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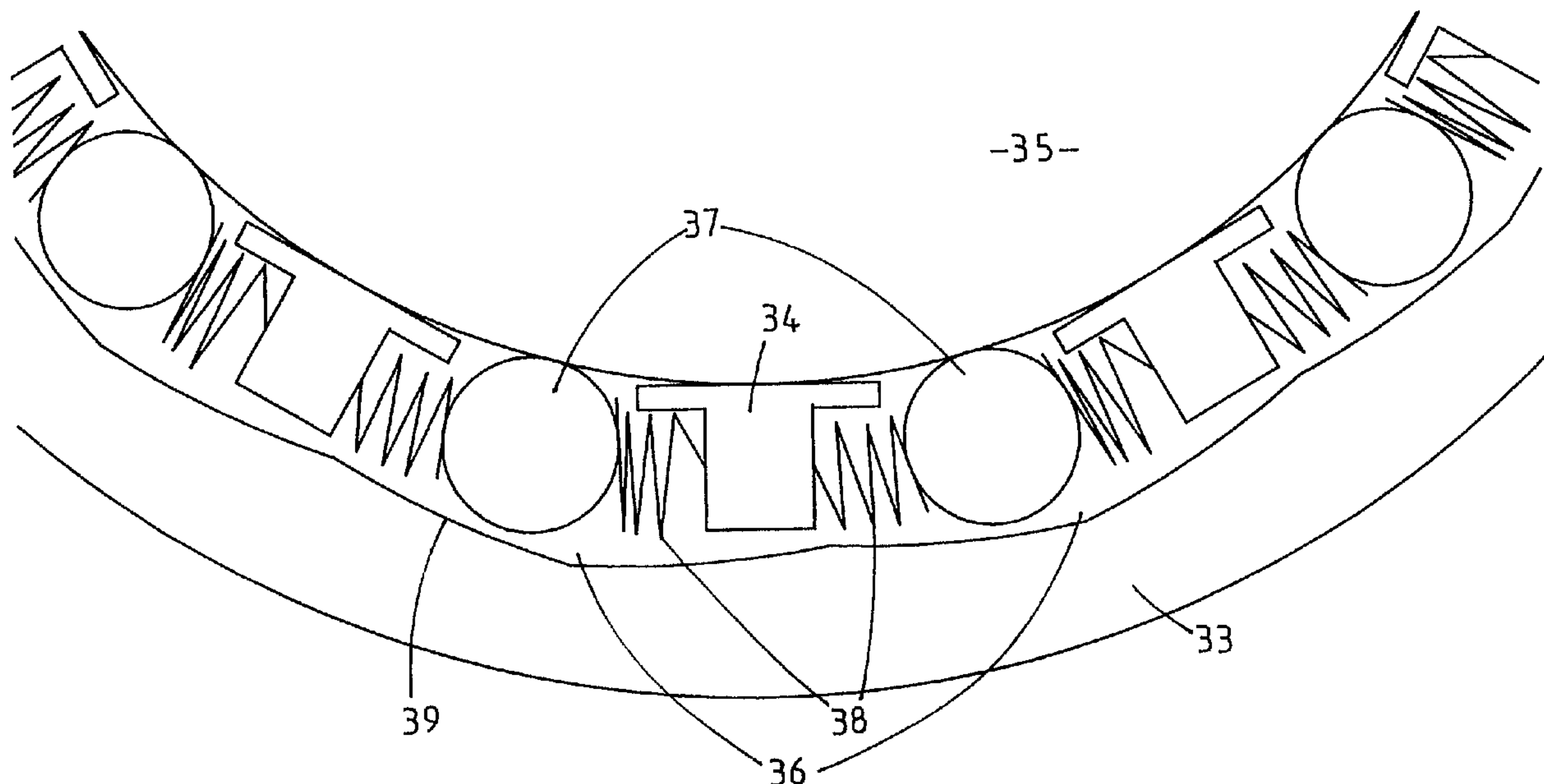
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A clamping mechanism having two or more jaws (1, 2) which may be opened to allow a tubular (5) to be introduced within the jaws and closed to retain the tubular (5) therewithin. Rollers (4) are located within concave recesses (3) and maintained in spaced apart relationship by biasing means (6). Rotation of tubular (5) may cause the rollers (4) to be wedged between a wall of the recess and tubular (5) to grip tubular (5) within jaws (1 and 2). The clamping mechanism may be utilised as an oil field tubular clamp, a slip, a pipe clamp etc. There is also disclosed a clutch comprising an outer race (33), a cage (34) and an inner ring (35). Recesses (36) are provided in outer race (33) and accommodate rollers (37) therewithin maintained in spaced apart relationship by cage (34). Cage (34) may be moved by an actuator to selectively allow free wheeling or prevent rotation in one or other direction. A socket ratchet (44) incorporating such a clutch is also disclosed.



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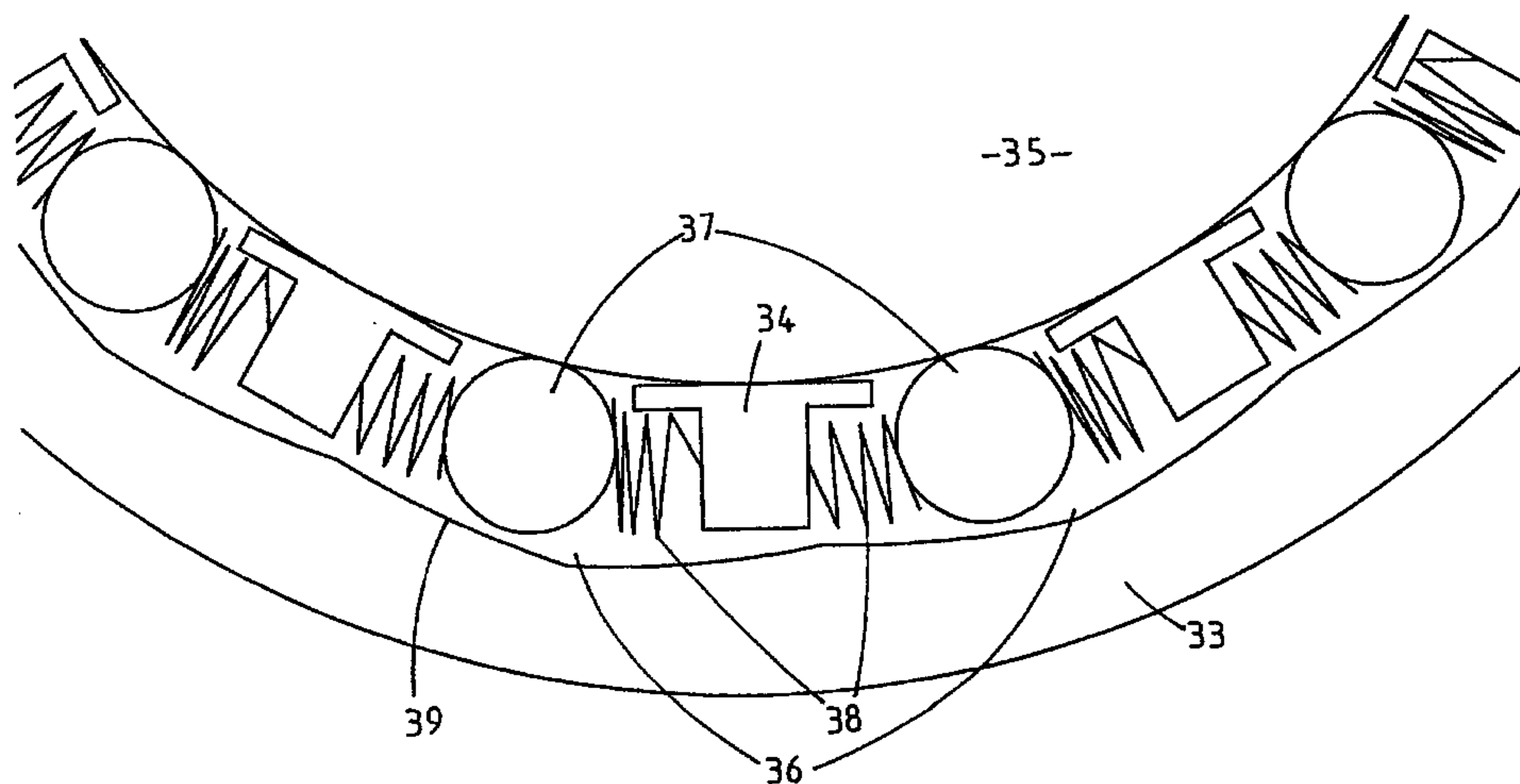
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CLAMPING MECHANISM, CLUTCH AND APPARATUS INCORPORATING THE SAME

The Technical Field

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This invention relates to gripping mechanisms. A first aspect relates to a clamping mechanism having multiple jaws which in one embodiment is suitable for gripping an oil field tubular. A second aspect relates to a user actuated clamping mechanism or clutch. A third aspect relates to an oil
10 field slip. A fourth aspect relates to a ratchet mechanism for a tool. A fifth aspect relates to a pipe clamp.

Background of the Invention

15 The sprague clutch is commonly employed as a one-directional clutch, for example in vehicle transmissions. Figure 18 shows a prior art type sprague clutch. A tubular body 100 has a plurality of axial recesses 101 formed therein to define a plurality of circumferential ramp surfaces 102. Rollers 103 are located within recesses 101 and maintained in a biased
20 position by springs 104. Rollers 103 contact and engage a ground inner ring 105.

When inner ring 105 is rotated clockwise with respect to body 100 rollers 103 are urged by inner ring 105 in a clockwise direction. Due to inclined
25 ramp surfaces 102 rollers 103 become wedged between ramp surfaces 102 and inner ring 105. Clockwise rotational force is therefore transferred between outer race 100 and inner ring 105 through rollers 103. When inner ring 105 is rotated anticlockwise with respect to outer race 100 rollers 103 move anticlockwise with respect to outer race 100.
30 This frees the rollers and inner ring 105 is able to rotate relatively freely with respect to outer race 100.

A modified design is shown in US 5,103,950 in which roller recesses

having a double cam-profile are utilised. Rollers 30 are also located within a cage 40. The double cam profile 21 enables the clutch to work in either direction. When shaft 10 and outer race 20 are wedged together by rollers 30, cage 40 is driven via shaft 10 and rollers 30. Power is thus
5 transferred via shaft 10, rollers 30 and cage 40. This clutch arrangement works automatically so that relative rotation of shaft 10 in outer race 20 causes rollers 30 to lock them together and cage 40 is driven thereby

During tubular running operations or well operations it is necessary to grip
10 an oil field tubular, such as a drill string, to hold one section whilst another section is rotated relative thereto to assemble or disassemble a string. A number of automated devices for handling drill pipes are known such as disclosed in US4,585,079.

15 Standard oil field tubulars are relatively robust and prior art clamping mechanisms have included toothed jaws or other means which apply a high force to a relatively small area of the tubular. As standard drill string is formed of relatively uniform steel this does not pose a major problem. However, some modern drill strings are formed of special materials, such
20 as high alloy steel pipe (e.g. 13 Cr), and handling by conventional clamping mechanisms can damage them. Such damage may reduce the life of the drill string and reduce the advantage gained from any surface coating or treatment.

25 The situation is problematic as the clamping mechanisms must restrain oil field tubulars against high torques (up to 300,000 foot pounds) in a dirty and greasy environment. Further, the tubulars may vary in diameter, ovality, wall thickness, material etc. The tubulars may also be dented, rusty or have surface scale.

30

A number of tools include ratchet mechanisms to allow free rotation in only one selected direction. Such tools include wrenches for socket sets, screw drivers, braces etc. In some situations, especially with wrenches,

there is very limited space to move a tool. In some cases the ratchet steps may be so coarse that it is not possible to move between one ratchet position to the next. This may make it impossible to use a tool in a confined space.

5

Pipe clamps typically include jaws which grip a pipe to be retained. As with oil filled tubulars this may result in marking of the pipe. It would be desirable to provide a pipe clamp which is able to resist high rotational forces without damaging the pipe.

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Disclosure of the Invention

It is an object of the invention to provide an improved gripping mechanism or to at least provide the public with a useful choice.

15

According to a first aspect of the invention there is provided a clamping mechanism including:

a plurality of jaws which may be moved apart to allow an object to be positioned within the jaws and moved together to substantially encompass the object; and

a plurality of gripping elements retained about the mouths of the jaws between the jaws and the object, the arrangement being such that when the jaws are closed about an object rotation of the object enclosed within the jaws may cause the gripping elements to move into positions in which they are wedged between the jaws and the object so that the object is gripped by the clamping mechanism.

25

The gripping elements are preferably retained by positioning means which allow the gripping elements to be rotated with respect to the jaws to bring the gripping elements into a position in which they may be wedged between the jaws and an object to be gripped. The positioning means is preferably a cage formed in sections corresponding to the jaw sections.

30

The gripping elements may be rollers which locate within ramped recesses formed in the jaws. For rotational gripping the rollers will be axially aligned and for longitudinal gripping the rollers will be transversely aligned. The recesses containing the rollers may have a ramp in only one direction or ramps in both directions to facilitate gripping for both directions of rotation.

Alternatively, the gripping elements may be asymmetric elements known as "dog bones". Where dog bones are employed the inner jaw surface and object to be gripped may have a substantially circular cross-section. Alternatively the gripping elements may be in the form of cams located along longitudinal ribs provided about the interior surfaces of the jaws.

The jaws may be formed in two or more parts. They may be hingedly connected or translated into and out of their closed configuration. The jaw sections may interengage at their edges and include means to lock the jaw sections together. A split pin arrangement through overlapping fingers may be employed.

According to a further aspect of the invention there is provided a clutch including:

- a generally cylindrical gripping surface;
- gripping elements; and
- positioning means retaining said gripping elements in spaced apart relation about the gripping surface wherein the positioning means may selectively rotate the gripping elements with respect to the gripping surface so as to cause the gripping elements to become wedged between the gripping surface and a gripped element.

The positioning means is preferably a cage to which the gripping elements are mounted and which may be rotated with respect to the gripping surface. The gripping elements may be rollers which co-operate with ramp surfaces formed in the gripping surface. Alternatively, the gripping

elements may be cams which are tiltable about axial ribs formed circumferentially about the gripping surface. The clutch may connect directly to a shaft or the like or include an internal ring to facilitate connection to a shaft or the like.

- 5 The clutch may be incorporated into a tool in place of a traditional ratchet type mechanism.

The invention should be interpreted to cover gripping mechanisms which grip the exterior or interior (e.g. inner wall of a tube) of a gripped element.

10

According to an aspect of the present invention there is provided a gripping mechanism comprising:

- a plurality of jaws which may be moved apart to allow an object to be positioned within the jaws and moved together to build a generally cylindrical gripping surface and to substantially encompass the object; and

15

a plurality of gripping elements retained about the mouths of the jaws between the jaws and the object;

20

the gripping surface and the gripping elements being formed in such a way that, when the jaws are closed about an object, rotation of the object in any direction may cause, independent of the rotating direction of the object, the gripping elements to move by displacement in a circumferential direction into positions in which they are wedged between the jaws and the object;

25

wherein springs are provided which act on the gripping elements in such a way that, when the jaws are closed about the object, the gripping elements are pushed against the object.

According to another aspect of the present invention there is provided a gripping mechanism comprising:

30

a generally cylindrical gripping surface;

gripping elements; and

positioning means retaining all gripping elements spaced from each other about the gripping surface, wherein the positioning means may rotate the gripping elements with respect to the gripping surface in any direction such that,

5a

independent of the rotating direction of the positioning means, the gripping elements move by displacement in a circumferential direction into positions in which they are wedged between the gripping surface and a gripped element; wherein springs are provided which act on the gripping elements in such a way
5 that the gripping elements are pushed against the gripped element.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided use of a gripping mechanism as provided hereinabove for clamping an oil field tubular.

