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DESCRIPTION

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention generally pertains to punch assemblies used in punch presses, and more particularly to punch holder and punch configurations of such assemblies.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Punch presses are typically configured to hold a plurality of tools for forming a variety of shapes and sizes of indentations and/or holes in sheet workpieces, for example, sheet metal. Tools of this sort commonly include at least one punch assembly and corresponding die. For example, in a multiple station turret punch press, a rotatable turret includes a plurality of bores, which hold a corresponding plurality of punch assemblies above a workpiece support surface, and a corresponding plurality of die receiving frames are located below the workpiece support surface. Alternatively, in other presses (such as Trumpf style presses), a rail (instead of a turret) is used for holding the punch assemblies.

[0003] A conventional punch assembly typically includes a punch guide, a punch body or holder, and a punch. The punch may be either fixedly or releasably attached to the holder. The punch holder and punch are often slidably engaged within the punch guide for reciprocal, axial movement along a central longitudinal axis of the punch guide. When such a punch assembly, and a corresponding die, are mounted in a press and located in a working position of the press, beneath the ram (or integrally connected to the ram), the punch is driven out from the punch guide, through an opening in a stripper plate, in order to form an indentation or a hole through a sheet workpiece with the tip of the punch. The stripper plate, which is attached to an end of the punch guide, prevents the workpiece from following the punch, upon its retraction back into the punch guide.

[0004] One such example can be seen in DE 195 05 754 Cl, which discloses a punch unit comprising a punch connected to a punch driver consisting of a punch driver lower part and a punch driver upper part. The punch driver upper part comprises a radially projecting head, which includes on its underside a radially extending recess in which a push button is radially guided. The push button is accessible on the peripheral surface of the upper punch driver head and it is under the action of a compression spring inserted into the recess, which tends to push the push button radially outwardly into a locked position. In this locked position, a projection of the push button directed radially with respect to the longitudinal axis of the punch engages into a longitudinal groove. To disassemble the punch unit, the push button is depressed from the outside radially, so that its radial projection emerges from the longitudinal groove, and then the head of the upper punch driver is rotated in the direction that the lower punch driver and the punch unscrew downwardly from the upper punch driver.

[0005] Those skilled in the art appreciate that the punches used in punch assemblies require regular maintenance and modification. For example, the punches may need to be sharpened or replaced when becoming worn, may need to be replaced when a different punch shape (or footprint) is required, and/or may need to be adjusted in position within the assembly to account for different lengths thereof. A variety of punch assembly configurations, which facilitate these types of maintenance and modification, have been taught and, in some cases, commercialized; however, there remains a need for new punch assembly configurations and methods that increase the ease and the speed by which such maintenance/modification can be made.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] According to the present invention, a punch holder is provided. The punch holder comprises an upper portion and a lower portion. The upper portion comprises a head unit for the punch holder and the lower portion comprises a punch coupling unit for the punch holder. The upper portion is operably coupled yet selectively adjustable relative to the lower portion. A first collar encircles a lateral extent of the upper portion. The first collar is movable in position relative to the lower portion, whereby movement of the first collar provides a corresponding adjustment in overall height of the punch holder. The first collar is operably coupled to the upper portion, wherein movement of the first collar results in corresponding movement of the upper portion. The first collar partially retains a linking member that is further partially retained by the upper portion. The first collar is movable solely via rotation, wherein application of a rotating force is single action required by user relative to the first collar to adjust the height of the punch holder. Whereby the rotating force on the first collar corresponds with rotating force on upper portion via the linking member being retained between the first collar and a flange of the head unit.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0007] The following drawings are illustrative of particular embodiments of the present invention and therefore do not limit the scope of the invention. The drawings should not be presumed as being to scale (unless so stated) and are intended for use in conjunction with the explanations in the following detailed description. Embodiments of the present invention will hereinafter be described in conjunction with the appended drawings, wherein like numerals denote like elements.

FIGS. 1A, 1B, and 1C are elevation, perspective, and cross-sectional views, respectively, of an exemplary punch holder and an exemplary punch.

FIGS. 2A, 2B, and 2C are elevation, perspective, and cross-sectional views, respectively, of the punch holder of FIGS. 1A-1C and an alternate version of the punch of FIGS. 1A-1C.

FIGS. 3A, 3B, 3C, and 3D are opposing elevation, perspective, and top views, respectively, of a further punch in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention.

FIGS. 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E are elevation, perspective, opposing cross-sectional, and exploded views, respectively, of a punch holder in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention.

FIGS. 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 5F, and 5G are elevation, perspective, four differing cross-sectional, and exploded views, respectively, of the punch holder of FIGS. 4A-4E with the further punch of FIGS. 3A-3D.

FIGS. 6A, 6B, 6C, and 6D are elevation, perspective, lateral cross-sectional, and exploded views, respectively, of the punch holder of FIGS. 4A-4E with alternate version of the further punch of FIGS. 3A-3D.

FIGS. 7A, 7B, 7C, 7D, and 7E are elevation, perspective, opposing lateral cross-sectional, and exploded views, respectively, of a further punch holder in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention.

FIGS. 8A, 8B, 8C, 8D, 8E, 8F, 8G, and 8H are elevation, perspective, lateral cross-sectional, four differing axial cross-sectional, and exploded views, respectively, of the further punch holder of FIGS. 7A-7E with the further punch of FIGS. 3A-3D.

FIGS. 9A, 9B, 9C, and 9D are elevation, perspective, lateral cross-sectional, and exploded views, respectively, of the further punch holder of FIGS. 7A-7E with the alternate version of further punch of FIGS. 3A-3D.

FIG. 10 is a flow diagram of an exemplary method of releasing and replacing a punch within certain punch holders.

FIG. 11A is an elevation view of an alternate punch holder relating to the punch holder of FIGS. 4A-4E in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, with an exemplary punch also shown (in dashed lines) being held thereby; and FIG 11B is an elevation view of a further alternate punch holder relating to the punch holder of FIGS. 4A-4E.

FIGS. 12A is an elevation view of an alternate punch holder relating to the punch holder of FIGS. 7A-7E in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, with an exemplary punch also shown (in dashed lines) being held thereby; and FIG. 12B is an elevation view of a further alternate punch holder relating to the punch holder of FIGS. 7A-7E.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0008] The following detailed description should be read with reference to the drawings, in which like elements in different drawings are numbered identically. Certain of the drawings

depict selected embodiments and they are not intended to limit the scope of the invention. It will be understood that embodiments shown in the drawings and described below are merely for illustrative purposes, and are not intended to limit the scope of the invention as defined in the claims.

