionally, any suitable number of retaining elements can be used, such as a number within a range of from two to fifty retaining elements, for example. It will be appreciated that retaining elements **558** can be evenly spaced with respect to one another, such as is shown in FIGS. 22 and 24, for example. Alternately, the retaining elements could be spaced in a graduated or otherwise uneven pattern (not shown), such as may be useful in generating an increased level of retention along one circumferential portion of the piston body relative to another circumferential portion of the piston body. It will be appreciated that the number of retaining elements that may be used can related to any one or more of a variety of factors and considerations, such as, for example, the size, shape and material properties of the piston body and the retaining elements as well as the desired level of retention that is to be achieved. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use as retaining elements include metals, such as aluminum and steel, for example. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use in forming the piston body can include fiber-reinforced thermoplastics, such as glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polypropylene and glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polyamide, for example, and high-strength (unfilled) thermoplastics, such as polyester, polyethylene and other polyether-based materials or any combination thereof, for example.

[00130] In the exemplary arrangement shown and described herein, retaining elements **558** extend generally longitudinally between a free end **560** that is disposed out of piston body **532** and an embedded end **562** that is encapsulated within the piston body. In one example of such an arrangement, the retaining elements are partially embedded in at least second side wall **550**. Optionally, a portion **564** of the embedded end of retaining elements **558** can extend into or otherwise along a portion of first end wall **544**, such as is shown in FIGS. 21, 23 and 25, for example. Additionally, the plurality of retaining elements can be separate

elements that are each independently embedded within the piston body. Alternately, however, the plurality of retaining elements could be connected together in a suitable manner, such as by one or more connecting walls, as is represented in FIG. 25 by item number **566**, for example.

[00131] It will be recognized that retaining elements **558** function to retain second open end **520** of flexible wall **516** in abutting engagement on or along the second end member (e.g., piston **506**) such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is maintained therebetween. In one exemplary arrangement, free end **560** of the retaining elements extends approximately axially from second end wall **556** of second side wall **550** and is formed or otherwise deflected to extend approximately transverse, such as has been defined above, with respect to the second side wall. In this manner, the free ends project radially-outwardly beyond the second side wall **550** and along at least a portion of flexible wall **516**. It will be appreciated that in some cases the free end of the retaining elements may contact or otherwise abuttingly engage the flexible wall or second open end thereof. In other cases, however, the free end may be disposed in axially spaced relation to the flexible wall or second open end thereof, such as is shown in FIG. 23, for example.

[00132] Flexible wall **516** includes an inside surface **568** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **514** and an outside surface **570** that abuttingly engages first side wall **534** and first end wall **544** of piston body **532**. As can be better seen in FIGS. 23 and 25, flexible wall **516** also includes an end surface **572** extending between and connecting the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **520**. An annular reinforcement member **574**, such as a bead wire, for example, can optionally be embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **520**. In a preferred arrangement, reinforcement member **574** has an approximate inside dimension **D1** (FIG. 23) and retaining elements **558** extend radially-outwardly in the formed or deflected condition to an approximate outside dimension **D2** (FIGS. 23 and 24). In such an arrangement, retaining elements **558** can at least partially overlap reinforcement member **574** and benefit from any additional rigidity provided to second open end **520** by the reinforcement member. It will be appreciated, however, that other arrangements could alternately be used, such as, for example, an arrangement in which the outside dimension of the retaining elements is less than inside dimension **D1** of the reinforcement member but greater than an outside dimension (not shown) of second side wall **550**.

[00133] One method of assembling a gas spring assembly, such as gas spring assembly **500**, for example, can include providing a flexible sleeve (e.g., flexible sleeve **512**) having opposing open ends (e.g., first and second open ends **518** and **520**). The method can also include providing a first end member (e.g., bead plate **502**) and securing the same across the first open end of the flexible sleeve such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed therebetween. The method can also include providing a second end member, such as piston assembly **506**, for example, having an end member body (e.g., piston body **532**) and a plurality of retaining elements (e.g., retaining elements **558**) that are each partially embedded therein. Initially, the remaining portion (e.g., free ends **560**) of the retaining elements projects approximately axially-outwardly from the end member body, such as is represented by retaining elements **558'** in FIG. 25, for example. In this manner, an open end of the flexible sleeve (e.g., second open end **520**) can then be positioned adjacent the second end member and pressed onto or otherwise urged into abutting engagement with one or more walls of the second end member, as is represented by arrow **AR1** in FIG. 25, such that a substantially fluid-tight seal is formed therebetween. The remaining portions (e.g., free ends **560**) of the retaining elements can then be bent, deflected or otherwise formed into a radially-outwardly extending orientation, such as is represented arrow **AR2** and dashed line **560'** in FIG. 25, for example. In this manner, the retaining elements can assist in retaining the second open end of the flexible sleeve on the second end member.

[00134] FIGS. 26-29 illustrate still a further example of a gas spring assembly **600** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **600** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **602**, for example, that is adapted for securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **604** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[00135] Gas spring **600** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston **606**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and that is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **608** to extend through mounting holes **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **610**, for example.

[00136] Gas spring **600** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **612** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **614** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIG. 26, flexible sleeve **612** includes a flexible wall **616** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **618** and **620**. Flexible wall **616** includes an inside surface **622** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **614** and an outside surface **624** that abuttingly engages piston **606**. As can be better seen in FIG. 28, flexible wall **616** also includes an end surface **626** that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **620**. It will be appreciated that flexible wall **616** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown), for example. Optionally, an annular reinforcement member **628**, such as a bead wire, for example, can be embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **620**.

[00137] First open end **618** can be secured on or along first end member **602** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, flexible sleeve **612** can include a mounting bead **630** formed along first open end **618** that can, optionally, include an annular reinforcement member **632**, such as a bead wire, for example, embedded therein with first end member **602** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **634**.

[00138] Piston **606** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **636** and a second or lower end **638**. First end **636** is adapted to receive and form a

substantially fluid-tight seal with second open end **620** of flexible sleeve **612**. Second end **638** of piston **606** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston **606** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **608** and threaded passage **610**, for example.

[00139] Piston **606** includes a piston body **640** and can also, optionally, include one or more additional components and/or elements, such as one or more threaded inserts, for example. The piston body has a first or outer side wall **642** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **636** and **638**. In use, flexible wall **616** of flexible sleeve **612** forms a rolling-lobe **644** that is displaced along first side wall **642** as the gas spring undergoes changes in overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **642** is merely exemplary in that the same includes a first portion **646** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **648** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **650** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[00140] Piston body **640** also includes a first or upper end wall **652** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to axis **AX** and/or a portion of first side wall **642**. Additionally, first end wall **652** is shown in FIGS. 26 and 28 as including an approximately planar portion **654** that transitions into first side wall **642** at a curved or shoulder portion **656**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **652** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, shoulder portion **656** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **654** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **652** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **642** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **652** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **642**, such as is shown in FIGS. 26 and 28, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range

of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[00141] As shown in FIGS. 26-29, piston body **640** further includes a second or inner side wall **658** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **652** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **658** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **660** and **662**, and can have a longitudinal length dimension and extend in circumferentially continuously and substantially uniformly around axis **AX** at approximately the same longitudinal length dimension. Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured, and/or can include one or more wall passages or openings extending through the second side wall. Additionally, second side wall **658** projects from first end wall **652** in a direction generally opposite second end **636** of piston body **640** and terminates at a second end wall **664**, which is shown as being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[00142] Piston body **640** also includes a plurality of retainment ridge segments **666** that extend circumferentially around axis **AX** and project radially-outwardly from second side wall **658**. In the exemplary embodiment shown in FIGS. 26-29, retainment ridge segments **666** include an outermost edge **668** and a shoulder surface **670** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and radially outwardly from outer surface **662** of second side wall **658** to outermost edge **668**. Additionally, shoulder surface **670** is disposed in facing relation to first end wall **652** and extends radially outwardly in generally transverse relation, as previously defined, to second side wall **658**.

[00143] Retainment ridge segments **666** include an outer surface **672** that extends generally circumferentially around axis **AX** and is oriented in a direction facing radially-outwardly and generally away from first end wall **652**. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 26-29, a relief feature or segment **674** is formed or otherwise provided between adjacent ones of retainment ridge segments **666**. As such, a plurality of relief features **674** are disposed in circumferentially spaced relation to one another around axis **AX** with the retainment ridge segments and relief

features being interleaved with one another (i.e., alternating from one to the other) around and/or along piston body **640**.

[00144] One benefit of utilizing a plurality of retainment ridge segments of the above-described construction is that a discontinuous outer surface is formed thereby that should result in reduced surface contact with the associated flexible wall that is retained by the retainment ridge segments. Such reduced contact is expected to result in reduced frictional forces generated by the displacement of second open end **620** of flexible sleeve **612** over the retainment ridge segments. The anticipated reduction of frictional forces is expected to permit the second open end to be urged or otherwise snapped-over a retainment ridge structure formed by the plurality of retainment ridge segments that has a greater cross-sectional dimension (e.g., diameter) than may be practical with conventional retainment ridge constructions. Such an increase in cross-sectional dimension can result in an enlarged shoulder surface and/or other features that would be expected to provide increased retention of the flexible wall on the piston, such as may be useful under tension load conditions, for example.

[00145] It will be appreciated that relief features **674** can be of any size, shape, quantity, arrangement and/or configuration that may be suitable for providing one or more of the benefits discussed above or others. As such, the relief features can include a relief surface **676** (FIGS. 28 and 29) that forms an inward extent of the relief feature. Additionally, relief surface **676** can extend into or otherwise intersect with any one or more of inner surface **662** and/or outer surface **664** of second side wall **658**, second end wall **664**, shoulder surface **670** and/or outer surface **672**. In the exemplary arrangement shown, the relief surface intersects second end wall **664**, shoulder surface **670** and outer surface **672**. As such, relief surfaces **676** are spaced outwardly of inner and outer surfaces **662** and **664**, which remain substantially continuous and uniform. It will be appreciated, however, that any other size, shape, quantity, arrangement and/or configuration of relief surfaces could alternately be used. For example, retainment ridge segments **666** as well as relief features **674** and relief surfaces **676** are shown as being, respectively, substantially identical to one another. However, different ones of the retainment ridge segments, relief features and/or relief surfaces could differ from occurrence to occurrence along or around the piston body **640**.

[00146] FIG. 30 illustrates yet another example of a gas spring assembly **700** in accordance with the subject matter of the present disclosure that is disposed between opposing structural components, such as upper and lower structural components **USC** and **LSC** of an associated vehicle (not shown), for example. Gas spring assembly **700** is shown as having a longitudinal axis **AX** and including a first end member, such as a top or bead plate **702**, for example, that is adapted for securement on or along one of the structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**). It will be appreciated that the first end member can be secured along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as, for example, by using one or more threaded mounting studs **704** that extend through corresponding mounting holes **HLS** in one of the associated structural components (e.g., upper structural component **USC**).

[00147] Gas spring **700** also includes an opposing second end member, such as a piston **706**, for example, that is longitudinally spaced from the first end member and that is adapted for securement on or along a different one of the structural components, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Again, it will be appreciated that the second end member can be operatively connected to or otherwise secured on or along the structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more threaded fasteners **708** to extend through mounting holes **HLS** in the associated structural component (e.g., lower structural component **LSC**) and threadably engage a corresponding mounting feature in the second end member, such as a threaded passage **710**, for example.

[00148] Gas spring **700** also includes a flexible sleeve or bellows **712** that is operatively connected between the first and second end members and at least partially defines a spring chamber **714** therebetween. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIG. 30, flexible sleeve **712** includes a flexible wall **716** that extends between opposing first and second open ends **718** and **720**. Flexible wall **716** includes an inside surface **722** that is in fluid communication with spring chamber **714** and an outside surface **724** that abuttingly engages piston **706**. As can be better seen in FIG. 32, flexible wall **116** also includes an end surface **726** that extends between and connects the inside and outside surfaces along second open end **720**. It will be appreciated that flexible wall **716** can be formed in any suitable manner, such as by using one or more fabric-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not shown) and/or one or more un-reinforced, elastomeric plies or layers (not

shown), for example. Optionally, an annular reinforcement member **728**, such as a bead wire, for example, can be embedded within the flexible wall along second open end **720**.

[00149] First open end **718** can be secured on or along first end member **702** in any manner suitable for forming a substantially fluid-tight seal therewith. For example, flexible sleeve **712** can include a mounting bead **730** formed along first open end **718** that can, optionally, include an annular reinforcement member **732**, such as a bead wire, for example, embedded therein with first end member **702** secured along or across the first open end of the flexible sleeve by capturing at least a portion of the mounting bead using a crimped edge connection **734**.

[00150] Piston **706** extends longitudinally between a first or upper end **736** and a second or lower end **738**. First end **736** is adapted to receive and form a substantially fluid-tight seal with second open end **720** of flexible sleeve **712**. Second end **738** of piston **706** is adapted to abuttingly engage an associated structural component, such as lower structural component **LSC**, for example. Additionally, as discussed above, piston **706** can be secured on or along the associated structural component in any suitable manner, such as by using threaded fastener **708** and threaded passage **710**, for example.

[00151] Piston **706** includes a piston body **740** and can also, optionally, include one or more additional components and/or elements, such as one or more threaded inserts, for example. The piston body has a first or outer side wall **742** that extends generally longitudinally between first and second ends **736** and **738**. In use, flexible wall **716** of flexible sleeve **712** forms a rolling-lobe **744** that is displaced along first side wall **742** as the gas spring undergoes changes in overall height, such as, for example, may be due to variations in load conditions applied thereto, as is well understood by those of skill in the art. It will be recognized that a wide variety of shapes, profiles and/or configurations can and have been used in forming the first or outer side wall of the piston assembly. As such, it will be appreciated that the profile of first side wall **742** is merely exemplary in that the same includes a first portion **746** having an approximately frustoconical or tapered shape, a second wall portion **748** having a curvilinear shape, and a third portion **750** having an approximately cylindrical shape.

[00152] Piston body **740** also includes a first or upper end wall **752** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse to

axis **AX** and/or a portion of first side wall **742**. Additionally, first end wall **752** is shown in FIGS. 30 and 32 as including an approximately planar portion **754** that transitions into first side wall **742** at a curved or shoulder portion **756**. It will be understood, however, that first end wall **752** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, shoulder portion **756** could have a larger or smaller radius and/or portion **754** could be at least partially curved or otherwise contoured. Furthermore, the description of first end wall **752** as extending generally transverse to first side wall **742** is to be broadly interpreted. As one example, first end wall **752** could be approximately perpendicular to first side wall **742**, such as is shown in FIGS. 30 and 32, for example. Recognizing, however, that the first side wall and first end wall can take a wide variety of shapes, contours, forms and/or configurations, the term "transverse" should be interpreted as including a wide range of relative angular orientations, such as a range of plus (+) or minus (-) 45 degrees from horizontal or the referenced feature or component, for example.

[00153] As shown in FIGS. 30-33, piston body **740** further includes a second or inner side wall **758** that extends circumferentially around axis **AX** and in an orientation that is generally transverse, as previously defined, to first end wall **752** and/or in an orientation that is approximately aligned with axis **AX**. Second side wall **758** can take any suitable shape, form and/or configuration. For example, the second side wall can include approximately cylindrical inner and outer surfaces **760** and **762**. Alternately, the second side wall can have one or more surfaces that are frustoconical, curvilinear and/or otherwise contoured. Additionally, second side wall **758** projects from first end wall **752** in a direction generally opposite second end **736** of piston body **740** and terminates at a second end wall **764**, which is shown as being approximately planar. However, it will be recognized that any alternate shape, form and/or configuration could be used.

[00154] Piston body **740** also includes a plurality of retainment ridge segments **766** that are spaced circumferentially-apart from one another around axis **AX** and project radially-outwardly from second side wall **758**. Retainment ridge segments **766** include an outermost edge **768**, a shoulder surface **770** and an outer surface **772**. Shoulder surfaces **770** extend circumferentially around axis **AX** and radially outwardly from outer surface **762** of second side wall **758** to outermost edge **768**. Additionally, shoulder surfaces **770** are disposed in facing relation to first end wall

752 and extend radially outwardly in generally transverse relation, as previously defined, to second side wall **758**.

[00155] Retainment ridge segments **766** include an outer surface **772** that extends generally circumferentially around axis **AX** and is oriented in a direction facing radially-outwardly and generally away from first end wall **752**. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 30-33, a relief feature or channel **774** is formed or otherwise provided between adjacent ones of retainment ridge segments **766**. As such, a plurality of channels **774** are disposed in circumferentially spaced relation to one another around axis **AX** with the retainment ridge segments and channels being interleaved with one another (i.e., alternating from one to the other) around and/or along piston body **740**.

[00156] One benefit of utilizing a plurality of retainment ridge segments of the above-described construction is that each retainment ridge segment includes a free end **776** that is capable of radially-inward deflection independent of the retainment ridge segments adjacent thereto. Such radially-inward deflection will act to effectively reduce the outside dimension formed by outermost edges **768** during installation of an associated flexible wall on the piston body. As such, retainment ridge segments having increased radial dimensions and/or radially-outward extents (e.g., enlarged outermost edges **768** and/or shoulder surfaces **770**) can be used. It is expected that such an increase the engagement of the features of the retainment ridge segments with flexible wall **716** will result in increased retention of flexible sleeve **712** on piston **706**.