10 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided use of a gripping mechanism as provided hereinabove as a clutch.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a clutch comprising:

15 a generally cylindrical gripping surface;
gripping elements having an asymmetric cross section when viewed along the axis of the general cylindrical gripping surface; and
positioning means retaining said gripping elements in spaced apart relation about the gripping surface wherein the positioning means may selectively rotate
20 the gripping elements with respect to the gripping surface so as to cause the gripping elements to become wedged between the gripping surface and a gripped element.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a socket
25 wrench including a clutch as provided hereinabove.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a jaw assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the jaw assembly comprising:

a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-
30 section; and
a gripping member support structure disposed around the gripping members, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a

5b

ramp surface that is lengthwise in a direction parallel to a longitudinal axis of the wellbore tubular.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a tong for rotating oilfield tubulars, the tong comprising:

a plurality of jaw assemblies, wherein each jaw assembly comprises:

a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;

a gripping member support structure having a curved cross-section, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in an inside surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and

an actuator connected to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a jaw assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the jaw assembly comprising:

a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;

a gripping member support structure, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and

an actuator connected to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided an assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the assembly comprising:

a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;

5c

a gripping member support structure, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable
5 relative thereto; and
an actuator connected to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a
10 clamping mechanism for selectively gripping a wellbore tubular, the clamping mechanism comprising:
a plurality of rollers;
a roller support member having a plurality of recesses formed therein, wherein each recess includes at least one cam surface adapted to cooperate with at least
15 one of the plurality of rollers to provide selective gripping of the tubular and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the roller support member and moveable relative thereto; and
an actuator connected to at least one of the roller support member and the cage,
20 wherein the selective gripping of the wellbore tubular is a result of a wedging action of the at least one of the plurality of rollers between at least one cam surface and an outer surface of the tubular.

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a jaw
25 assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the jaw assembly comprising:
a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
a gripping member support structure disposed around the gripping members, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member
30 retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface that is lengthwise aligned with an axis of the wellbore tubular; and
a lever member pivotally attached to the gripping member support structure, wherein the jaw assembly is a slip.

5d

According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided a gripping device, comprising:

- 5 a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
- a gripping member support structure disposed around the gripping members, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface that is lengthwise aligned with an axis of the wellbore tubular and
- 10 wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and
- an actuator operatively coupled to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

15 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided use of a gripping mechanism as described herein, wherein use of a gripping mechanism for clamping an oil field tubular comprises use of a gripping mechanism for clamping a drill string.

20 According to a further aspect of the present invention there is provided use of a gripping mechanism as described herein, wherein use of a gripping mechanism as a clutch comprises use of a gripping mechanism as a clutch in a socket wrench.

25 Brief Description of the Drawings

The invention will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

30 Figure 1: shows a conceptual view of a clamping mechanism of the invention.

Figure 2: shows a detailed view of a section of the clamping mechanism shown in figure 1.

5e

Figure 3: shows a plan view of the main sections of a clutch connected to a shaft.

Figure 4a: shows a detailed cross-sectional view of a section of the clutch of
5 figure 3.

Figure 4b: shows a plan view of socket set handle incorporating a clutch
mechanism according to the invention.

10 Figure 4c: shows a side view of the socket set handle shown in figure 4b.

Figure 5: shows a cross-sectional view of a clamping mechanism suitable for use in a machine for handling oil field tubulars.

Figure 6: shows a section of the cage assembly of the mechanism of figure 5 for holding the rollers in place.

Figure 7: shows a jaw of the clamping mechanism shown in figure 5.

Figure 8: shows a locking mechanism for securing the distal ends of the jaws of the clamping mechanism shown in figure 5 together.

Figure 9: shows the clamping mechanism of figures 5 to 8 incorporated within an automated oil field tubular handling device.

Figure 10: shows an arrangement utilising jaw sections opened and closed by opposed rams.

Figure 11: shows a ram actuated jaw arrangement utilising a single ram.

Figure 12a: shows a slip including a gripping mechanism for restricting axial movement of a tubular.

Figure 12b: shows a cross sectional view of a slip.

Figure 12c: shows an end view of the slip shown in figure 12b.

Figure 12d: shows a pipe clamp.

Figure 13: shows a dog bone gripping member.

Figure 14: shows an inverted cam gripping member.

Figure 15: shows an alternative wall profile of a jaw.

Figure 16: shows a gripping mechanism utilising an off set housing with graduated rollers.

5 Figure 17: shows an arrangement for internally gripping a pipe.

Figure 18: illustrates a known sprague type clutch.

Best mode for carrying out the invention

10

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the concept of the clamping mechanism of the invention. Jaws 1 and 2 are provided with wedge shaped recesses 3 having rollers 4 positioned therein. Jaws 1 and 2 may be moved apart so that a tubular member 5 may be moved laterally into the jaws. Jaws 1
15 and 2 may be pivotally connected together at one end to enable the jaws to open and close or the jaws may be translated apart and forced back together. Although two jaws are shown in figure 1 it will be appreciated that 3 or more jaw segments could be used.

20

Rollers 4 are biased apart by springs 6. When jaws 1 and 2 are closed around a tubular member 5, as shown in figure 1, rollers 4 are initially located at the apex of recess 3 (see roller 7 in figure 2). When the tubular member 5 is rotated rollers 4 are urged by tubular member 5 in the direction of rotation of tubular 5.

25

The dashed roller 8 in Figure 2 illustrates the position adopted by the roller when urged to the left by rotation of tubular member 5. It will be seen that roller 8 becomes wedged between ramp face 9 and tubular member 5. All of the rollers 4 are likewise wedged as tubular member 5 is rotated
30 and this causes tubular member 5 to be restrained from rotation within the clamping mechanism.

It will be apparent that rotation in the opposite direction will cause roller 8 to be wedged between opposite ramp surface 10 and tubular member 5. The clamping mechanism can thus restrain rotation of tubular member 5 in both directions.

5

For a relatively smooth tubular member 5 the above mechanism may be satisfactorily. If rollers 4 are biased towards tubular member 5 by springs 6 then rotation of tubular member 5 will move rollers 4 relatively consistently into their wedged positions. Where the surface of the tubular 10 5 is uneven it is desirable to move the rollers so that each roller is wedged between the jaws 1 and 2 and the tubular 5.

A number of positioning means could be used to position the rollers ranging from cages through to magnetic retention means.

15

In figures 3 and 4a a clutch mechanism utilising this principle will be described. The clutch consists of an outer race 33, a cage 34, and an inner ring 35. A plurality of wedge shaped axial recesses 36 are formed in outer race 33. Rollers 37 are accommodated in recesses 36. Rollers 37 20 are biased by springs 38 between sections of cage 34. Cage 34 is rotatable relative to outer race 33. In a "neutral" position cage 34 is positioned with respect to outer race 33 so that rollers 37 are positioned adjacent the apexes of recesses 36. In this position rollers 37 are biased by springs 38 towards the apex of recesses 36 and so do not become 25 wedged between ramp surfaces 39 and inner ring 35. This allows inner ring 35 to rotate freely in either direction with respect to outer race 33.

When the cage is rotated clockwise with respect to outer race 33 rollers 37 are urged by springs 38 in a clockwise direction so that they become 30 wedged between ramp surface 39 and inner ring 35. In this position inner ring 35 is restricted from clockwise rotation relative to outer race 33. Due to the double wedge profile of the recesses 36 it will be appreciated that relative rotation of ring 35 in the anticlockwise direction can be restrained

by anticlockwise rotation of cage 34 with respect to outer race 33 to position rollers 37 adjacent the opposite ramp surfaces.

This arrangement has the advantage that the clutch may be selectively
5 operated. It also allows the clutch to operate in a free wheeling mode whilst selectively restraining rotation in either direction.

Referring now to figures 4b and 4c a socket set handle incorporating the above clutch mechanism will be described. Socket handle 44 is
10 equivalent to outer race 33 shown in figure 4a. Cage 46 has a plurality of rollers 46a which engage within recesses 47. Inner race 45 has a hexagonal socket engaging portion 45a.

Actuator 48 has a pin 49 which engages with cage 46. Actuator 48 is
15 shown in its neutral position but can be moved to the left or right so that pin 49 moves cage 46 to the left or right so that the clutch mechanism can be adjusted to prevent relative rotation of inner race 45 with respect to handle 44 in either direction. A spring loaded ball 48a engages with notches 48b to retain cage actuator 48 in the desired position.

20

It will be appreciated that this arrangement enables a socket tool to be used in very confined spaces due to the minimal handle rotation required to produce rotation of bolt head 45a.

25 Referring now to figure 5 there is shown a clamping mechanism suitable for gripping an oil field tubular such as a drill pipe, tubing or casing. First and second jaws 11 and 12 are pivotable about respective rods 13 and 14. Jaw 11 includes a semi-circular cage 15 containing rollers 16. Jaw 12 includes a semi-circular cage 17 containing rollers 18. A partial
30 perspective view of a portion of semi-circular cage 15 is shown in figure 6. It will be seen that openings 19 are provided in cage 15 which allow rollers 16 to protrude therethrough but are sized so as not to allow rollers 16 to escape from cage 15.

The inner faces of jaws 11 and 12 adjacent cage assemblies 15 and 17 have recesses formed therein, similar to the recesses 3 shown in figure 1. Springs 20 (only one pair of which are indicated on each side) centrally bias rollers 16 and 18 within the recesses. Other suitable biasing means
5 such as resilient materials may also be employed in place of springs 20.

Jaws 11 and 12 may pivot away from each other about rods 13 and 14 so that the jaws may open. This enables a tubular member 21 to be laterally introduced between the jaws and the jaws closed to retain the
10 tubular member 21 therewithin. Jaw 11 (as shown in figure 7) includes recesses 22 formed on the inside face thereof and is provided with a plurality of fingers 23 at the distal end thereof. Fingers 23 have bores 24 therethrough.

15 As best shown in figure 8 arm 12 is seen to be provided with complimentary fingers 23 (only one of which is indicated) which interengage with fingers 25 (only one of which is indicated) when the jaws are in the closed position. Jaw 11 supports a locking assembly 26. The locking assembly includes a guide rod 27 located within a bore in arm
20 11 which allow the locking assembly to slide up and down between opened and closed positions.

Each of the fingers 23 and 25 are seen to include a locking pin section 29 having a respective groove 30 formed therein (one of which is indicated).
25 When the locking assembly 26 is in the raised position, shown in figure 8, the locking pin sections 29 extend from one finger 23 to an adjacent finger 25. This locks the distal ends of arms 11 and 12 together. Spring loaded pins 31 (only one of which is indicated) are biased within grooves 30 in this position to retain the locking pin sections 29 in place.

30 When the locking assembly is forced down so that plate 32 abuts arms 11 and 12 the locking pin sections 29 are positioned so as to be located entirely within the bore of a single finger 23 or 25. This allows the distal

ends of arms 11 and 12 to be separated and the clamping mechanism to be opened.

In use, jaws 11 and 12 are pivoted apart so as to provide an opening
5 which will allow a tubular member to be introduced laterally within the clamping mechanism. Jaws 11 and 12 are then pivoted towards one another and locking mechanism 26 is lifted so as to lock the distal ends of arms 11 and 12 together (as shown in figure 5).

10 When cages 15 and 17 are in their initial positions rollers 16 and 18 are positioned adjacent the apexes of the recesses formed in the jaws. This allows a tubular 21 to be rotated in either direction. When it is desired to grip tubular 21, cages 15 and 17 are rotated relative to jaws 11 and 12 in the direction in which rotation is to be restrained. This brings rollers 16
15 and 18 into engagement with their respective ramp surfaces so as to wedge rollers 16 and 18 between tubular 21 and jaws 11 and 12. To release tubular 21 it may be rotated in the opposite direction and locking mechanism 26 lowered to open the jaws.

20 Figure 6 shows a portion of a cage 15. As shown in figure 6 the rollers 16 preferably comprise a number of separate stacked rollers. This allows the rollers to maintain better contact over the section of tubular to be clamped, as some sections may have dents or other deformations.

25 The axial length of each jaw 11, 12 will typically be in a range of from 10 to one times the nominal pipe diameter. The roller element 16 will typically have a diameter of from .01 to .5 times the nominal pipe diameter. The axial length of the roller elements 16 will preferably be between 0.1 to twice the nominal pipe diameter.

30

Figure 9 shows an automated tubular handling mechanism incorporating the clamping mechanism shown in figures 2 to 6. Clamping mechanism 40 is contained within a tubular handling apparatus 41. Rams 42 and 43

may be driven to rotate arms 11 and 12 into their opened and closed positions and a further ram, (not shown), may be used to move the locking mechanism 26 between its opened and closed positions.

5 Referring now to figure 10 an opposed arrangement is shown in which jaw sections 60 and 61 are guided within guides 62 and 63. Jaws 60 and 61 are driven apart and together by rams 64 and 65. A pipe may be laterally introduced through the opening at 66 when the jaws are moved apart.

10

Referring now to figure 11 another configuration is shown, similar to that shown in figure 10. Jaws 67 and 68 are guided within guides 69 and 70 and are driven together and apart by ram 71. As only a single ram 71 is utilised in this example a locking mechanism of the type shown in figure 8
15 is required at 72.

Figure 12a shows a gripping mechanism suitable for use as slips in a drilling rig. A slip is designed to grip an oil field tubular and restrain it from longitudinal movement due to the weight of the string. In this case
20 rollers 75 and 76 are provided about the inside of jaws 73 and 74 in an orientation transverse to the axis of oil field tubular 77. Rollers 75 and 76 have flanged ends so that the roller profile closely matches that of the tubular 77 it is designed to grip. Corresponding ribs 78 and 79 locate and guide rollers 75 and 76 axially along jaws 73 and 74. Guides 78 and 79
25 taper inwardly from the tops to the bottoms of the jaws so that, in use, as rollers 75 and 76 are drawn down they become wedged between tubular 77 and jaws 73 and 74.

In use jaws 73 and 74 may be translated apart to allow a tubular 77 to be
30 laterally introduced. Jaws 73 and 74 may then be closed and secured together. Rollers 75 and 76 may be retained within respective cages. The cages may be maintained at an elevated position whilst jaws 73 and 74 are closing and be urged downwardly, perhaps by gravity, once jaws

73 and 74 are closed. As guides 78 and 79 taper inwardly towards the bottoms of the jaws rollers 75 and 76 will thus be wedged between tubular 77 and jaws 73 and 74 as tubular 77 is pulled down. This arrangement could be substituted for a conventional slip assembly.

5

Referring now to figures 12b and 12c a slip having an actuating mechanism is shown. In this embodiment a plurality of button type rollers 110 are retained within a cage 111. The rollers are located within annular recesses 112 within the jaw bodies 113. An actuating lever 114 is
10 pivotable about pin 115 and vertical movement of lever 114 thus causes vertical movement of cage 111. Upward movement of lever 114 causes cage 111 to move downwardly and prevents downward movement of a drill string 116 within the slip. Downward movement of lever 114 prevents upward movement of drill string 116 with respect to the slip.
15 When lever 114 is in the middle position (as shown) the drill string can move in either direction. This enables a user to selectively control movement of a drill string relative to the slip.

Referring now to figure 12c it will be seen that the slip comprises two
20 jaws 113 and 117 pivotable about hinge 118 and closed by a closing device 119.

In another embodiment the outer profile of jaw bodies 113 may taper from the top to the bottom and the jaws may be received in a body having a
25 bore of a profile corresponding to the outer profile of the jaws. In this way the jaws close about a tubular as the jaws are located within the bore in the body.

Referring now to figure 12d a pipe clamp is shown. The pipe clamp
30 includes a handle 110 having jaw sections 111 to 114. Jaw sections 111 and 114 are pivotable connected to handle 110 at points 115 and 116. Jaw sections 111 and 112 are pivotably connected at 117, jaw sections 112 and 113 are pivotably connected at 118 and jaw sections

113 and 114 are pivotally connected at 119.

Jaw 111 has associated rollers 120 and 121 which locate within recesses 122 and 123 of jaw 111. Rollers are likewise provided in recesses in the
5 other jaw sections.

Jaw sections 113 and 114 are connected together by a latch 124. This enables the part clamp to be fitted about a pipe and then secured together by latch 124 securing together jaws 113 and 114. Additional jaw
10 sections may also be inserted between jaw sections 113 and 114 to allow larger pipes to be gripped.