[0009] As described above, a conventional punch assembly includes a punch guide, a punch body or holder, and a punch, wherein the punch can be either fixedly or releasably attached to the punch holder. As will be appreciated from the following description, certain embodiments described herein focus on punch holders and corresponding punch configurations. Among its many objects, the punch holders embodied herein are configured to increase the ease and speed by which maintenance and/or modification of punches used with the holders can be performed. Another exemplary object is to provide different configurations of punch holders so as to be applicable with a wide variety of punch press designs. A further object is to provide a tiered plurality of punch holders, each having a unique set of favorable characteristics. While this description and the corresponding drawings primarily pertain to punch holders and punches, it should be appreciated that the holders can be used with corresponding punch guides; however, the invention should not be limited to such.

[0010] FIGS. 1A, 1B, and 1C, as described above, illustrate differing views of a punch holder 10 and a punch 12 relating to yet not constituting certain embodiments of the invention, with FIG. 1C showing a cross-sectional view of FIG. 1B along the lines 1C-1C. As shown, a lower end of the punch holder 10 defines a recess 14 in which the punch 12 is configured to be inserted and secured, and then subsequently locked. In particular, as illustrated in FIG. 1C, the recess 14 of the punch holder 10 has inner threading 16 configured to mate with outer threading 18 of a stem 20 of coupling end 22 of the punch 12. In use, the coupling end 22 of the punch 12 is inserted in the holder recess 14 such that the stem 20 is brought into contact with, and screwed into, the threading 16 of the holder recess 14. Upon reaching a desirable height for portion of the punch 12 extending out of the punch holder 10, the punch's position can then be locked. With continued reference to FIG. 1C, a fastener 24 (e.g., bolt) is inserted in a channel 26 that passes centrally through the punch holder 10. The fastener 24 is of a length so as to extend through the channel 26 and further into an inner bore 28 defined in the punch stem 20. In particular, the fastener 24 has outer threading 30 configured to mate with inner threading 32 of the punch bore 28. In use, when the fastener 24 is screwed inward such that its head 34 makes contact with a shoulder 36 within channel 26 (or upon fully depressing a spring 38 supported by the shoulder 36), the punch's position is locked relative to the holder 10.

[0011] FIGS. 2A, 2B, and 2C, as already described herein, show differing views of the punch holder 10 and an alternate version of the punch 12 further relating to yet not constituting certain embodiments of the invention, with FIG. 2C showing a cross-sectional view of FIG. 2B along the lines 2C-2C. Given the above, it should be appreciated that the same securing/locking steps already described with regard to the holder 10 and punch 12 of FIGS. 1A-1C are equally applicable with the punch holder 10 and alternate punch 12' of FIGS. 2A-2C. However, as noted above, the punch 12' differs in its configuration from the punch 12. In

particular, the punch 12', as opposed to being a solid integral body such as punch 12, is shown with an exemplary tip 40 having ejector portion 41 and filler (e.g., urethane) 42 that are configured to mate and in part be secured to coupling end 22' of the punch 12'. To that end, in certain embodiments, the punch 12' is configured to utilize other tips (e.g., having differing footprints) as desired, by readily removing/replacing the tip 40.

[0012] The designs of FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C have many favorable aspects. For example, the punches 12, 12' can be removed from the punch holder 10 using only a couple of relatively simple steps, i.e., backing out the fastener 24 from inner threading 32 of the punch 12, 12', and then backing out the punch 12, 12' from the inner threading 16 of the holder 10. To that end, once unlocked, the punches 12, 12' can be backed out from the holder 10 by hand (i.e., without tools). In addition, a variety of punch configurations can be used with the holder 10 (such as punches 12, 12') so long as the punches have coupling ends of similar design to those of punches 12, 12' (so as to be configurable to the holder 10). Further, the minimal use of components in the design enables its cost to be kept at a low level.

[0013] However, the designs of FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C also can be viewed as having a few drawbacks. For example, the steps in adjusting/removing the punch 12, 12' with regard to the holder 10 dictate significant handling of the holder assembly, which can add to the time needed for punch adjustment/replacement, but generally tends to make such processes messy for the user. In addition, the removal/replacement steps generally dictate using a tool (e.g., during the locking/unlocking of the fastener 24 from the punch 12, 12'), adding further time to the process of punch adjustment/replacement. Also, there is repetitive contact made over significant areas of the holder 10, and punch 12, 12' during removal/adjustment of the punch 12, 12', which can promote undesired wear in those areas. Further, while the length of the punch 12, 12' protruding from the holder 12 can be adjusted (following unlocking of the fastener 24 from the punch 12, 12' and then rotation of the punch 12, 12'), it can be difficult to quickly and accurately adjust or fine tune the length as needed. Thus, while the punch holder assemblies of FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C can be viewed as good design options for some, it would be nice to have other similarly-styled, yet advanced, tool holder assembly options for others.

[0014] FIGS. 3A-3D, as described above, illustrate differing views of a punch 50 in accordance with certain embodiments. Similar to the punches 12, 12' shown in FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C, the punch 50 has a stem 52 included on a coupling end 54 thereof. However, instead of threading being used for coupling with a punch holder, the punch 50 is defined with a recess 54. As shown, the recess 54 is defined on the lateral surfaces 56 of the stem 52. In certain embodiments, the recess 54 is defined to be of particular shape so as to conjointly mate with shape of locking members of a punch holder (as later described herein). As should be appreciated, the manner by which the shapes of the recess 54 and locking members conjoin, and conversely separate from each other, allow for increased ease and speed by which the punch 50 can be joined to, or removed from, a punch holder. As shown, in certain embodiments, the recess 54 can have a concave shape so as to mate with a spherical member. As further shown, in certain embodiments, the recess 54 can be formed to continuously extend over a circumference of outer side of the stem 52. While it is appreciated

that the recess 54 can be defined as other shapes, it should be understood that using a concave shape not only enables easier entry of locking members, but when formed to have defined upper and lower edges 58, 60, vertical movement of spherical members (which are extended into the recess 54) can be minimized.