[00157] It will be appreciated that channels **774** can be of any size, shape, quantity, arrangement and/or configuration that may be suitable for providing one or more of the benefits discussed above, or others. As such, channels **774** can extend into or otherwise intersect with any one or more of inner surface **762** and/or outer surface **764** of second side wall **758**, second end wall **764**, shoulder surface **770** and/or outer surface **772**. In the exemplary arrangement shown, channels **774** extend through or otherwise intersect at least a portion of each of inner surface **762** and/or outer surface **764** of second side wall **758**, second end wall **764**, shoulder surface **770** and outer surface **772**. Additionally, it will be appreciated that channels **774** can be of any suitable size, shape, quantity, arrangement and/or configuration. In the exemplary arrangement shown in FIGS. 30-33, channels **774** are shown as being approximately U-shaped and include opposing side walls **778** and a bottom

wall **780**. However, it will be appreciated that any other suitable arrangement and/or configuration could alternately be used. For example, retainment ridge segments **766** and channels **774** are respectively shown as being substantially identical from occurrence to occurrence. In an alternate arrangement, however, retainment ridge segments **766** and/or channels **774** could differ, such as in size and/or shape, for example, from occurrence to occurrence along or around the piston body.

[00158] Piston bodies **640** and **740** can be formed from any suitable material or combination of materials for providing the desired strength and retention properties of piston **606** and **706**, respectively. Examples of materials that may be suitable for use in forming the piston body can include fiber-reinforced thermoplastics, such as glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polypropylene and glass (or other) fiber-reinforced polyamide, for example, and high-strength (unfilled) thermoplastics, such as polyester, polyethylene and other polyether-based materials or any combination thereof, for example.

[00159] As used herein with reference to certain features, elements, components and/or structures, numerical ordinals (e.g., first, second, third, fourth, etc.) may be used to denote different singles of a plurality or otherwise identify certain features, elements, components and/or structures, and do not imply any order or sequence unless specifically defined by the claim language. Additionally, the terms “transverse,” and the like, are to be broadly interpreted. As such, the terms “transverse,” and the like, can include a wide range of relative angular orientations that include, but are not limited to, an approximately perpendicular angular orientation.

[00160] Furthermore, the phrase “flowed-material joint” and the like are to be interpreted to include any joint or connection in which a liquid or otherwise flowable material (e.g., a melted metal or combination of melted metals) is deposited or otherwise presented between adjacent component parts and operative to form a fixed and substantially fluid-tight connection therebetween. Examples of processes that can be used to form such a flowed-material joint include, without limitation, welding processes, brazing processes and soldering processes. In such cases, one or more metal materials and/or alloys can be used to form such a flowed-material joint, in addition to any material from the component parts themselves. Another example of a process that can be used to form a flowed-material joint includes applying, depositing or otherwise presenting an adhesive between adjacent

component parts that is operative to form a fixed and substantially fluid-tight connection therebetween. In such case, it will be appreciated that any suitable adhesive material or combination of materials can be used, such as one-part and/or two-part epoxies, for example.

[00161] Further still, the term "gas" is used herein to broadly refer to any gaseous or vaporous fluid. Most commonly, air is used as the working medium of gas spring devices, such as those described herein, as well as suspension systems and other components thereof. However, it will be understood that any suitable gaseous fluid could alternately be used.

[00162] It will be recognized that numerous different features and/or components are presented in the embodiments shown and described herein, and that no one embodiment may be specifically shown and described as including all such features and components. For example, retainment element **474** of FIGS. 17-20 could take the form of a plurality of retainment elements that are separate from one another and partially embedded within flexible wall **454**, such as has been described above in connection with retainment elements **374'** of flexible sleeve **312'** in FIG. 15. As such, it is to be understood that the subject matter of the present disclosure is intended to encompass any and all combinations of the different features and components that are shown and described herein, and, without limitation, that any suitable arrangement of features and components, in any combination, can be used. Thus it is to be distinctly understood claims directed to any such combination of features and/or components, whether or not specifically embodied herein, are intended to find support in the present disclosure.

[00163] Thus, while the subject matter of the present disclosure has been described with reference to the foregoing embodiments and considerable emphasis has been placed herein on the structures and structural interrelationships between the component parts of the embodiments disclosed, it will be appreciated that other embodiments can be made and that many changes can be made in the embodiments illustrated and described without departing from the principles hereof. Obviously, modifications and alterations will occur to others upon reading and understanding the preceding detailed description. Accordingly, it is to be distinctly understood that the foregoing descriptive matter is to be interpreted merely as illustrative of the subject matter of the present disclosure and not as a limitation. As such, it is intended that the subject matter of the present disclosure be construed as

including all such modifications and alterations insofar as they come within the scope of the appended claims and any equivalents thereof.

CLAIMS:

1. A flexible sleeve dimensioned for securement to an associated end member for an associated gas spring assembly, said flexible sleeve comprising:

a flexible wall having a longitudinal axis and extending circumferentially about said axis, said flexible wall including an inside surface adapted to at least partially define a spring chamber, an outside surface opposite the inside surface, an end surface disposed adjacent an open end;

an annular reinforcement member substantially fully embedded within said flexible wall adjacent said open end; and,

at least one retainment element including an element surface, said at least one retainment element disposed along at least one of said inside surface, said outside surface and said end surface of said flexible wall such that said element surface is at least partially exposed along said flexible wall.

2. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said at least one retainment element includes a first element surface and a second element surface opposite said first element surface, said at least one retainment element being at least partially embedded within said flexible wall such that said first element surface is in substantially full abutting engagement with said flexible wall and said second element surface is outwardly exposed along one of said inside surface and said outside surface of said flexible wall.

3. A flexible sleeve according to claim 2, wherein said at least one retainment element includes an inner element surface and an outer element surface disposed radially-outwardly of said inner element surface, said at least one retainment element being at least partially embedded within said flexible wall such that at least a portion of at least one of said inner element surface and said outer element surface is in abutting engagement with said flexible wall and a remaining portion of said at least one of said inner element surface and said outer element surface is outwardly exposed along at least one of said end surface and said one of said inside surface and said outside surface of said flexible wall.

4. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said at least one retainment element includes a first element surface, a second element surface opposite said first element surface, an inner element surface and an outer element surface disposed radially-outwardly of said inner element surface, said at least one retainment element being at least partially embedded within said flexible wall such that at least said first element surface and said outer element surface are in substantially full abutting engagement with said flexible wall and at least said second surface is outwardly exposed along said one of said inside surface and said outside surface of said flexible wall.

5. A flexible sleeve according to claim 4, wherein said inner element surface of said at least one retainment element is outwardly exposed along said end surface of said flexible wall.

6. A flexible sleeve according to claim 4, wherein said inner element surface of said at least one retainment element is in substantially full abutting engagement with said flexible wall.

7. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said at least one retainment element includes a first element surface, a second element surface opposite said first element surface and a passage extending through said at least one retainment element between said first element surface and said second element surface, and at least a portion of said flexible wall extends through said passage and forms an attachment element at least partially securing said at least one retainment element to said flexible wall.

8. A flexible sleeve according to claim 7, wherein said passage is one of a plurality of passages spaced apart along said at least one retainment element, and said attachment element is one of a plurality of attachment elements each extending through one of said plurality of passages.

9. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said at least one retainment element is an endless annular ring.

10. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said at least one retainment element is a split ring having an approximately annular shape and first and second end surfaces disposed in facing relation to one another.

11. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said at least one retainment element is one of a plurality of retainment elements disposed in circumferentially-spaced relation to one another about said axis along said flexible wall.

12. A flexible sleeve according to claim 1, wherein said annular reinforcement member includes a circumferential axis extending about said longitudinal axis, and said retainment element can function to provide resistance to shear forces acting through said flexible wall in a longitudinal direction and provide resistance to rotation of said flexible wall about said circumferential axis of said annular reinforcement member.

13. A gas spring assembly comprising:

a first end member;

a second end member disposed in longitudinally-spaced relation to said first end member, said second end member including an end wall, a side wall projecting longitudinally from said end wall in a direction toward said first end member, and a retainment ridge projecting radially outwardly from said side wall, said retainment ridge including a shoulder surface disposed in facing relation to said end wall; and,

a flexible sleeve according to any one of claims 1-12 operatively connected between said first and second end members, said open end of said flexible sleeve being received along said side wall of said second end member such that said inside surface of said flexible wall is disposed toward said shoulder surface of said retainment ridge and said outside surface of said flexible wall is disposed in abutting engagement with said end wall.

14. A gas spring assembly according to claim 13, wherein said retainment ridge includes an outer edge having a cross-sectional dimension, and said at least one retainment element includes an inner surface having an inner cross-sectional dimension and an outer surface disposed radially-outwardly of said inner surface and having an outer cross-sectional dimension, said inner cross-sectional dimension of said inner surface being less than said cross-sectional dimension of said outer edge of said retainment ridge and said outer cross-sectional dimension of said outer surface being greater than said cross-sectional dimension of said outer edge of said retainment ridge.

15. A method of assembling a gas spring assembly, said method comprising:

providing a flexible sleeve including a flexible wall and a reinforcement member, said flexible wall having an open end with said reinforcement member substantially fully embedded within the flexible wall adjacent said open end;

providing at least one retainment element including an element surface and positioning said at least one retainment element along said open end of said flexible wall such that said element surface is at least partially exposed therealong;

providing an end member having a longitudinal axis and including an end wall, a side wall projecting longitudinally from said end wall and a retainment ridge projecting radially outwardly from said side wall, said retainment ridge including a shoulder surface disposed in facing relation to said end wall and an outer peripheral edge;

positioning said open end of said flexible wall and said at least one retainment element adjacent said retainment ridge of said end member; and,

urging said open end of said flexible wall and said at least one retainment element along said retainment ridge such that at least said open end is forced over said outer peripheral edge of said retainment ridge and such that at least said flexible wall abuttingly engages at least one of said end wall and said side wall of said end member.

16. A method according to claim 15, wherein said flexible wall includes an inside surface and an outside surface, said at least one retainment element includes a first element surface and a second element surface opposite said first element surface, and said method further comprises:

orienting said at least one retainment element along said open end of said flexible wall such that said first element surface is disposed toward said inside surface of said flexible wall and adhesively attaching said at least one retainment element to said flexible wall along said inside surface thereof.

17. A method according to claim 15, wherein providing a flexible sleeve and providing at least one retainment element together include providing a flexible sleeve in accordance with any one of claim 1-12.

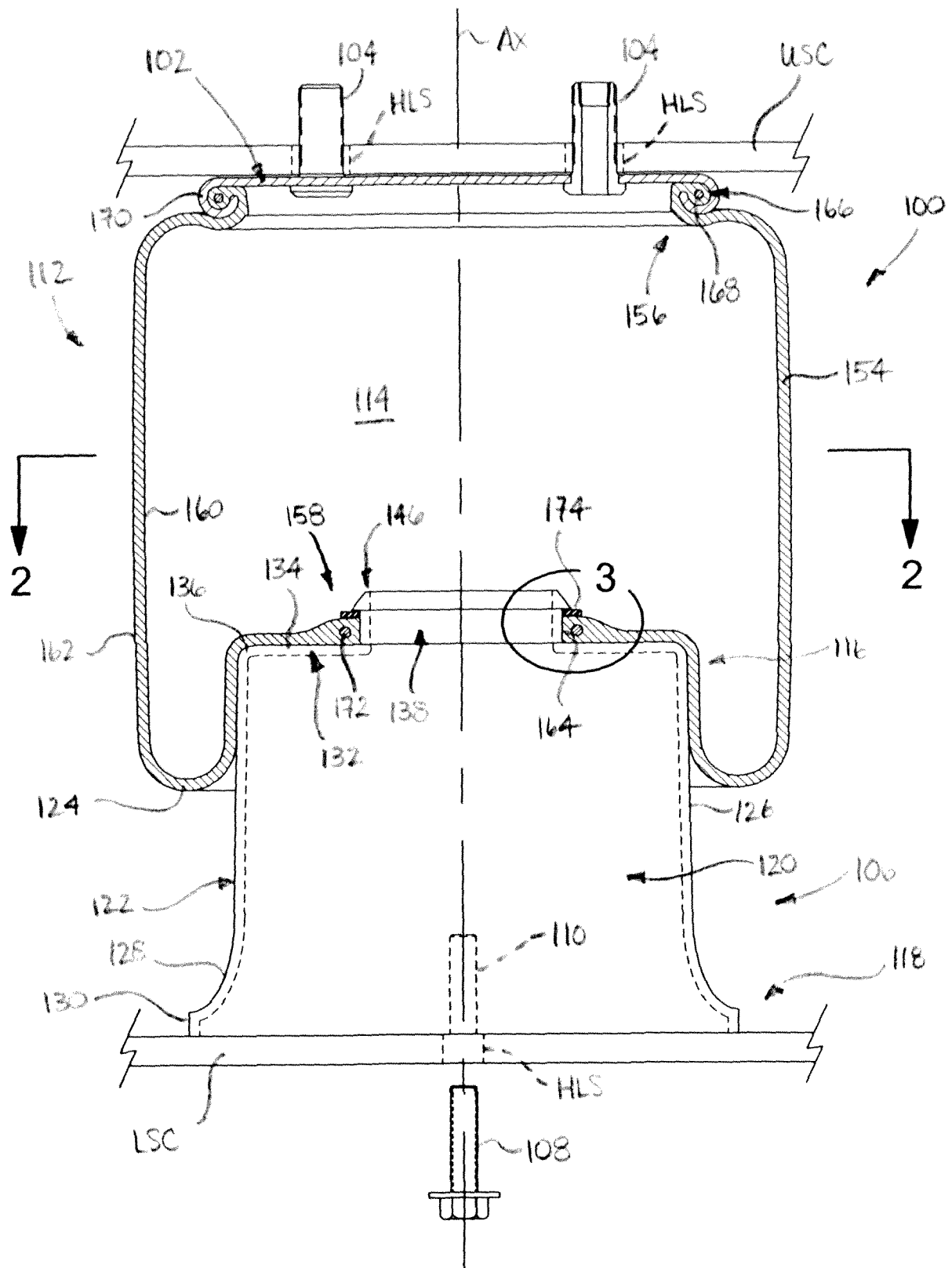


FIG. 1

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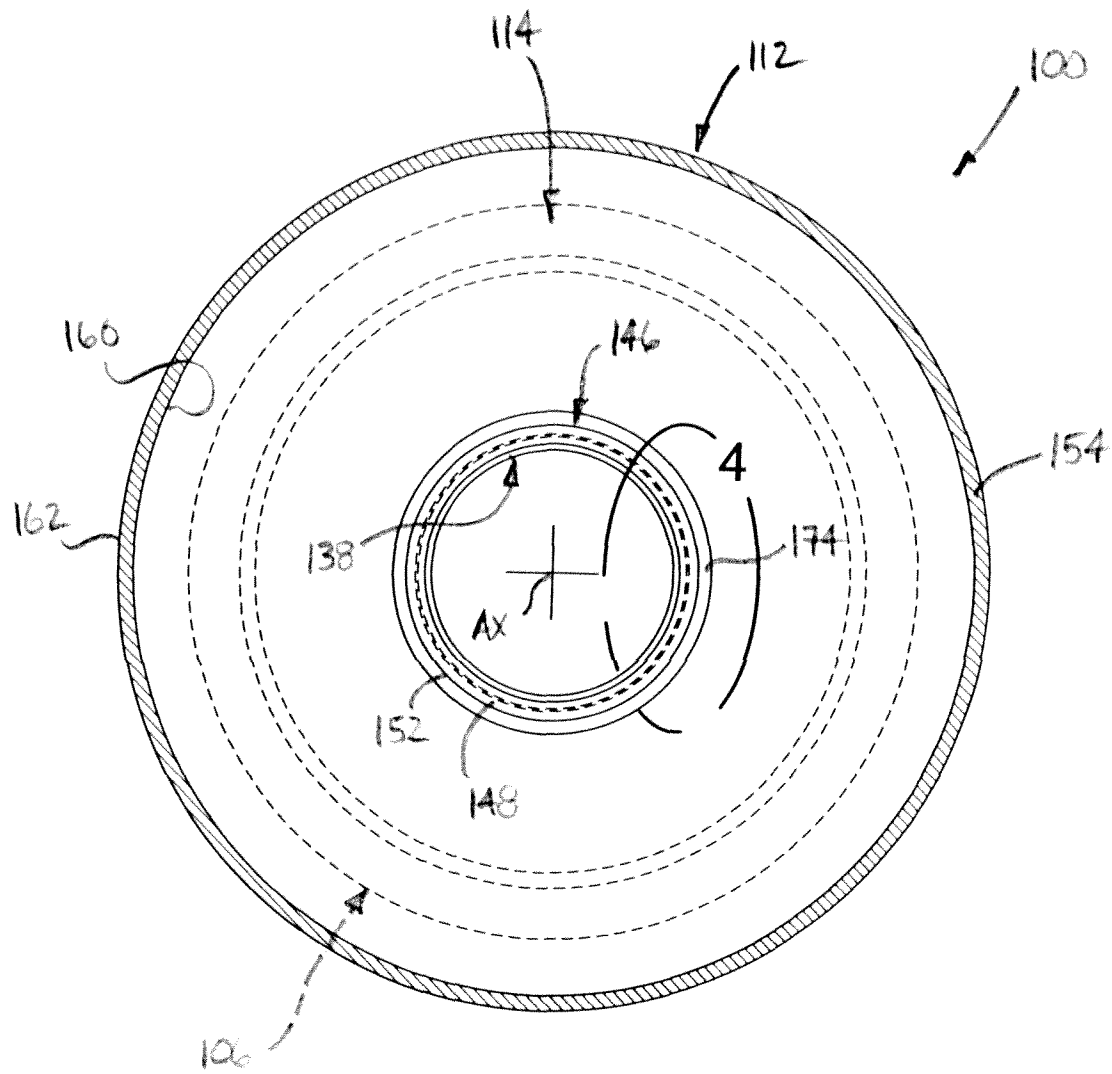


