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(54) Title: ELECTRONIC SWITCH MECHANISM

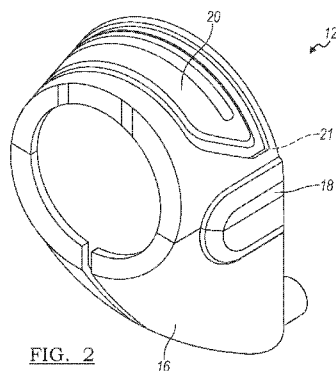


FIG. 2

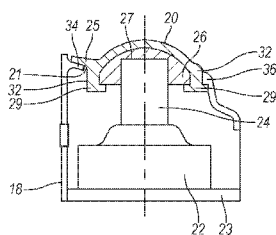


FIG. 3

(57) Abstract: A switch mechanism (12) includes a housing (16, 18) with a fenestration (21), a switch element (22) held in the housing, and a membrane switch held in the fenestration. The membrane switch includes a flexible membrane (20) and a rigid rib (26). The rib is constrained to linear movement by guides (37, 38) in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to translate to actuate the switch element.



ELECTRONIC SWITCH MECHANISM

FIELD

[0001] The present disclosure relates to an electronic switch mechanism. More specifically, the present disclosure relates to an electronic switch mechanism for an electrosurgical instrument.

BACKGROUND

[0002] The statements in this section merely provide background information related to the present disclosure and may not constitute prior art.

[0003] Typical switches for electrosurgical instruments, as well as other non-medical devices, include one or more tactile push buttons to activate the instrument. For example, certain instruments employ one button for a left-handed operator and a second button for a right-handed operator. Among the literature that can pertain to this technology include, for example, the following patent documents and published patent applications: U.S. Patent Nos. 4,618,754; 5,376,765; 6,303,887; 6,880,989; 6,911,608; 6,998,554; and U.S. Patent Publication No. 2013/0140164, the entire contents of which are incorporated herein by reference for all purposes.

[0004] Accordingly, it would be desirable for an instrument to include a switch mechanism that accommodates ambidextrous operation of the instrument.

SUMMARY

[0005] The present disclosure provides an electronic switch mechanism. In various arrangements, the switch mechanism is associated with an electrosurgical instrument. The switch mechanism has two or more buttons or tabs to enable a medical practitioner to actuate the instrument. More specifically, the two or more buttons or tabs are configured to allow the medical practitioner to operate the instrument with either hand. That is, the medical practitioner can use his/her fingers or thumbs from either hand to provide ambidextrous operation of the instrument.

[0006] Accordingly, pursuant to one aspect of the present invention, a switch mechanism includes a housing with a fenestration, a switch element held in the housing, and a membrane switch held in the fenestration. The membrane switch includes a flexible membrane and a rigid rib. The rib is constrained to linear movement by guides in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to translate to actuate the switch element.

[0007] This aspect of the present invention can be further characterized by one or any combination of the features described herein, such as: the housing is a handpiece; the switch mechanism is on a center plane of the handpiece; the membrane supports off center activation of the switch mechanism; the membrane supports off center activation by about 30°; the membrane is insert molded; and the switch mechanism is arranged to provide ambidextrous operation of the switch mechanism.

[0008] Accordingly, pursuant to another aspect of the present invention, a switch mechanism includes a housing with a fenestration, a switch element held in the housing, and a membrane switch held in the fenestration. The membrane includes a flexible membrane and a rigid rib. The rib is constrained so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to move to actuate the switch element.

[0009] The foregoing aspect of the present invention can be further characterized by one or any combination of the features described herein, such as: the rib is constrained to linear movement by guides in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to translate to actuate the switch element; the rib is constrained to pivotal movement by fulcrums in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to rotate about one of the fulcrums to actuate the switch element; the housing is a handpiece and the switch mechanism is on a center plane of the handpiece and wherein the membrane supports off center activation of the switch mechanism; the membrane is insert molded; and the switch mechanism is arranged to provide ambidextrous operation of the switch mechanism.

[0010] Accordingly, pursuant to yet another aspect of the present invention, a switch mechanism includes a housing with a fenestration, a switch element held in the housing, and a membrane switch held in the fenestration. The membrane switch includes a flexible membrane and a rigid rib. The rib is constrained to pivotal movement by fulcrums in the housing so that contact with

the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to rotate about one of the fulcrums to actuate the switch element.

The foregoing aspect of the present invention may be further characterized by one or any combination of the features described herein, such as: the housing is a handpiece; the switch mechanism is on a center plane of the handpiece; the membrane supports off center activation of the switch mechanism; the membrane supports off center activation by about 30°; the membrane is insert molded; and the switch mechanism is arranged to provide ambidextrous operation of the switch mechanism.

[0011] Further features, advantages, and areas of applicability will become apparent from the description provided herein. It should be understood that the description and specific examples are intended for purposes of illustration only and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure.