[0015] In certain embodiments as shown, the stem 52 is further defined with slots 62. The slots 62 are configured to mate with guiding members of a punch holder (as later described herein) in order to fix the orientation of the punch 50 with the holder. However, a further benefit of such slots 62 is that they help better position areas of the recess 54 configured to align with locking members of the punch holder. To that end, while not shown, the recess 54 can just as well be defined as a plurality of recesses, located at areas about the stem 52 that are configured to align with locking members of a punch holder. Further, it should be noted that while certain designs may involve inclusion of a solitary slot, the use of multiple slots 62, particularly on opposing sides 56 of the stem 52, effectively minimizes any freedom for the punch 50 to "wobble" relative to the punch holder.

[0016] Continuing with the punch 50, and particularly the stem 52 thereof, in certain embodiments, its outer lateral surfaces 56 are round, whereby such collective surface 56 is circularly shaped. Instead, the shape of the stem can be formed to have one or more straight edges, while not adversely affecting the parameters of the recess 54 defined therein, as described above. Further, it should be noted that the punch 50 has lower portion similar in design to the punch 12 of FIGS. 1A-1C. In light of this, it should be appreciated that the punch 50, as exemplified via the punch 12' of FIGS. 2A-2C, can take on different footprints as desired so as to have wide applicability of use in corresponding punch holders. Two such punch holders 70 and 100 are shown in FIGS 4A-4E and 7A-7E, respectively, as described below.

[0017] FIGS. 4A-4E, as described above, show differing views of a punch holder 70 in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, with FIGS. 4C and 4D showing cross-sectional views of FIG. 4B along lines 4C-4C and 4D-4D, respectively. As illustrated in FIGS. 4A and 4B, the punch holder 70 is configured with upper and lower (or first and second) collars 72, 74 operatively situated on differing segments of the holder 70. Each of the collars 72, 74 is adapted to perform different actions with regard to a punch held by the holder 70. Regarding the upper collar 72, when rotated either in clockwise direction or counterclockwise direction, a corresponding height adjustment of a punch (held by the holder 70) results, as described below. Regarding the lower collar 74, it is rotatable in only one direction (e.g., in a counterclockwise direction); however, when rotated, release of a punch (held by the holder 70) results.

[0018] Referring back to the upper collar 72, the collar 72 is operably coupled to an upper portion (or head or head unit) 76 of the punch holder 70 such that rotation of the collar 72 results in corresponding rotation of the head 76. In certain embodiments (and as further described below with regard to FIGS. 4E, 5D, and 6D), a flange 84 of the head 76 is operably coupled yet rotatable with the collar 72 via one or more members 78 retained there between. As will be further detailed below, rotation of the head 76 of the punch holder 70 (via rotation of

the upper collar 72) results in a corresponding height adjustment of punch held by the holder 70. Conversely, regarding the lower collar 74, as it is rotated relative to a lower portion (or holder coupler or punch coupling unit) 96 of the holder 70, the collar 74 correspondingly enables retaining members 86 to be drawn away from a punch held by the holder 70 so as to release the punch.

[0019] As alluded to above, more will be described of the adjustment and release mechanisms of the punch holder 70 below with regard to FIGS. 5A-5G and 6A-6D. However, at this point, it should be appreciated that by using the upper and lower collars 72 and 74, both punch height adjustment and punch removal with regard to the punch holder 70 are made quick and easy actions for the user. For example, punch height adjustment can be provided by the user via a single step or action of rotating the collar 72. Additionally, such punch height adjustment can be performed via a rotating force being applied to the collar 72, wherein application of the rotating force is performable with a single hand of the user. To that end, such adjustment can be performed without need for any tools. Likewise, via use of the lower collar 74, a punch can be released from the punch holder 70 by the user via a single step or action of rotating the collar 74. Additionally, such punch release can also be performed via a rotating force applied with a single free hand of the user. To that end, such release can be performed without need for any tools.

[0020] Turning to FIGS. 5A-5G, as described above, they illustrate differing views of the punch 50 when retained in the punch holder 70, with FIG. 5C showing cross-sectional view of FIG. 5B along lines 5C-5C and FIGS. 5D, 5E, and 5F showing cross-sectional views of FIG. 5C along lines 5D-5D, 5E-5E, and 5F-5F, respectively. As described above, with rotation of the upper collar 72, the head 76 of the punch holder 70 can correspondingly rotate on account of its flange 84 being operably coupled with the collar 72 via one or more members 78. With reference to FIG. 5D, in certain embodiments, the one or more members 78 involve a linking member 78a. Referring back to FIGS. 4C and 4E and now with reference to FIGS. 5D and 6D, it can be described how the linking member 78a is associated with the corresponding rotation of the upper collar 72 and the punch holder head 76, and how the rotation of the head 76 corresponds to vertical height adjustment of the punch 50. However, index collar 92 of the punch holder 70 should initially be detailed.

[0021] As shown, e.g., in FIG. 4B, the index collar 92 is situated between the upper and lower collars 72, 74. With reference to FIG. 4C, the index collar 92 is operably held to the punch holder head 76. In certain embodiments as shown, the collar 92 is held to the head 76 via retaining ring 94 (e.g., threaded on the lower end of head 76). However, despite being held together via ring 94, the punch holder head 76 can be rotated relative to the index collar 92. Thus, a function of the ring 94 (apart from joining index collar 92 to punch holder head 76) is to lock or maintain the vertical height of the punch holder head 76 relative to the index collar 92 regardless of rotation of the head 76.

[0022] With further reference to FIG. 4C, rotation of the head 76 (via rotation of the upper collar 72) causes height adjustment of a lower segment of the tool holder 70. In certain

embodiments, such lower segment is a one-piece element that is shiftably coupled to the head 76 and which the punch 50 is attached (releasably in this embodiment). In certain embodiments, such element is a holder coupler 96, which is coupled to head 76 in similar fashion as punch holder 10 and punches 12, 12' described with regard to FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C. For example, with continued reference to FIG. 4C, a lower end of the punch holder head 76 defines a recess 98 in which the holder coupler 96 is configured to be inserted and secured. In particular, as illustrated in FIG. 4C, the recess 98 of the head 76 has inner threading 100 configured to mate with outer threading 102 of a stem 104 protruding from the holder coupler 96. In use, the holder coupler 96 is inserted in the recess 98 of the head 76 such that the stem 104 is brought into contact with, and screwed into, the threading 100 of the recess 98.