FIG. 2

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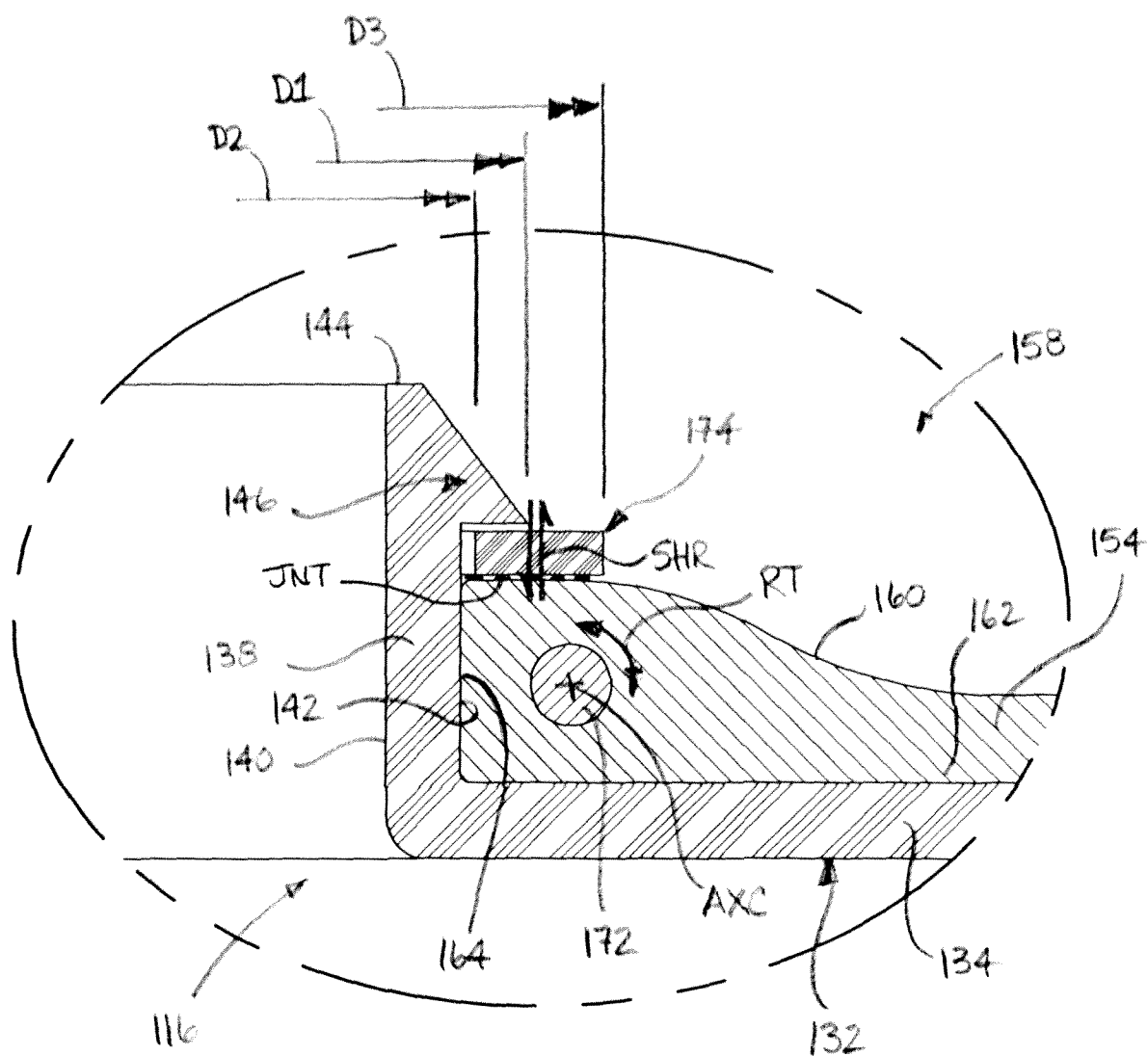


FIG. 3

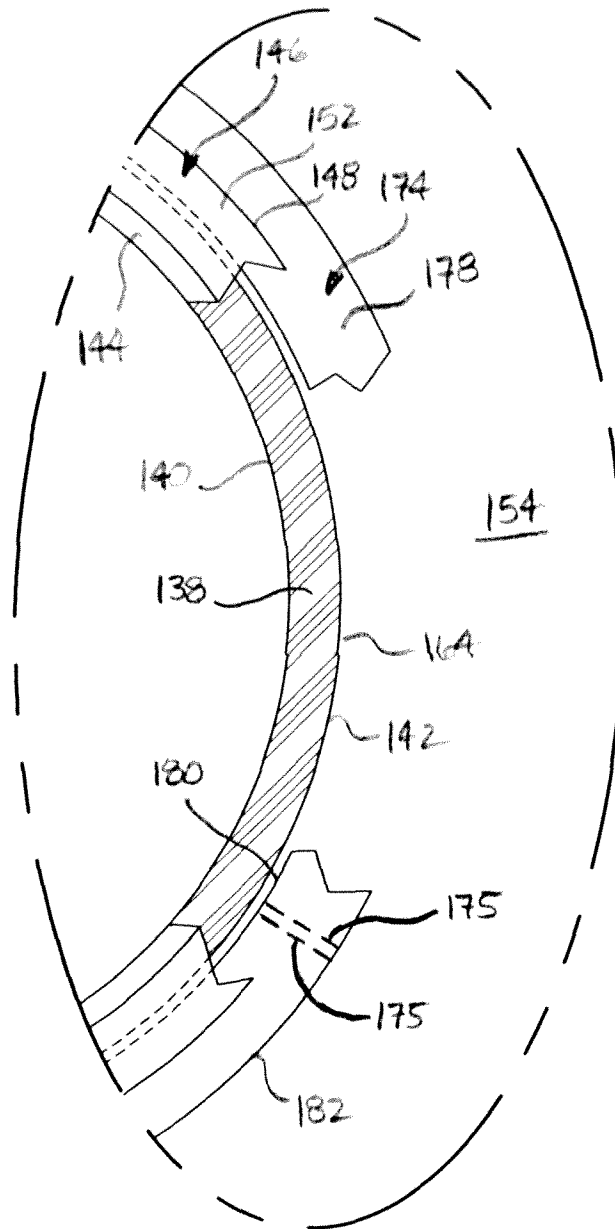


FIG. 4

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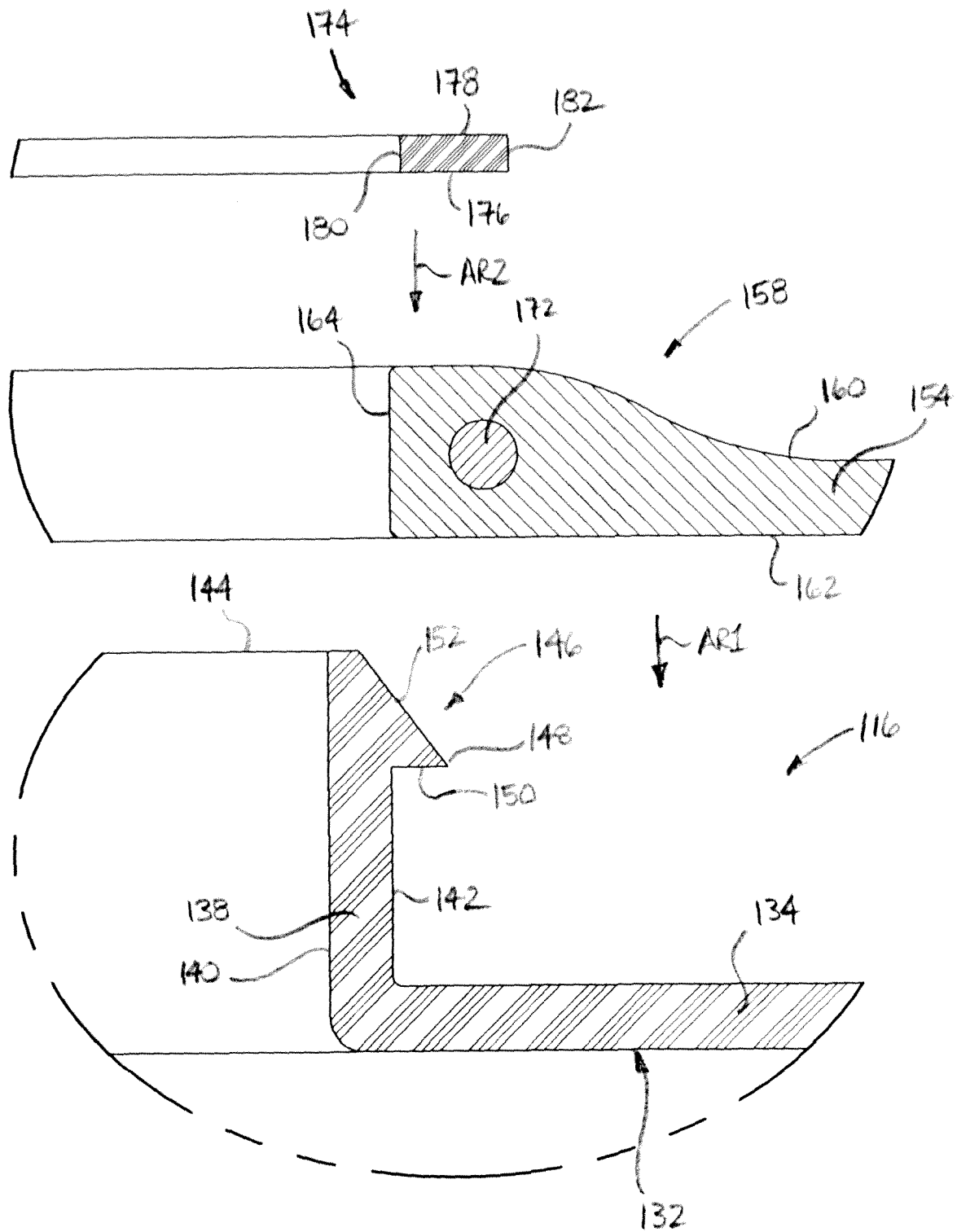


FIG. 5

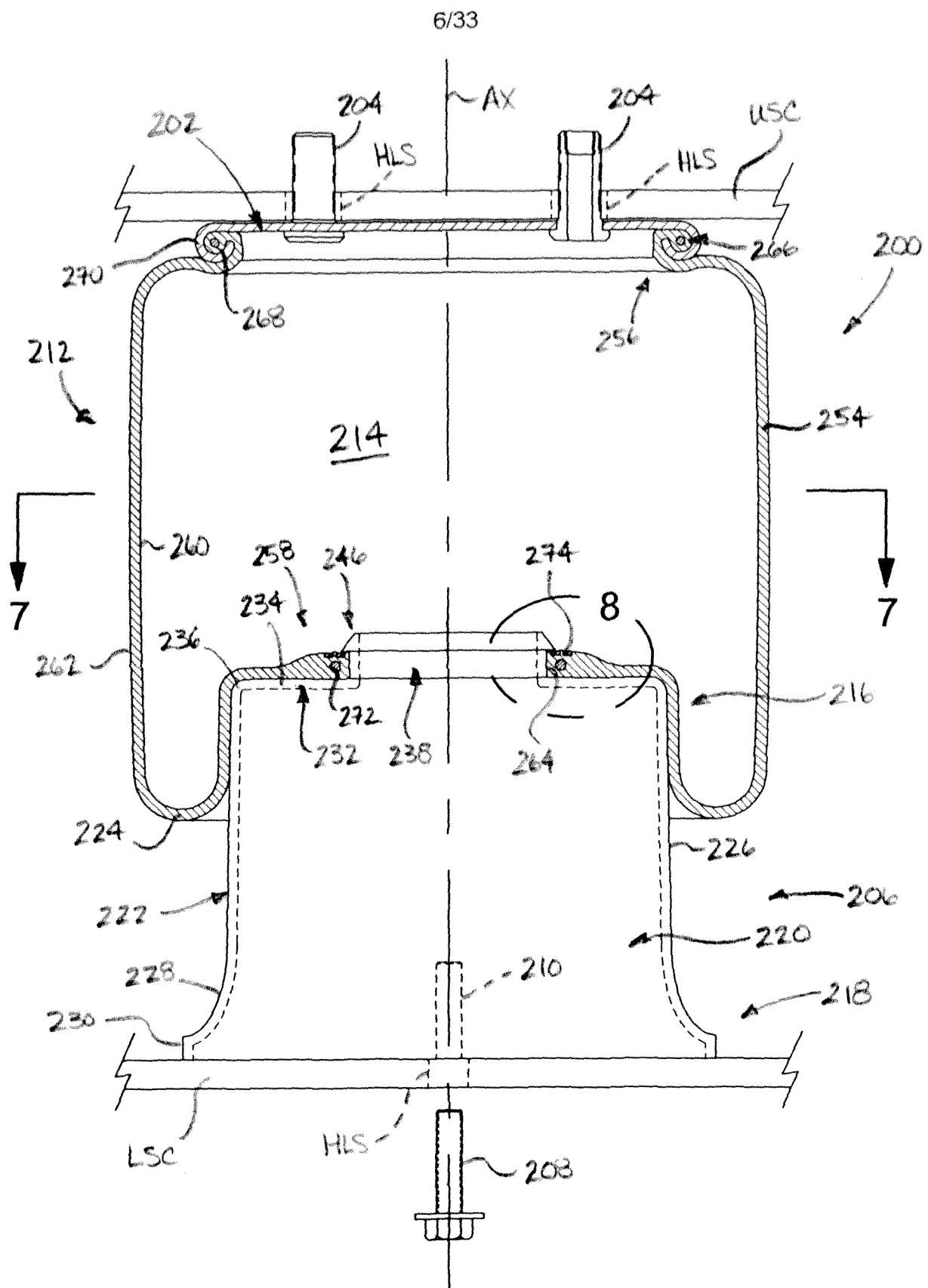


FIG. 6

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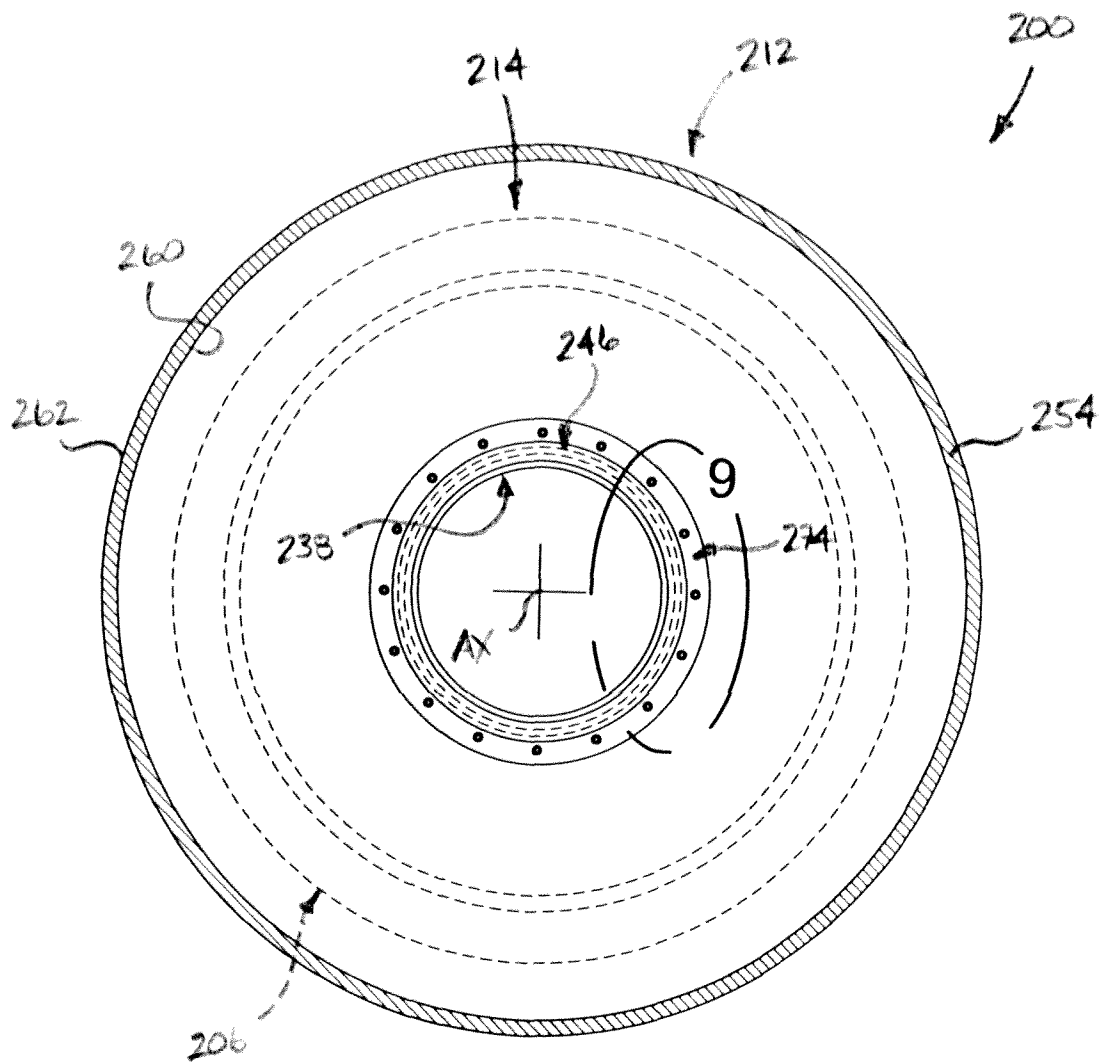