DRAWINGS

[0012] The drawings described herein are for illustration purposes only and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure in any way. The components in the figures are not necessarily to scale, emphasis instead being placed upon illustrating the principles of the invention. In the drawings:

[0013] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a switch mechanism with a portion of a handle in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

[0014] FIG. 2 is an isolated view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 1;

[0015] FIG. 3 is a side cross-sectional view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 1;

[0016] FIG. 4 is a front cross-sectional view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 1;

[0017] FIG. 5 is an interior top view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 1;

[0018] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of alternative switch mechanism in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

[0019] FIG. 7 is a side cross-sectional view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 6;

[0020] FIG. 8 is a front cross-sectional view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 6; and

[0021] FIG. 9 is an interior top view of the switch mechanism shown in FIG. 6.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0022] The following description is merely exemplary in nature and is not intended to limit the present disclosure, application, or uses.

[0023] Referring now to FIG. 1, a handpiece for an electrosurgical instrument embodying the principles of the present invention is illustrated therein and designated at 10. The handpiece 10 includes an electronic switch mechanism 12 attached to a handle 14. The switch mechanism and the handle 14 can be separate units attached to each other or a single integral unit.

[0024] Referring further to FIGs. 2 and 3, the electronic switch mechanism 12 includes a lower housing 16 and an upper housing 18. The upper housing 18 includes an opening or fenestration 21 that holds a membrane switch with a membrane 20 and a rigid rib 26. The rigid rib 26 includes rib extensions 28 as shown in FIGs. 4 and 5 to provide additional rigidity to the rigid rib 26.

[0025] The upper housing 18 includes an interior platform or member 23 that supports a switch 22. The switch 22 includes an upper extension or button 24 that engages with the rigid rib 26 in a region 27. The membrane 20 includes extensions 32 with tab portions 29 and further includes an upper tab portion 25. As such, one of the tab portions 29 latches underneath the rigid rib 26 and a lip 36 of the upper housing 18, and the other tab portion 29 latches underneath the rigid rib 26 while the upper tab portion 25 engages with a lip 34 of the upper housing 18. Accordingly, the engagement of the lips 34 and 36 of the housing 18 with the membrane 20 secures the membrane 20 in the fenestration 21.

[0026] Referring in particular to now FIGs. 4 and 5, the lateral most extent of the rigid rib 26 slide up and down along inner walls 37 of the upper housing 18. A set of posts 38 positioned on both sides of the rigid rib 26 engage in a manner with the rigid rib 26 to provide guidance to the rigid rib 26 as it follows the walls 37. Hence, the walls 37 and the posts 38 enable the rigid rib 26 to provide vertical actuation of the switch 22. Specifically, as a medical professional presses on the membrane 20, as indicated by the downward portions of the arrows 60, contact between the membrane 20 and the rigid rib 26 causes the rigid rib 26 to press against the button 24, which, in turn, actuates the switch 22. After pressure

is removed from the membrane 20, the membrane along with the rigid rib 26 springs back and retains its original shape as indicated by the upper portions of the arrows 60 so that the switch mechanism 12 returns to its original un-actuated position.

[0027] The switch 22 in certain arrangements controls the activation of an energy source. For example, if the switch mechanism 12 is associated with an electrosurgical instrument with electrodes, the switch mechanism may control the operation of a radiofrequency (RF) energy source electrically connected to the instrument. Hence, when a medical profession presses and actuates the switch mechanism 12, electrical energy is delivered to the electrodes to treat, for example, tissue of a patient. The associated instrument can be forceps that coagulate or cut the tissue. The instrument can be a monopolar instrument that only requires one electrode that interacts with a neutral electrode, which is likewise connected to the body of a patient. Alternatively, the instrument can be a bipolar electrosurgical instrument with two electrodes (a distal electrode and a proximal electrode). A RF voltage with different potentials is applied to such bipolar instruments so that a current passes from one electrode to the other electrode through the tissue, thereby heating the tissue to coagulate or cut the tissue.

[0028] In some arrangements, the membrane 20 is insert molded from a flexible low-durometer material. In the arrangement shown in FIG. 4, the membrane 20 has an arc span of approximately 70°, for example, an arc span of approximately 35° from each side of a center plane, CP. Accordingly, if a force is applied to the membrane 20 anywhere in this 70° arc span, the resulting

displacement of the membrane 20 is translated into vertical motion of the rigid rib 26 to push the button 24, which in turn actuates the instrument associated with the switch mechanism 12. In other arrangements, the arc span of the membrane 20 can be greater than or less than 70°.

[0029] Turning now to FIG. 6, there is shown an alternative switch mechanism 112. The switch mechanism 112 includes a lower housing similar to the previously described lower housing for the switch mechanism 12 as well as an upper housing 118. The upper housing 118 includes an opening or fenestration 121, which holds a membrane switch with a membrane 120.