[0023] Given the threaded connection between punch holder head 76 and holder coupler 96, rotation of the head 76 would normally involve a corresponding rotation of holder coupler 96. However, with continued reference to FIG. 4C, the index collar 92 defines a bore 105 to support a body 106 (e.g., a dowel pin) which extends into a channel 108 vertically extending along a side of the coupler 96, thereby preventing rotation of the holder coupler 96. As such, with the holder coupler 96 unable to rotate with the punch holder head 76, any rotation of the head 76 causes the head threading 100 to rotate about the coupler threading 102. However, as described above, the retaining ring 94 maintains vertical position of the head 76 relative to the index collar 92. As such, rotation of the head 76 causes vertical adjustment of the holder coupler 96 in the holder threading 100 and corresponding vertical adjustment of punch (e.g., punch 50) held by the coupler 96.

[0024] In certain embodiments, with reference to FIG. 5B, rotating the upper collar 72 in a clockwise direction (in the direction of arrow A) results in a corresponding rotation of punch holder head 76 such that holder coupler 96 climbs upward in the threading 100 of head 76 and thereby decreases vertical height of the punch 50. Conversely, rotating the upper collar 72 in a counterclockwise direction (in the direction of arrow B) results in a corresponding rotation of head 76 such that holder coupler 96 backs downward in the threading 100 of head 76 and thereby increase vertical height of the punch 50.

[0025] As described above, the head 76 of the punch holder 70 is configured to correspondingly rotate with upper collar 72, and this can be accomplished via use of a linking member 78a. As further described, the linking member 78a can be retained between the collar 72 and a flange 84 of the head 76. For example, in certain embodiments as shown in FIG. 5D, the linking member 78a can be partially retained both within an opening 82a in the flange 84 of the head 76 and a recess 79a on underside surface 80 of the upper collar 72. As such, if the upper collar 72 is rotated clockwise (in the direction per arrow A), the linking member 78a is also rotated so as to rotate the flange 84 of the head 76. In certain embodiments, the recess 79a is elongated so as to form more of a channel which is configured to slide about linking member 78a during initial rotation of the collar 72, whether turned clockwise or counterclockwise. More will be described of this later.

[0026] With continued reference to FIG. 5D, as the head flange 84 is rotated, it passes about

an upper end 110 of the index collar 92. In certain embodiments, the upper end 110 is defined with a plurality of notches 92a spaced uniformly about a circumference of the end 110, and which forms a means for differentiating degree of vertical height adjustment made to the punch 50. In certain embodiments and as shown with reference to FIGS. 4E and 5D, an indexing member 78b is partially retained within a further opening 82b of the flange 84. With continued reference to FIG. 5D, in certain embodiments (and contrary to the linking member 78a), the indexing member 78b is not always held between collar underside surface 80 and flange 84, but only during periods when height of punch 50 is adjusted. To that end, and with reference to FIGS. 5D and 6D, a pair of recesses 79b in the underside surface 80 of the upper collar 72 is shown flanking the flange opening 82b, and the flange opening 82b is in alignment with a particular notch 92a of notch collar upper end 110 such that the indexing member is partially retained both in flange opening 82b and notch 92a. As such, it should be appreciated that FIG. 5D shows a configuration for the punch holder 70 in which the punch 50 is locked at a particular vertical height setting.

[0027] Moreover, it should be appreciated the rationale to elongate the upper collar recess 79a for linking member 78a. For example, and with continued reference to FIG. 5D, if the upper collar 72 is rotated in the direction of A (i.e., in clockwise direction), the recess 79a (in underside 80 of upper collar 72) slides in clockwise direction about the linking member 78a until the member 78a contacts a shoulder 79a' of the recess 79a. Upon such contact, the linking member 78a is forced to rotate with the upper collar 72, which correspondingly rotates punch holder head 76 (based on the member 78a being partially retained in flange opening 82a of head 76). The extent of the recess 78a is defined so that at about the same time the linking member 78a contacts the recess shoulder 79a', the recess 79b previously lagging the indexing member 78b is brought into alignment behind the member 78b. As such, with the rotation of the flange 84 resulting from the linking member 78a, the indexing member 78b (on account of also being retained in opening 82b of holder flange 84) is forced to back out of its current notch 92a in index collar 92 (and partially into aligned recess 79b). In turn, as the upper collar 72 is rotated, the indexing member 78b rolls about the circumference of the index collar 92, sliding into each notch 92a along the way, until the desired further notch setting is reached.

[0028] It should be appreciated that the manner by which the indexing member 78b slides into each notch 92a of the index collar 92 while being rotated, enables the assembly to provide a certain signal with every index setting that the member 78b passes. In certain embodiments, such signal may be auditory, such as a clicking sound from the member 78b landing into each notch 92a. Alternately, or in combination, such signal may be based on touch, e.g., force vibration caused by the member 78b landing in each notch 92a as the upper collar 72 is turned. Such signaling has particular significance as it can be used by the user to determine to what extent the vertical height of the punch is being adjusted. For example, in certain embodiments, each signal can signify a punch height adjustment of +/- .002" from the prior index setting. However, it should be appreciated that the division of height adjustment can be configured as desired.

[0029] Upon adjusting the indexing member 78b to a new desired setting (or notch 92a) in the index collar 92, the upper collar 72 can be released. In certain embodiments, with further reference to FIG. 5D, a biasing member 108 is further utilized in recess 79c in underside surface 80 of upper collar 72 and opening 82c in underside surface of a head flange 84. In certain embodiments as shown, the biasing member 108 can involve at least a spring element 78c, and optionally a pair of members 78d holding the spring element 78c there between. As the upper collar 72 is rotated in either clockwise or counterclockwise directions, the spring element 78c is compressed initially between opposing ends recess 79c and opening 82c from initial non-movement of the flange 84 (as described above with regard to linking member 78a). To that end, once the rotating force is removed from the collar 72, the spring element 78c recoils, pulling back upper collar 72 in direction opposite the rotation direction such that the recesses 79b also recoil in position to flank the indexing member 78b (thereby locking the member 78b in selected notch 92a of index collar 92) and to centrally position the pushing member 78a in recess 79a. In certain embodiments, one or more of the linking member 78a, indexing member 78b, and holding members 78d are spherical members (e.g., such as ball bearings); however, these members can take on other shapes so long as they can cleanly move along underside surface 80 of upper collar 72 and notched end 110 of index collar 92.

