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(54) Title: HUB UNIT

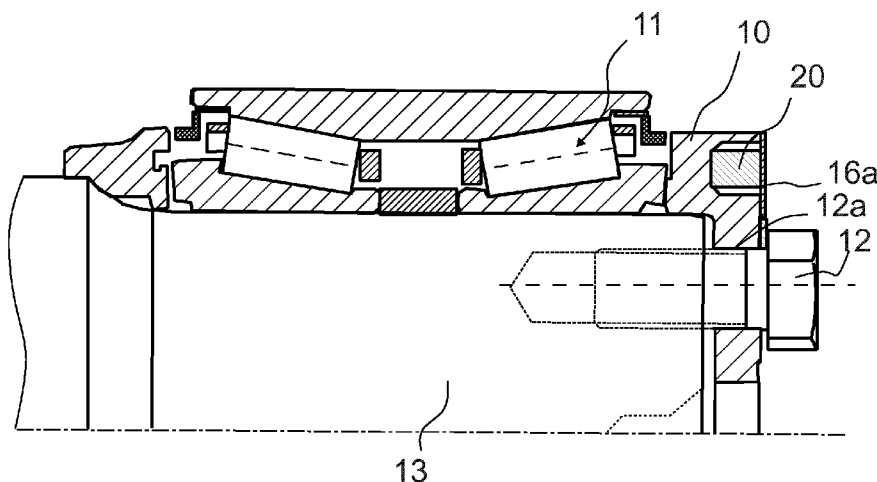


Fig. 1

(57) Abstract: The invention relates to a hub unit including an end cap (10) for preloading and retaining a bearing unit (11) on an axle (13). It is proposed that the end cap (10) is provided with a sensor unit (20) for detecting at least vibrations and/or temperature of the bearing unit (11).

Hub unit

Field of the Invention

The invention relates to a hub unit including an end cap for preloading and re-
5 taining a bearing unit on an axle. Hub units of this kind are in particular used for railway train hubs, which include in particular two-row tapered roller bearings suitable for heavy loads.

Background of the Invention

10 Hub units for bearings with tapered raceways for rollers suitable for heavy loads are provided with one or two inner rings fitted onto an axle and outer rings mounted in the hub of the wheel. The inner rings have to be retained and preloaded so as to support the axial forces resulting from the inclinations of the raceways.

15

It is known to provide retaining end caps at the end of the axle, wherein the retaining end caps are fixed by means of three or four screws for preloading and retaining the bearing unit on the axle.

20 Retaining end caps in hub units of this type have to act as springs and thus allow for a predetermined flexibility in the axial direction. The strength and material properties, in particular the elastic properties of the ring are therefore highly relevant for the product as a whole and are extensively studied in advance using finite-element analysis algorithms. This problem has led to the technical
25 prejudice that the end cap should be constituted by one massive single body made of strong and flexible steel and that protuberances or recesses should be avoided as far as possible.

Further, it is known to provide bearings other than the above tapered roller
30 bearings with sensor units attached to the outer or inner ring. Typical sensor units are formed as temperature sensors, rotation sensor or vibration sensors

suitable for detecting an operating status of the bearing, which may help to detect problems or wear at a very early stage.

Hitherto, sensor units as described above have not been used in railway hubs
5 because it was considered impossible to integrate the sensor in such a way that the resulting assembly is sufficiently robust for operating the harsh conditions e.g. under freight trains.

A further difficulty is the provision of a sufficiently robust power supply for the
10 sensor unit and a reliable possibility for reading out data.

Summary of the Invention

It is the object of the invention to solve the above problems of the prior art by
15 providing a hub unit including an end cap with a sensor unit for detecting operating parameters of the bearing unit.

The invention starts from a hub unit including an end cap for preloading and retaining a bearing unit on an axle. In particular, the invention relates to train
20 hubs for any kind of railway train, in particular for freight trains. The typical diameter of the end cap required for the invention is 180mm - 200mm, wherein the latter values are minimum sizes. The invention is applicable for both G-Class and K-Class hubs. Typical preload forces are 445000N on K class.

25 It is proposed that the end cap is provided with a sensor unit for detecting at least vibrations and/or temperature of the bearing unit. By providing the sensor unit on or in the end cap rather than on the outer or inner ring of the bearing, it is possible to create an assembly which is sufficiently robust to meet the requirements of the technical field in terms of temperature resistance, robustness,
30 chemical resistance, etc.