[0030] Referring further to FIGs. 7 and 8, the membrane switch further includes a pair of rigid ribs 126, shown as rigid ribs 126A and 126B in FIG. 9, and the rigid ribs 126 include rib extensions 128 to provide additional rigidity to the rigid ribs 126. The upper housing 118 holds a switch 22 on a platform 23. The switch 22 includes an upper extension or button 24 that engages with the rigid ribs 126 in a region 127. More specifically, as shown in FIG. 9, the rigid rib 126A engages with the two button 24 in a region 127A, and the rigid rib 126B engages with the button 24 in a region 127B. The membrane 20 includes extensions 132 with tab portions 129 and further includes an upper tab portion 125. As such, one of the tab portions 129 latches underneath the rigid ribs 126 and a lip 136 of the upper housing 118. The other tab portion 129 latches underneath the rigid ribs 126 while the upper tab portion 125 engages with a lip 134 of the upper housing 118. Accordingly, the engagement of the lips 134 and 136 with the membrane 120 secures the membrane 120 in the fenestration 121.

[0031] The rigid ribs 126 include set of protrusions or bumps 129A, 129B, and 129C. More specifically, the bump 129A is associated with the rigid rib 126B, the bump 129C is associated with the rigid rib 126A, and the bump 129B is associated with both rigid ribs 126A and 126B. The membrane 120 includes a set of protrusions or bumps 137A, 137B, and 137C that are in contact with the bumps 129A, 129B, and 129C, respectively. The location of the bumps 129A, 129B, and 129C provides tactile information to the medical professional as to where the medical professional's fingers and/or thumbs are located with respect to the membrane 120.

[0032] Referring also to FIG. 9, the lateral most extent 140A and 140B of the rigid ribs 126A and 126B, respectively, engage with respective fulcrums 142A and 142B associated with the upper housing 118. Accordingly, as a medical professional presses on the lateral portions of the membrane 120, as indicated by the arrows 160A and 160C, contact between the membrane 120 and the rigid rib 126A or 126B causes the rigid rib 126A or 126B to pivot about the respective fulcrum 142A or 142B. That is, the rigid ribs 126A and 126B pivot about the fulcrums 142A and 142B independently from each other. Accordingly, pressure on the bump 137A presses the bump 137A against the bump 129A of the rigid rib 126B such that the rigid rib 126B pivots about the fulcrum 142B and presses against the button 24 in the region 127B, which, in turn, actuates the switch 22. And pressure on the bump 137C presses the bump 137C against the bump 129C of the rigid rib 126A such that the rigid rib 126A pivots about the fulcrum 142A and presses against the button 24 in the region 127A, which, in turn, actuates the

switch 22. Note that downward pressure in the medial region of the membrane 120, as indicated by the arrow 160B, causes the lateral portions 140A and 140B of the rigid ribs 126A and 126B to translate vertically downward away from the fulcrums 142A and 142B. This downward motion causes the rigid ribs 126A and 126B to press against the button 24 in the regions 127A and 127B, which actuates the switch 22 of the switch mechanism 112. After pressure is removed from the membrane 120, the membrane 120, along with the rigid ribs 126A and 126B, springs back and retains its original shape so that the switch mechanism 112 returns to its original un-actuated position.

[0033] The switch 22 in certain arrangements controls the activation of an energy source. For example, if the switch mechanism 112 is associated with an electrosurgical instrument with bipolar electrodes, the switch mechanism may control the operation of a radiofrequency (RF) energy source electrically connected to the instrument. Hence, when a medical profession presses actuates the switch mechanism 112, electrical energy is delivered to the electrodes to treat, for example, tissue. The associated instrument can be forceps that coagulate or cut the tissue. The instrument can be a monopolar instrument that only requires one electrode that interacts with a neutral electrode, which is likewise connected to the body of a patient. Alternatively, the instrument can be a bipolar electrosurgical instrument with two electrodes (a distal electrode and a proximal electrode). A RF voltage with different potentials is applied to such bipolar instruments so that a current passes from one electrode to the other electrode through the tissue, thereby heating the tissue to coagulate or cut the tissue.

[0034] In some arrangements, the membrane 120 is insert molded from a flexible low-durometer material. In the arrangement shown in FIGs. 6 through 9, the arc span between the bumps 160A and 160C of the membrane 120 is approximately 60°, that is, an arc span of approximately 30° from each side of a center plane, CP. Accordingly, if a force is applied to the membrane 120 anywhere in this 60° arc span, the resulting displacement of the membrane 120 is translated into motion of the rigid ribs 126A or 126B in the regions 127A or 127B to push the button 24, which in turn actuates the instrument associated with the switch mechanism 112. In other arrangements, the arc span between the bumps 160A and 160C can be greater than or less than 60°.

