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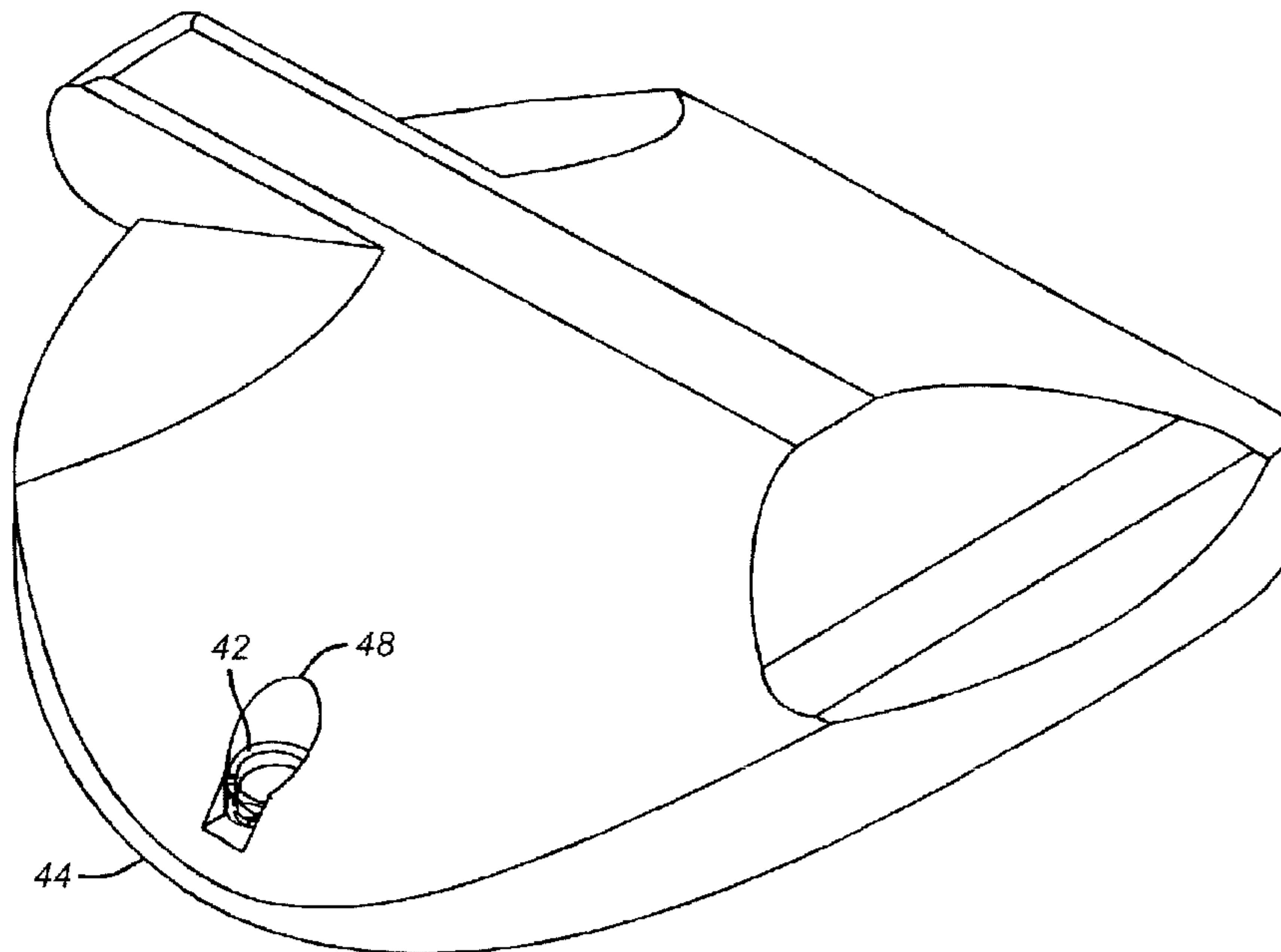
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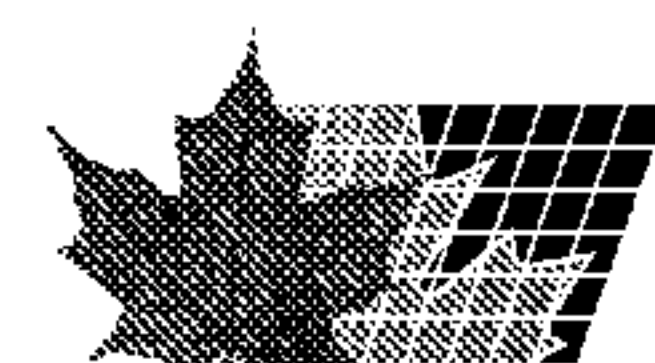
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(54) Title: EQUALIZING FLAPPER FOR DOWNHOLE SAFETY VALVES