In a preferable embodiment, the sensor unit is provided with a wireless transmitter for sending the data acquired by the sensor to a remote receiver unit, which may in particular be installed in the train and connected to a controller of the train. The controller may be configured to evaluate the data received from the sensor unit and to generate warning signal if e.g. a high temperature or strong vibrations indicate that the end of the lifetime of the bearing is approaching.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the end cap is provided with a pocket accommodating the sensor unit, wherein the pocket is covered by at least one cover plate.

The sensor unit may be protected from damaging influences from the outside such as gravel, oil, salt, etc. by being safely accommodated within the pocket.

Further, it is proposed that the pocket is formed as an annular recess arranged concentrically with respect to a rotation axis of the bearing unit, which corresponds to a symmetry axis of the end cap or of a central hole thereof.

In this case, the cover plate is preferably provided with a through-hole, wherein at least an antenna portion of the transmitter unit protrudes through the through-hole over the outer surface cover plate. As a consequence, the cover plate may be made of robust metal, in particular of anodized carbon steel, while at the same time the cover plate does not screen the radio transmission signals to and from the antenna portion of the transmitter unit.

In a preferred embodiment of the invention, the sensor unit is provided with an arc-shaped sealed housing and with a circuit board arranged within the housing. The arc-shape is particularly suitable for being fitted into the end cap in proximity to an outer circumference thereof such that the hub package size may be kept while at the same time ensuring a sufficient strength of the hub.

In order to enable a fitting of the circuit board into the arc-shaped housing, it is proposed that the circuit board comprises multiple parts, the parts being pivotably connected by flexible elements to one another. In a preferred embodiment, a wiring side of at least one of the multiple parts is oriented in a direction essentially opposite to the direction in which the wiring side of at least one of the neighboring parts of the circuit board is oriented. The flexible elements may be used to switch the wiring sides of the circuit board. This helps to fit the assembly into the curved interior of the housing.

10 In preferred embodiments of the invention, the sensor unit may comprise at least one acoustic emission (AE) sensor, a temperature sensor and a gyro sensor.

A further aspect of the invention relates to a controller suitable for reading out data acquired by the sensor unit of a hub unit according to the above defined type, wherein the controller is configured to generate a status information and/or warning signals based on the detection results obtained from the sensor unit.

The above embodiments of the invention as well as the appended claims and figures show multiple characterizing features of the invention in specific combinations. The skilled person will easily be able to consider further combinations or sub-combinations of these features in order to adapt the invention as defined in the claims to his specific needs.

25

Brief Description of the Figures

The invention will now be described in more detail for explanatory, and in no sense limiting, purposes, with reference to the following figures, in which

30 Fig. 1 is a schematic cross-sectional view of a hub unit with an end cap and a two-row taper roller bearing.

- Fig. 2 is a sectional view of the end cap of Fig. 1.
- Fig. 3 shows an end cap of a hub unit according to the invention in an assembled state.
- 5 Fig. 4 shows the end cap of Fig. 1 and 3 with a sensor unit and with one cover plate removed.
- Fig. 5 shows the sensor unit of the hub unit according to Figs. 3 and 4 separated from the hub unit.
- 10 Fig. 6 shows the sensor unit of Fig. 5 with its top cover part removed.
- Fig. 7 shows the sensor unit of Figs. 5 and 6, wherein a supporting plate carrying the transmitter unit is removed.
- 15 Fig. 8 shows the sensor assembly and the circuit boards of the sensor unit according to Figs. 5-7 without a housing of the sensor unit.
- 20 Fig. 9 shows a sectional view of the sensor unit according to Figs. 4-8.

25 Detailed Description of the Embodiments

Fig. 1 shows a hub unit including an end cap 10 fixed with three bolts 12 on an axial end face of an axle 13 so as to preload and retain a bearing unit 11 with a split inner ring and an outer ring fitted onto the axle 13. The bearing unit 11 is a two-row taper roller bearing in O-configuration.

30

As illustrated in Fig. 3, the end cap 10 comprises a solid metal base part 14 and three arc-shaped cover plates 16a – 16c fixed with two screws 17 respectively

onto an axially outer side of the base portion 14 so as to surround the central portion with the bolts 12.