[0035] The description of the invention is merely exemplary in nature and variations that do not depart from the gist of the invention are intended to be within the scope of the invention. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the invention.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A switch mechanism comprising:
 - a housing, the housing having a fenestration;
 - a switch element held in the housing;
 - a membrane switch, the membrane switch being held in the fenestration and including a flexible membrane and a rigid rib,
 - wherein the rib is constrained to linear movement by guides in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to translate to actuate the switch element.
2. The switch mechanism of claim 1 wherein the housing is a handpiece.
3. The switch mechanism of claim 2 wherein the switch mechanism is on a center plane of the handpiece.
4. The switch mechanism of 3 wherein the membrane supports off center activation of the switch mechanism.
5. The switch mechanism of claim 4 wherein the membrane supports off center activation by about 30°.

6. The switch mechanism of claim 1 wherein the membrane is insert molded.

7. The switch mechanism of claim 1 wherein the switch mechanism is arranged to provide ambidextrous operation of the switch mechanism.

8. A switch mechanism comprising:
- a housing, the housing having a fenestration;
 - a switch element held in the housing;
 - a membrane switch, the membrane switch being held in the fenestration and including a flexible membrane and a rigid rib,
- wherein the rib is constrained so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to move to actuate the switch element.
9. The switch mechanism of claim 8 wherein the rib is constrained to linear movement by guides in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to translate to actuate the switch element.
10. The switch mechanism of claim 8 wherein the rib is constrained to pivotal movement by fulcrums in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to rotate about one of the fulcrums to actuate the switch element.
11. The switch mechanism of claim 8 wherein the housing is a handpiece and the switch mechanism is on a center plane of the handpiece and wherein the membrane supports off center activation of the switch mechanism.
12. The switch mechanism of claim 8 wherein the membrane is insert molded.

13. The switch mechanism of claim 8 wherein the switch mechanism is arranged to provide ambidextrous operation of the switch mechanism.

14. A switch mechanism comprising:
 - a housing, the housing having a fenestration;
 - a switch element held in the housing;
 - a membrane switch, the membrane switch being held in the fenestration and including a flexible membrane and a rigid rib,
 - wherein the rib is constrained to pivotal movement by fulcrums in the housing so that contact with the membrane causes the membrane to deform and the rib to rotate about one of the fulcrums to actuate the switch element.
15. The switch mechanism of claim 14 wherein the housing is a handpiece.
16. The switch mechanism of claim 15 wherein the switch mechanism is on a center plane of the handpiece.
17. The switch mechanism of 16 wherein the membrane supports off center activation of the switch mechanism.
18. The switch mechanism of claim 17 wherein the membrane supports off center activation by about 30°.
19. The switch mechanism of claim 14 wherein the membrane is insert molded.

20. The switch mechanism of claim 14 wherein the switch mechanism is arranged to provide ambidextrous operation of the switch mechanism.