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

An equalizer valve for a flapper in a subsurface safety valve is described. A tapered plunger is biased by compact spring disposed in the plunger bore. The spring is supported by a C-shaped ring extending into a peripheral groove around the plunger bore.



ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

An equalizer valve for a flapper in a subsurface safety valve is described. A tapered plunger is biased by compact spring disposed in the plunger bore. The spring is supported by a C-shaped ring extending into a
5 peripheral groove around the plunger bore.

EQUALIZING FLAPPER FOR DOWNHOLE SAFETY VALVES

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The field of this invention related to equalizing valves mounted in ninety degree rotatable closure members, known as flappers, and more particularly to biasing systems to keep such equalizing valves in a closed position.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Typically, a well completion includes a sub-surface safety valve. This valve is actuated from the surface using a hydraulic control system with control lines running from the surface to the valve location. These valves feature a closure member which is rotatable through an arc of ninety degrees. The control system pressure is used to move a hollow tube, known as a flow tube, downwardly, usually against a return spring. The downward movement of the flow tube rotates the flapper downwardly and out of the way to allow flow from the producing formation to reach the surface through the flow tube. Removal of pressure from the control system allowed the return spring to bias the flow tube upward, whereupon another spring on the flapper urged it to the closed position, blocking the opening in the flow tube

With the flapper in the closed position, formation pressure builds up on the closed flapper. In this intended mode of operation, the flapper holds back the flow from the formation in order to allow for safe well operation. The problem that arises occurs when the well needs to be placed in service at a later time. The flapper must then be opened. However, at this time there may be substantial differential pressure acting on substantially the entire cross-sectional area of the flapper. Aggravating this differential pressure problem would be a situation in the well bore above the closed flapper where thousands of feet of the tubing was gas filled or filled with a light density fluid. The presence of gas or light weight fluids above the flapper had, in the past, required that such fluids be replaced with heavier fluid to eliminate or reduce differential pressure across the flapper prior to actuation of the flow tube. The fluid replacement procedure was costly as well as time consuming and better

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methods were developed to expedite the re-opening of the flapper under conditions of high differential pressure.

The equalizing valve in the flapper design was developed to addressed this issue. This prior art design is illustrated in **Fig. 1**. A flapper **10** is shown in perspective with a vertical segment **12** machined out adjacent an edge **14**. Undercuts **16** and **18** straddle the vertical segment **12** to allow for placement of a leaf spring **20** therein. Leaf spring **20** straddles bore **22** in which is disposed a plunger **24**. Plunger **24** has a taper **26** which is biased against a mating edge or surface in bore **22**. The plunger **24** is situated so that a flow tube(not shown), when urged downwardly by a control system will first contact plunger **24** and move it against the bias of leaf spring **20**. Thus, before the flapper **10** begins to move, the taper **26** has come off of its mating edge or surface in the bore **22** to equalize pressure on the flapper **10**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the view in **Fig. 1** illustrates the down hole side of the flapper and that the flow tube is positioned on the opposite side of the flapper from which location it can make initial contact with the extending plunger **24**.

There was a weakness in the design described above which , in some cases, resulted in leakage past taper **26** and its mating surface in bore **22**. The reason this happened is directly related to the amount of the flapper **10** that had to be machined away to form the removed vertical segment **12** and its adjacent undercuts **16** and **18**. The removal of so much metal to accommodate the leaf spring **20** weakened the flapper **10** sufficiently to allow distortion of bore **22** with resulting leakage past taper **26**.