The metal base part 14 is illustrated in a cross-sectional view in Fig. 2. An outer
5 side of the metal base part 14, which faces away from the bearing unit 11 in the assembled configuration is provided with an annular, groove-like recess 18, which is symmetric with respect to a central hole of the end cap 10 and its base part 14. The pocket or recess 18 is delimited by a metal wall 19 of essentially constant thickness on the radially outer side and by a solid bulk body of the
10 base part 14 on the radially inner side.

As illustrated in Figs 3 and 4, the cover plates 16a-16c cover the annular, groove-like recess 18 which is machined into the base portion 14 around its entire circumference concentrically to the rotational symmetry axis of the base portion 14. The base portion 14 has a threefold rotational symmetry, wherein only
15 the holes 12a (Figs 1 and 2) for the bolts 12 and for the screws for fixing the cover plate 16a-16c break the complete rotational symmetry. As a consequence, the base portion 14 is very robust and sufficiently strong to support the required axial loads while having the required elastic properties and being at the
20 same time easily machinable.

As illustrated in Fig. 4, the sensor unit 20 is arranged in the annular pocket 18. The sensor unit 20 has a protruding antenna portion 22, which is part of a wireless transmitter 24 of the sensor unit 20 and the cover plate 16a covering the
25 sensor unit 20 has a through-hole 26 (Fig. 3). In the assembled configuration as illustrated in Fig. 3, the antenna portion 22 is fitted through the through-hole 26 so as to protrude over the cover plate 16a.

Fig. 5 illustrates a configuration wherein the sensor unit 20 has been taken out
30 of the pocket 18. The sensor unit 22 has a connector 28 for connecting the sensor unit 20 to a power supply, e.g. batteries or accumulators provided in the recess under the cover plates 16b and 16c.

A top plastic cover 30 of a housing 32 of the sensor unit 20 is made of a very robust plastic material such as PPS GF30. Rolled metal inserts 34 are fitted into holes at both ends of the housing 32. The inserts 34 receive the screws for fixing the cover plate 16a such that the sensor unit 20 is fixed with the same screws.

The top cover 30 is fixed on the housing by two further screws and an O-ring seal is provided between the top cover 30 and the rest of the housing 32. The bottom part of the housing 32 is equally made of the same robust plastic material as the top cover 30.

Fig. 6 illustrates a configuration where the top cover 30 is removed. A base plate 36 supports the transmitter unit 24 and three parts of 38a, 38b, 40 of a circuit board are fitted into pertinent mounting slots in the housing 32 so as to be arranged parallel to an axial direction of the end cap 10, which corresponds to a rotation axis of the bearing 11. The circuit board 40 in the middle of the sensor unit 20 is arranged such that its wiring side faces radially outwards, i.e. towards the convex side of the housing 32, whereas the circuit boards 38a, 38b are arranged in the essentially opposite direction, i.e. such that their wiring sides face towards the concave side of the housing 32. As shown in Fig. 8, the circuit board 40 and the circuit boards 38a, 38b are connected to one another with flexible elements 41a, 41b so as to be pivotable. The entire circuit board configuration can therefore be easily fitted into the curved interior of the housing 32 while allowing for sufficient mounting space for the circuit elements despite of the curved shape of the housing 32.

Fig. 7 shows a configuration where the base plate 36 with the transmitter 24 is removed. A bottom surface of the housing 32 is provided with a through-hole 42 (Fig. 9) receiving the sensor base plate 44 which is forced downwards by springs (not illustrated) thrusting to the backside of the base plate 36. The sen-

sensor base plate 44 carries vibration sensor and/or acoustic emission (AE) sensor 48 and a temperature sensor 50.

As illustrated in Figs. 8 and 9, a gyro sensor 52 is mounted on the circuit board
5 40.

The sensor base plate 44 is pressed to the bottom surface of the pocket 18 in the base portion 14 of the end cap 10, which is very close to the inner ring of the bearing such that the temperature and the vibrations of the inner ring can be
10 measured in a very reliable way.

Further, two extra crystals for the transmitter unit 24 are provided on the central circuit board 40.