FIG. 7

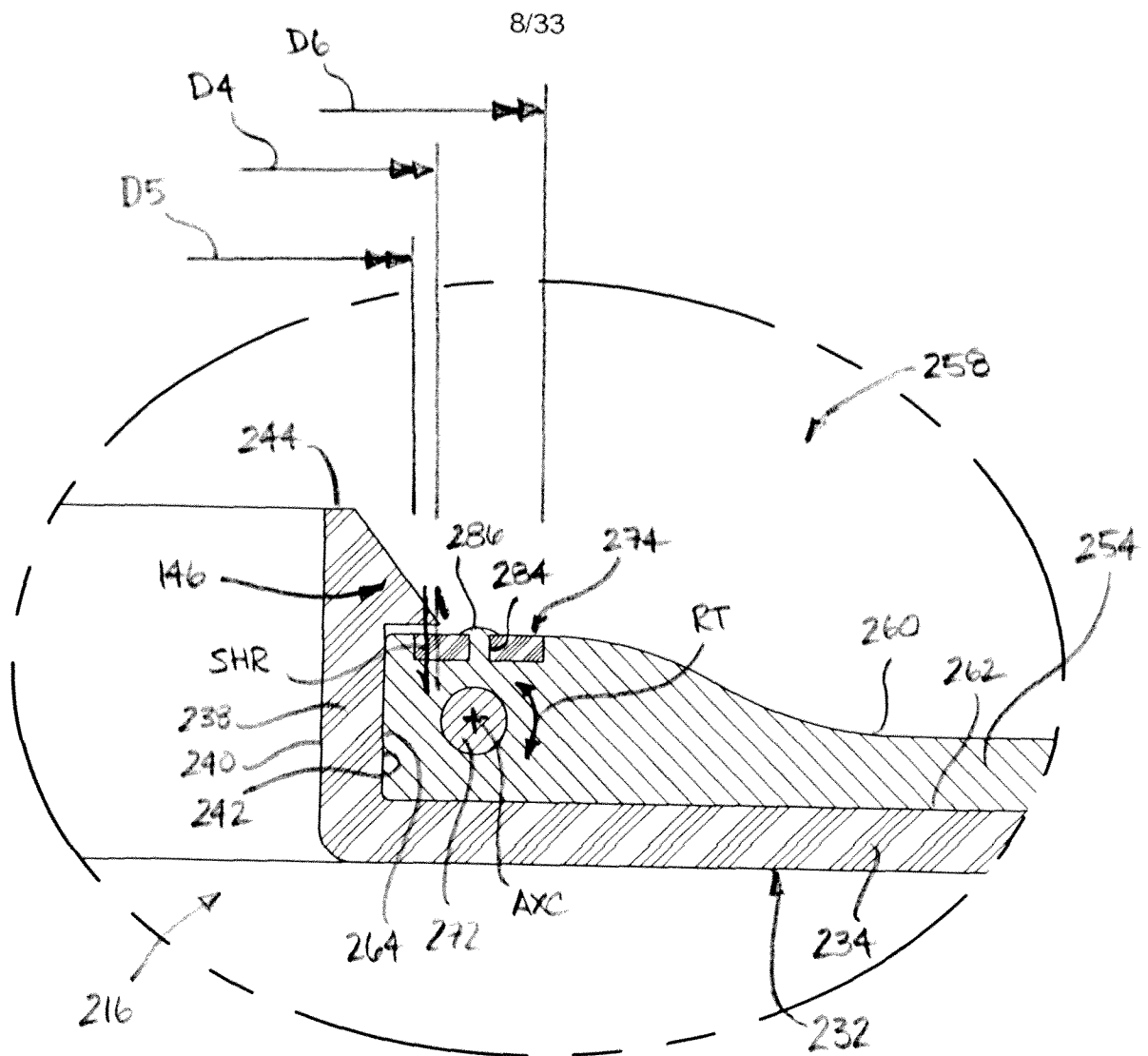


FIG. 8

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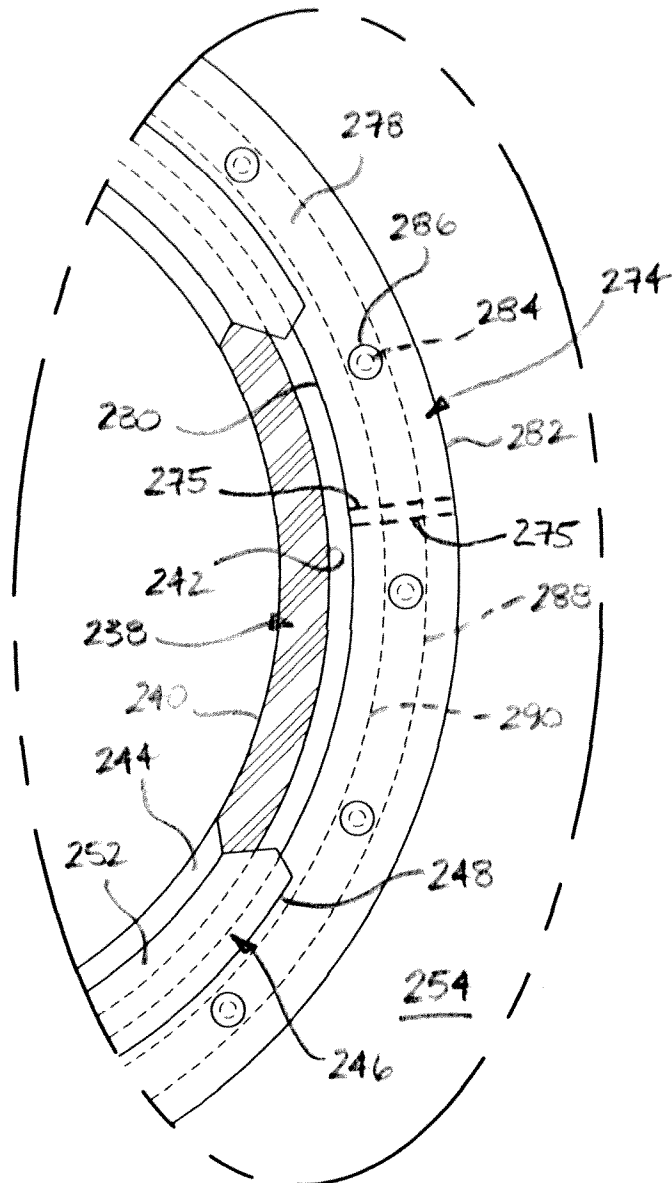


FIG. 9

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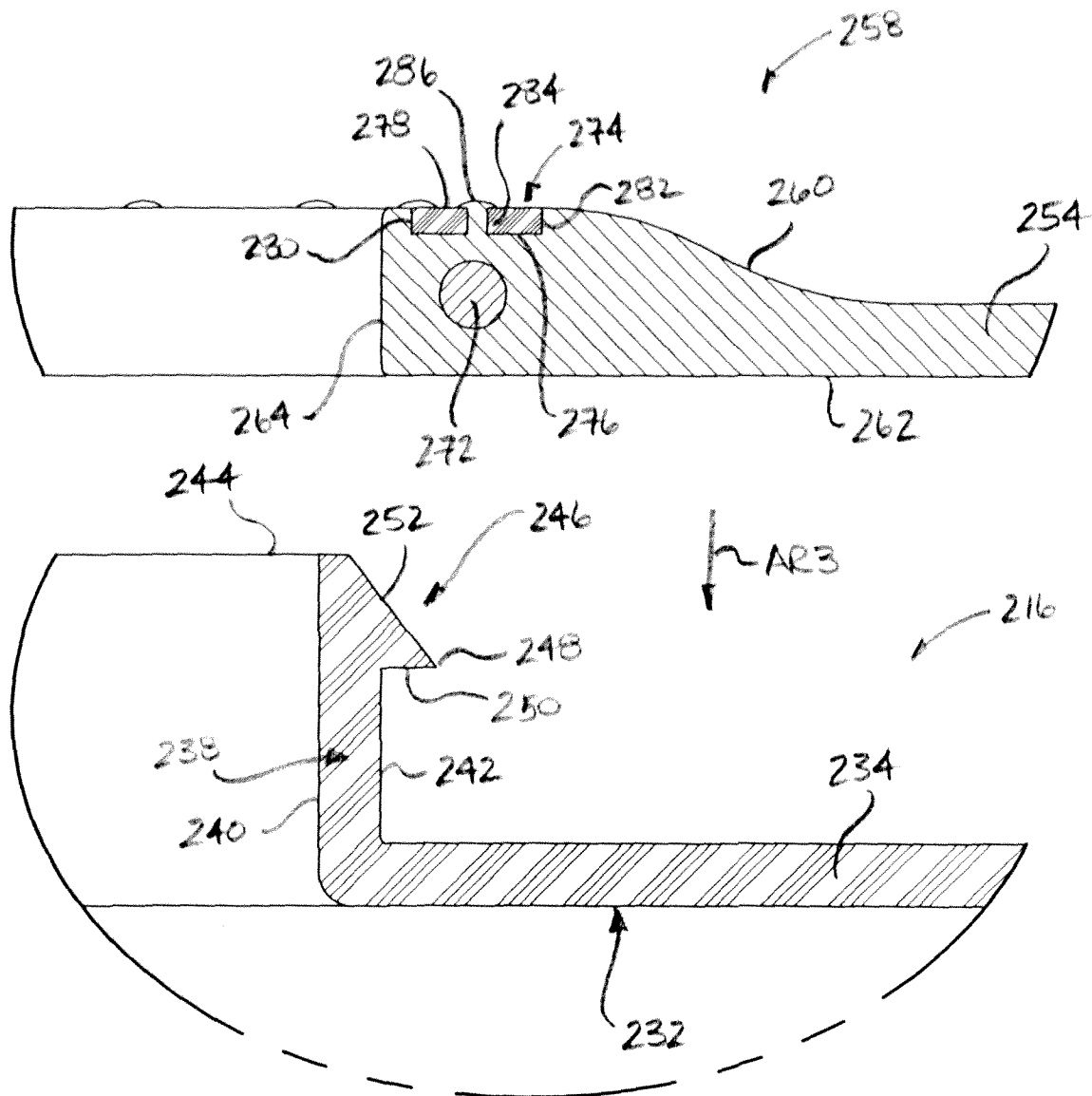


FIG. 10

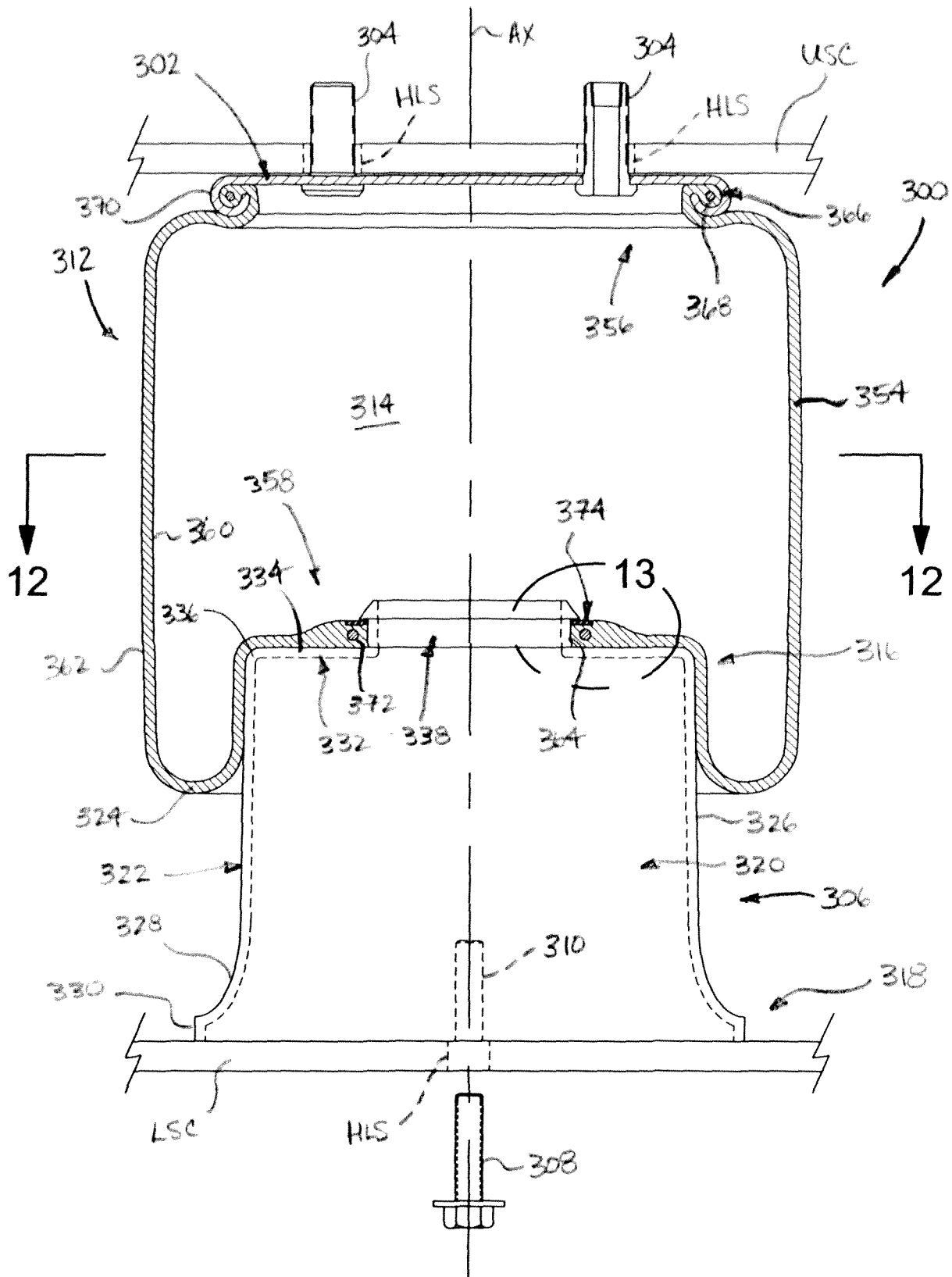


FIG. 11

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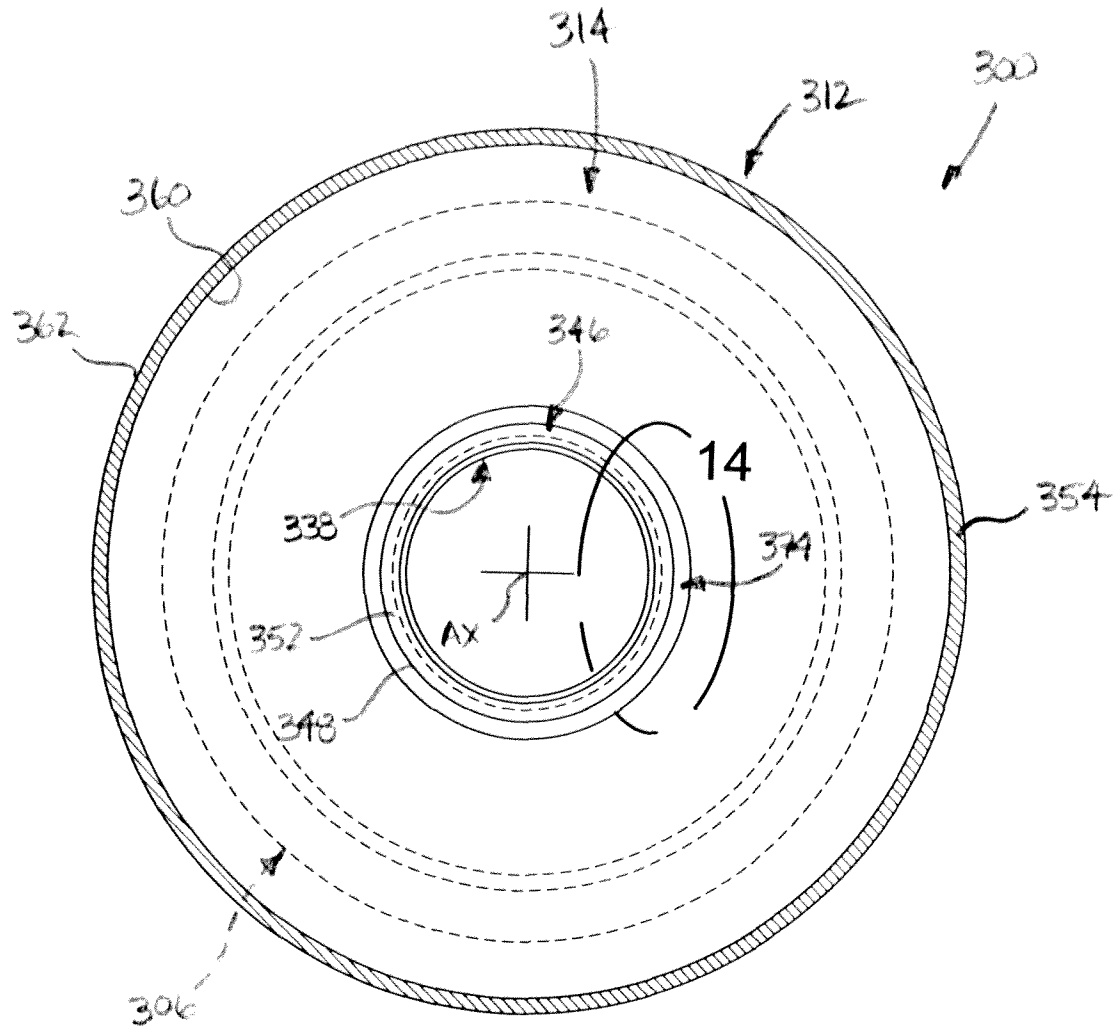