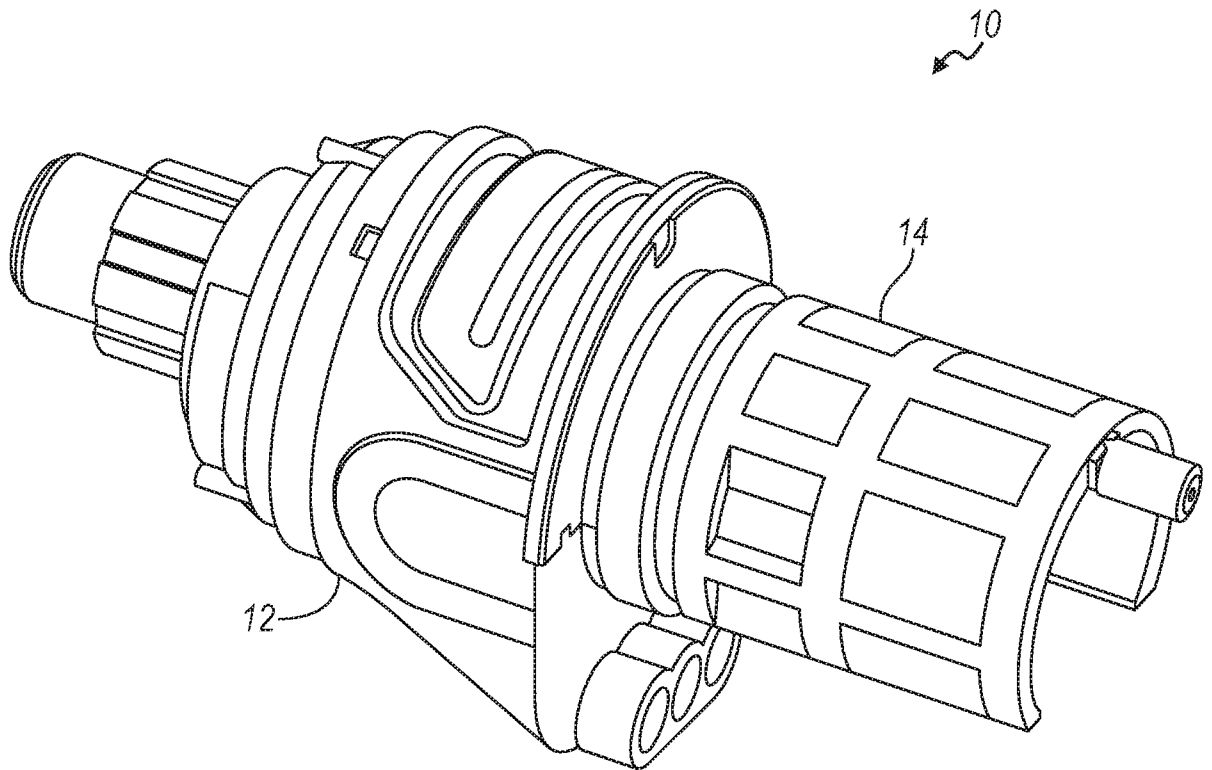


FIG. 1

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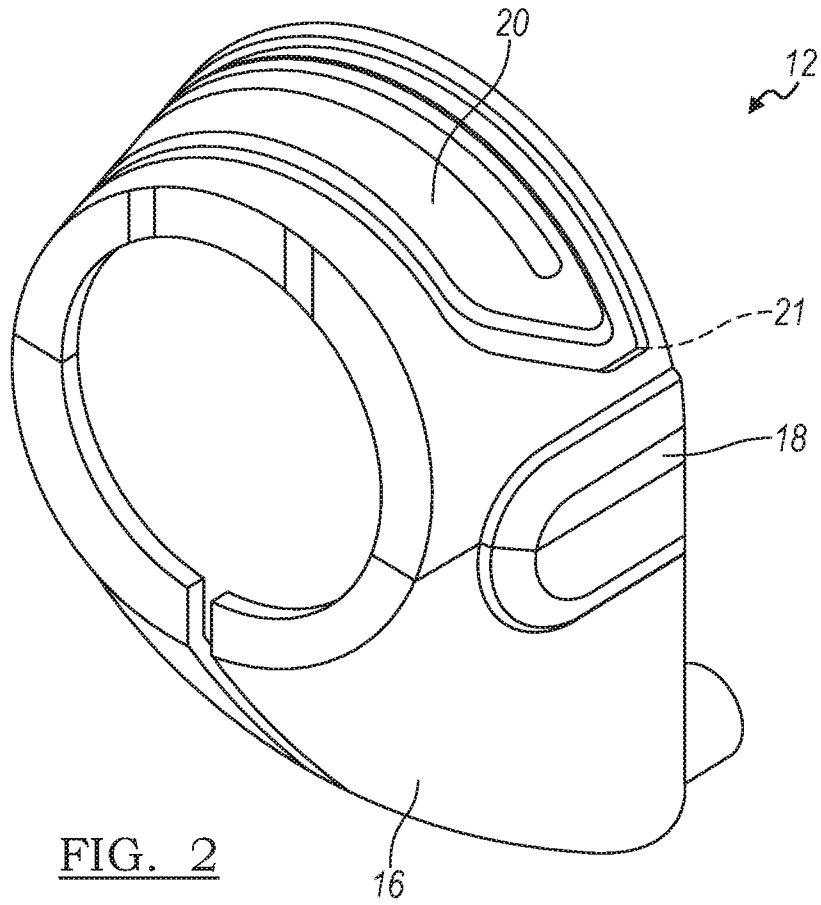