[0030] Turning to the lower collar 74, reference is made to FIGS. 5B, 5C, and 5E-5G. As already described above, when the collar 74 is rotated as intended, the collar 74 correspondingly enables retaining members 86 to be drawn away from the punch 50 held by the punch holder 70 so as to release the punch 50. In certain embodiments, the intended rotation is in a counterclockwise direction, e.g., as shown by arrow C in FIG. 5B. However, the invention should not be limited to such, as the intended rotation for the collar 74 could just as well be in a clockwise direction. In certain embodiments, the retaining members 86 are spherical members (e.g., such as ball bearings); however, these members 86 can take on other shapes so long as they can cleanly move within bores 114 and align with cavities 88 and recess contour in punch hub 52. As shown with reference to FIG. 5C, the lower collar 74 is operably held to lower portion (holder coupler) 96 of the punch holder 70. In certain embodiments as shown, the collar 74 is held to the coupler 96 via retaining ring 111 (e.g., threaded on the lower end of coupler 96). However, despite being held together via ring 111, the lower collar 74 can be rotated relative to the holder coupler 96.

[0031] The holder coupler 96 and its general functioning with respect to the head 76 of punch holder 70 have already been described. However, with regard to the punch 50 and the retaining members 86 used therefor, a hub 112 of the holder coupler 96 is defined with bores 114 on opposing surfaces thereof. The lower collar 74, when held together to the holder coupler hub 112, encircles hub 112 so as to align with bores 114 thereof. Continuing with the lower collar 74 and its release functionality, reference is made to FIGS. 4C and 5F. In certain embodiments, the bores 114 are defined to have a diameter 116 at inner surface 118 of the hub 112 that is greater than a diameter 120 at the hub outer surface 122. As such, the retaining members 86 are permitted to protrude from, yet not pass through the bores 114 at the hub inner surface 118. Conversely, in certain embodiments, the retaining members 86 are permitted to pass out of the bores 114 at the hub outer surface 122 and be kept in continual

contact with cavities 88 defined in underside surface 90 of lower collar 74. As such, the members 86 are at least partially retained in bores 114, even at deepest areas of cavities 88.

[0032] In certain embodiments, moving the collar 74 in its rotatable direction results in cavities 88 defined in underside surface 90 of the collar 74 to correspondingly rotate and increase in depth under retaining members 86 such that the members 86 lose contact with, and thereby release, the punch 50. In certain embodiments, floor surface 88a of the cavities 88 in underside surface 80 is defined to be smooth and gradually ramp with regard to its depth transition in order to enable smooth travel of the members 86 along such surfaces 88a as the lower collar 74 is rotated. Consequently, corresponding rotation of the collar 74 is made to be smooth, i.e., not impeded by any sudden changes in depth along cavities 88.

[0033] It should be appreciated that once the lower collar 74 is rotated, and the depth of cavities 88 increase behind the retaining members 86, a downward pulling force applied to the punch 50 could be used to force the members 86 to withdraw into the cavities 88 and thereby release the punch 50. However, certain embodiments involve using means to force the retaining members 86 to withdraw into cavities 88 and to force the punch 50 out from the holder coupler 96 upon rotation of the lower collar 74. In certain embodiments, a spring-loaded plunger 124 is provided as such means. As further detailed below, travel path of the plunger 124 is confined to the hub inner recess 126 of the holder coupler 96.

[0034] Starting at a state at which punch 50 is already secured to punch holder 70 (see FIG. 5C), the hub 52 of the punch 50 is located within inner recess 126 of holder coupling hub 112. With further reference to FIG. 5F, the retaining members 86 are shown in contact with corresponding shallow regions of cavities 88 so as to protrude from the bores 114 and be conjoined with recess 54 of the punch hub 52. In this state, it should also be noted that a spring 128 is in compressed state to the rear of the plunger 124. In certain embodiments, the spring 128 is housed within a pocket 130 located atop hub inner recess 126.

[0035] With reference to FIG. 4B, 4C and 5F, upon rotation of the lower collar 74, the depth of cavities 88 increases behind the retaining members 86, and the plunger 124 travels to its fully-extended position (via recoiling force of spring 128), thereby pushing against punch hub 52 (forcing its exit from hub inner recess 126) and further pushing out any portions of retaining members 86 projecting from bores 114 into hub recess 126. As described above, the travel path of the plunger 124 is confined to the hub inner recess 126, whereby the plunger 124 is prevented from extending outside the inner recess 126 via contact with one or more pins 132 (see FIG. 4D). In certain embodiments as shown, two such pins 132 may be used, with the pins 132 protruding from corresponding holes 134 provided on opposing sides of hub inner surface 118 (e.g., directly opposite the inner surface sides of the hub 112 in which the bores 114 are defined). It should be recognized that the pins 132, when positioned in such manner, would further correspond to slots 62 in hub 52 of punch 50 to ensure correct positioning of the punch 50 with the holder 70.

[0036] In certain embodiments, a protection mechanism is provided to prevent the punch 50

from being inadvertently released from the holder 70. With reference to FIG. 5E, following release of rotational force on the lower collar 74, the mechanism forces the collar 74 back to its pre-rotation position. Much like the biasing member 108 described with regard to the upper collar 72, a biasing member 136 (e.g., spring) can be used as the mechanism, but in this case, it is located within channel 137 of collar 74. Further distinguishing from the biasing member 108 described with regard to the upper collar 72, the biasing member is operably coupled to a pin (e.g., dowel pin) 138 vertically extending between holder coupler 96 and upper collar 72 (see FIG. 4C). With reference to FIG. 5E, as the lower collar 74 is rotated in applicable direction, the channel 137 correspondingly slides about the biasing member 136 and compresses member between channel end 140 and rigidly-fixed pin 138. To that end, once the rotating force is removed from the collar 74, the biasing member 136 is configured to recoil against channel end 140, thereby rotating lower collar 74 to its pre-rotated position.

[0037] Continuing with the above, the recoil of the biasing member 136 would correspondingly cause lower collar 74 to return to its pre-rotated position, i.e., such that shallow-depth regions of cavities 88 are aligned with retaining members 86, thereby driving the members 86 (via contact with floor region 88a of cavities 88) to project again out of bores 114 and into hub recess 126. However, as described above, a prior effect of the rotating force being applied to the collar 74 is the plunger 124, via spring 128, sliding to a position within the hub recess 126 so as to come into contact with the pins 132. In certain embodiments, the plunger 124 in this extended (or release) position is aligned with the bores 114 of the recess 126. As a consequence, the retaining members 86 can be blocked from protruding from the bores 114 of the recess 126. Thus, despite the recoiling force of biasing member 136 as described above, the retaining members 86 are prevented from moving axially, and as such, the lower collar 74 can be effectively locked in its rotated state.