FIG. 12

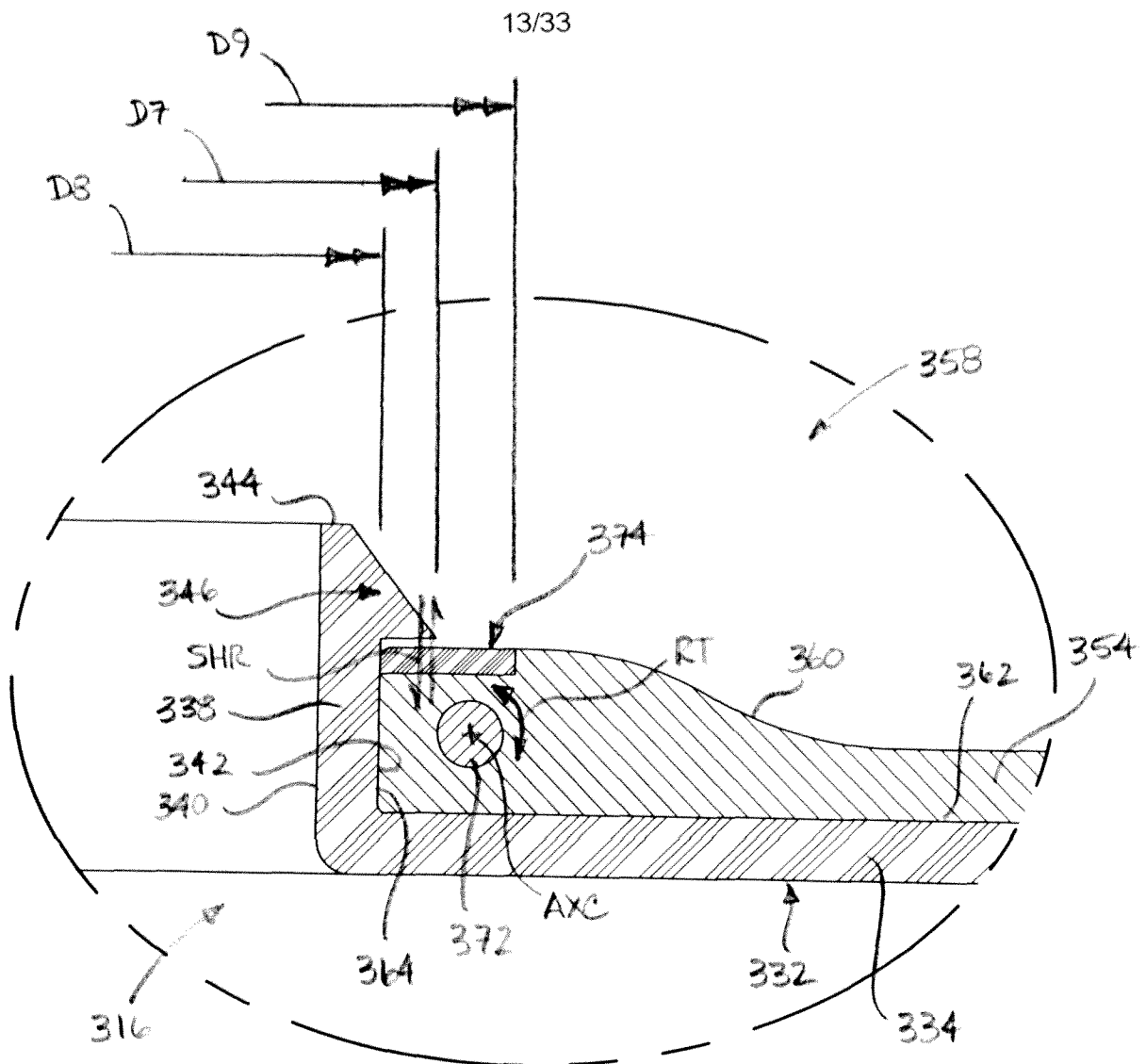


FIG. 13

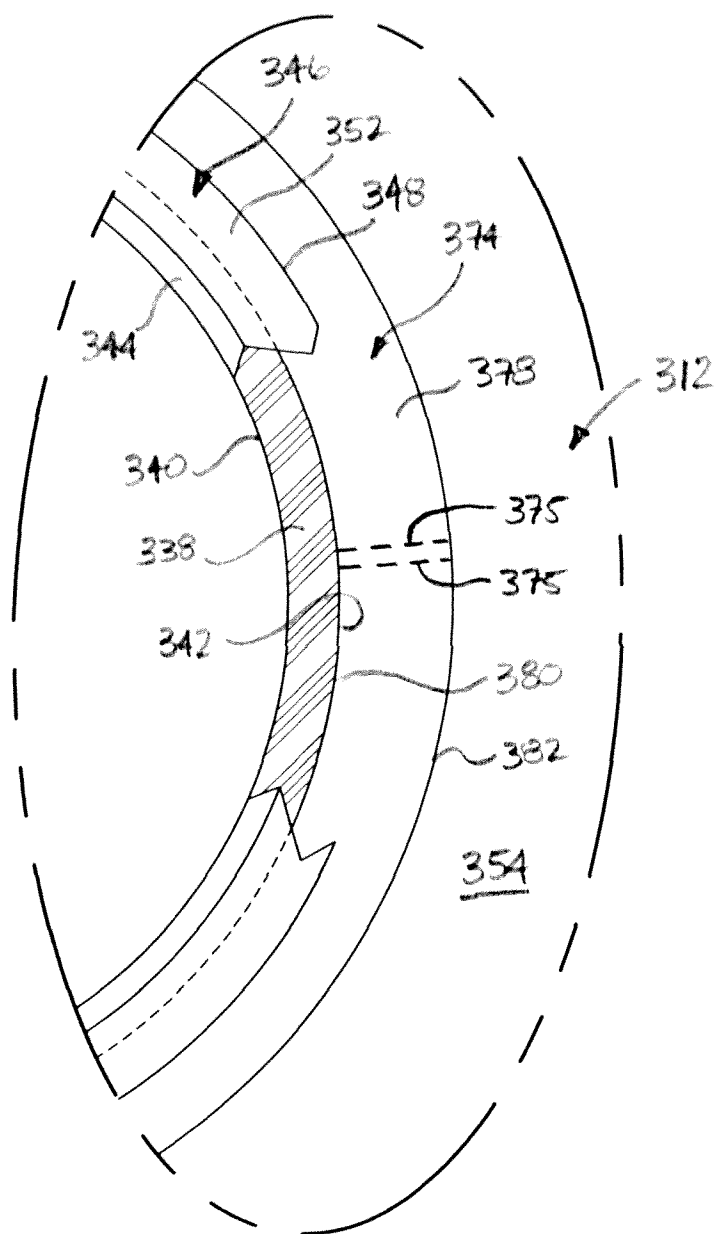


FIG. 14

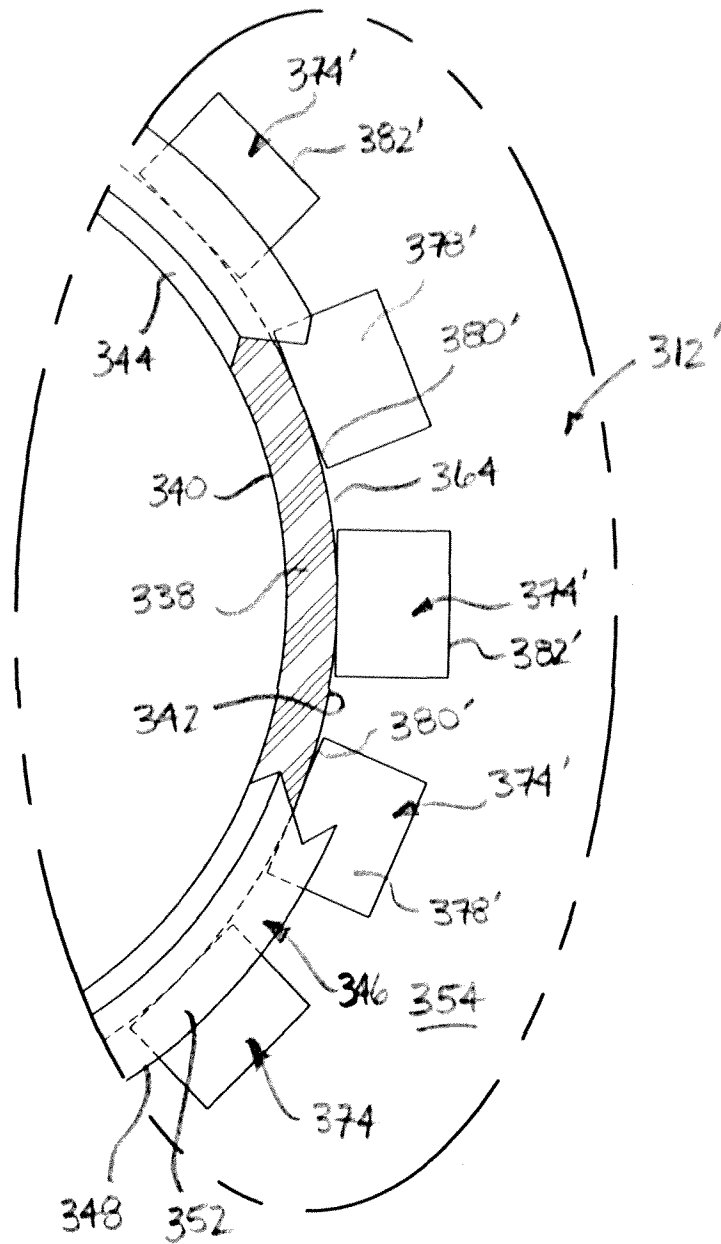


FIG. 15

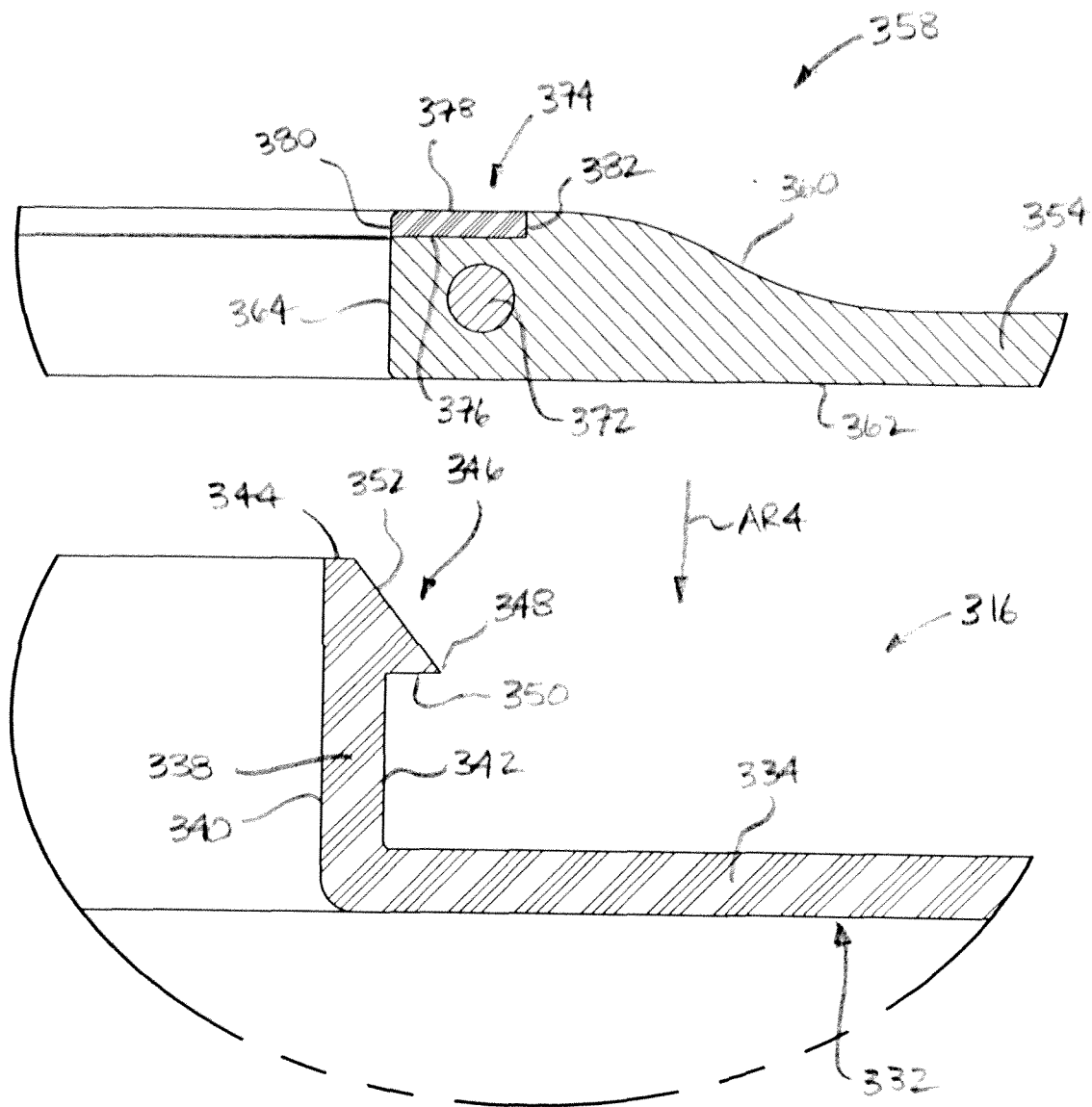


FIG. 16

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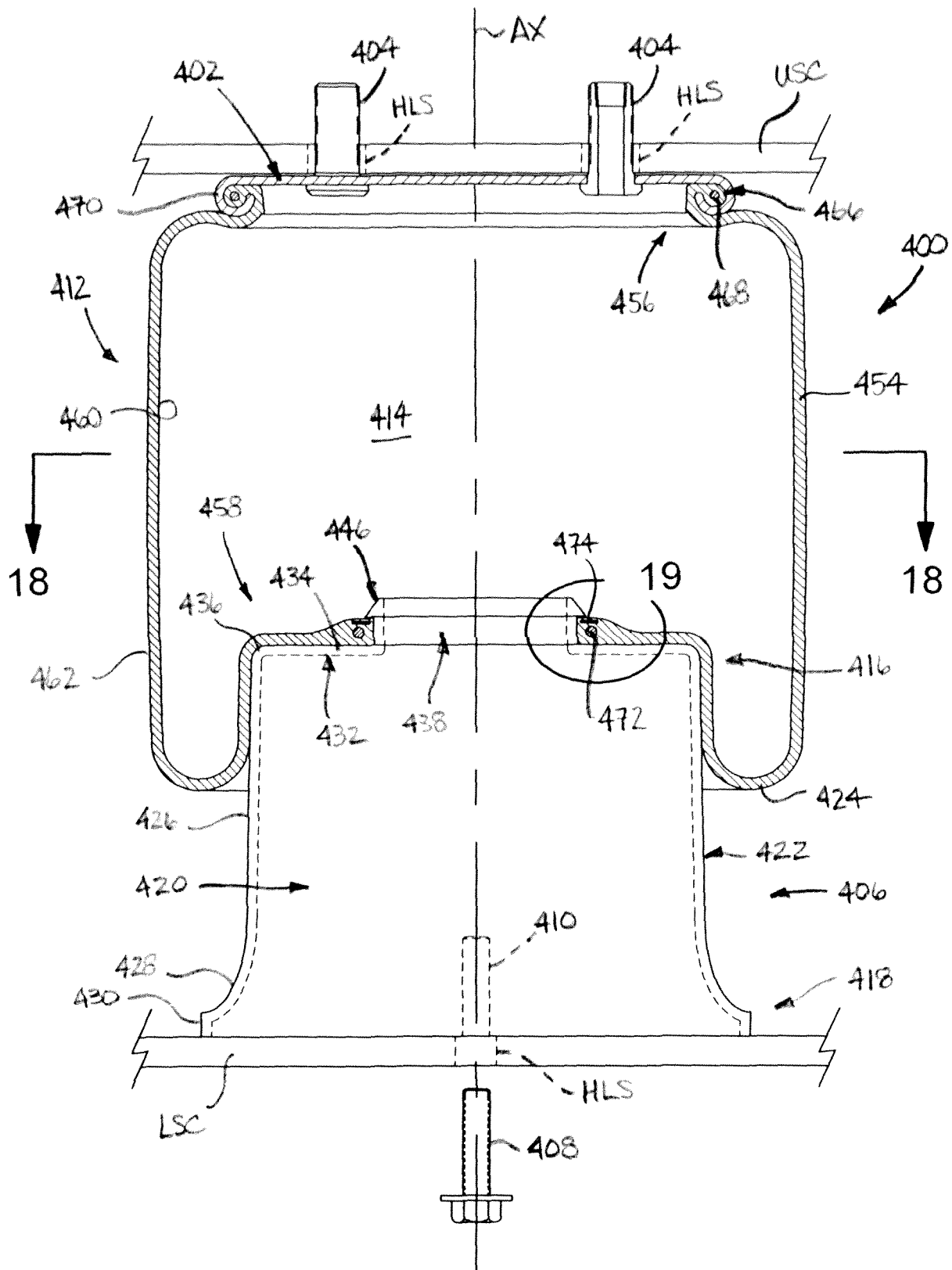