FIG. 2

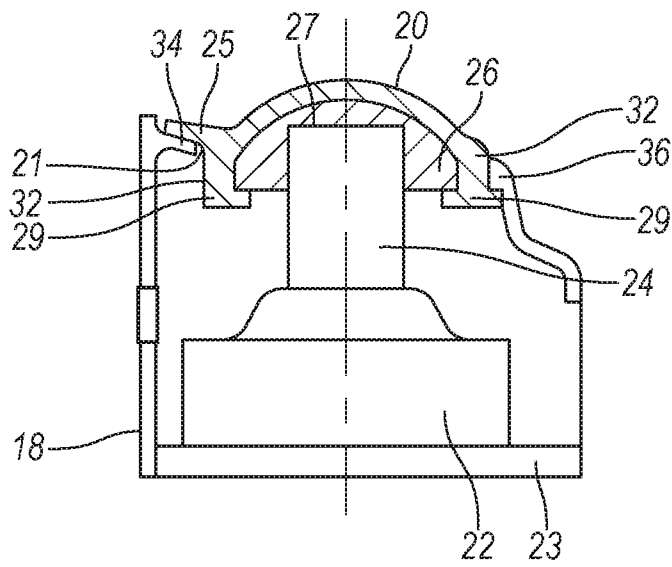


FIG. 3

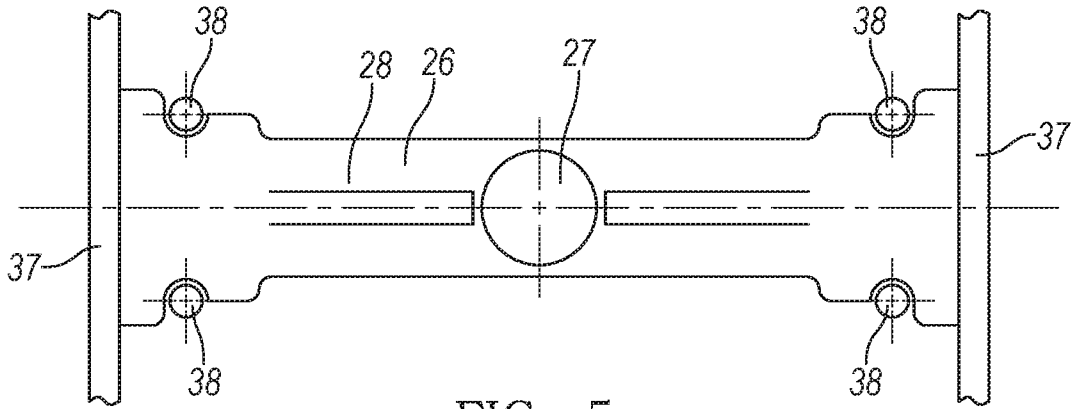


FIG. 5