[0038] Such state, and blocking position of the plunger 124 relative to the bores 114 and retaining members 86, in turn enhances ease by which a new punch 50 can be inserted into recess 126 and subsequently locked therein (via retaining members 86). To that end, such insertion/locking of punch 50 with the holder 70 can be performed without corresponding rotation of the lower collar 74, but instead with application of a single vertical force applied to the punch 50 as it is inserted into the recess 126. For example, in subsequently coupling a further punch 50 to the holder 70, the hub 52 of such punch 50 can be inserted in the inner hub recess 126 and forced against plunger 124 until the plunger 124 is vertically pushed out of alignment with the bores 114. Once such clearance is established in the recess 126 at the bores 114, the recoiling force of the biasing member 136 causes the lower collar 74 to rotate to its pre-rotated position. This rotation of the collar 74 thereby slides the shallow-depth regions of cavities 88 into alignment with retaining members 86, driving the members 86 (via contact with floor region 88a of cavities 88) to project out of bores 114 and into hub recess 126, thereby locking punch 50 via the members 86. As described above, once locked to the holder 70, the punch 50 is prevented from being released without corresponding rotation of the lower collar 74, and the collar 74 is predisposed to be in a non-rotated position via the biasing member 136 being in its recoiled (or expanded state).

[0039] Turning to FIGS. 6A-6D, as described above, they illustrate differing views of an alternate version of the punch 50 when retained in the punch holder 70, with FIG. 6C showing cross-sectional view of FIG. 6B along lines 6C-6C. Given the above, it should be appreciated that the same punch adjustment/release steps already described with regard to the holder 70 and punch 50 of FIGS. 5A-5G are equally applicable with the punch holder 70 and alternate punch 50' of FIGS. 6A-6D. However, as noted above, the punch 50' differs in its configuration from the punch 50. In particular, the punch 50', as opposed to being a solid integral body such as punch 50, is shown with an exemplary tip 150 having ejector portions 152 and mechanism for ejecting (e.g., spring 154) that are configured to mate with and in part be secured to coupling portion 156 of the punch 50'. To that end, in certain embodiments, the punch 50' is configured to utilize other tips as desired, by readily removing/replacing the tip 150.

[0040] FIGS. 7A-7E, as described above, show differing views of an additional punch holder 170 in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, with FIGS. 7C and 7D showing cross-sectional views of FIG. 7B along lines 7C-7C and 7D-7D, respectively. As illustrated in FIGS. 7A and 7B, the punch holder 170 is configured with upper and lower (or first and second) collars 172, 174 operatively situated on differing segments areas of the holder 170. Each of the collars 172, 174 is adapted to perform different actions with regard to a punch held by the holder 170. Regarding the upper collar 172, when rotated either in clockwise direction or counterclockwise direction, a corresponding height adjustment of a head 176 of the holder 170 results, as described below. Regarding the lower collar 174, it is rotatable in only one direction (e.g., in a counterclockwise direction); however, when rotated, release of a punch (held by the holder 170) results.

[0041] Comparing the punch holder 170 of FIGS. 7A-7E with the punch holder 70 of FIGS. 4A-4E, the punch holder 170 has some significant differences in structure, but a certain amount of crossover is carried over from what has been already been disclosed with regard to the height adjustment and release mechanisms configured with the punch holder 70. For example, the punch holder 170 has a different configuration, with a spring 171 being positioned internal to a flange collar or flange 173, such that the holder 170 is correspondingly thought of, and thus referred to, as a "floating" configuration. In light of this, as described above, the upper collar 172 shown for punch holder 170 can be situated at the head 176 whereby the height of the head 176 is adjustable. However, when combined with floating functionality of head (via spring 171), the head 176 can be driven an added distance so as to at least match (and often exceed) adjusted height that can be achieved with punch holder 70 (with respect to directly adjusting height of punch mounted to the holder). As for lower collar 174, the description for its function of releasing punch is very similar to what was described for punch holder 70, but differs in terms of not having a holder coupler. As such, the lower collar is instead held to a lower end of the index collar 192.

[0042] Referring back to the upper collar 172, the collar 172 is operably coupled to an upper portion (or head or head unit) 176 of the punch holder 170 such that rotation of the collar 172 results in corresponding height adjustment of the head relative to an index collar 192. In certain embodiments (and as further described below with regard to FIGS. 7E, 8D, and 9D), a

flange 184 of the head 176 is operably coupled to the collar 172 via a retaining ring 181 and the head 176 is rotatable with the collar 172 via one or more members 178 retained between. As will be further detailed below, rotation of the head 176 (via rotation of the upper collar 172) results in a corresponding height adjustment of the head 176. Conversely, regarding the lower collar 174, as it is rotated relative to a lower portion (or index collar or punch coupling unit) 192 of the holder 170, the collar 174 correspondingly enables retaining members 186 to be drawn away from a punch held by the holder 170 so as to release the punch.

[0043] As alluded to above, more will be described of the adjustment and release mechanisms of the punch holder 170 below with regard to FIGS. 8A-8H and 9A-9D. However, at this point, it should be appreciated that by using the upper and lower collars 172 and 174, both head height adjustment and punch removal with regard to the punch holder 170 are made quick and easy actions for the user. For example, head height adjustment can be provided by the user via a single step or action of rotating the collar 172. Additionally, such head height adjustment can be performed via a rotating force being applied to the collar 172, wherein application of the rotating force is performable with a single hand of the user. To that end, such adjustment can be performed without need for any tools. Likewise, via use of the lower collar 174, a punch can be released from the punch holder 170 by the user via a single step or action of rotating the collar 174. Additionally, such punch release can also be performed via a rotating force applied with a single free hand of the user. To that end, such release can be performed without need for any tools.

[0044] Turning to FIGS. 8A-8H, as described above, they illustrate differing views of the punch 50 when retained in the punch holder 170, with FIG. 8C showing cross-sectional view of FIG. 8B along lines 8C-8C and FIGS. 8D, 8E, 8F, and 8G showing cross-sectional views of FIG. 8C along lines 8D-8D, 8E-8E, 8F-8F, and 8G-8G, respectively. As described above, with rotation of the upper collar 172, the head 176 of the punch holder 70 can correspondingly rotate on account of its flange 184 being operably coupled with the collar 172 with one or more members 178 retained there between. With reference to FIG. 8D, in certain embodiments, the one or more members 178 involve a linking member 178a. Referring back to FIGS. 7C and 7E and now with reference to FIGS. 8D and 9D, it can be described how the linking member 178a is associated with the corresponding rotation of the upper collar 172 and the head 176, and how the rotation of the head 176 corresponds to effective vertical height adjustment of the punch 50.