FIG. 17

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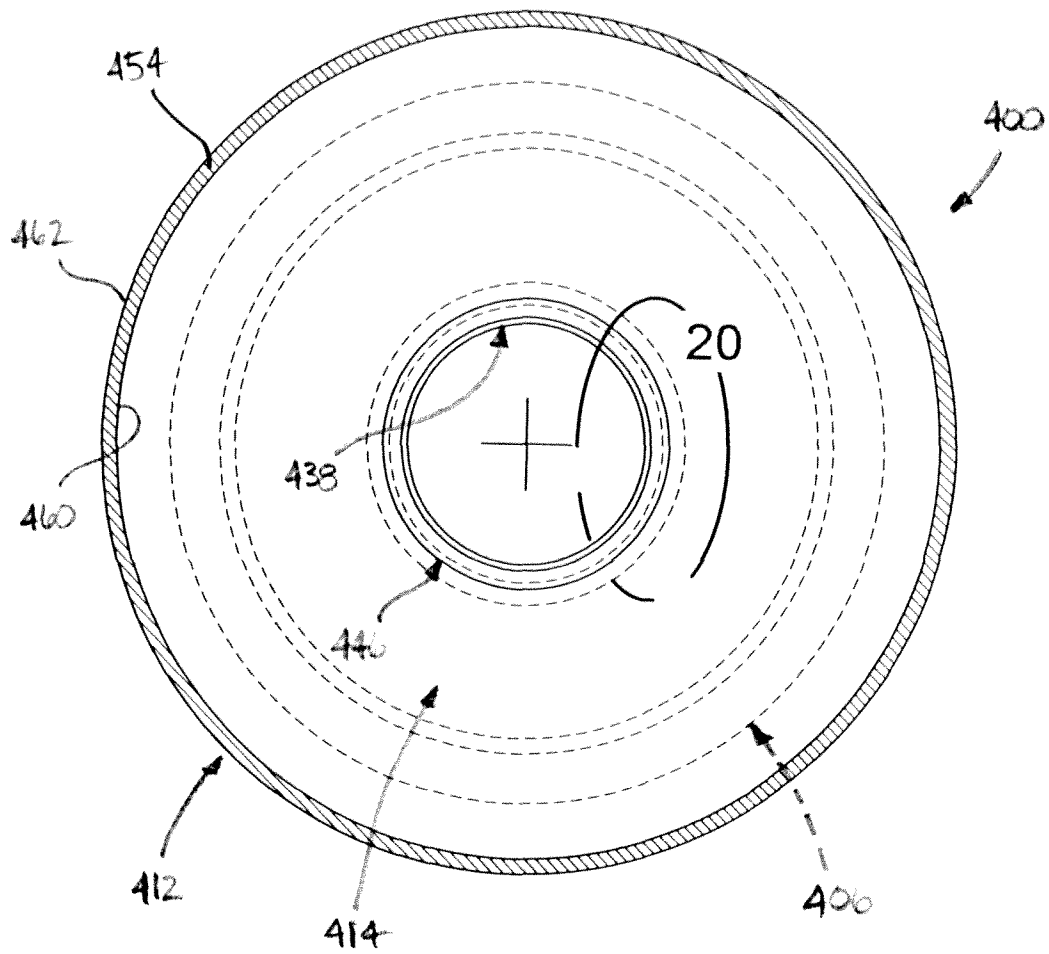


FIG. 18

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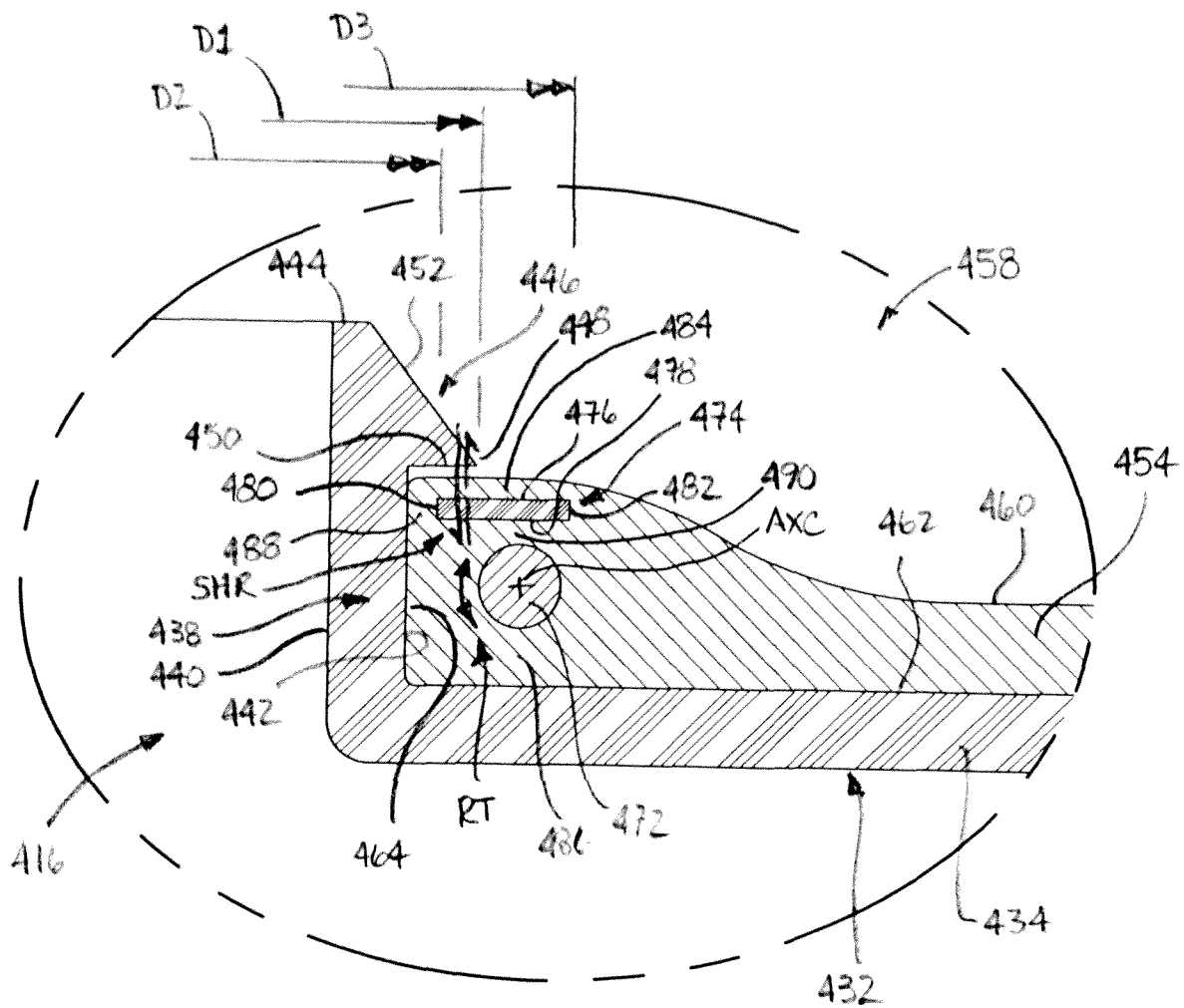


FIG. 19

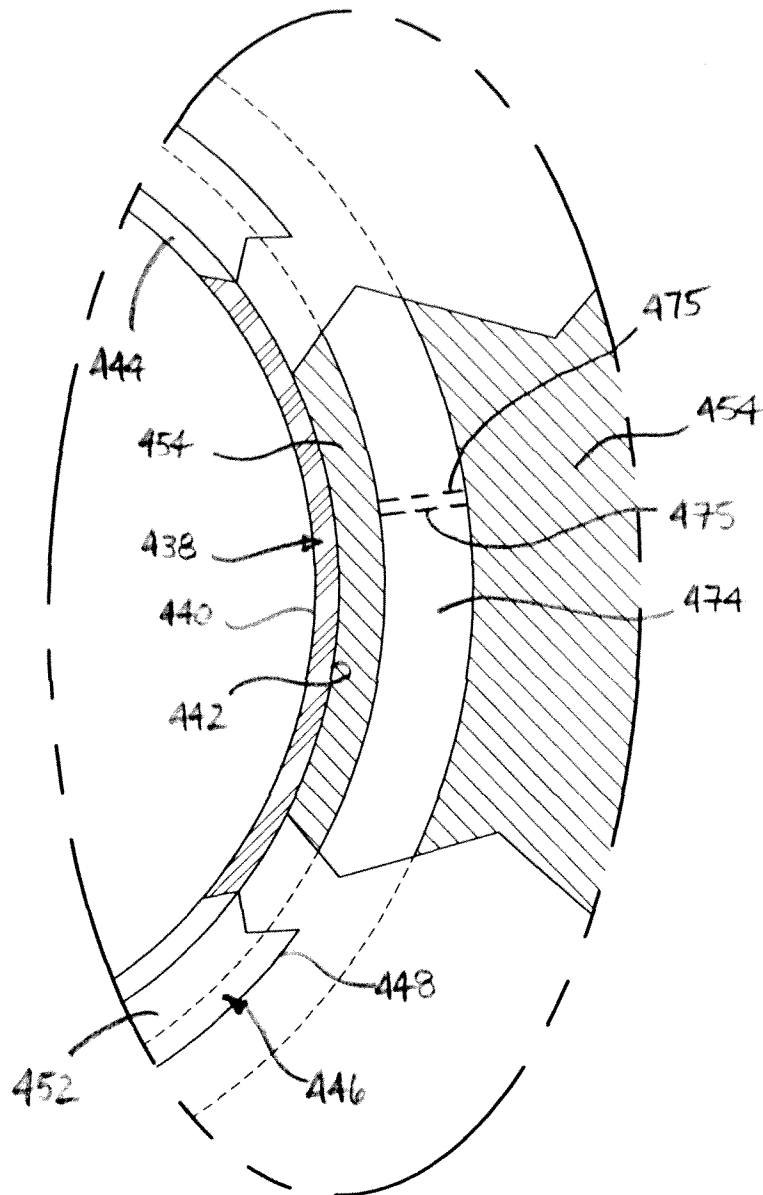


FIG. 20

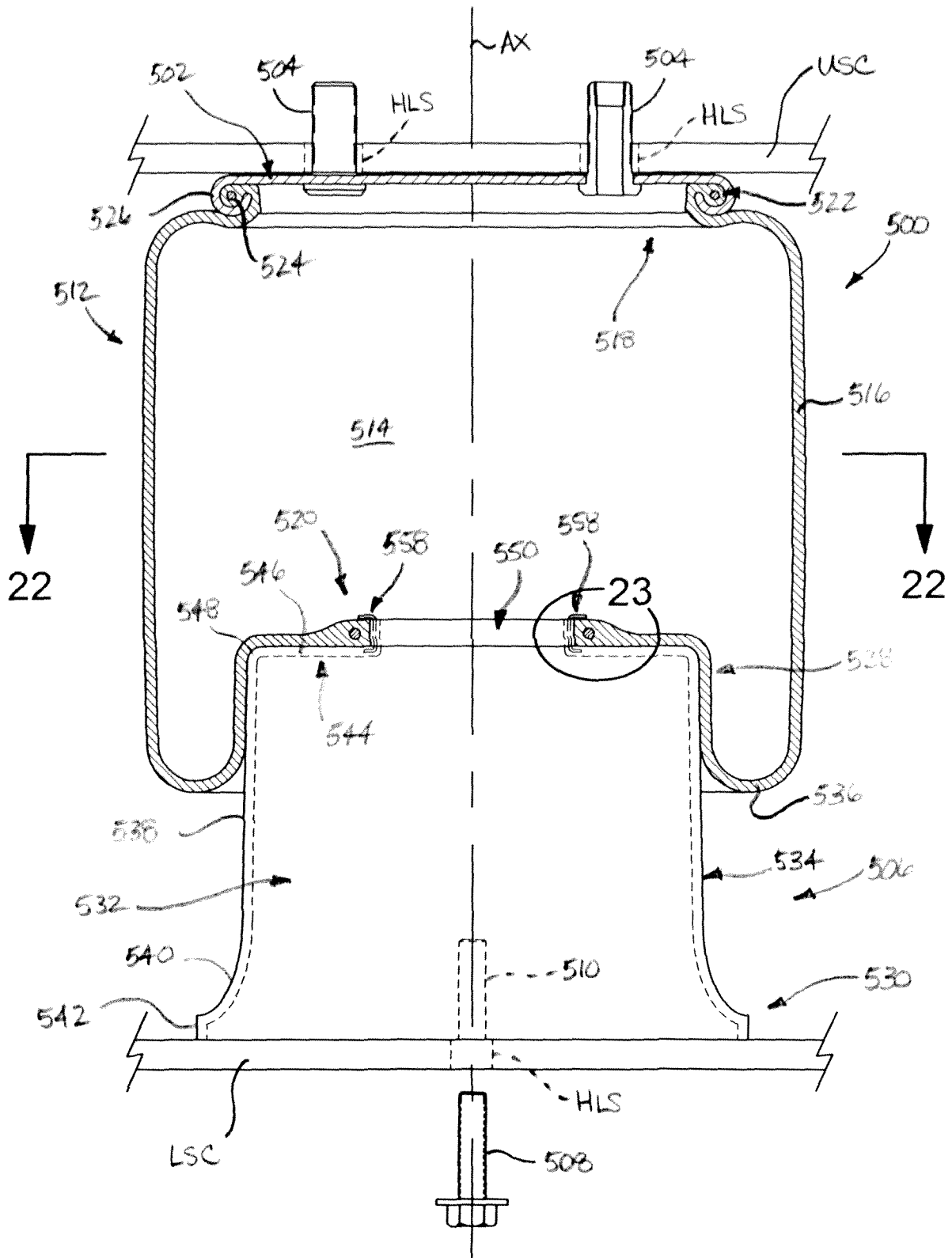


FIG. 21

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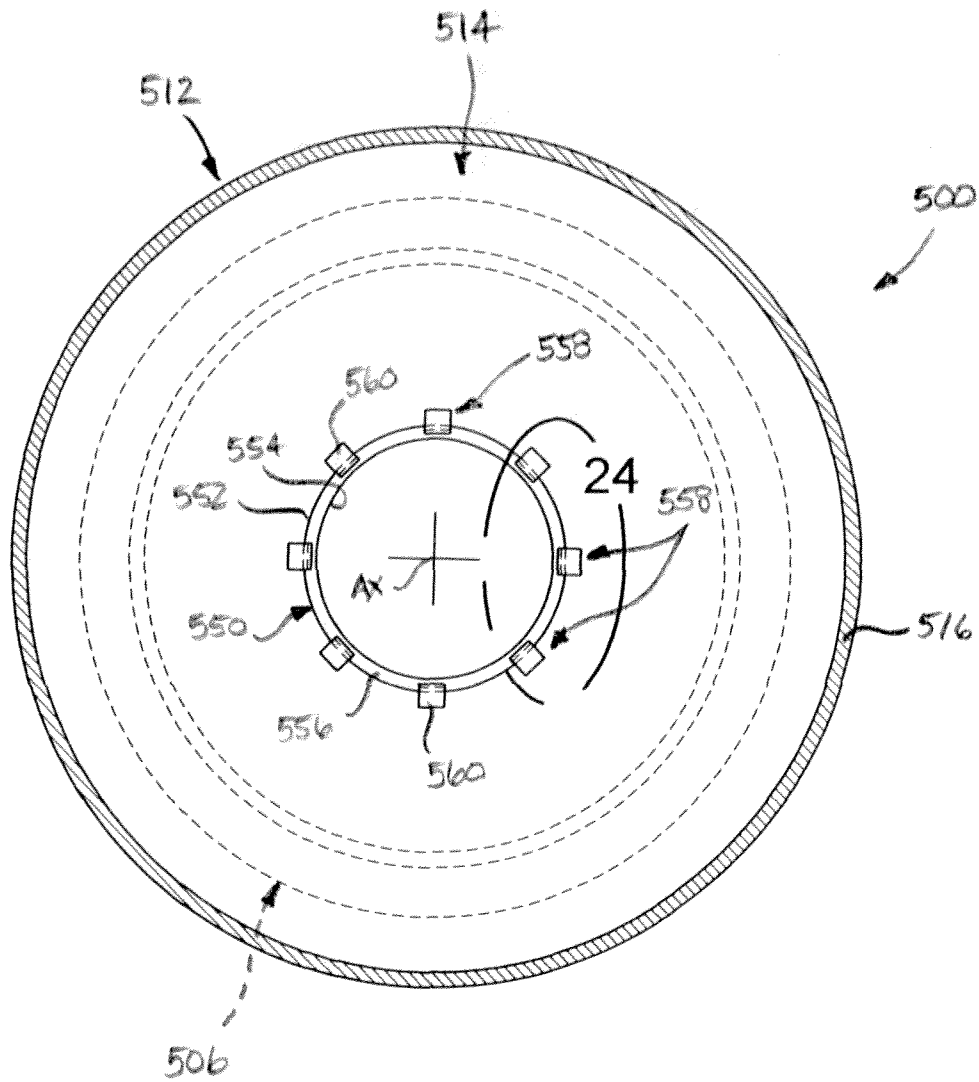