Accordingly, the objective of the present invention is to improve the design of the prior art **Fig. 1** so as to eliminate the leakage problem under conditions of high differential pressure across the flapper **10**. This and other advantages will become apparent to those skilled in the art from a review of the preferred embodiment, described below.

Relevant to the present invention are US Patents: 6,079,947; 5,884,705; 5,503,229; and 5,752,569.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An equalizer valve for a flapper in a subsurface safety valve is described. A tapered plunger is biased by compact spring disposed in the plunger bore. The spring is supported by a retaining ring which may be a C-shaped ring extending into a peripheral groove around the plunger bore.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a prior art equalizer design for a flapper:

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the equalizer valve of the present invention;

Figure 3 is an elevational view of the equalizer valve of the present invention; and

Figure 4 is an exploded view of the equalizer valve of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring to Fig. 3, the flapper **28** is shown to best illustrate the extension of the plunger **30** so as to position it for selective contact with a downwardly moving flow tube, schematically represented by arrow **32**. Plunger **30** resides in bore **34**, which is preferably narrow. Bore **34** has a mill flat **36**, best seen in Fig. 4. The plunger **30** has a mating taper **38** which makes sealing contact with mill flat **36**. Other configurations for sealing apart from mill flat **36** and taper **38** can be used without departing from the invention. For example, sealing can be metal to metal at an end of plunger **30**. Alternatively the sealing can involve a resilient seal or seals or could involve metal to metal contact at other locations of plunger **30**.

A bias on plunger **30** is provided by a spring **40** which is retained in bore **34** by a retainer such as c-ring **42**. In the preferred embodiment the spring **42** is a wave spring. This type of spring is preferred because it provides a relatively large closing force when longitudinally compressed a short

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distance as compared with, for example, a coiled spring. Wave springs are available from Smalley Steel Company of Wheeling, Illinois. They feature the ability to fit in small spaces and yet to provide the requisite force. In the case of a flapper **28** there is a limited space available dictated by the thickness
5 near edge **44** where contact with the flow tube (represented by arrow **32**) has to occur.

Figs. 2 and 4 illustrate how much less metal needs to be removed to accommodate spring **40** than the prior art design depicted in Fig. 1. Very little material beyond the diameter of taper **38** on plunger **30** needs to
10 be removed. A peripheral groove **46** is machined in bore **34** to accept a retainer, such as, the c-ring **42**, as shown in Fig. 3. Spring **40**, supported by c-ring **42** puts a closing force on plunger **30** by forcing its taper **38** against mill flat **36** in bore **34**. This closing force is overcome by the flow tube force represented by arrow **32** such that equalizing across flapper **28** occurs before
15 the flapper **28** is actually rotated by the flow tube itself.

Those skilled in the art will notice that the removed segment **48** out of flapper **28** is considerably smaller than the vertical segment **12** and undercuts **16** and **18** shown as removed from flapper **10**. As a result, under extreme differential pressures there is no distortion in bore **34** which could
20 cause leakage between mill flat **36** and taper **38**.

Removed segment **48** may be slightly larger than bore **34** to facilitate the machining of groove **46** and the subsequent insertion of c-ring **42**.

While spring **40** is preferably a wave spring other types of low
25 profile biasing mechanisms are within the scope of the invention. Such alternatives can include coil springs or one or more Belleville washers. Yet other biasing systems that permit a minimization of the size of removed segment **48** are within the scope of the invention.

The above description of the preferred embodiment is illustrative
30 and is not intended to be the full limits of the invention which is depicted in the claims which appear below.

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I CLAIM:

1. An equalizing system for a flapper in a well valve comprising:
a flapper having a bore therethrough;
5 a plunger, having a longitudinal axis and an outer periphery about said axis, and extending through said bore and biased into selective sealing contact therewith, said biasing accomplished by a biasing member disposed about said periphery.
- 10 2. The system of claim 1, wherein:
said biasing member comprises at least one wave spring.
3. The system of claim 1, wherein:
said biasing member comprises at least one Bellville washer.
15
4. The system of claim 1, wherein:
said biasing member comprises at least one coiled spring.
5. An equalizing system for a flapper in a well valve comprising:
20 a flapper having a bore therethrough;
a plunger, having a longitudinal axis and an outer periphery about said axis, and extending through said bore and biased into selective sealing contact therewith, a travel stop for said plunger in said bore.
- 25 6. The system of claim 5, further comprising:
at least one spring in said bore to create said bias.
7. The system of claim 6, wherein:
at least one wave spring in said bore to create said bias.
- 30 8. The system of claim 6, wherein:
at least one Bellville washer in said bore to create said bias.