[0045] As described above, the head 176 of the punch holder 170 has operably coupled thereto the upper collar 172, and this can be accomplished via use of a linking member 178a. As further described, the linking member 178a can be retained between the collar 172 and a flange 184 of the head 176. For example, in certain embodiments as shown in FIG. 8D, the linking member 178a can be partially retained both within an opening 182a in the flange 184 of the head 176 and a recess 179a on underside surface 180 of the upper collar 172. As such, if the upper collar 172 is rotated clockwise (in the direction per arrow A), the linking member 178a is also rotated so as to rotate the flange 184 of the head 176. In certain embodiments, the recess 179a is elongated so as to form more of a channel which is configured to slide

about linking member 178a during initial rotation of the collar 172, whether turned clockwise or counterclockwise. More will be described of this later.

[0046] With continued reference to FIG. 8D, as the head flange 184 is rotated, it passes about an upper end 210 of an index collar 192. In certain embodiments as shown, a spacing body (e.g., formed of urethane) 169 protrudes vertically from index collar upper end 210 to prevent too low of an adjustment with regard to head 176. In certain embodiments, the upper end 210 is defined with a plurality of notches 192a spaced uniformly about a circumference of the end 210, and which forms a means for differentiating degree of vertical height adjustment made to the head 176. In certain embodiments and as shown with reference to FIGS. 7E and 8D, an indexing member 178b is partially retained within a further opening 182b of the flange 184. With continued reference to FIG. 8D, in certain embodiments (and contrary to the linking member 178a), the indexing member 178b is not always held between collar underside surface 180 and flange 184, but only during periods when height of head 175 is adjusted. To that end, and with reference to FIGS. 8D and 9D, a pair of recesses 179b in the underside surface 180 of the upper collar 172 is shown flanking the flange opening 182b, and the flange opening 182b is in alignment with a particular notch 192a of notch collar upper end 210 such that the indexing member is partially retained both in flange opening 182b and notch 192a. As such, it should be appreciated that FIG. 8D shows a configuration for the punch holder 170 in which the punch 50 is locked at a particular vertical height setting.

[0047] Moreover, it should be appreciated the rationale to elongate the upper collar recess 179a for linking member 178a. For example, and with continued reference to FIG. 8D, if the upper collar 172 is rotated in the direction of A (i.e., in clockwise direction), the recess 179a (in underside 180 of upper collar 172) slides in clockwise direction about the linking member 178a until the member 178a contacts a shoulder 179a' of the recess 179a. Upon such contact, the linking member 178a is forced to rotate with the upper collar 172, which correspondingly rotates extension head 175 (based on the member 178a being partially retained in flange opening 182a of extension head 175). The extent of the recess 178a is defined so that at about the same time the linking member 178a contacts the recess shoulder 179a', the recess 179b previously lagging the indexing member 178b is brought into alignment behind the member 178b. As such, with the rotation of the flange 184 resulting from the linking member 178a, the indexing member 178b (on account of also being retained in opening 182b of holder flange 184) is forced to back out of its current notch 192a in index collar 192 (and partially into aligned recess 179b). In turn, as the upper collar 172 is rotated, the indexing member 178b rolls about the circumference of the index collar 192, sliding into each notch 192a along the way, until the desired further notch setting is reached.

[0048] It should be appreciated that the manner by which the indexing member 178b slides into each notch 192a of the index collar 192 while being rotated, enables the assembly to provide a certain signal with every index setting that the member 178b passes. In certain embodiments, such signal may be auditory, such as a clicking sound from the member 178b landing into each notch 192a. Alternately, or in combination, such signal may be based on touch, e.g., force vibration caused by the member 178b landing in each notch 192a as the

upper collar 172 is turned. Such signaling has particular significance as it can be used by the user to determine to what extent the vertical height of the punch is being adjusted. For example, in certain embodiments, each signal can signify a punch height adjustment of $\pm .002$ " from the prior index setting. However, it should be appreciated that the division of height adjustment can be configured as desired.

[0049] Upon adjusting the indexing member 178b to a new desired setting (or notch 192a) in the index collar 192, the upper collar 172 can be released. In certain embodiments, with further reference to FIG. 8D, a biasing member 208 is further utilized in recess 179c in underside surface 180 of upper collar 172 and opening 182c in underside surface of head flange 184. In certain embodiments as shown, the biasing member 208 can involve at least a spring element 178c, and optionally a pair of members 178d holding the spring element 178c there between. As the upper collar 172 is rotated in either clockwise or counterclockwise directions, the spring element 178c is compressed initially between opposing ends recess 179c and opening 182c from initial non-movement of the flange 184 (as described above with regard to linking member 178a). To that end, once the rotating force is removed from the collar 172, the spring element 178c recoils, pulling back upper collar 172 in direction opposite the rotation direction such that the recesses 179b also recoil in position to flank the indexing member 178b (thereby locking the member 178b in selected notch 192a of index collar 192) and to centrally position the pushing member 178a in recess 179a. In certain embodiments, one or more of the linking member 178a, indexing member 178b, and holding members 178d are spherical members (e.g., such as ball bearings); however, these members can take on other shapes so long as they can cleanly move along underside surface 180 of upper collar 172 and notched end 210 of index collar 192.

[0050] Turning to the lower collar 174, reference is made to FIGS. 8B, 8C, and 8E-8H. As already described above, when the collar 174 is rotated as intended, the collar 174 correspondingly enables retaining members 186 to be drawn away from the punch 50 held by the punch holder 170 so as to release the punch 50. In certain embodiments, the intended rotation is in a counterclockwise direction, e.g., as shown by arrow D in FIG. 8B. However, the invention should not be limited to such, as the intended rotation for the collar 174 could just as well be in a clockwise direction. In certain embodiments, the retaining members 186 are spherical members (e.g., such as ball bearings); however, these members 186 can take on other shapes so long as they can cleanly move within bores 214 and align with cavities 188 (as described below) and recess contour in punch hub 52. As shown with reference to FIG. 8C, the lower collar 174 is operably held to lower portion (index collar) 192 of the punch holder 170. In certain embodiments as shown, the lower collar 174 is held to the index collar 192 via retaining ring 211 (e.g., threaded on the lower end of index collar 192). However, despite being held together via ring 211, the lower collar 174 can be rotated relative to the index collar 192. It should be further noted (with reference to FIG. 8C) that lower end of index collar passes through opening 180 in floating flange 173 and floating flange 173 is held to index collar 192. In certain embodiments as shown, the floating flange 173 is held to the index collar 192 via retaining ring 215 (e.g., threaded on lower end segment of index collar 192).