FIG. 22

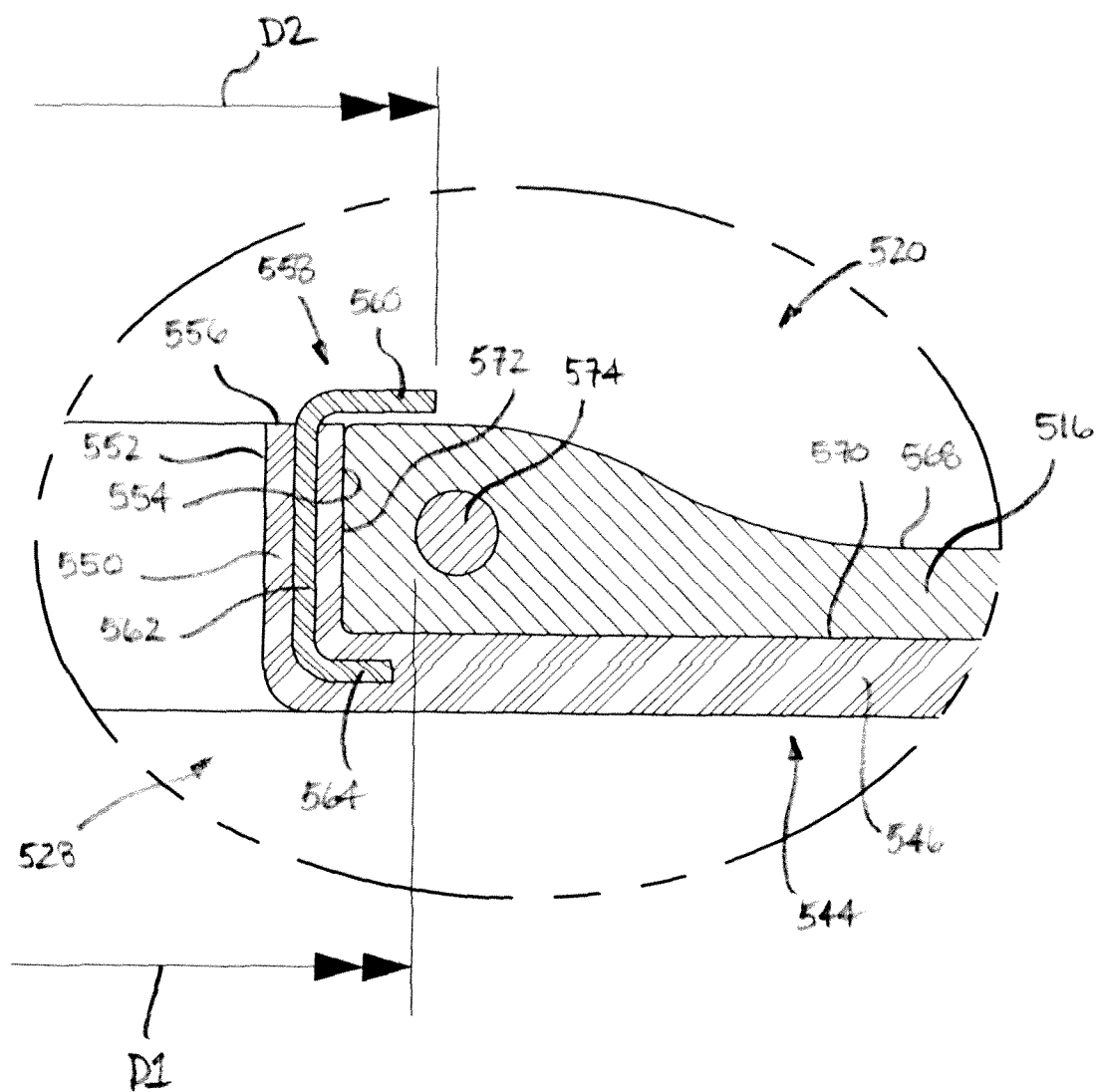


FIG. 23

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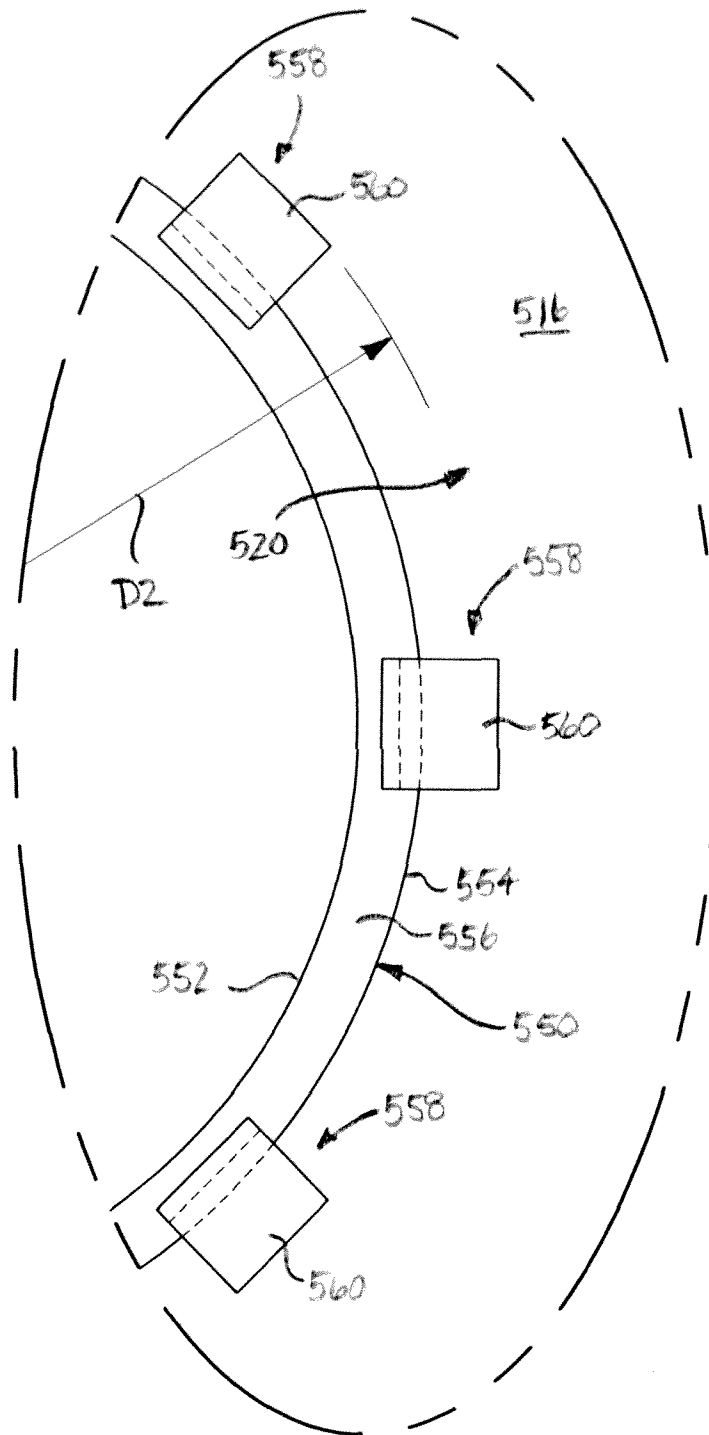


FIG. 24

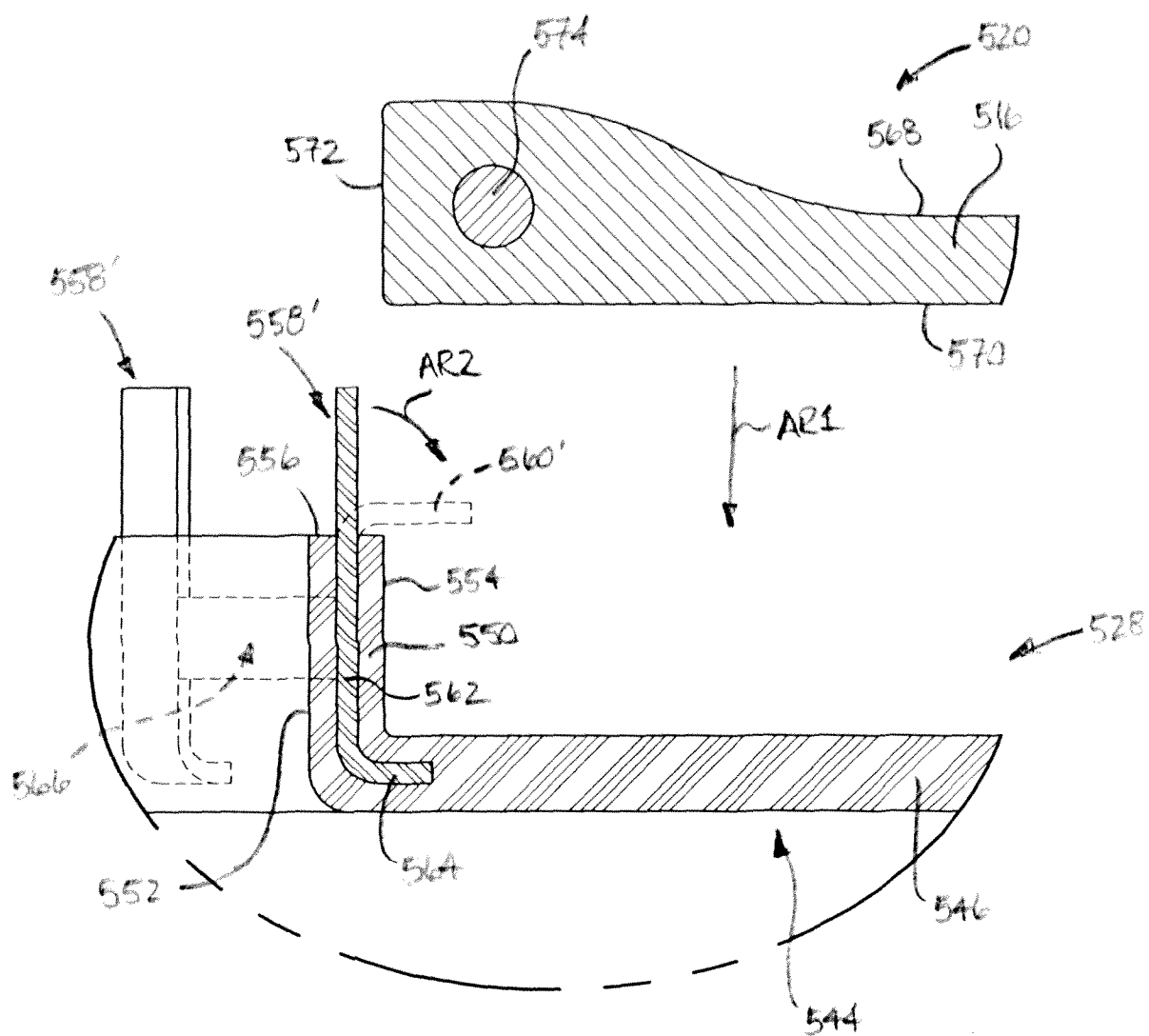


FIG. 25

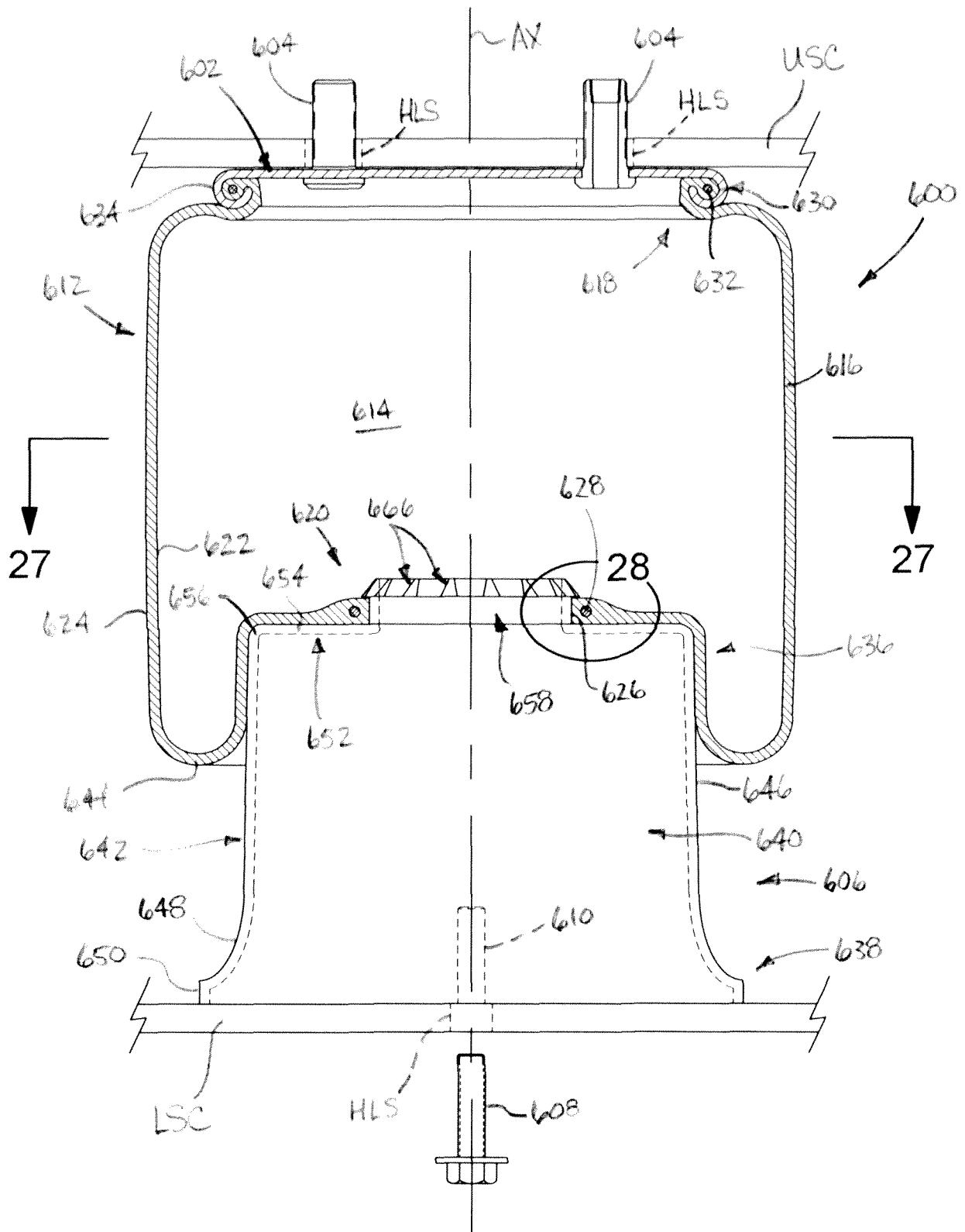


FIG. 26

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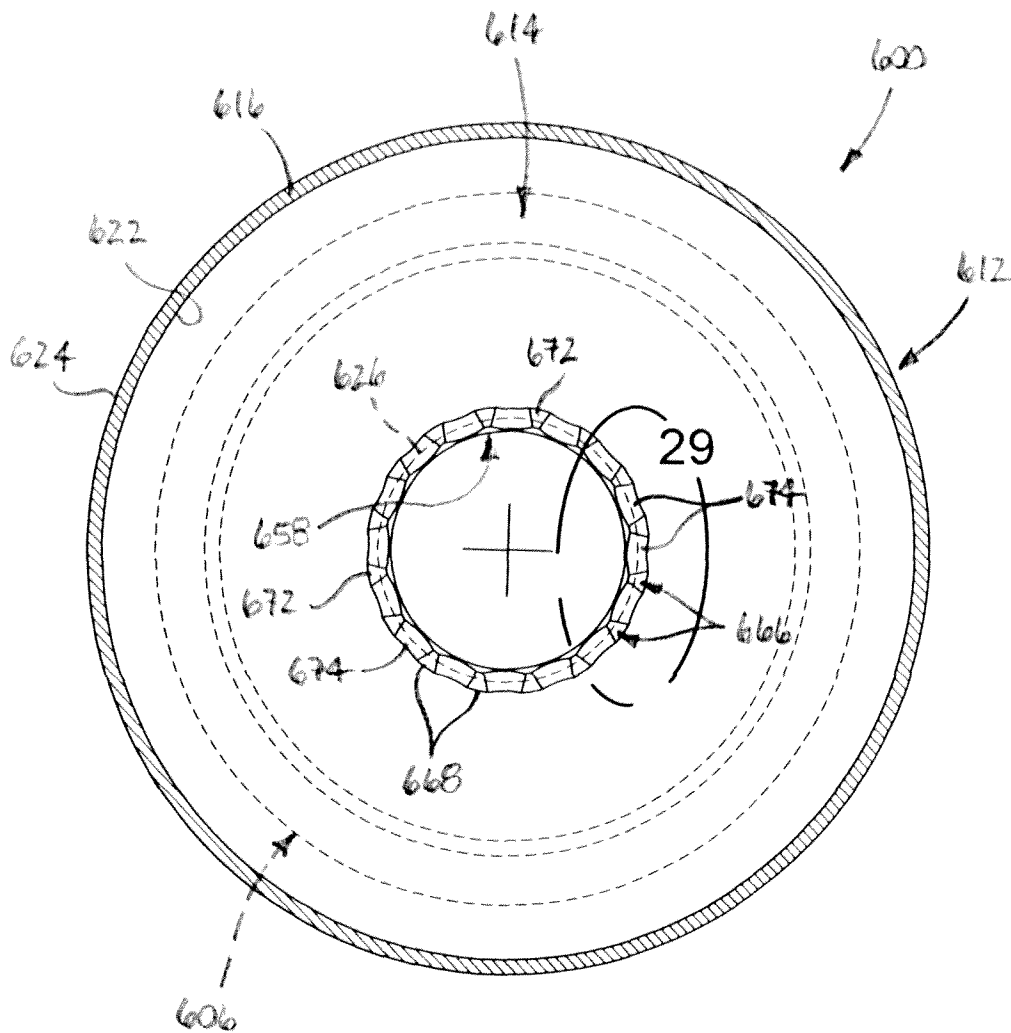


FIG. 27

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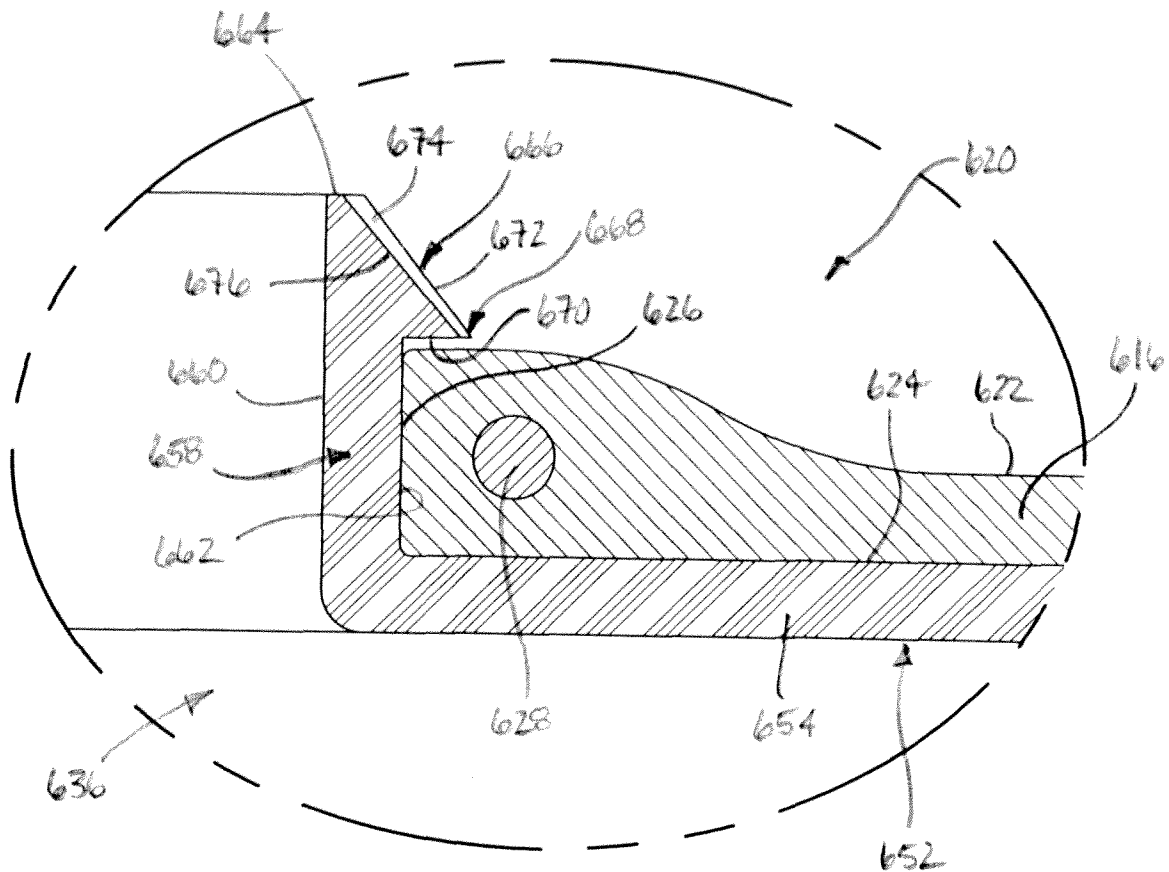