In use, the jaw sections are fitted about a pipe and latch 124 secures jaw sections 113 and 114 together. Handle 110 may then be rotated about
15 the pipe. This causes pivot points 115 and 116 to move with respect to one another so as to tighten the jaw sections about the pipe 125. This forces rollers 120 and 121 etc tightly into recesses 122 and 123 so as to firmly retain pipe 125 with respect to the pipe clamp. The use of rollers 120 and 121 minimises any damage to the pipe.

20

Referring now to figure 13 an alternative embodiment is shown in which asymmetric gripping elements are employed. Instead of the rollers previously described, having circular cross-sections, rollers having non-circular gripping elements may be employed. In the embodiment of figure
25 13 a dog bone 82 is shown between the surfaces of a pipe 80 and a jaw 81. The outer surface of pipe 80 and inner surface of jaw 81 are substantially circular in cross-section. The asymmetric shape of dog bone 82 means that relative rotation between part 80 and jaw 81 causes dog bone 82 to rotate. As it rotates sections of dog bone 82 having
30 increasing diameter are positioned between part 80 and jaw 81 until dog bone 82 wedges part 80 and jaw 81 together. It will be appreciated that gripping means incorporating dog bones may be substituted in the examples previously described.

Referring now to figure 14 a further alternative gripping means is described. In this embodiment a jaw or outer race 83 has a plurality of axial ribs distributed about the interior thereof. Cams 85 engage ribs 84
5 and their orientation is adjusted by forces applied via springs 86 and 87 from cage 88. In use cage 88 is initially positioned so that cam 85 assumes the position shown in figure 14. When cage 88 is moved to the left with respect to race 83 spring 86 tilts cam 85 so that its right hand end 90 engages pipe 89. Movement of pipe 89 to the left with respect to
10 jaw 83 causes cam 85 to become wedged and locks pipe 89 and jaw 83 together. Again such gripping element could be substituted for those previously described.

Referring now to figure 15 an alternative recess profile is shown. In this
15 embodiment recess 50 has a ramp portion 51 at one end and a corresponding ramp portion 52 at the other end. In this case two rollers 53 and 54 are located within the single recess 50. It will be appreciated that in this embodiment roller 53 will engage the tubular when it is rotated in one direction and roller 54 will engage the tubular when it is rotated in
20 the opposite direction. Again this arrangement may be substituted for the arrangements described.

Figure 16 shows an alternative construction in which jaws 91 and 92 are offset with respect to one another and graduated rollers 94a to 94f and
25 95a to 95f are provided between jaws 91 and 92 and pipe 93. This arrangement has the advantage that axial recesses do not need to be formed in the inner faces of the jaws as the offset construction provides a natural wedge between the inner face of jaws 91 and 92 and pipe 93.

30 Figure 17 illustrates that the invention may equally be applied to gripping the interior or exterior of an object. Figure 17 illustrates how the invention may be utilised to grip a pipe 99 from the interior rather than exterior. The same applies to the clutch previously described. In this

case tubular body 96 has axial recesses 97 formed in the exterior thereof and rollers 98 located within the recesses. The rollers may be accommodated within a cage which enables actuation of the gripping means as previously described.

5

Although the clamping mechanism has been described in relation to the clamping of oil field tubulars it is to be appreciated that it may have application in other areas also. The clamping mechanism may be incorporated into a hand tool to grip sections of pipe. A ratchet system
10 may be incorporated to allow incremental rotation.

It will thus be seen that the invention provides a clamping mechanism suitable for restraining a tubular against high rotational torques in either direction without damaging the tubular. The clamping mechanism may
15 be incorporated within existing tongs of oil field tubular handling apparatus. The clamping mechanism may be operated quickly and easily and requires no lubrication.

The clutch of the invention is selectively actuateable and may operate in
20 either direction. The clutch may be incorporated as an emergency brake on a vehicle drive shaft, conveyor system etc or where a temporary brake is required and the shaft end is not accessible.

Where in the foregoing description reference has been made to integers or
25 components having known equivalents then such equivalents are herein incorporated as if individually set forth.

Although this invention has been described by way of example it is to be appreciated that improvements and/or modifications may be made thereto
30 without departing from the scope of the invention as defined in the appended claims.

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A gripping mechanism comprising:
 - a plurality of jaws which may be moved apart to allow an object to be positioned within the jaws and moved together to build a generally cylindrical gripping surface and to substantially encompass the object; and
 - a plurality of gripping elements retained about the mouths of the jaws between the jaws and the object;
 - the gripping surface and the gripping elements being formed in such a way that, when the jaws are closed about an object, rotation of the object in any direction may cause, independent of the rotating direction of the object, the gripping elements to move by displacement in a circumferential direction into positions in which they are wedged between the jaws and the object;
 - wherein springs are provided which act on the gripping elements in such a way that, when the jaws are closed about the object, the gripping elements are pushed against the object.
2. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, wherein the jaws are pivotally connected together at a proximal end of each jaw and secured together by locking means at the distal ends thereof.
3. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 2, wherein the distal ends of the jaws have interengaging fingers and the locking means consists of pin sections passing through adjacent apertures in the fingers when engaged.
4. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, wherein the jaws are opened and closed by driving means causing lateral separation and closure.
5. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the jaws are opened and closed by one or more hydraulic ram.
6. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, including three or more pivotably connected jaws lockable at distal ends thereof.

7. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 6, where further jaw sections are insertable between the jaws.
8. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 6 or 7, wherein the proximal ends of two jaws are pivotally connected to a handle and arranged so that rotation of the handle relative to the jaws draws the distal ends of the jaws together.
9. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 8, wherein the gripping elements consist of a plurality of cylindrical rollers circumferentially spaced apart about the mouths of the jaws.
10. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 9, wherein the axis of the cylindrical rollers are substantially parallel with the axis of the mouths of the jaws.
11. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one claims 1 to 10, wherein a plurality of concave recesses are provided about the circumference of the mouths of the jaws which accommodate gripping elements.
12. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 11, wherein the concave recesses are substantially V-shaped.
13. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one claims 1 to 12, wherein the gripping elements are retained by positioning means which is rotatable relative to the jaws by actuation means.
14. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 13, wherein the positioning means is formed in a plurality of sections corresponding to the jaw sections.
15. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, wherein the gripping elements have an asymmetric cross section along an axis parallel to the mouths of the jaws.
16. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, wherein the gripping elements are in the form of cams located along longitudinal ribs circumferentially spaced apart about the mouths of the jaws.

17. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, comprising two jaws having semi-circular jaw mouths which are off-set in a closed position having rollers of progressively different sizes provided adjacent the jaw mouths to define a substantially cylindrical opening to receive a tubular member.

18. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 1, wherein the gripping elements are in the form of rollers disposed transversely to the axis of the mouth of the jaws.

19. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 18, wherein the rollers are circumferentially spaced apart within a plurality of axially spaced apart circumferential grooves.

20. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 19, wherein the rollers are retained by a cage which is axially movable by actuation means to selectively position the rollers adjacent walls of the grooves.

21. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 18, wherein the jaws have a tapered outer profile which is accommodated within a body having a tapered bore.

22. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 18 to 21, wherein the gripping mechanism is a slip.

23. A gripping mechanism comprising:

a generally cylindrical gripping surface;

gripping elements; and

positioning means retaining all gripping elements spaced from each other about the gripping surface, wherein the positioning means may rotate the gripping elements with respect to the gripping surface in any direction such that, independent of the rotating direction of the positioning means, the gripping elements move by displacement in a circumferential direction into positions in which they are wedged between the gripping surface and a gripped element;

wherein springs are provided which act on the gripping elements in such a way that the gripping elements are pushed against the gripped element.

24. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 23, wherein the positioning means is a cage which retains the gripping elements spaced apart circumferentially adjacent the generally cylindrical gripping surface.
25. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 24, wherein an actuator is provided to move the cage relative to the generally cylindrical gripping surface.
26. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 25, wherein the gripping elements are cylindrical rollers.
27. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 26, wherein concave recesses are provided at circumferentially spaced intervals about the general cylindrical gripping surface to accommodate the rollers.
28. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 27, wherein the recesses are substantially V-shaped.
29. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 25, wherein the gripping elements have an asymmetric cross section when viewed along the axis of the general cylindrical gripping surface.
30. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 29, wherein the gripped element is a ring.
31. A gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 29, wherein the gripped element is a shaft.
32. A gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 23, wherein the generally cylindrical gripping surface is the exterior surface of a tubular and the gripping elements are disposed between the generally cylindrical gripping surface and the internal surface of a pipe.
33. Use of a gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 1 to 22 for clamping an oil field tubular.

34. Use of a gripping mechanism as claimed in any one of claims 23 to 32 as a clutch.
35. A clutch comprising:
a generally cylindrical gripping surface;
gripping elements having an asymmetric cross section when viewed along the axis of the general cylindrical gripping surface; and
positioning means retaining said gripping elements in spaced apart relation about the gripping surface wherein the positioning means may selectively rotate the gripping elements with respect to the gripping surface so as to cause the gripping elements to become wedged between the gripping surface and a gripped element.
36. A clutch as claimed in claim 35, wherein the positioning means is a cage which retains the gripping elements spaced apart circumferentially adjacent the generally cylindrical gripping surface.
37. A clutch as claimed in claim 36, wherein an actuator is provided to move the cage relative to the generally cylindrical gripping surface.
38. A clutch as claimed in any one of claims 35 to 37, wherein the gripped element is a ring.
39. A clutch as claimed in any one of claims 35 to 37, wherein the gripped element is a shaft.
40. A clutch as claimed in any one of claims 35 to 39, wherein the general cylindrical gripping surface is the exterior surface of a tubular and the gripping elements are disposed between the generally cylindrical gripping surface and the internal surface of a pipe.
41. A socket wrench including a clutch as defined in any one of claims 35 to 40.
42. A jaw assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the jaw assembly comprising:
a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section; and
a gripping member support structure disposed around the gripping members, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer

recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface that is lengthwise in a direction parallel to a longitudinal axis of the wellbore tubular.

43. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein the ramp surface is a plurality of ramp surfaces.

44. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein the jaw assembly is a slip.

45. The jaw assembly of claim 44, wherein the gripping prevents axial relative movement of the tubular.

46. The jaw assembly of claim 44, wherein the gripping members are button type rollers.

47. The jaw assembly of claim 44, further including a lever member pivotally attached to the gripping member support structure.

48. The jaw assembly of claim 47, wherein the lever member selectively controls the capability of the wellbore tubular to move relative to the slip.

49. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein the jaw assembly is a plurality of jaw assemblies and the jaw assemblies are included in an oilfield tong assembly.

50. The jaw assembly of claim 49, wherein the gripping member transmits torque to the wellbore tubular from the tong.

51. A tong for rotating oilfield tubulars, the tong comprising:
 a plurality of jaw assemblies, wherein each jaw assembly comprises:
 a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
 a gripping member support structure having a curved cross-section, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in an inside surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and

an actuator connected to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

52. The tong assembly of claim 51, wherein the jaw assemblies transmits torque to the oilfield tubulars.

53. The tong assembly of claim 52, wherein the plurality of jaws are pivotally connected together.

54. The tong assembly of claim 51, wherein the ramp surface is a plurality of ramp surfaces.

55. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein each recess and gripping member form a pair and the pairs are arranged in at least two dimensions.

56. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein each recess and gripping member form a pair and the pairs are arranged circumferentially with respect to each other.

57. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein each recess and gripping member form a pair and the pairs are arranged axially with respect to each other.

58. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein each recess includes a plurality of ramp surfaces.

59. The jaw assembly of claim 58, wherein the plurality of recesses are distributed in at least two directions.

60. A jaw assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the jaw assembly comprising:
a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
a gripping member support structure, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and
an actuator connected to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

61. The jaw assembly of claim 60, wherein engaging the actuator causes the gripping member support structure to move downwardly to prevent downward movement of a drill string within the jaw assembly.

62. The jaw assembly of claim 60, wherein engaging the actuator causes the gripping member support structure to move upwardly to prevent upward movement of a drill string within the jaw assembly.

63. The jaw assembly of claim 60, wherein engaging the actuator allows movement of the drill string within the jaw assembly upwardly or downwardly.

64. The jaw assembly of claim 60, wherein engaging the actuator permits selective control of the movement of a drill string relative to the jaw assembly.

65. The jaw assembly of claim 60, wherein the actuator is a biasing member.

66. An assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the assembly comprising:
a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
a gripping member support structure, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and
an actuator connected to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.

67. A clamping mechanism for selectively gripping a wellbore tubular, the clamping mechanism comprising:
a plurality of rollers;
a roller support member having a plurality of recesses formed therein, wherein each recess includes at least one cam surface adapted to cooperate with at least one of the plurality of rollers to provide selective gripping of the tubular and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the roller support member and moveable relative thereto; and
an actuator connected to at least one of the roller support member and the cage,
wherein the selective gripping of the wellbore tubular is a result of a wedging action of the at least one of the plurality of rollers between at least one cam surface and an outer surface of the tubular.

68. The clamp mechanism of claim 67, wherein the plurality of rollers and the roller support member interact to prevent axial relative movement of the wellbore tubular.
69. The clamp mechanism of claim 67, wherein the plurality of rollers are spherical.
70. The jaw assembly of claim 42, wherein the gripping members are operable to grip the wellbore tubular axially.
71. A jaw assembly for gripping a wellbore tubular, the jaw assembly comprising:
a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
a gripping member support structure disposed around the gripping members, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface that is lengthwise aligned with an axis of the wellbore tubular; and
a lever member pivotally attached to the gripping member support structure, wherein the jaw assembly is a slip.
72. The jaw assembly of claim 71, wherein the lever member selectively controls the capability of the wellbore tubular to move relative to the slip.
73. A gripping device, comprising:
a plurality of gripping members each having a substantially circular cross-section;
a gripping member support structure disposed around the gripping members, the gripping member support structure including a plurality of gripping member retainer recesses in a surface thereof, wherein each of the recesses includes a ramp surface that is lengthwise aligned with an axis of the wellbore tubular and wherein a cage is disposed adjacent to the gripping member support structure and moveable relative thereto; and
an actuator operatively coupled to at least one of the gripping member support structure and the cage.
74. Use of a gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 33, wherein use of a gripping mechanism for clamping an oil field tubular comprises use of a gripping mechanism for clamping a drill string.

75. Use of a gripping mechanism as claimed in claim 34, wherein use of a gripping mechanism as a clutch comprises use of a gripping mechanism as a clutch in a socket wrench.