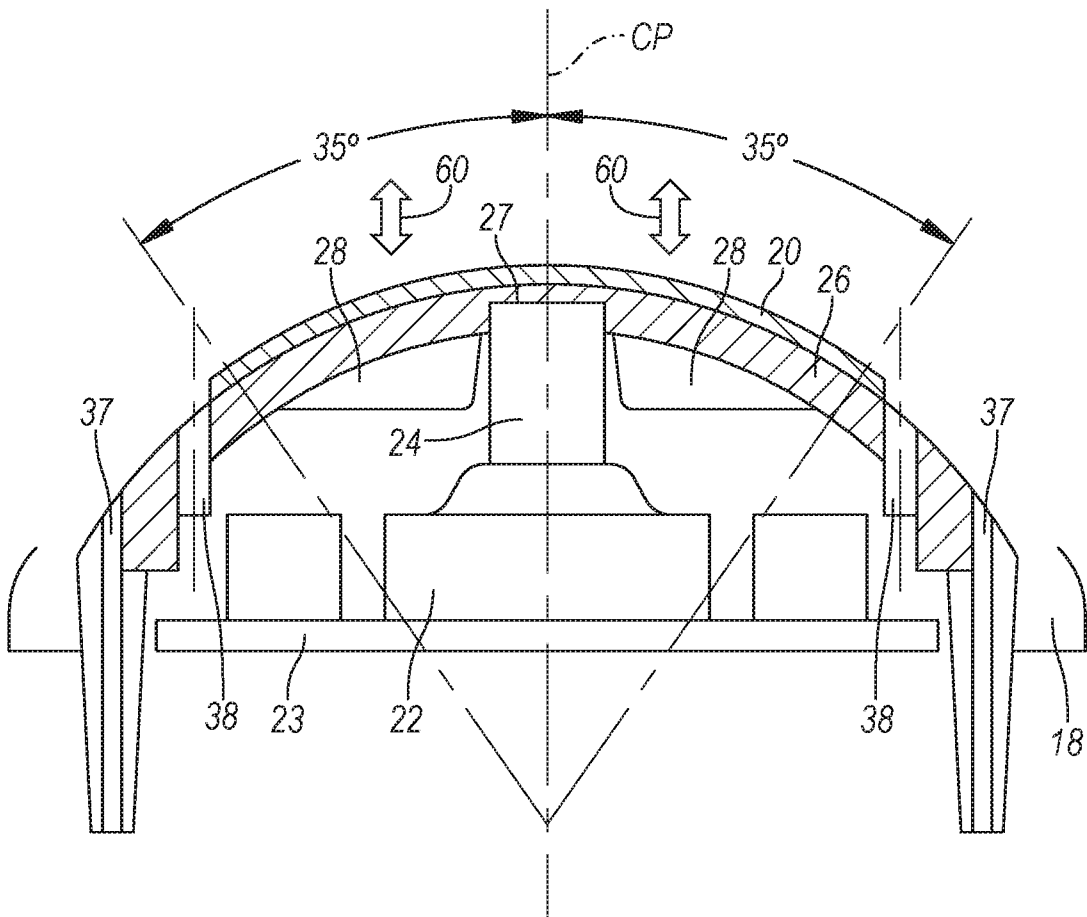


FIG. 4

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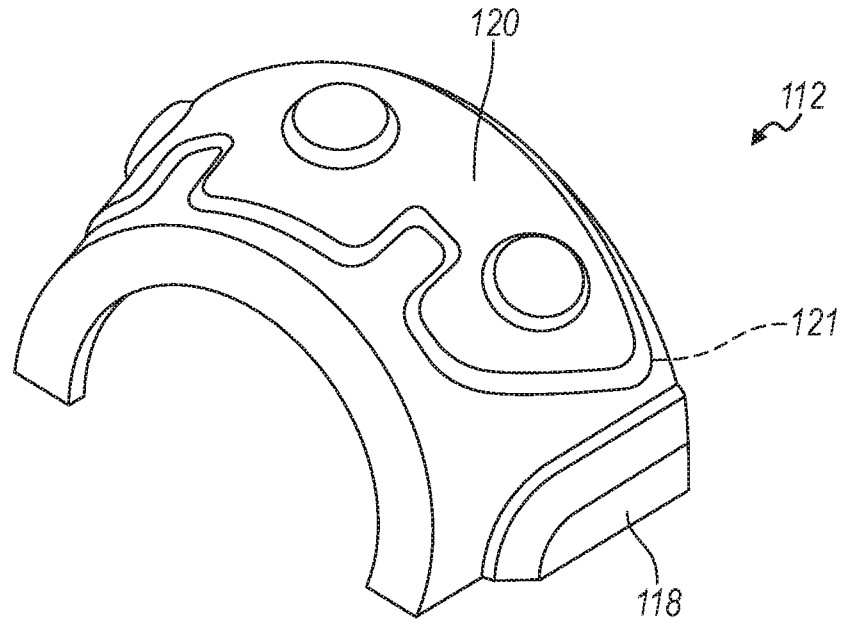