FIG. 28

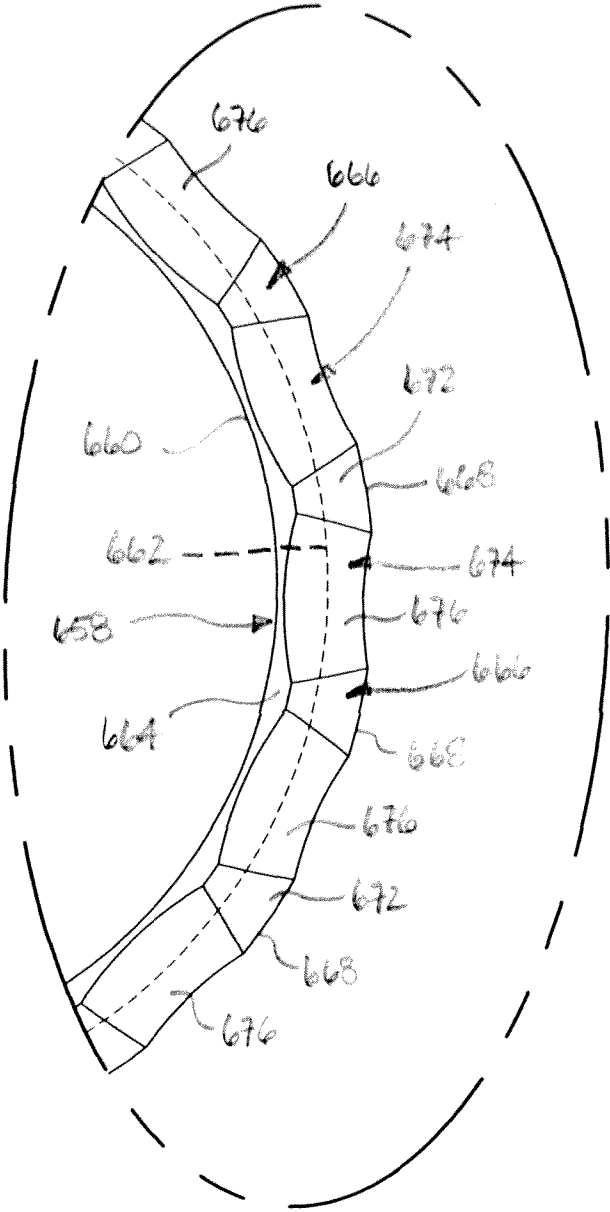


FIG. 29

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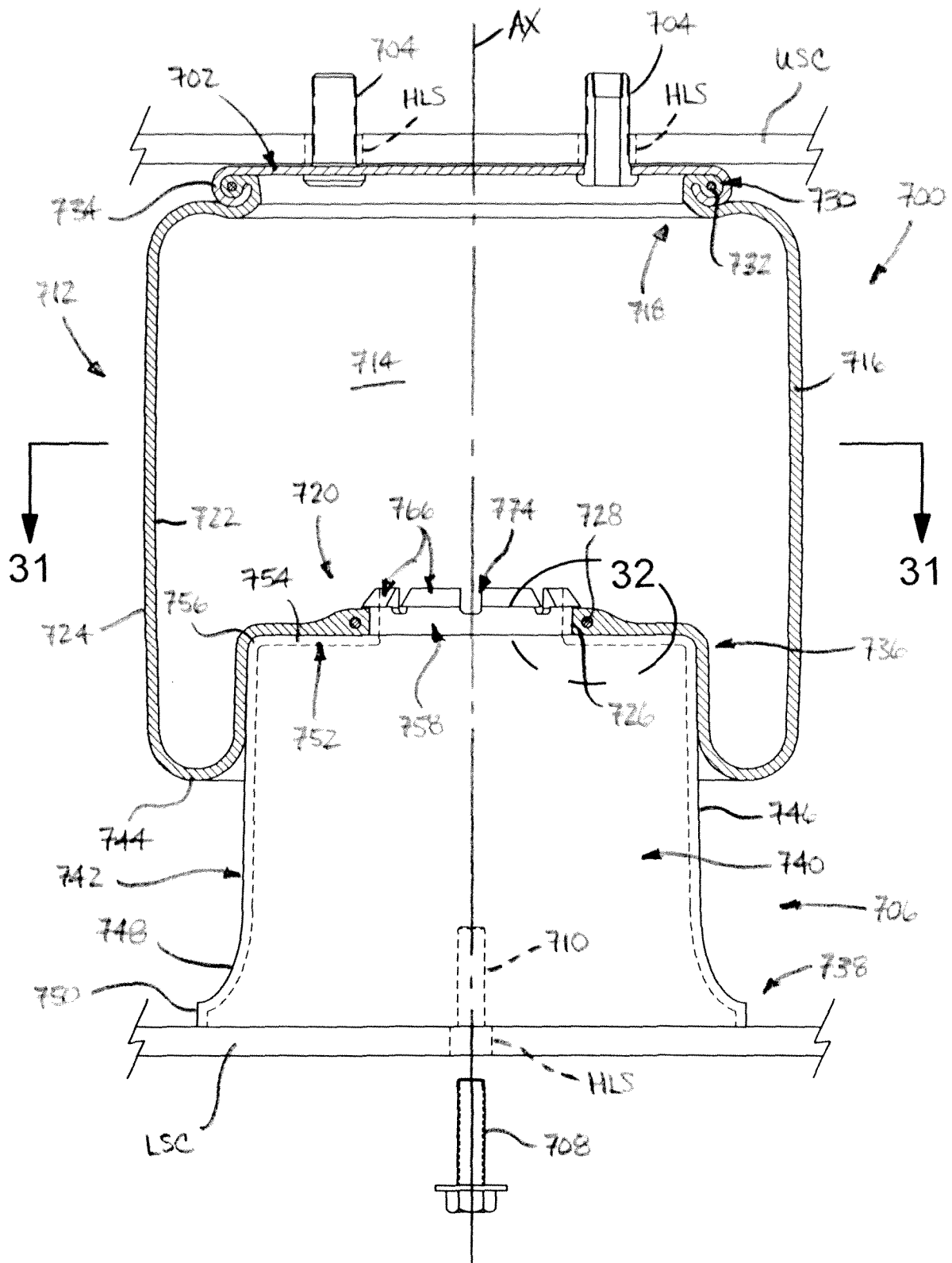


FIG. 30

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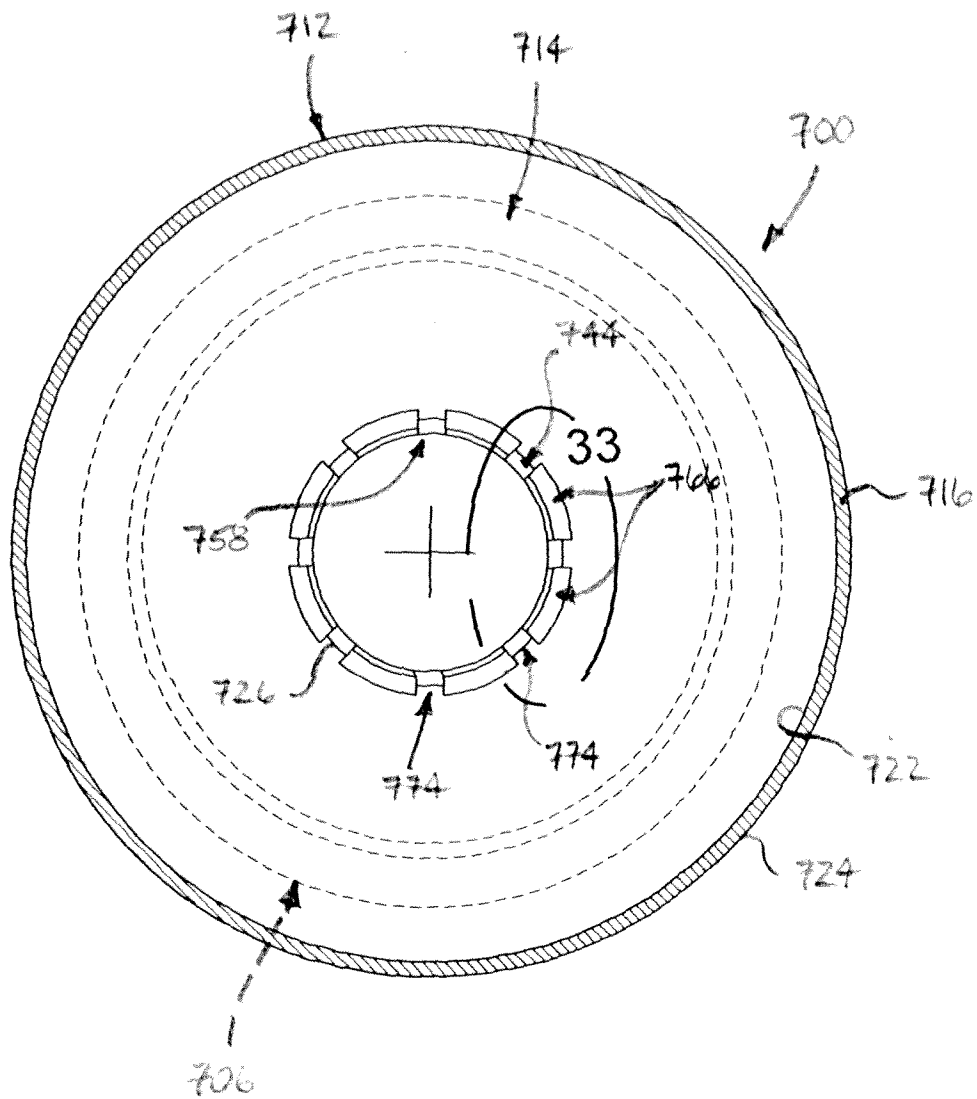


FIG. 31

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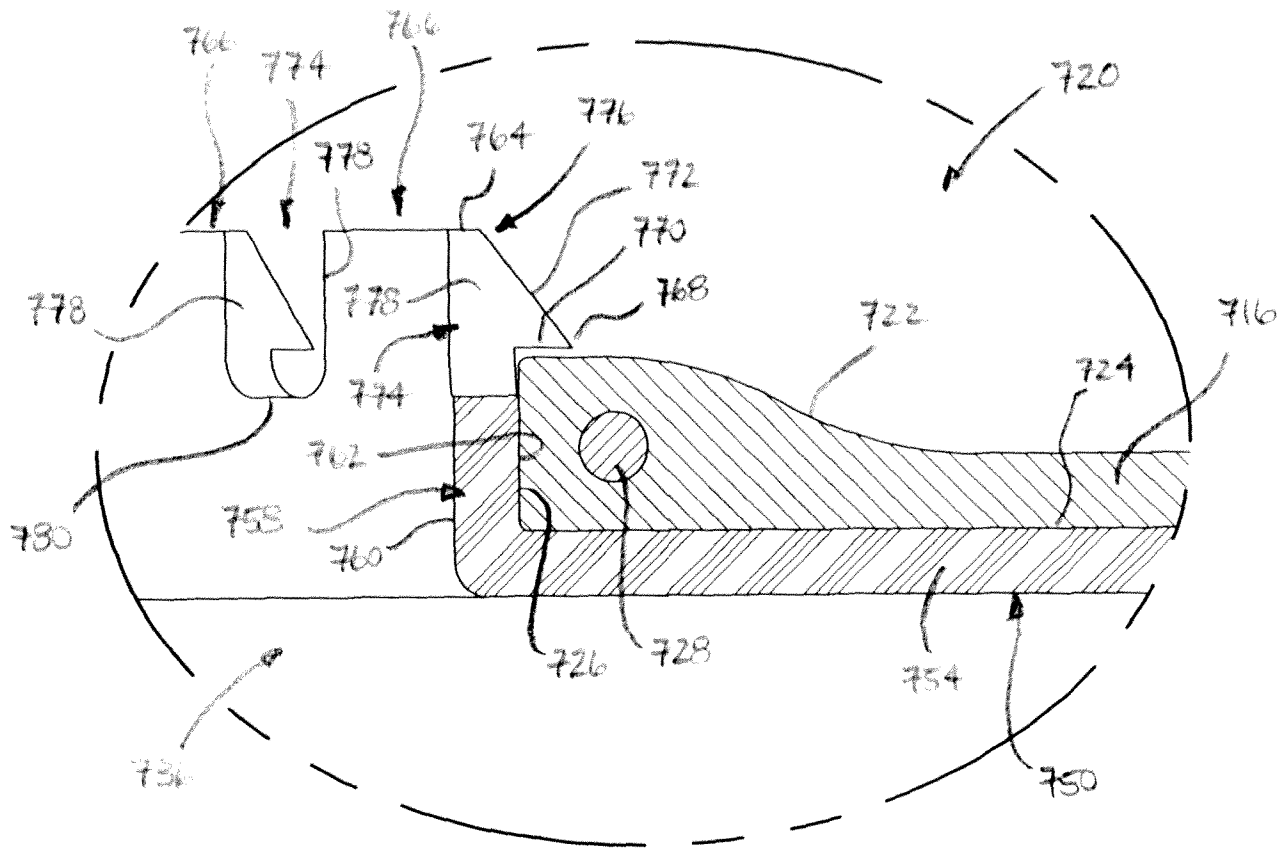


FIG. 32

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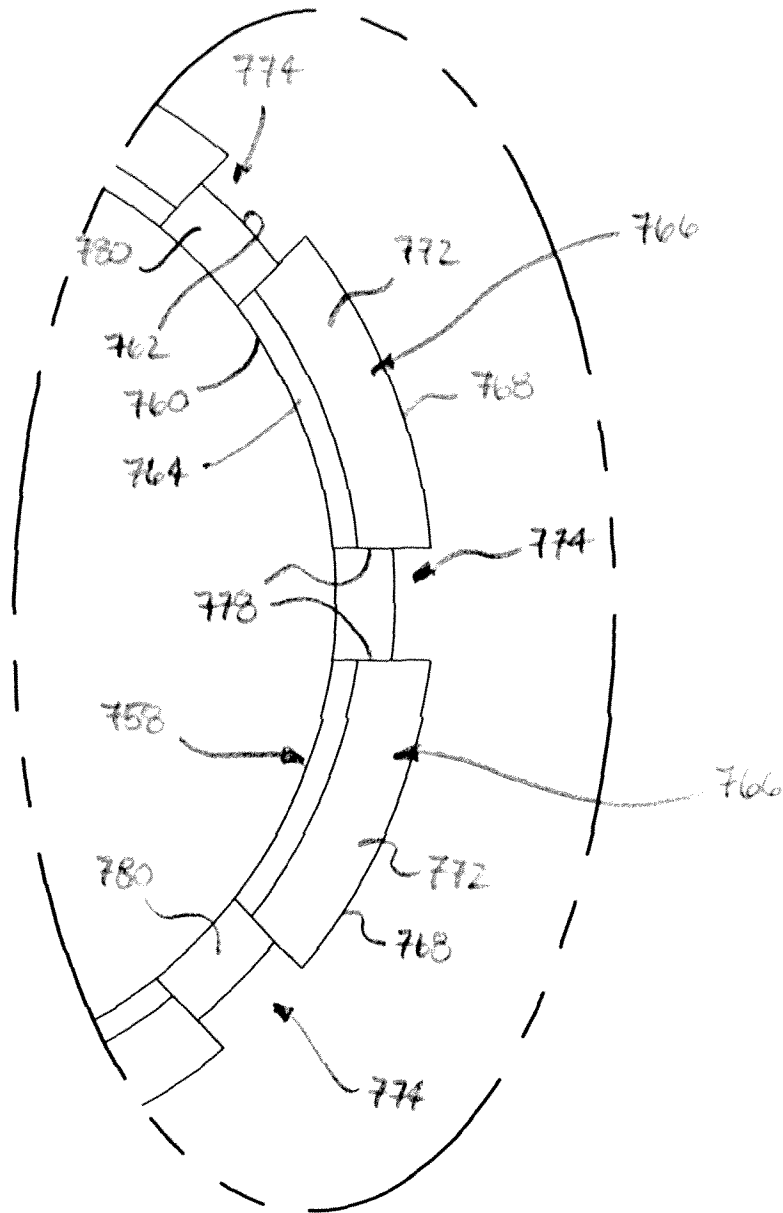


FIG. 33