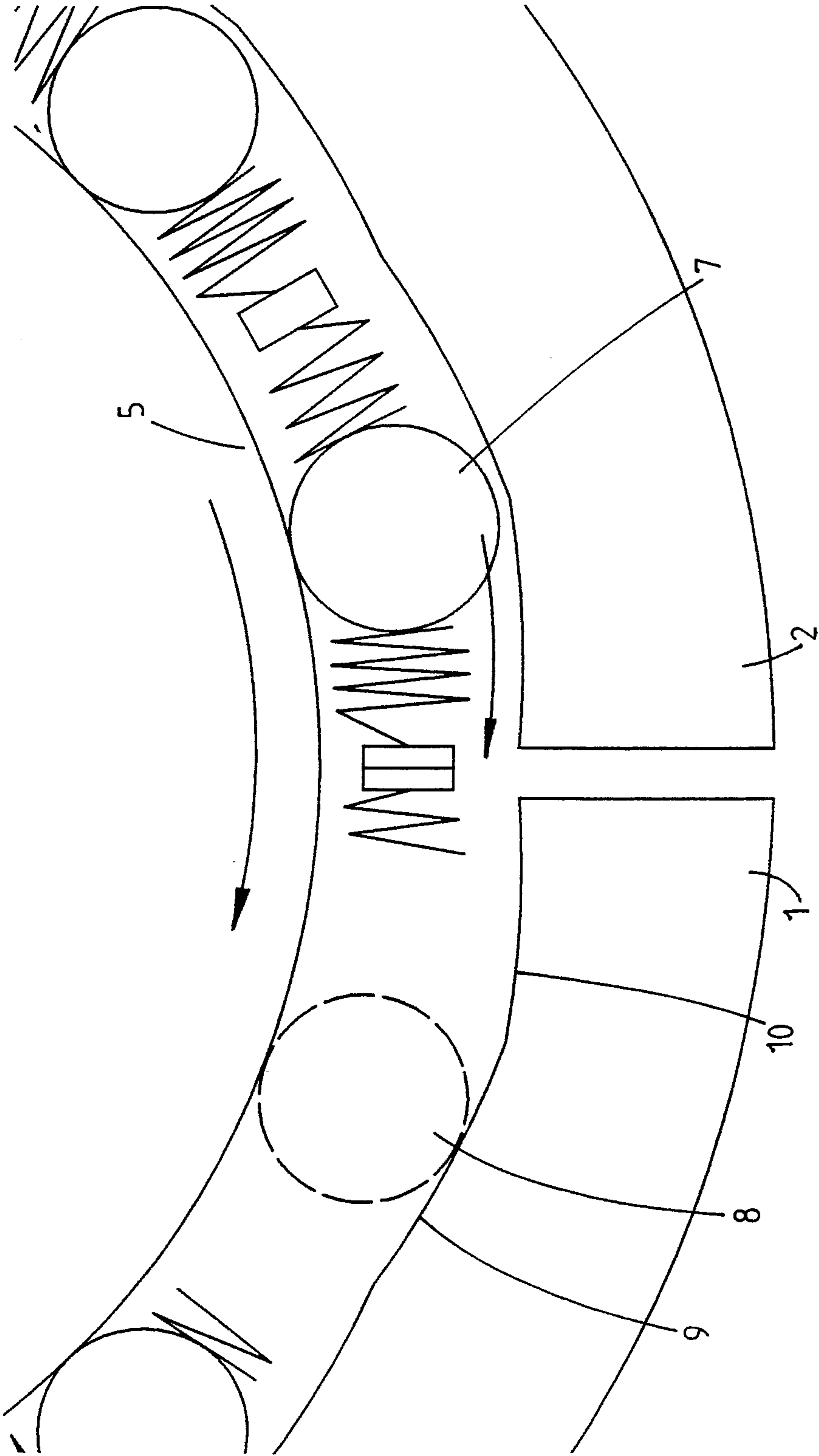


FIG. 2

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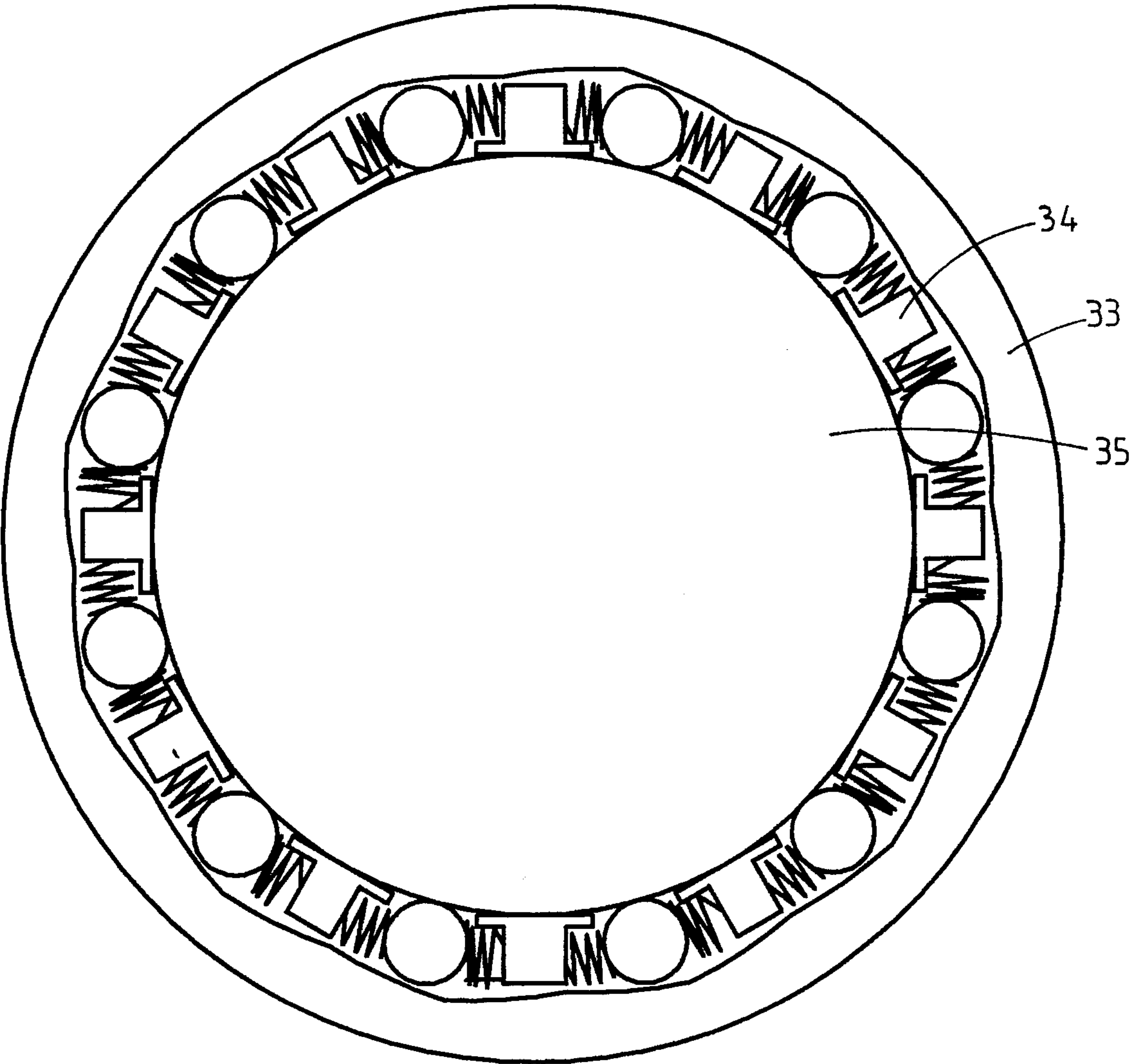


FIG. 3

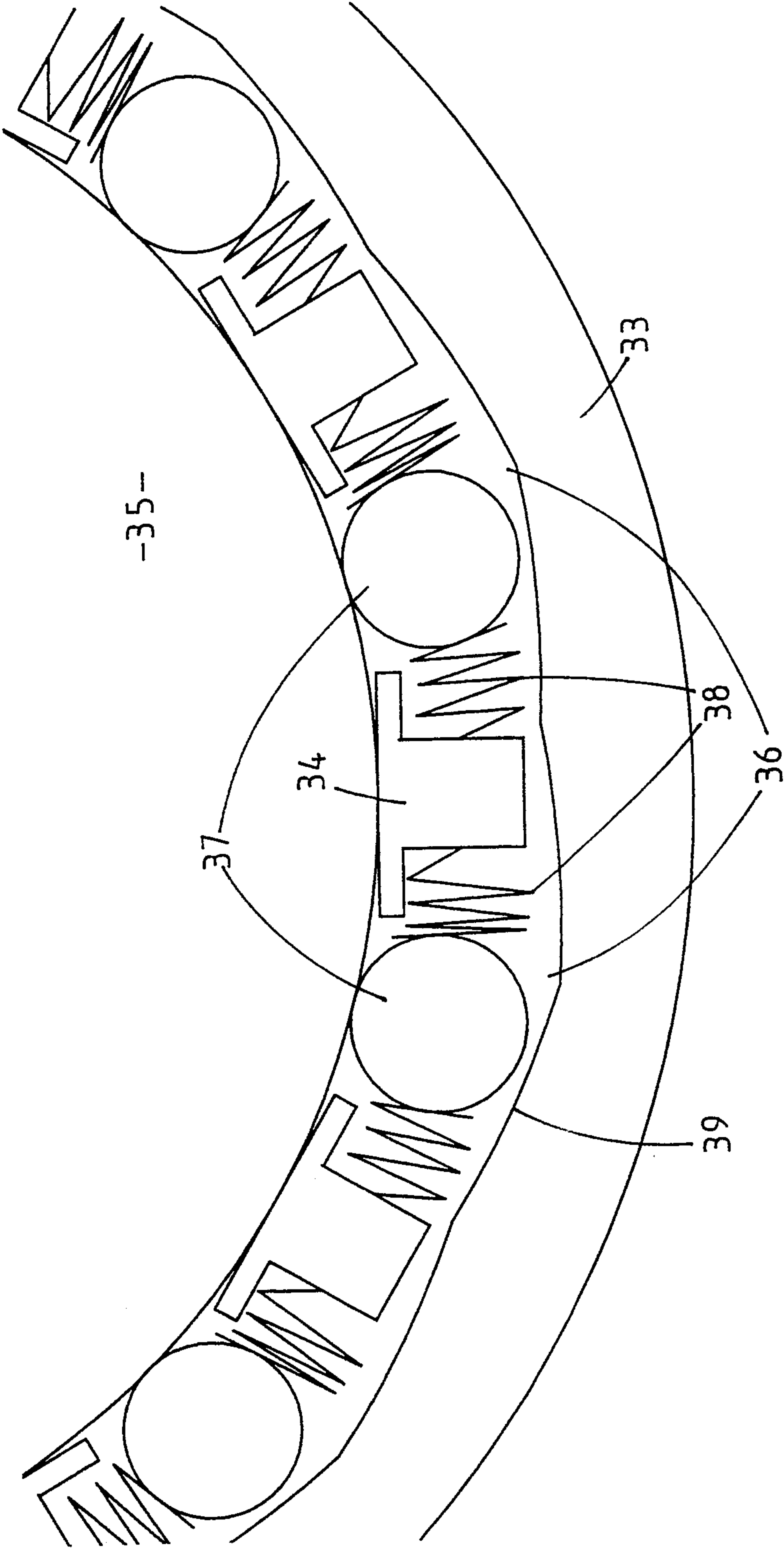
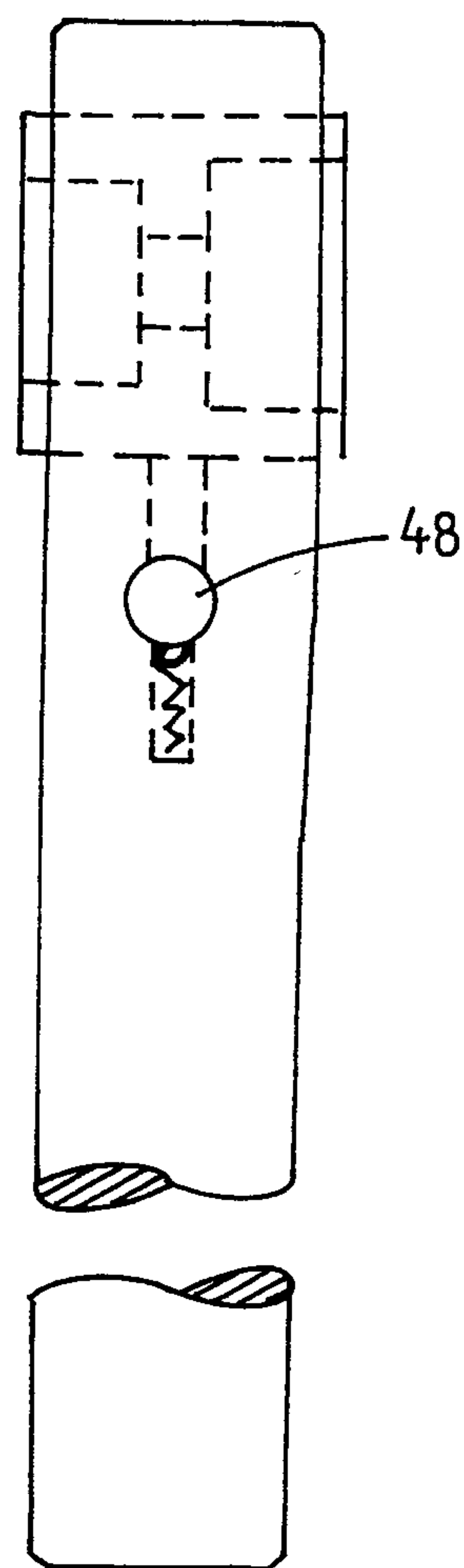
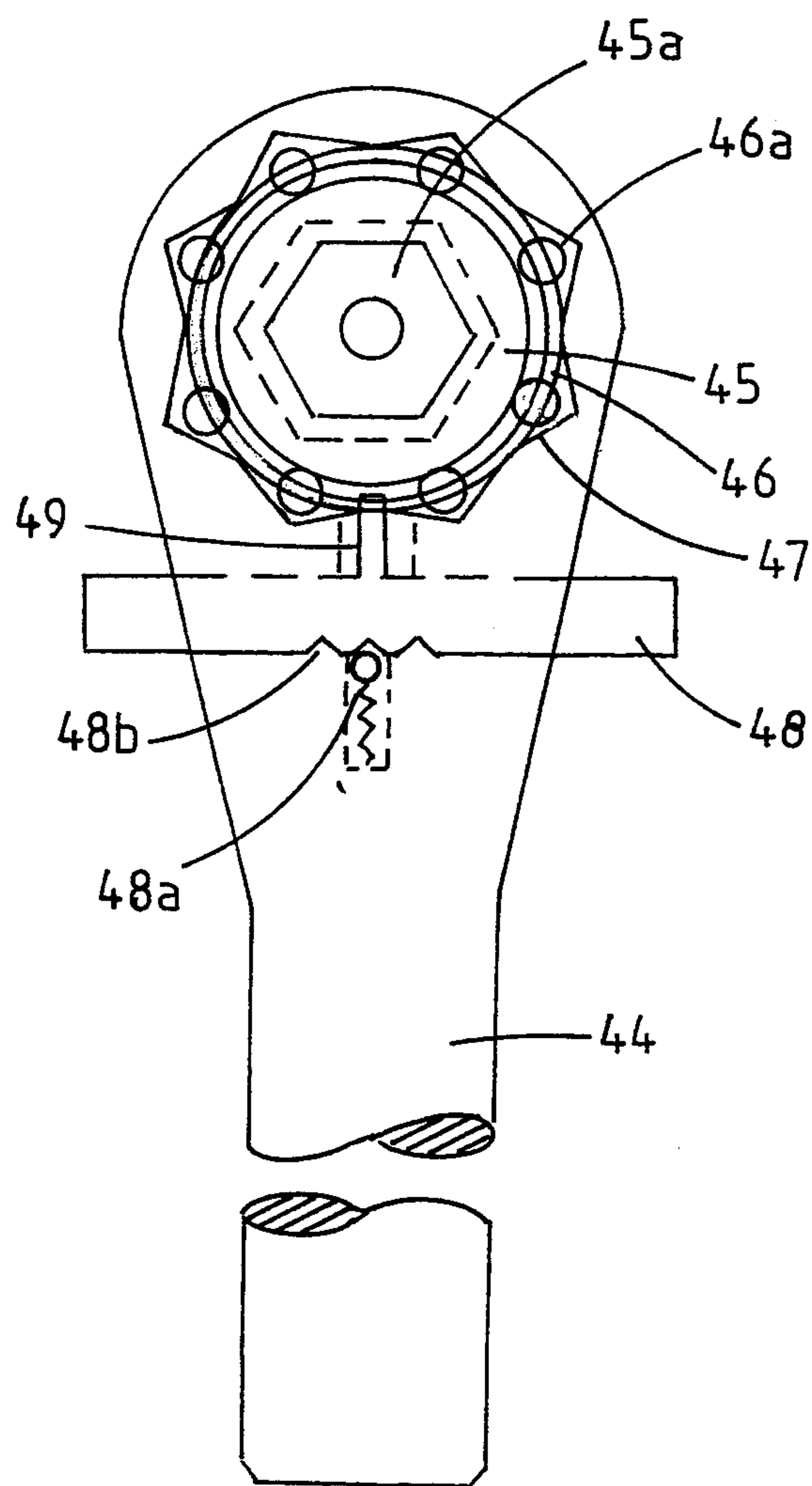