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9. The system of claim 6, wherein:
at least one coiled spring in said bore to create said bias.
- 5 10. The system of claim 6, wherein:
said spring is supported by said travel stop.
11. The system of claim 10, wherein:
said travel stop is disposed in a groove circumscribing said
10 bore.
12. The system of claim 11, wherein:
said travel stop further comprises a snap ring.
- 15 13. An equalizing system for a flapper in a well valve comprising:
a flapper having a bore therethrough;
a plunger, having a longitudinal axis and an outer periphery
about said axis, and extending through said bore and biased into selective
sealing contact therewith, said bore conforming to the shape of said
20 periphery.
14. The system of claim 13, wherein:
said bias is applied within said bore.
- 25 15. The system of claim 14, wherein:
said plunger is retained by a retainer mounted in said bore.
16. The system of claim 15, wherein:
said bias is applied by at least on spring supported by said
30 retainer.
17. The system of claim 16, wherein:

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said spring comprises a wave spring.

18. The system of claim 13, wherein:

5 said plunger comprises a projection extending from said
periphery for selective sealing in said bore, said projection, when pushed
against said bias out of sealing contact, directs flow past said plunger radially,
in a direction away from said longitudinal axis, to get around said projection.

19. The system of claim 16, wherein:

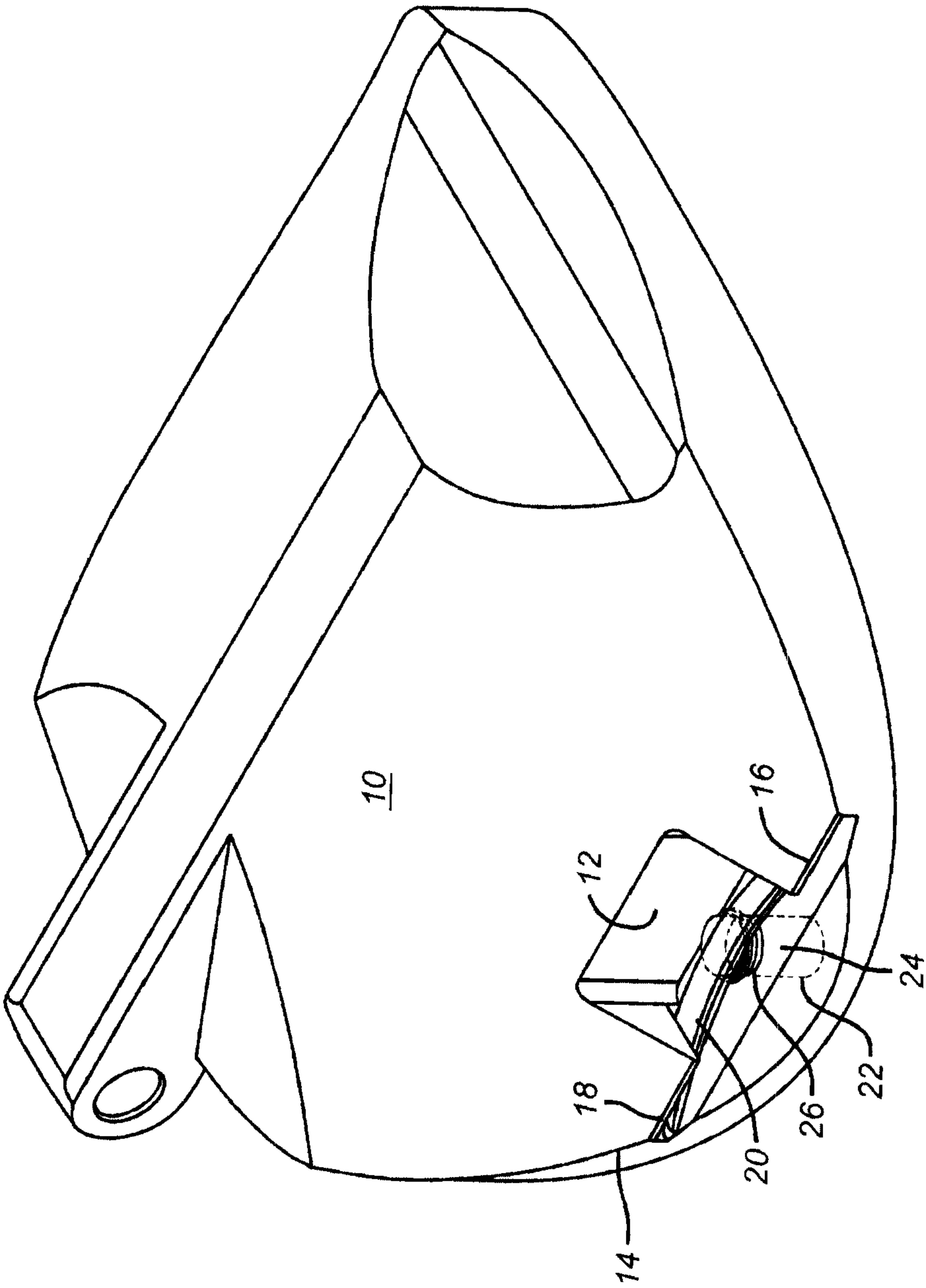
10 said retainer comprises a snap ring.