15 The signals obtained by the sensors 48-52 are processed in a processing unit 54 on the circuit board 40 and transmitted in a wireless way by the transmitter 24 of the sensor unit 20. The signals are received and processed by a control unit (not illustrated) in the train, which compares the measured values with threshold values, which may be a function of the outside temperature or other
20 outside parameters, and generates status information and/or warning signals in relation to the bearing unit 11.

Claims

- 5 1. Hub unit including an end cap (10) for preloading and retaining a bearing unit on an axle (13),
 characterized in that
 the end cap (10) is provided with a sensor unit (20) for detecting at least vibrations and/or temperature of the bearing unit (11).
- 10 2. Hub unit according to claim 1,
 characterized in that
 the sensor unit (20) is provided with a wireless transmitter (24) for sending the data acquired by the sensor unit (20).
- 15 3. Hub unit according to one of the preceding claims,
 characterized in that
 the end cap (10) is provided with a pocket (18) accommodating the sensor unit (20), wherein the pocket (18) is covered by at least one cover
20 plate (16a – 16c).
4. Hub unit according to claim 3,
 characterized in that
 the pocket is formed as an annular recess (18) arranged concentrically
25 with respect a rotation axis of the bearing unit (11).
5. Hub unit according to claims 2 and 3,
 characterized in that
 the cover plate (16a) is provided with a through hole (26), wherein at
30 least an antenna portion (22) of the transmitter unit (24) protrudes through the through hole (26) over the cover plate (16a).

6. Hub unit according to one of the preceding claims,
characterized in that
the sensor unit (20) is provided with an overall arc-shaped sealed housing (32) and with a circuit board (38a, 38b, 40) arranged within the housing (32).
5
7. Hub unit according to claim 4,
characterized in that
the circuit board comprises multiple parts (38a, 38b, 40), the parts being pivotably connected by a flexible element (41a, 41b) to one another.
10
8. Hub unit according to claim 7,
characterized in that
a wiring side of at least one of the multiple parts (40) of the circuit board is oriented in a direction essentially opposite to the direction in which at least one of its neighboring parts (38a, 38b) of the circuit board is oriented.
15
9. Hub unit according to one of the preceding claims,
characterized in that
the sensor unit (20) comprises at least one acoustic emission sensor (48).
20
10. Hub unit according to one of the preceding claims,
characterized in that
the sensor unit (20) comprises at least one gyro sensor (52).
25
11. Controller suitable for reading out data acquired by the sensor unit of a hub unit according any one of the preceding claims, wherein the controller is configured to generate a status information and/or warning signals based on the detection results obtained from the sensor unit (20).
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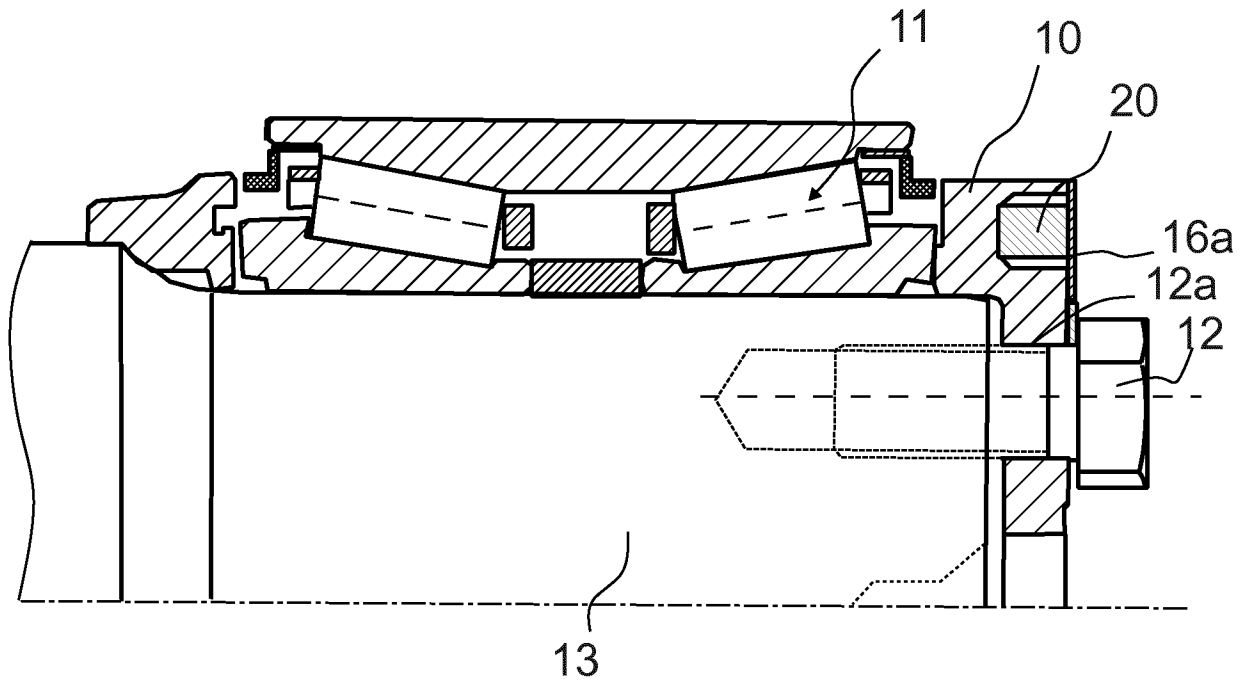