FIG. 4a



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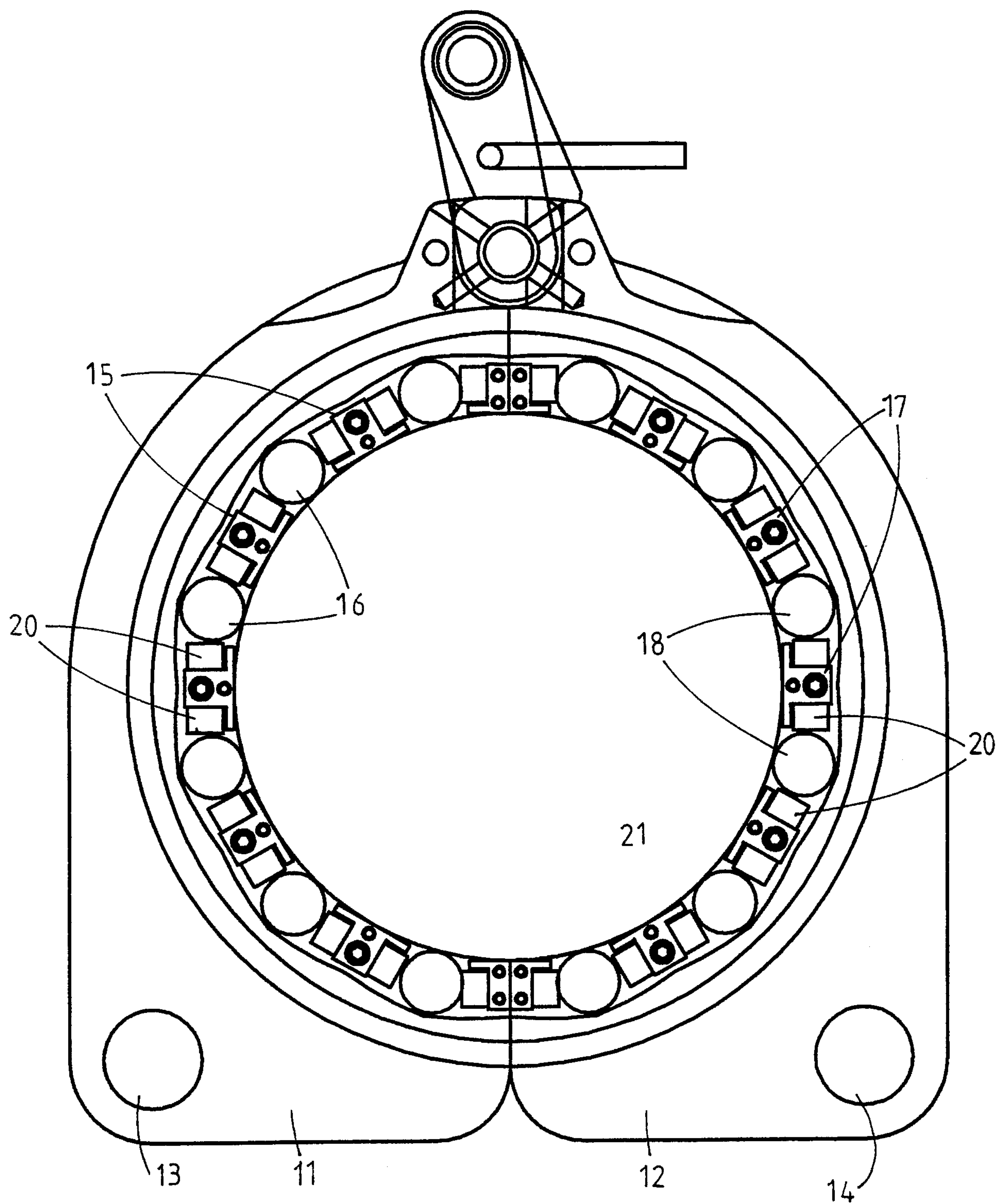


FIG. 5

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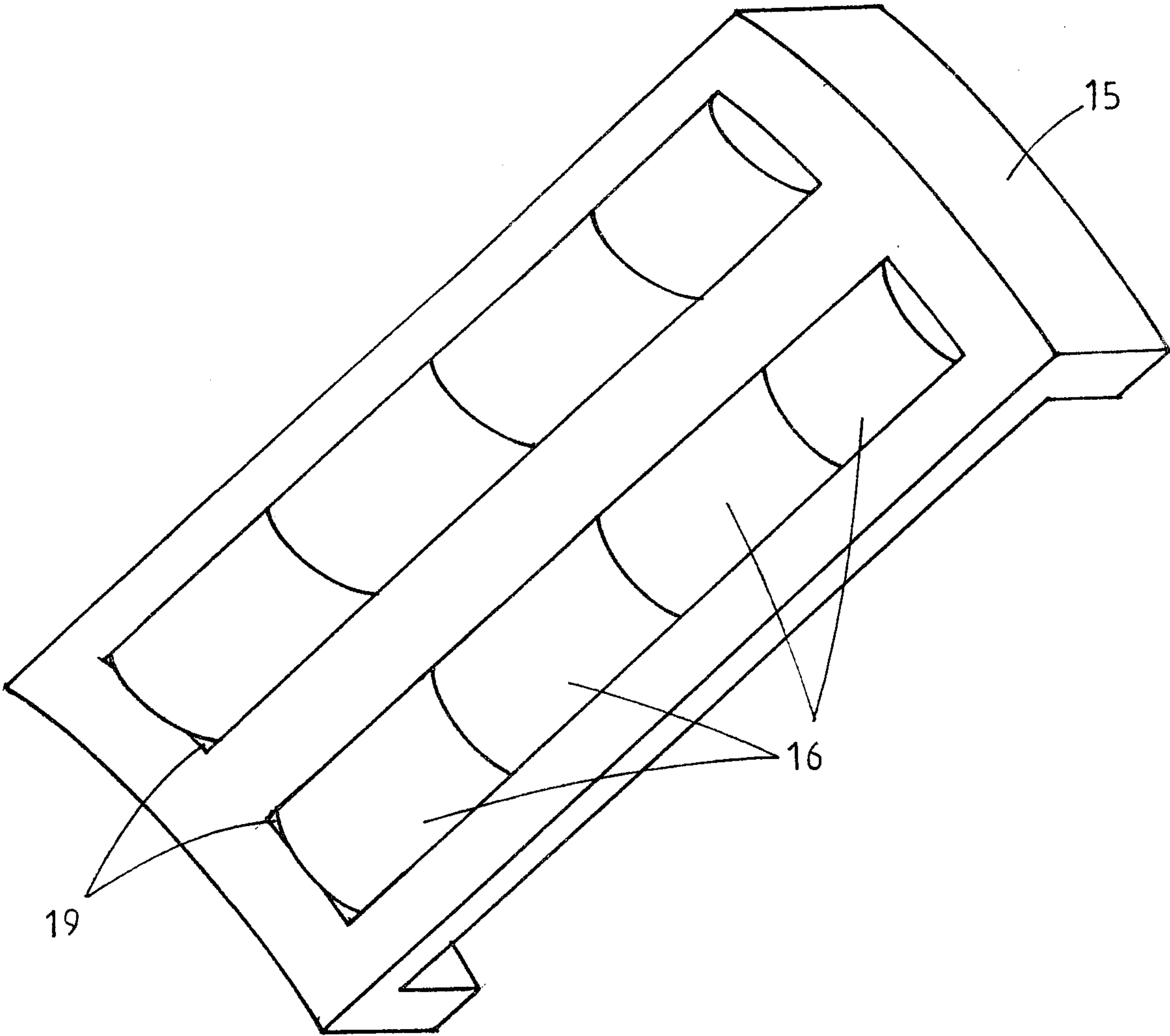
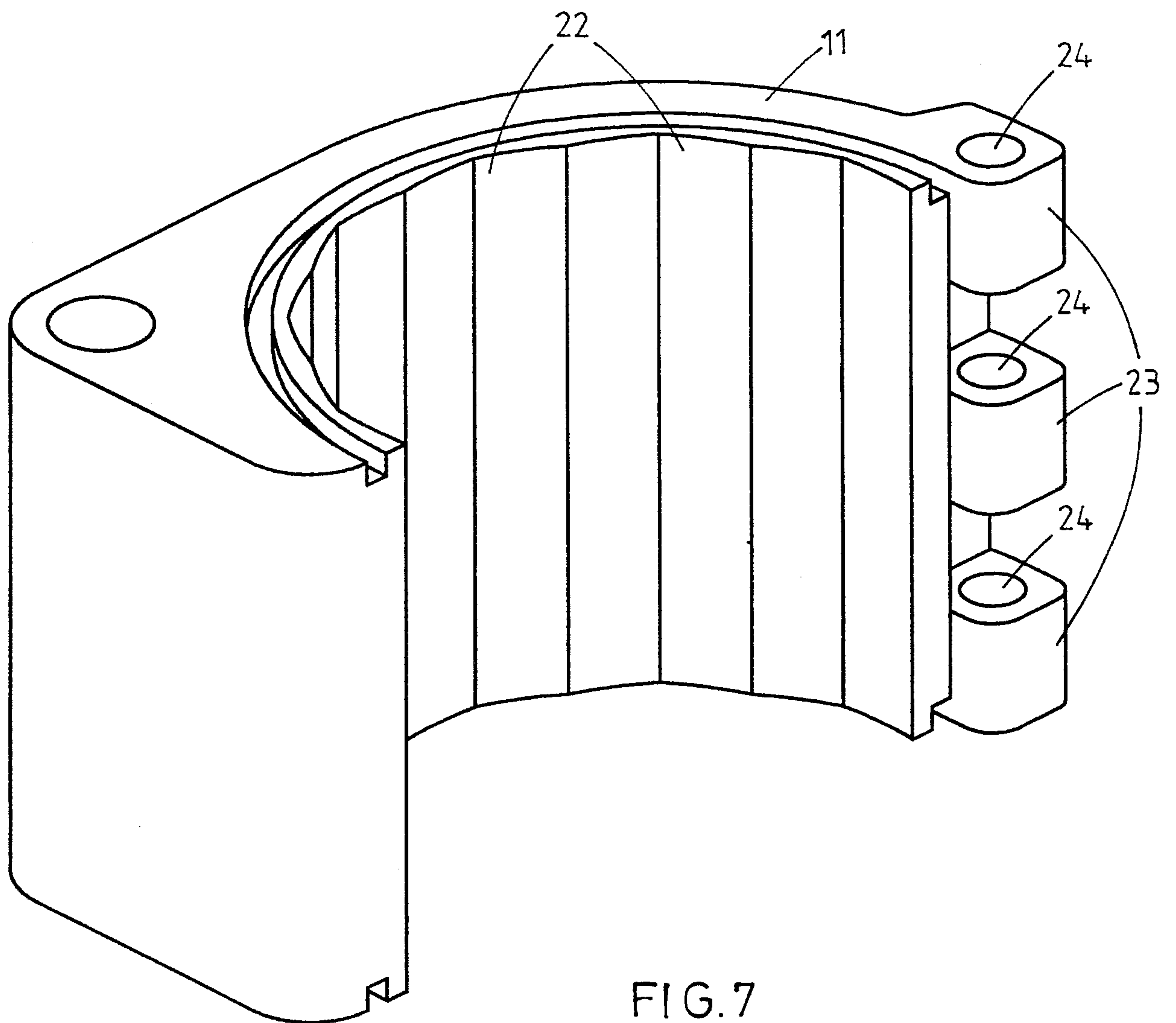


FIG. 6

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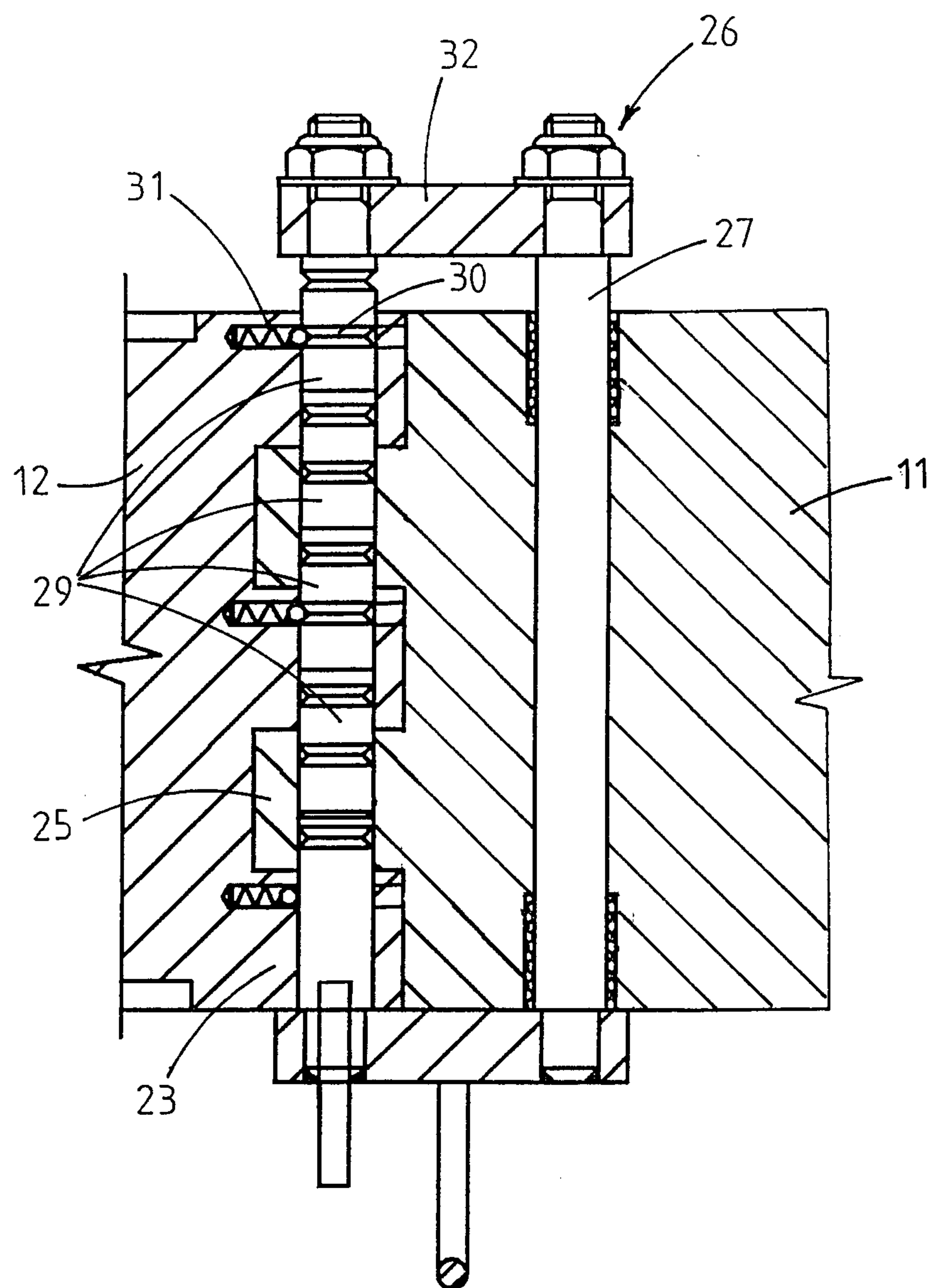
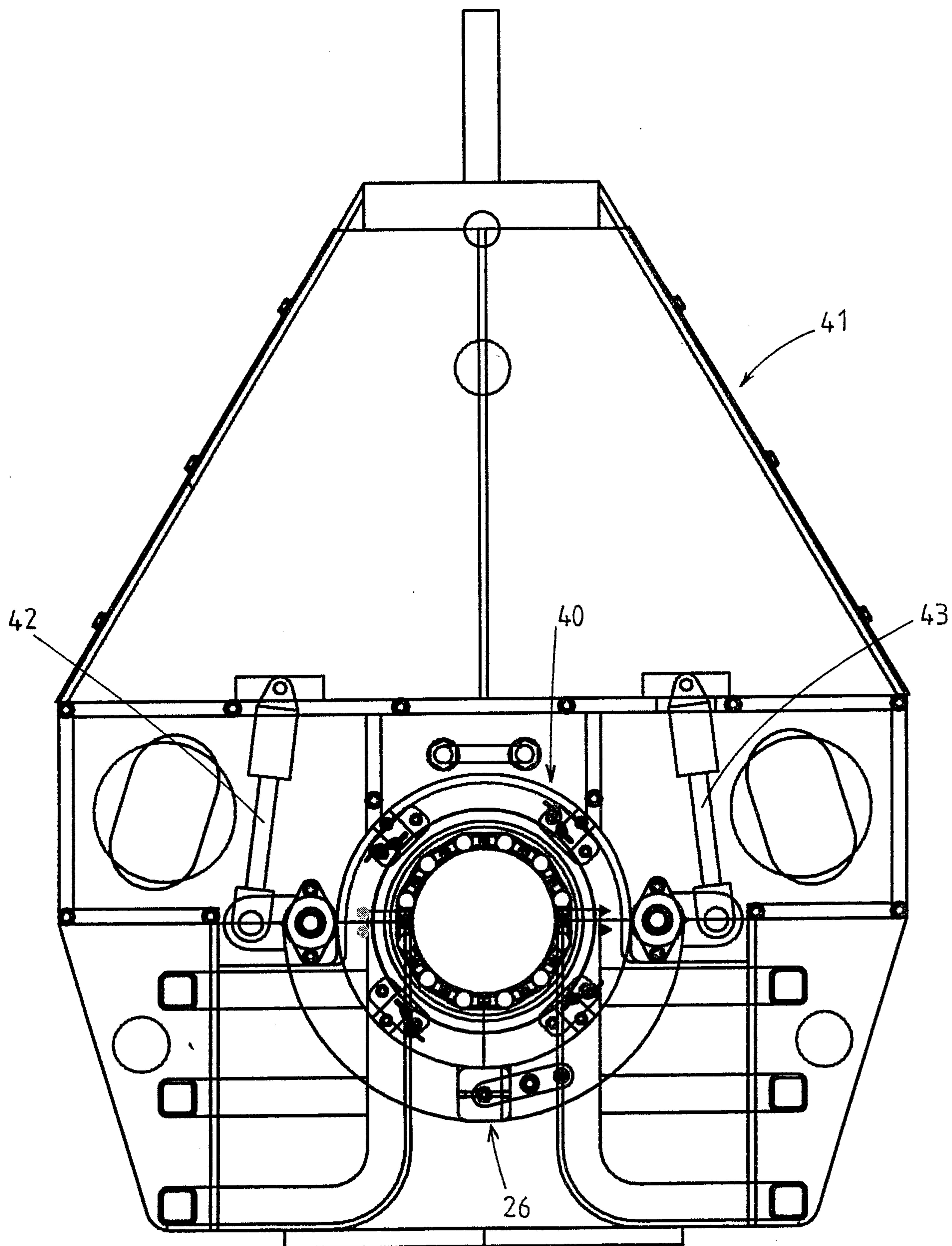