20. The system of claim 16, wherein:

said retainer is disposed in a groove surrounding said bore.

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(PRIOR ART)
FIG. 1

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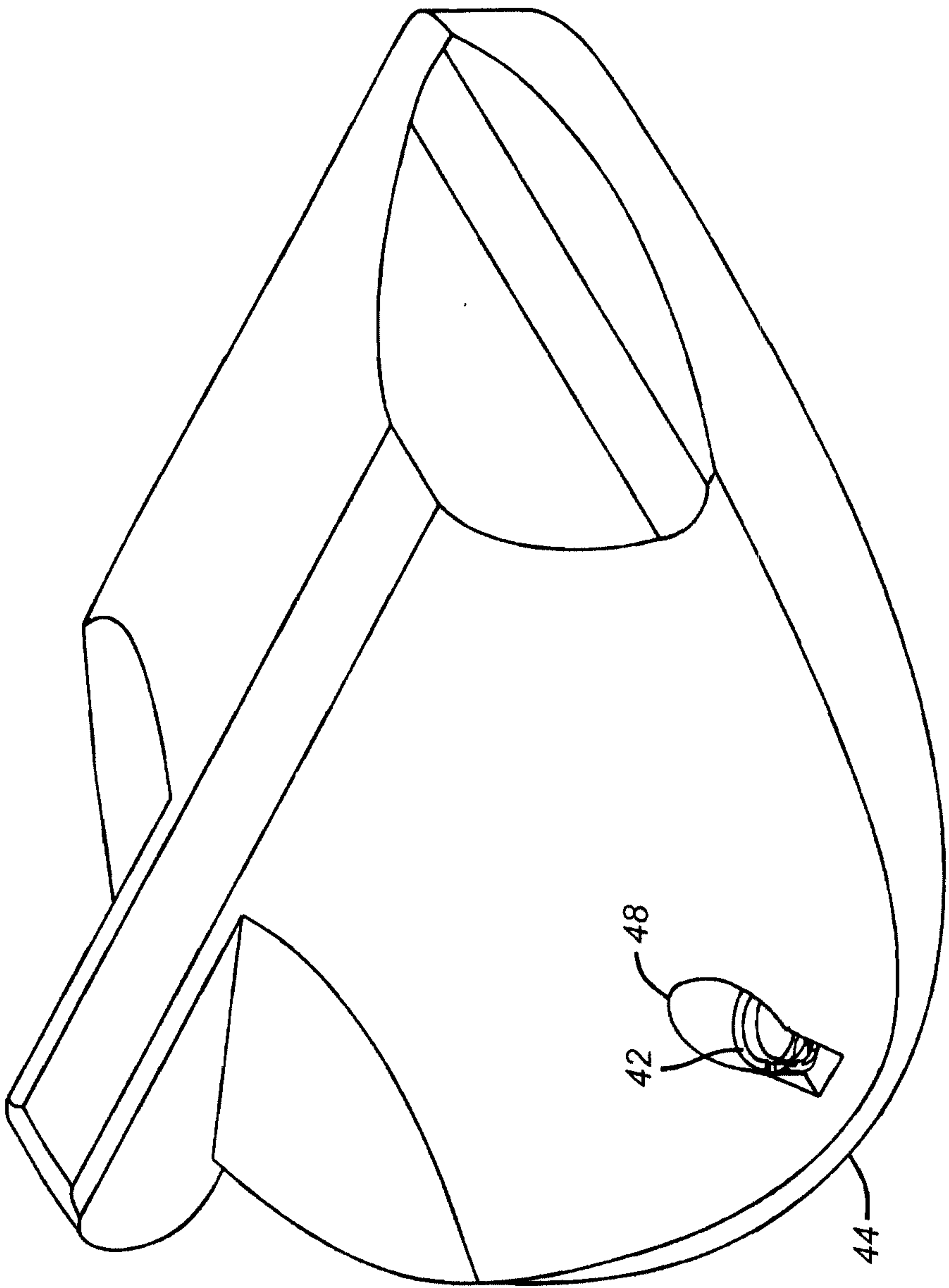