FIG. 6

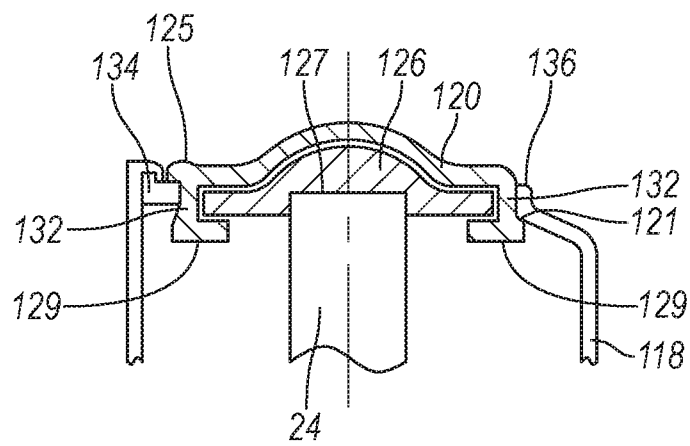


FIG. 7

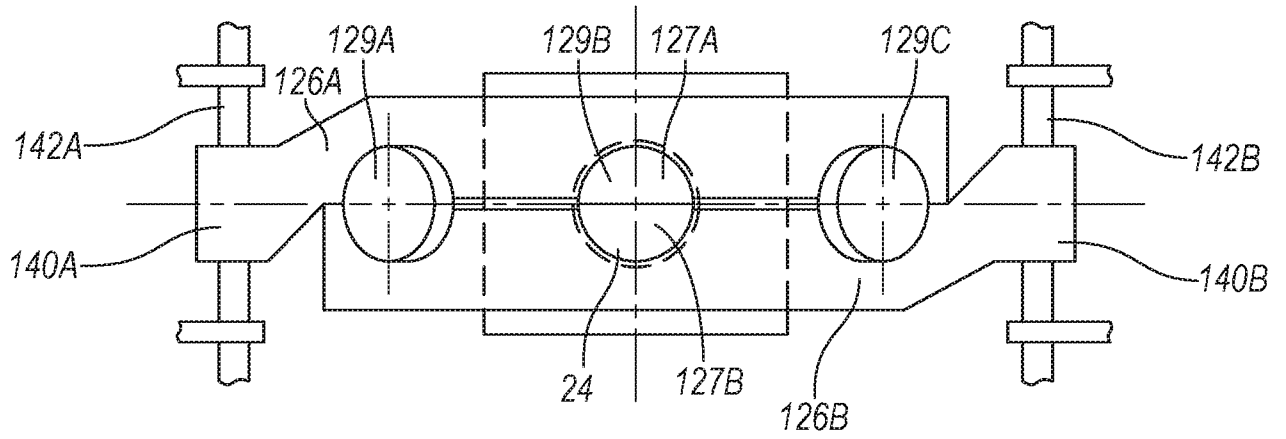


FIG. 9

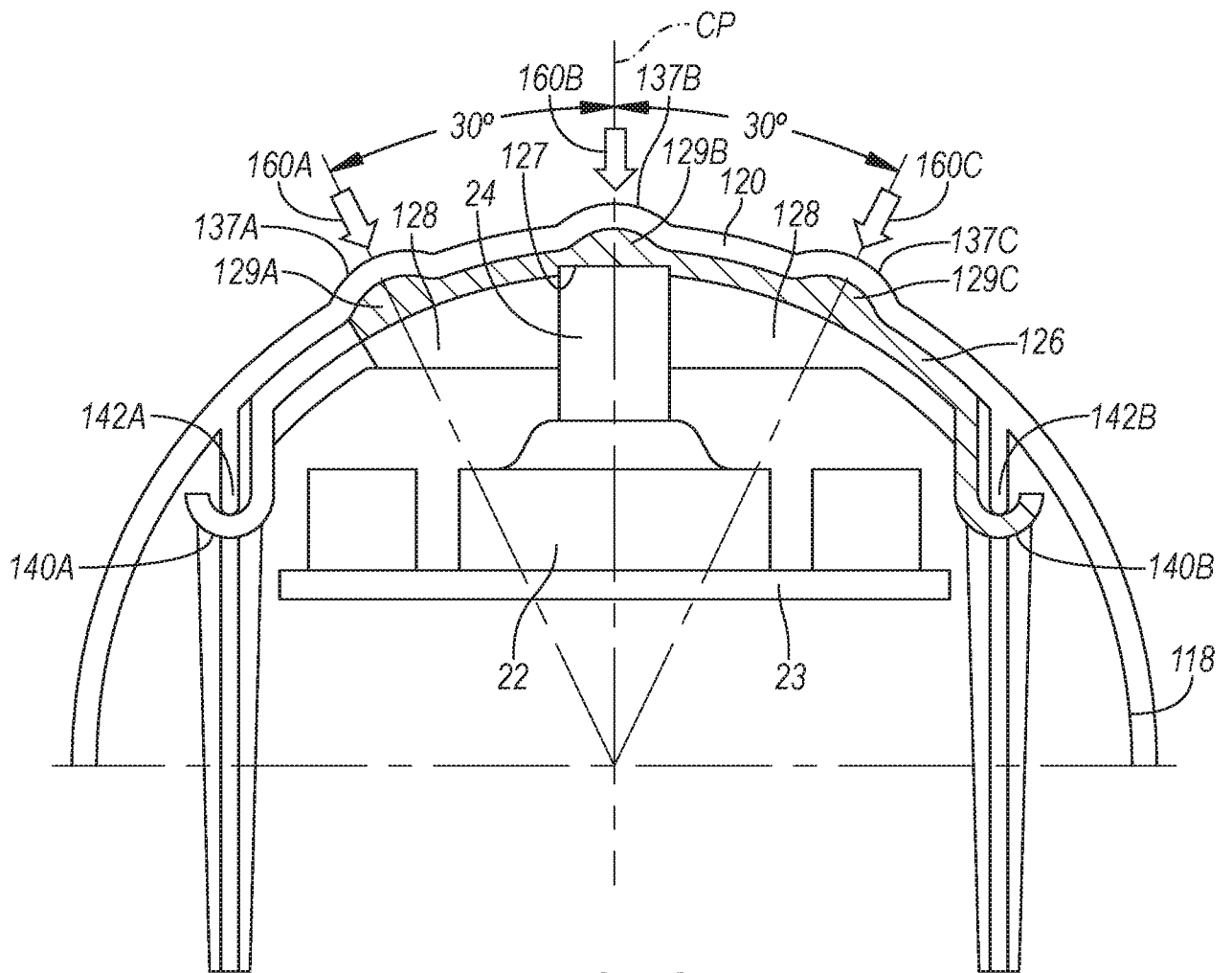


FIG. 8

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2016/028086

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER
 INV. H01H13/06 H01H13/08 H01H21/08 H01H21/10
 ADD. A61B18/12 A61B18/14 A61B17/00

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

B. FIELDS SEARCHED
 Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
 H01H A61B

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

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
 EPO-Internal, WPI Data

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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X	EP 2 282 316 A1 (VALEO SIST S DE SEGURIDAD Y DE CIERRE [ES]) 9 February 2011 (2011-02-09) paragraphs [0020] - [0040], [0051] - [0054]; figures 1-5	1-9, 11-13
	-/--	

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

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Date of the actual completion of the international search 11 November 2016	Date of mailing of the international search report 25/11/2016
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Name and mailing address of the ISA/ European Patent Office, P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL - 2280 HV Rijswijk Tel. (+31-70) 340-2040, Fax: (+31-70) 340-3016	Authorized officer Meyer, Jan
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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2016/028086

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT		
Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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Information on patent family members

International application No PCT/US2016/028086

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