FIG. 8

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FIG. 9

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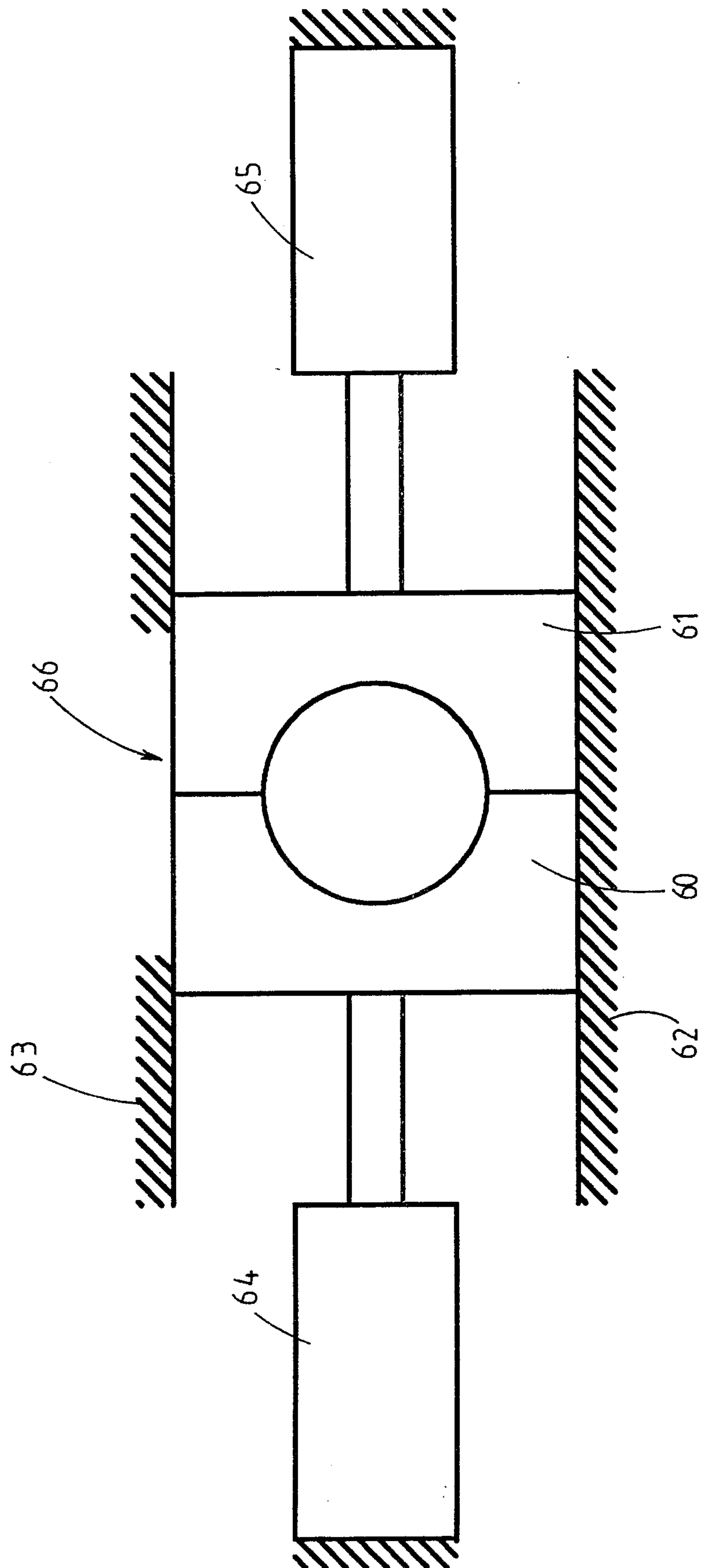
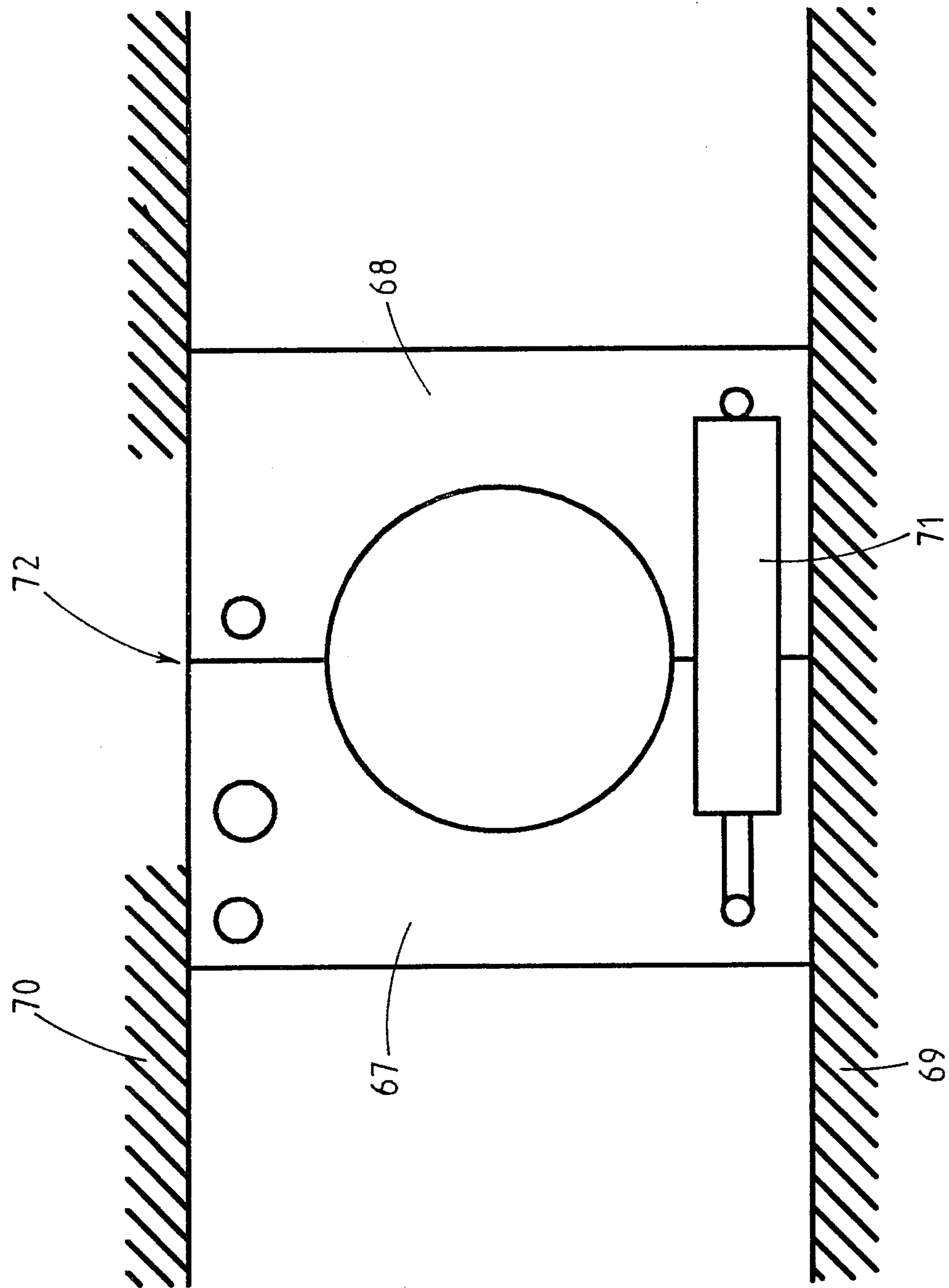


FIG. 10



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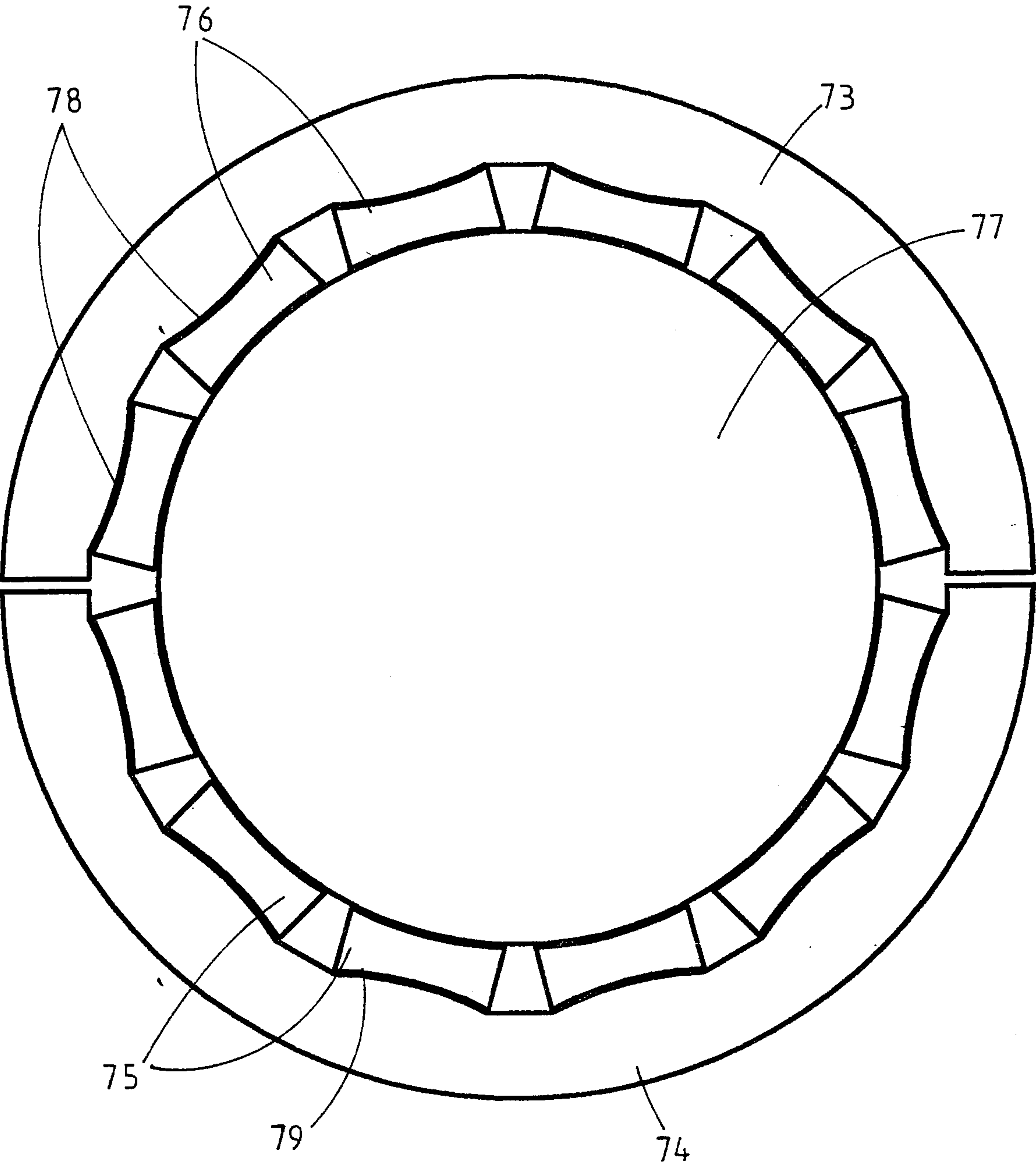
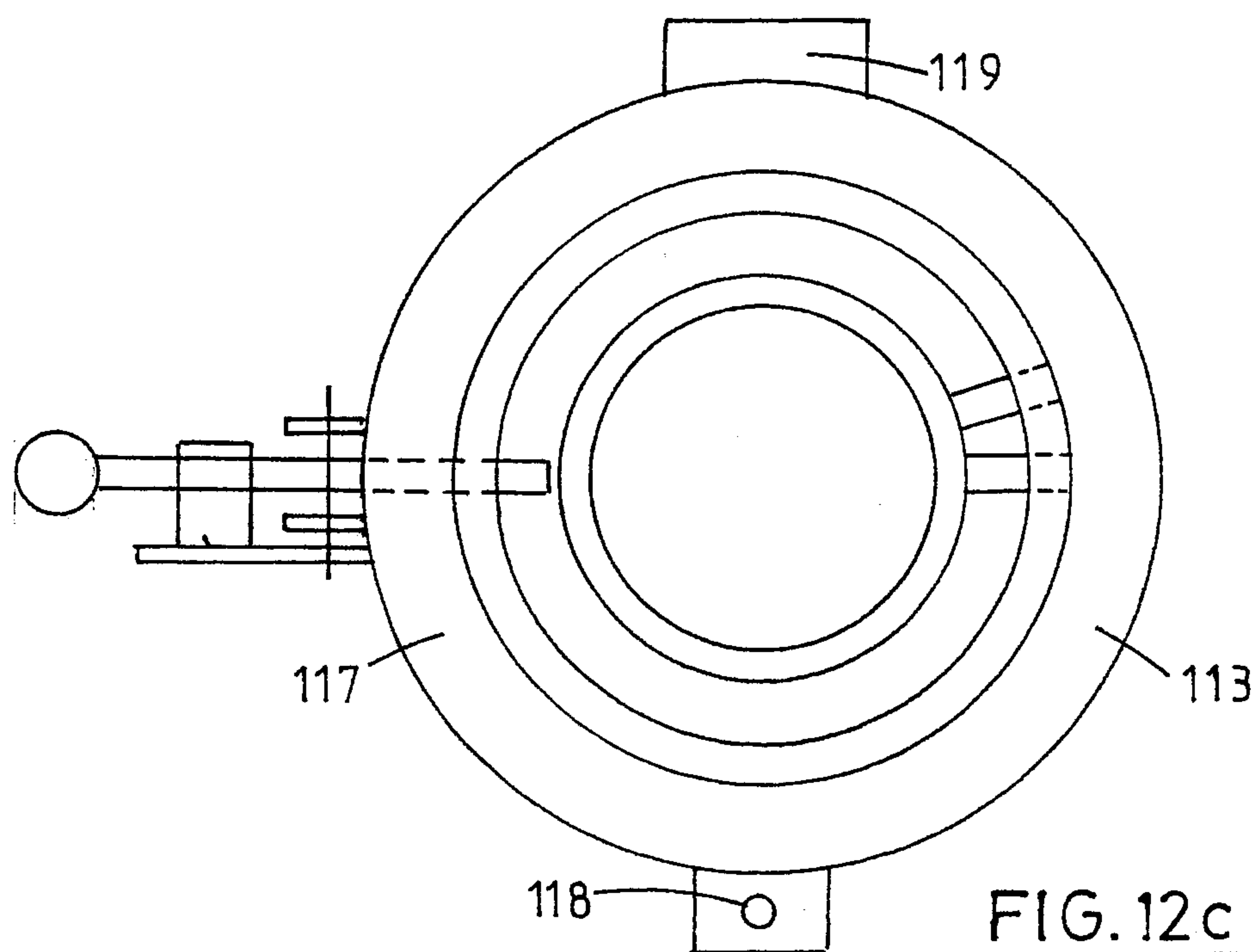
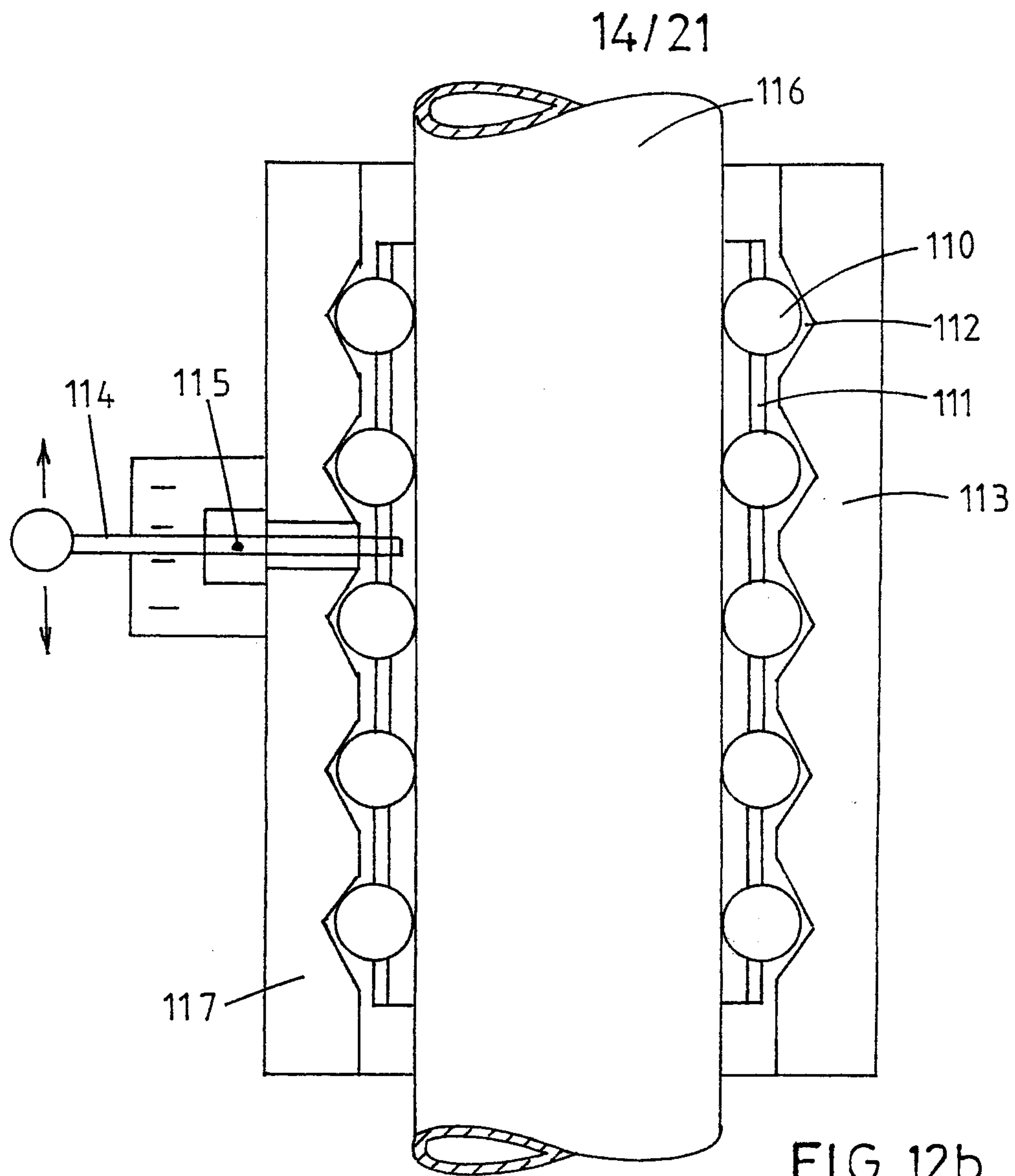