FIG. 2

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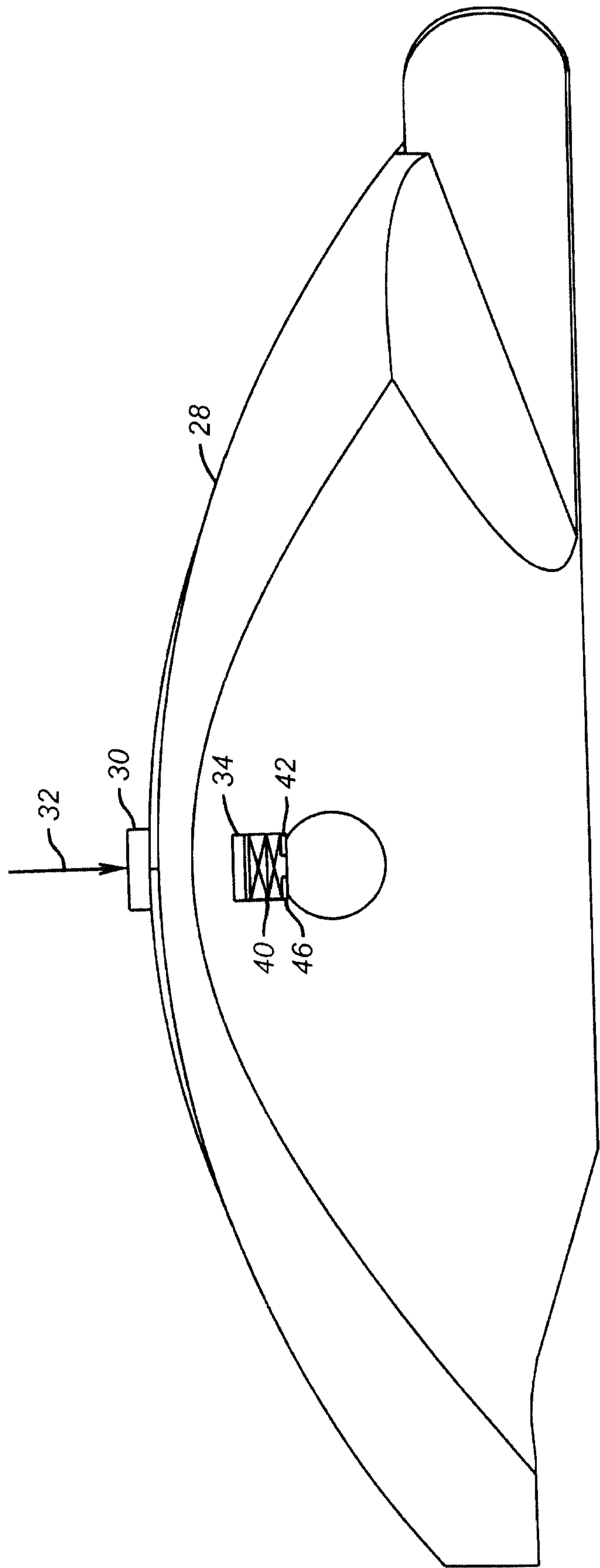