Fig. 1

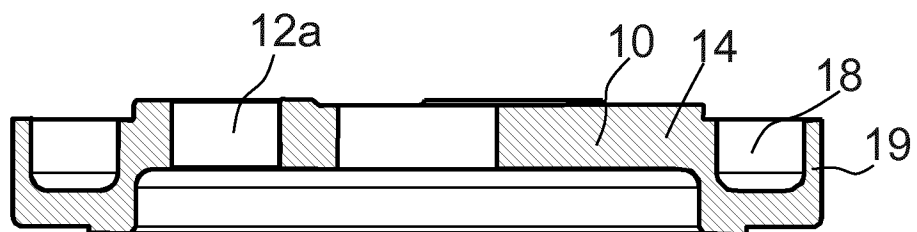
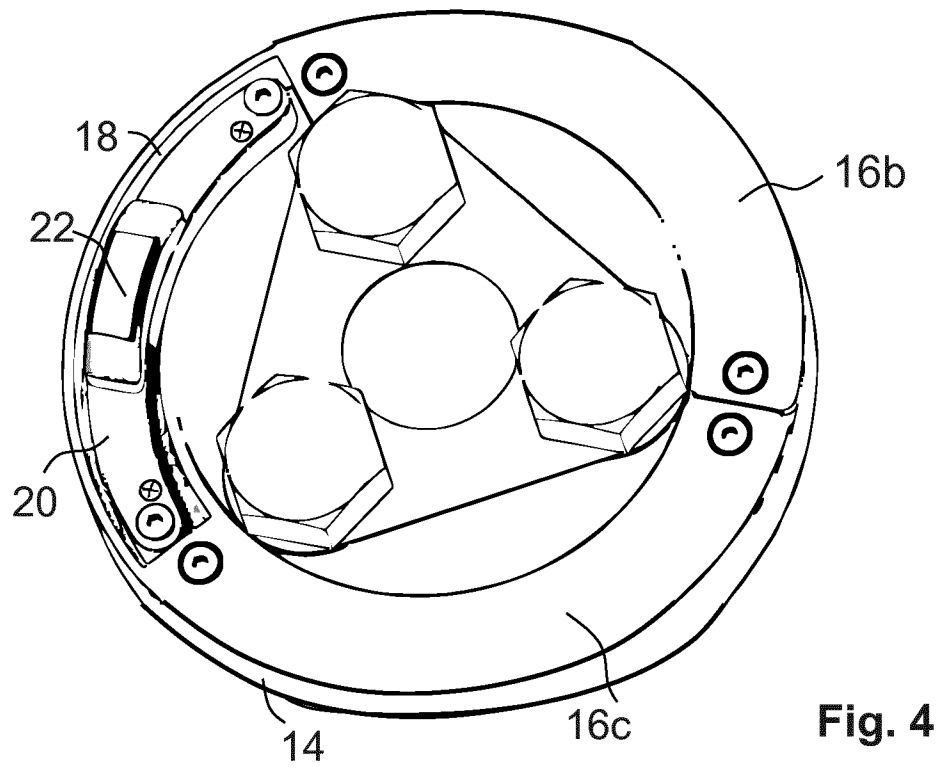
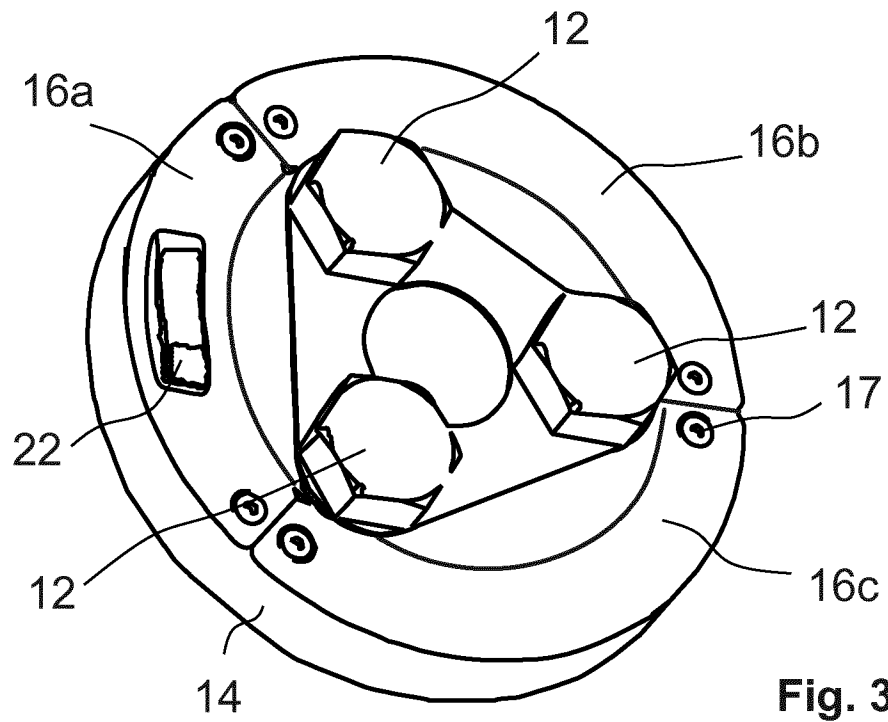