FIG. 12a



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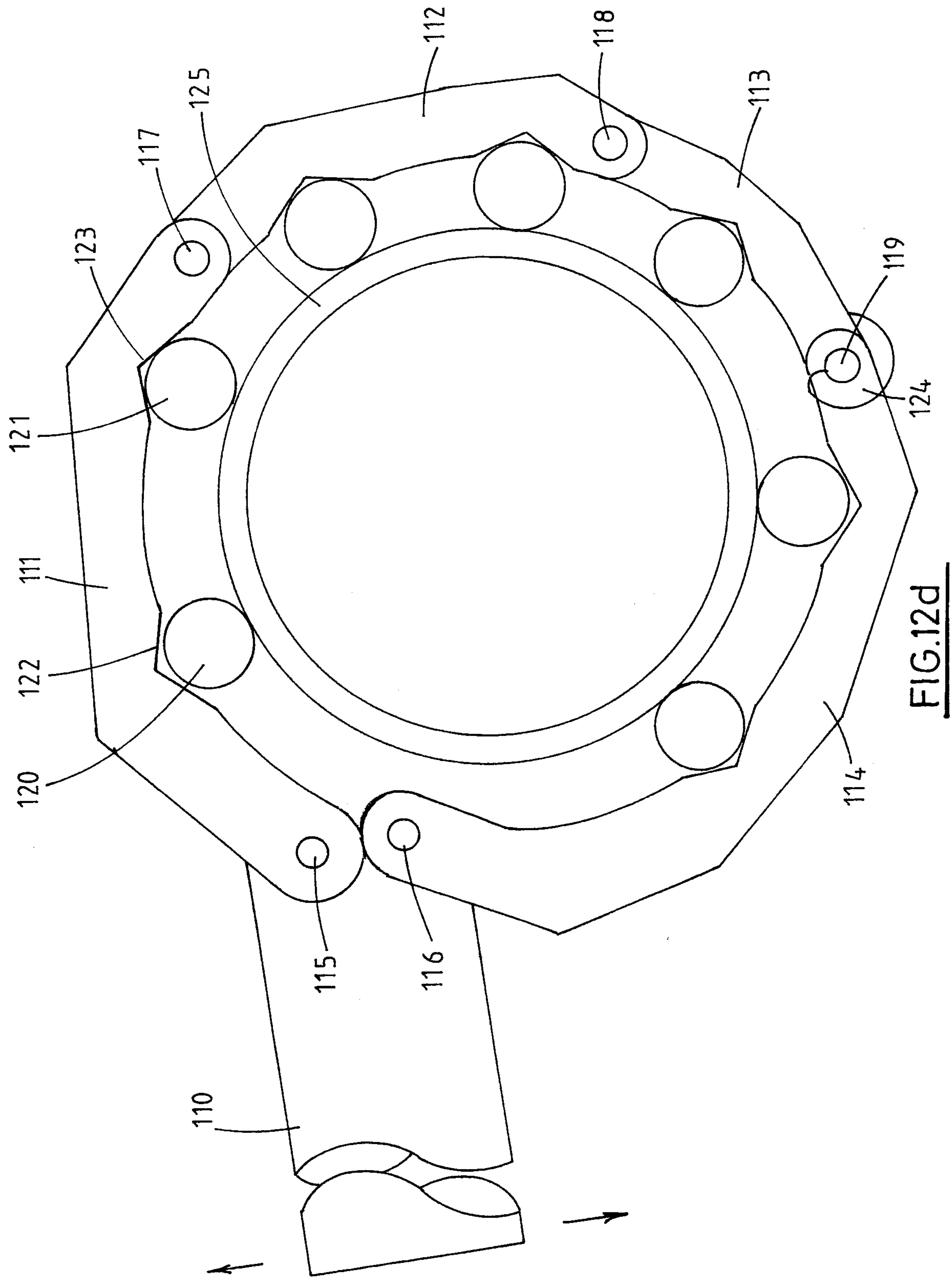
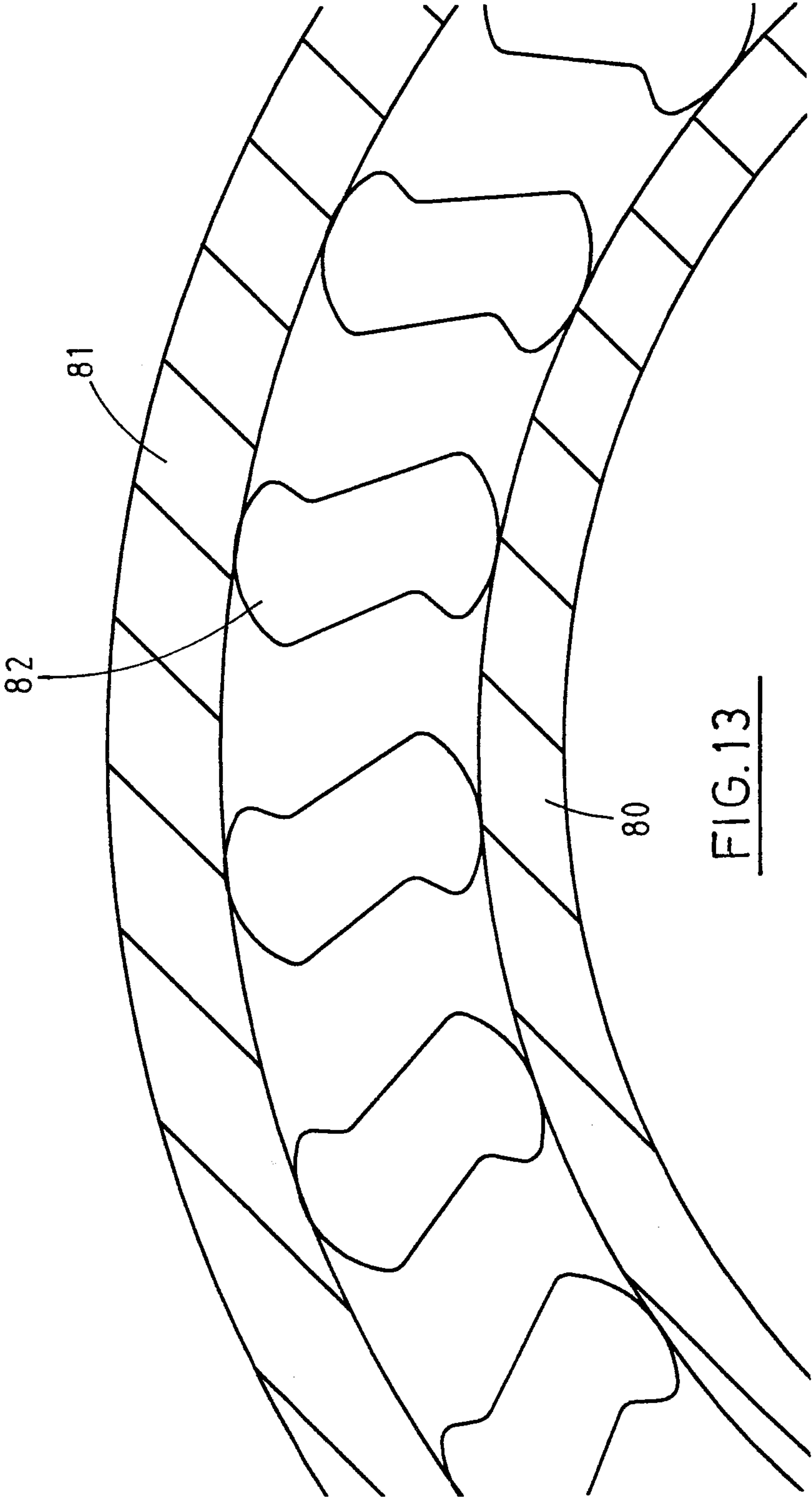