FIG. 3

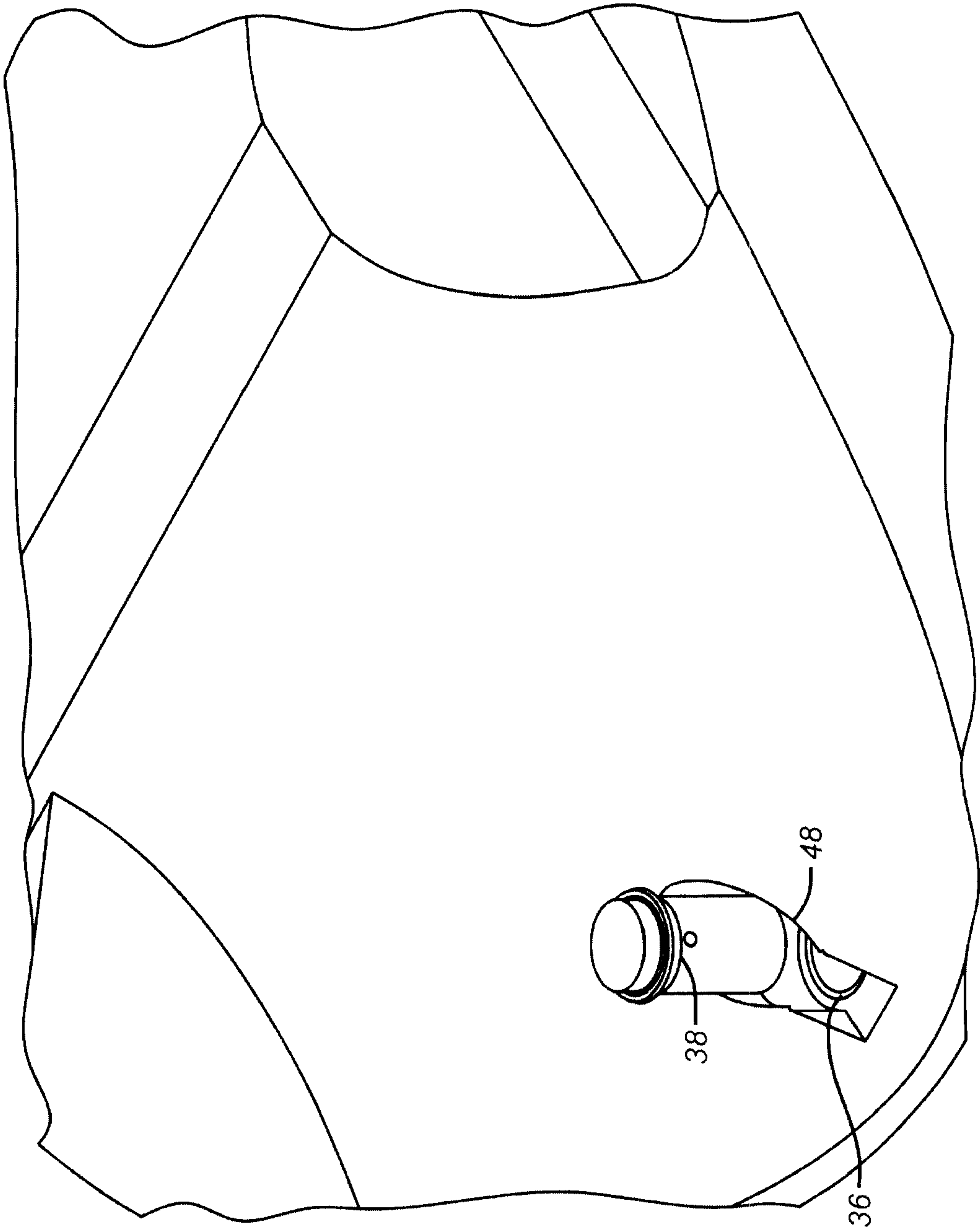


FIG. 4