Fig. 2

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3 / 5

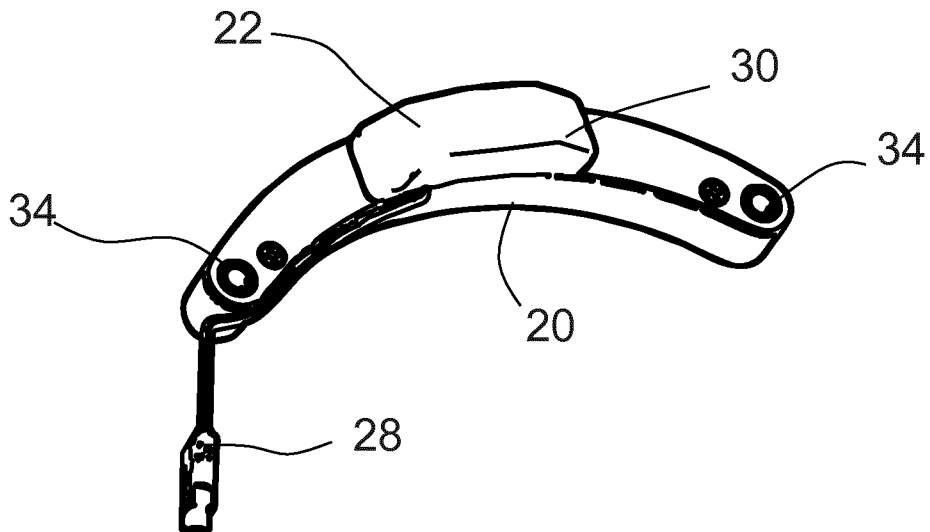


Fig. 5