FIG. 12d



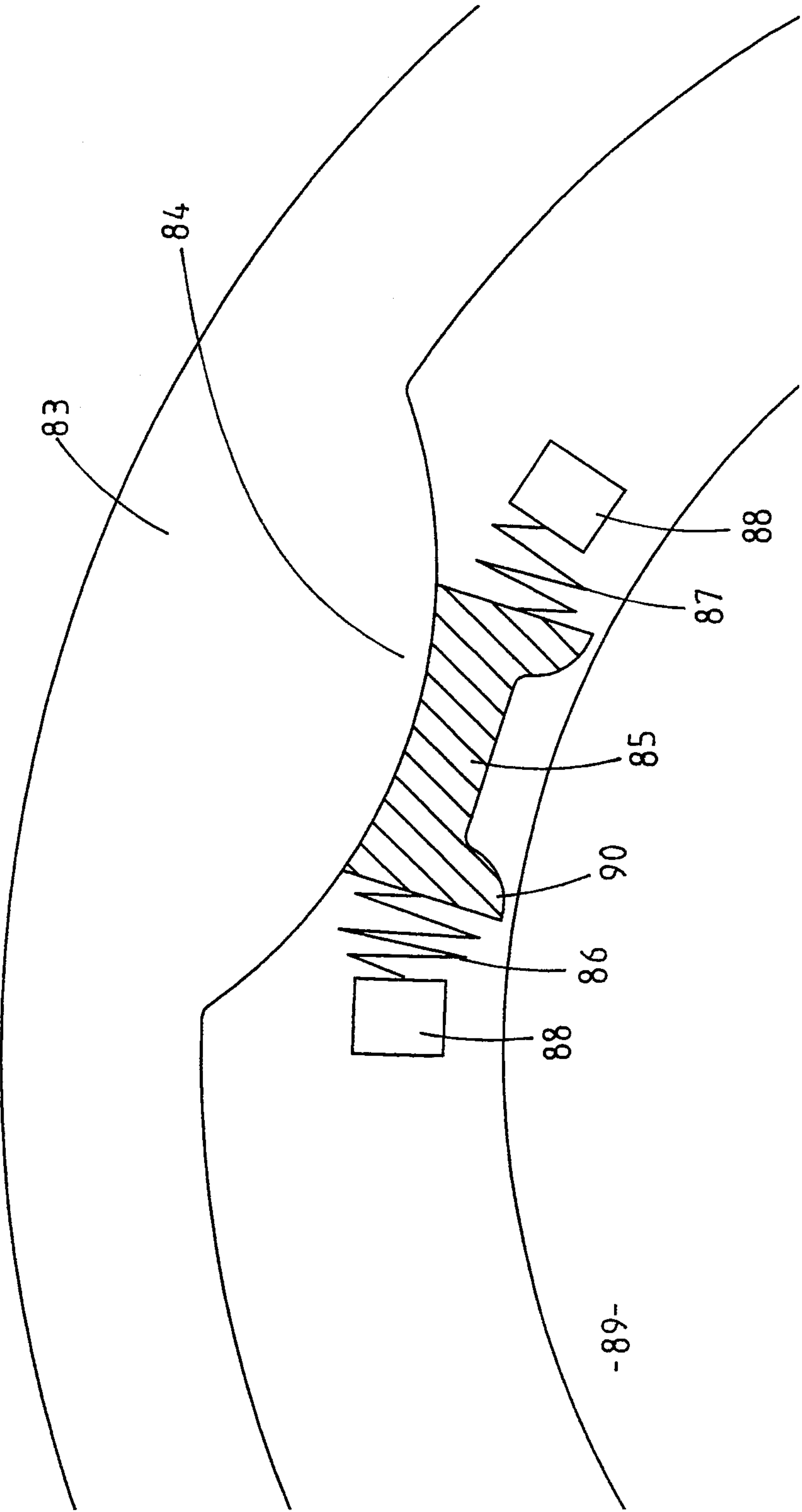


FIG.14

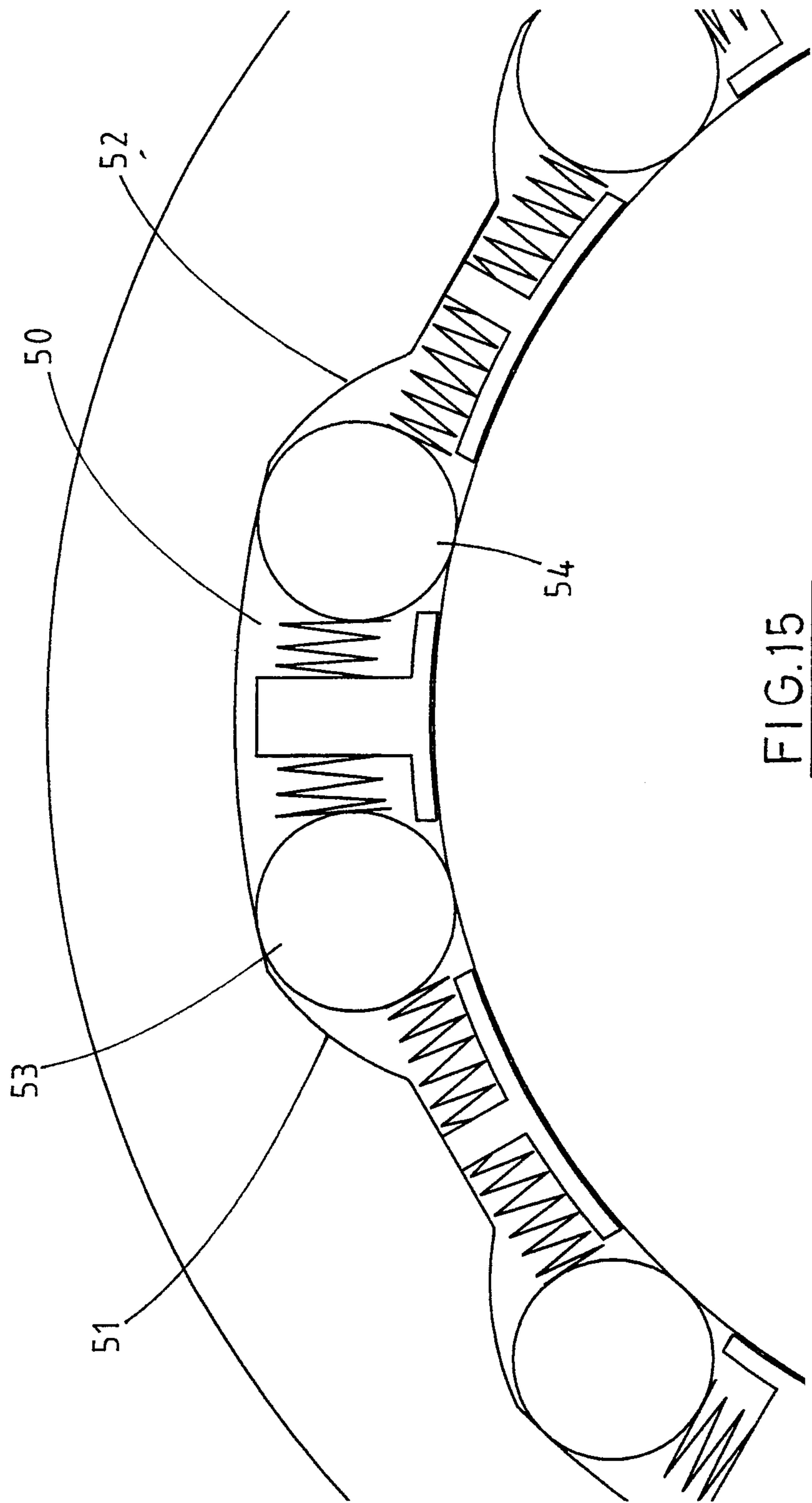


FIG. 15

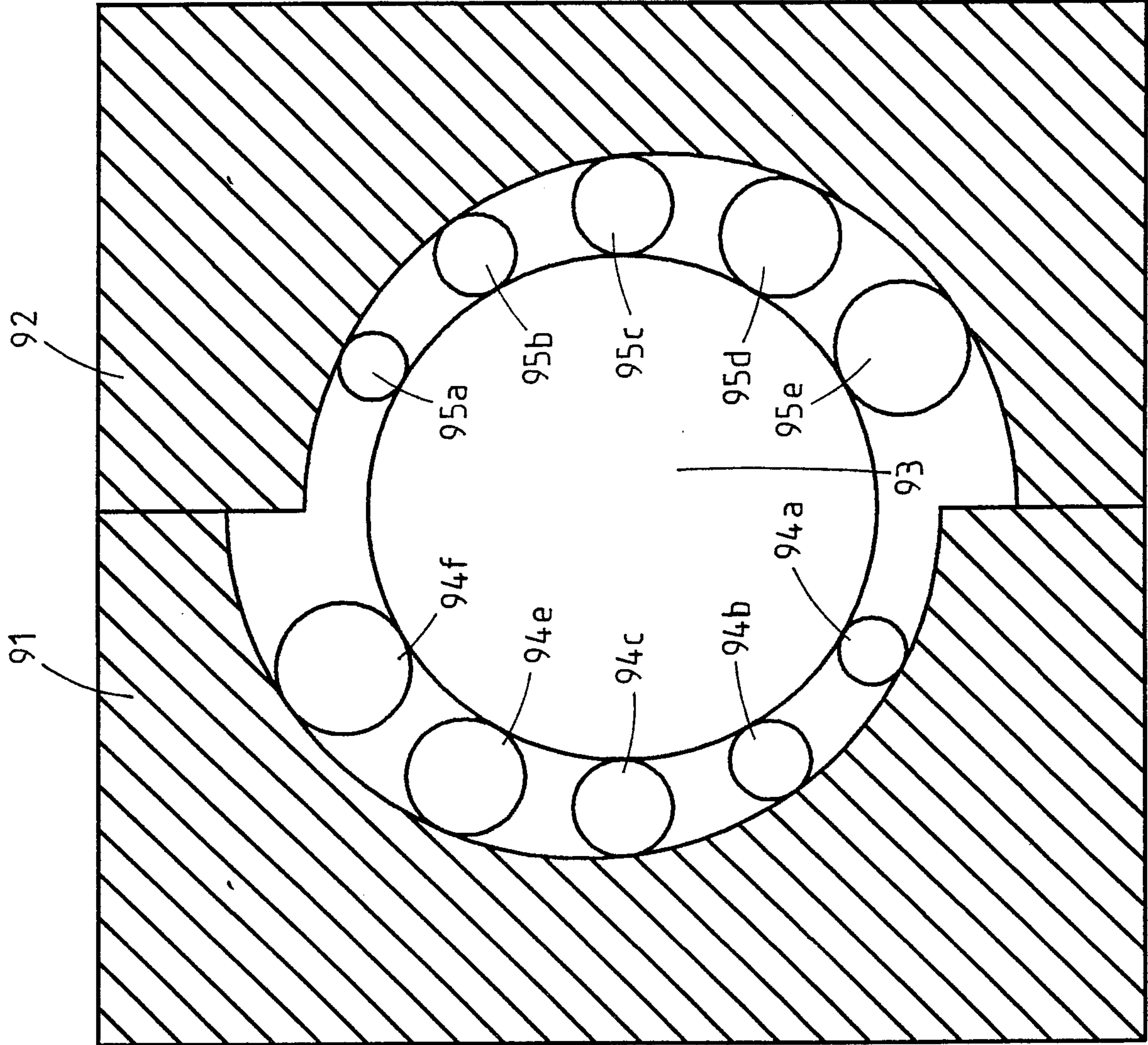


FIG. 16

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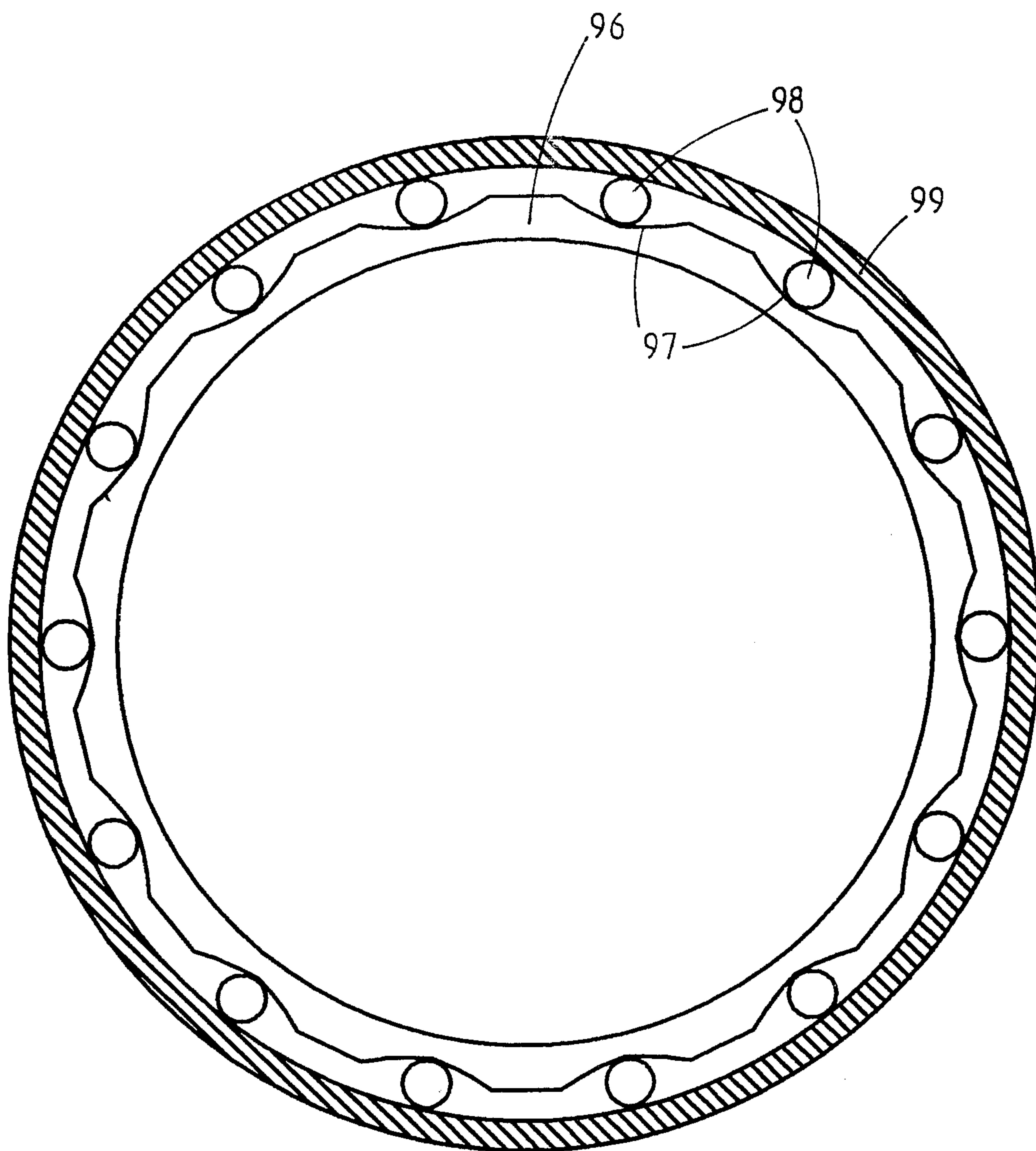
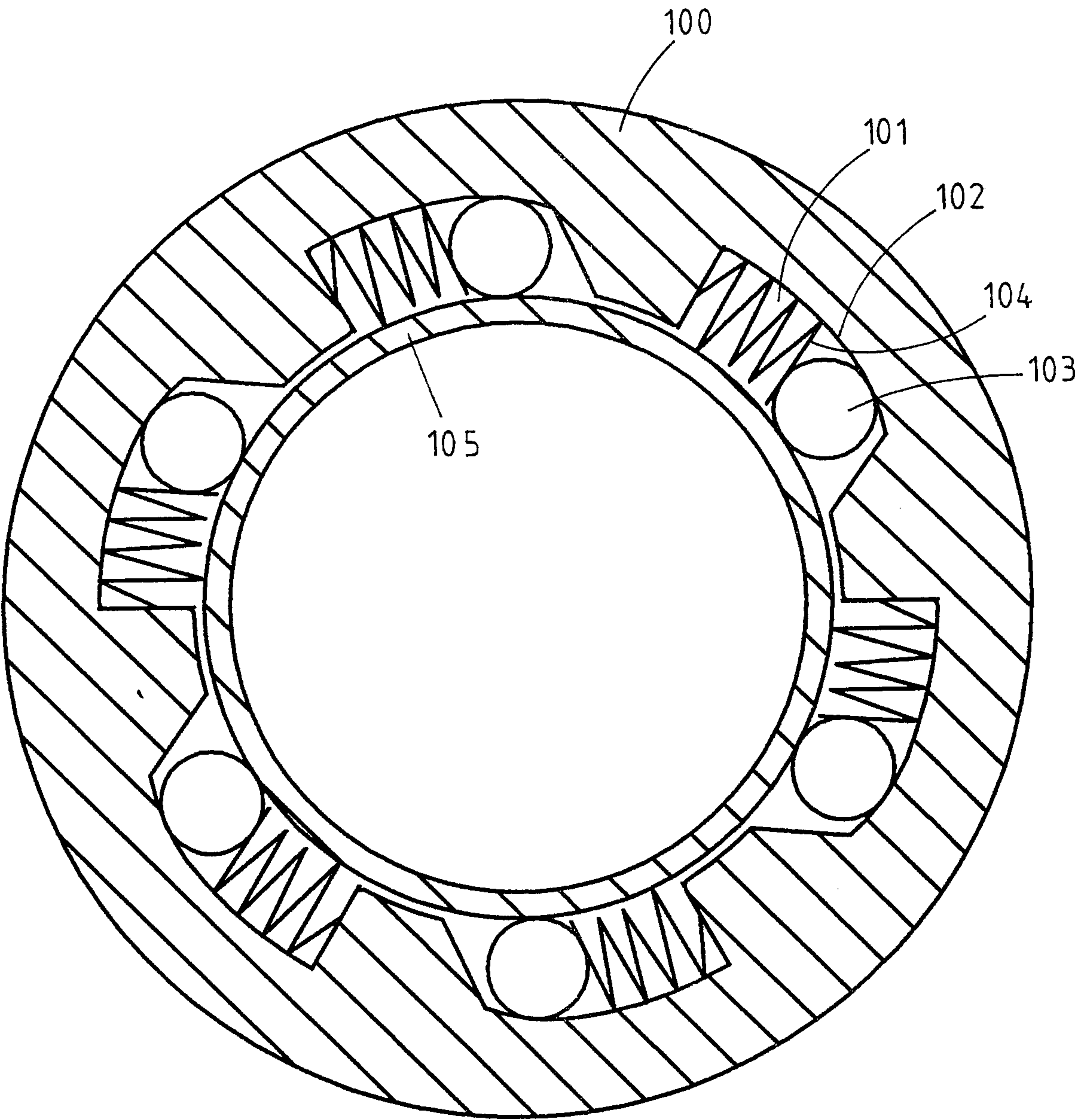


FIG. 17



" Prior Art "

FIG.18