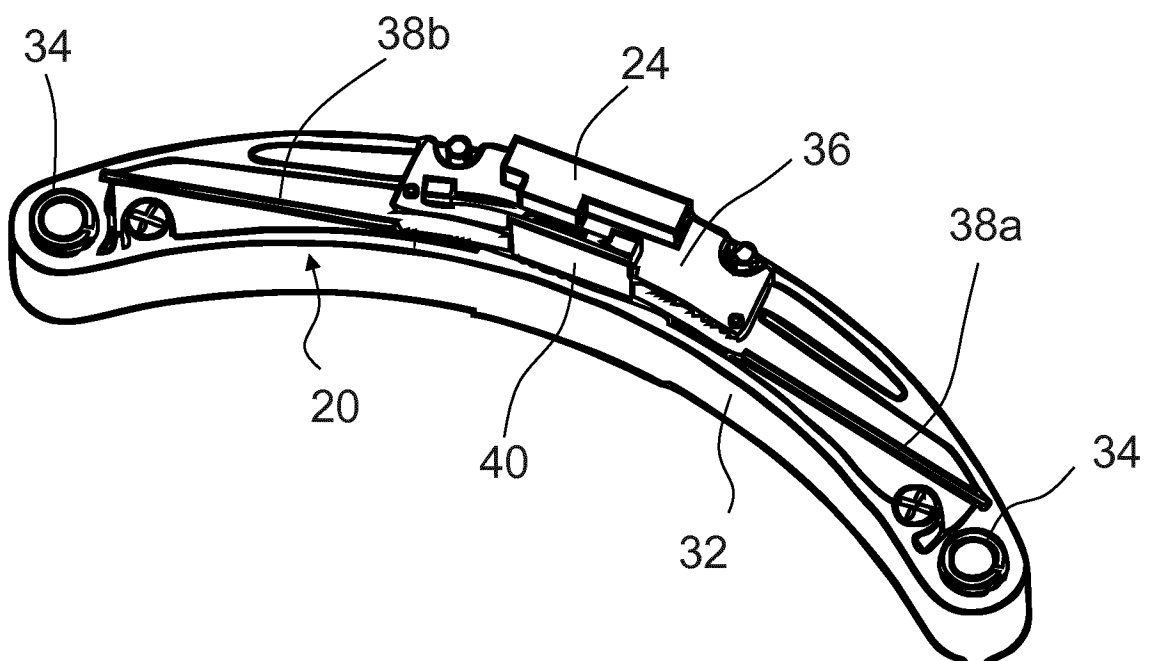


Fig. 6

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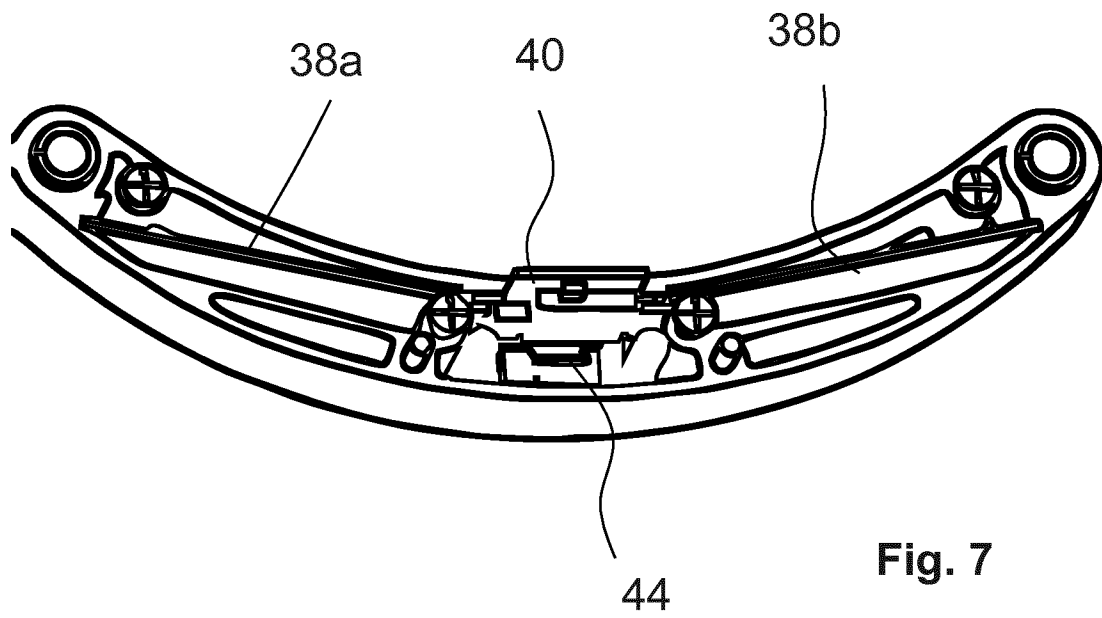


Fig. 7

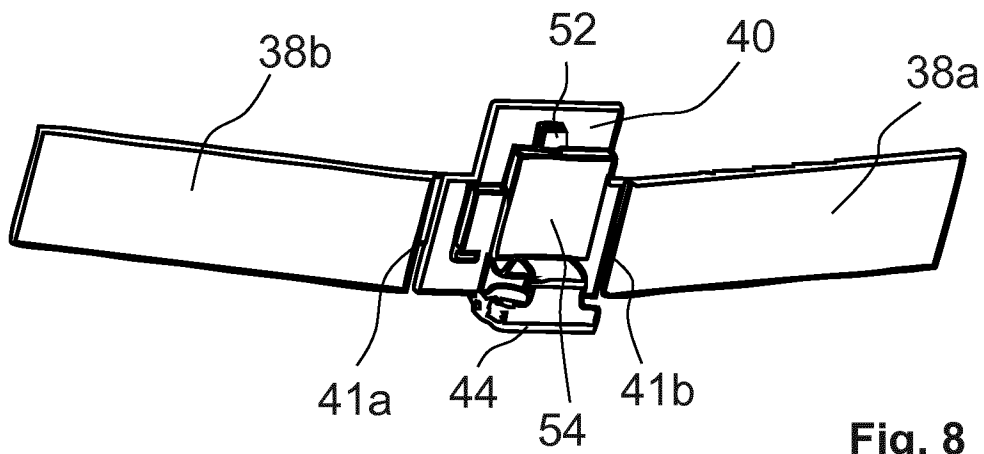


Fig. 8

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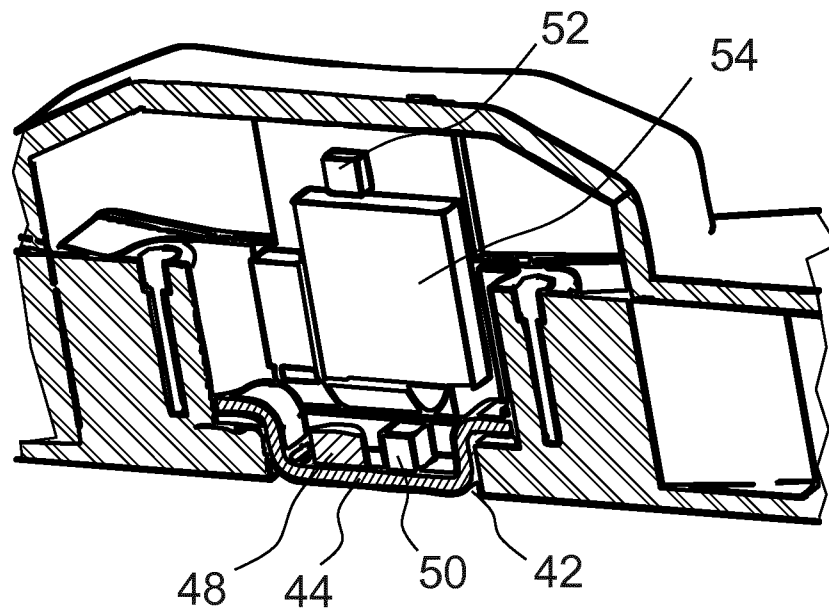


Fig. 9

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/EP2013/056474

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. B61F15/20

ADD.

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)

B61F G01P

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

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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X	----- WO 00/51869 A1 (SKF IND SPA [IT]; MORETTI ROBERTO [IT]; SEMA SILVANO [IT]; GENERO MATT) 8 September 2000 (2000-09-08) figure 6	1,11
X	----- JP 2008 051819 A (NSK LTD) 6 March 2008 (2008-03-06) figure 4	1,11
X	----- WO 2011/135198 A2 (NTN SNR ROULEMENTS [FR]; BALLAS GERARD [FR]; CHAUDIER BERNARD [FR]; LE) 3 November 2011 (2011-11-03) figure 1	1,11
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.



See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

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"&" document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

17 December 2013

Date of mailing of the international search report

03/01/2014

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Lorandi, Lorenzo

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

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Information on patent family members

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