[0051] The index collar 192 and its general functioning with respect to adjustable head 176 of punch holder 170 have already been described. However, with regard to the punch 50 and the retaining members 186 used therefor, a hub 212 of the index collar 192 is defined with bores 214 on opposing surfaces thereof. The lower collar 174, when held together to the index collar hub 212, encircles the hub 212 so as to align with bores 214 thereof. Continuing with the lower collar 174 and its release functionality, reference is made to FIGS. 7C and 8G. In certain embodiments, the bores 214 are defined to have a diameter 216 at inner surface 218 of the hub 212 that is greater than a diameter 220 at the hub outer surface 222. As such, the retaining members 186 are permitted to protrude from, yet not pass through the bores 214 at the hub inner surface 218. Conversely, in certain embodiments, the retaining members 186 are permitted to pass out of the bores 214 at the hub outer surface 222 and be kept in continual contact with cavities 188 defined in underside surface 190 of lower collar 174. As such, the members 186 are at least partially retained in bores 214, even at deepest areas of cavities 188.

[0052] In certain embodiments, moving the collar 174 in its rotatable direction results in cavities 188 defined in underside surface 190 of the collar 174 to correspondingly rotate and increase in depth under retaining members 186 such that the members 186 lose contact with, and thereby release, the punch 50. In certain embodiments, floor surface 188a of the cavities 188 in underside surface 180 is defined to be smooth and gradually ramp with regard to its depth transition in order to enable smooth travel of the members 186 along such surfaces 188a as the lower collar 174 is rotated. Consequently, corresponding rotation of the collar 174 is made to be smooth, i.e., not impeded by any sudden changes in depth along cavities 188.

[0053] It should be appreciated that once the lower collar 174 is rotated, and the depth of cavities 188 increase behind the retaining members 186, a downward pulling force applied to the punch 50 could be used to force the members 186 to withdraw into the cavities 188 and thereby release the punch 50. However, certain embodiments involve using means to force the retaining members 186 to withdraw into cavities 188 and to force the punch 50 out from the index collar 192 upon rotation of the lower collar 174. In certain embodiments, a spring-loaded plunger 224 is provided as such means. As further detailed below, travel path of the plunger 224 is confined to the hub inner recess 226 of the index collar 192.

[0054] Starting at a state at which punch 50 is already secured to punch holder 170 (see FIG. 7C), the hub 52 of the punch 50 is located within inner recess 226 of index collar hub 212. With further reference to FIG. 8G, the retaining members 186 are shown in contact with corresponding shallow regions of cavities 188 so as to protrude from the bores 214 and be conjoined with recess 54 of the punch hub 52. In this state, it should also be noted that a spring 228 is in compressed state to the rear of the plunger 224. In certain embodiments, the spring 228 is housed within a pocket 230 located atop hub inner recess 226.

[0055] With reference to FIG. 7B, 7C and 8G, upon rotation of the lower collar 174, the depth of cavities 188 increases behind the retaining members 186, and the plunger 224 travels to its fully-extended position (via recoiling force of spring 228), thereby pushing against punch hub

52 (forcing its exit from hub inner recess 226) and further pushing out any portions of retaining members 186 projecting from bores 214 into hub recess 226. As described above, the travel path of the plunger 224 is confined to the hub inner recess 226, whereby the plunger 224 is prevented from extending outside the inner recess 226 via contact with one or more pins 232 (see FIG. 7C). In certain embodiments as shown, two such pins 232 may be used, with the pins 232 protruding from corresponding holes 234 provided on opposing sides of hub inner surface 218 (e.g., directly opposite the inner surface sides of the hub 212 in which the bores 214 are defined). It should be recognized that the pins 232, when positioned in such manner, would further correspond to slots 62 in hub 52 of punch 50 to ensure correct positioning of the punch 50 with the holder 170.

[0056] In certain embodiments, a protection mechanism is provided to prevent the punch 50 from being inadvertently released from the holder 170. With reference to FIG. 8F, following release of rotational force on the lower collar 174, the mechanism forces the collar 174 back to its pre-rotation position. Much like the biasing member 208 described with regard to the upper collar 172, a biasing member 236 (e.g., spring) can be used as the mechanism, but in this case, it is located within channel 237 of collar 174. Further distinguishing from the biasing member 208 described with regard to the upper collar 172, the biasing member is operably coupled to a pin 238 vertically extending from stop ring 239 held between retaining ring 215 and lower collar 174 and prevented from rotating via member (e.g., ball) 237, partially retained in recesses 187a and 187b of ring 215 and stop ring 239, respectively (see FIGS. 8C, 8E, and 8F). With reference to FIG. 8F, as the lower collar 174 is rotated in applicable direction, the channel 237 corresponding slides about the biasing member 236 and compresses member between channel end 240 and rigidly-fixed pin 238. To that end, once the rotating force is removed from the collar 174, the biasing member 236 is configured to recoil against channel end 240, thereby rotating lower collar 174 to its pre-rotated position.

[0057] Continuing with the above, the recoil of the biasing member 236 would correspondingly cause lower collar 174 to return to its pre-rotated position, i.e., such that shallow-depth regions of cavities 188 are aligned with retaining members 186, thereby driving the members 186 (via contact with floor region 188a of cavities 188) to project again out of bores 214 and into hub recess 226. However, as described above, a prior effect of the rotating force being applied to the collar 174 is the plunger 224, via spring 228, sliding to a position within the hub recess 226 so as to come into contact with the pins 232. In certain embodiments, the plunger 224 in this extended (or release) position is aligned with the bores 214 of the recess 226. As a consequence, the retaining members 186 can be blocked from protruding from the bores 214 of the recess 226. Thus, despite the recoiling force of biasing member 236 as described above, the retaining members 186 are prevented from moving axially, and as such, the lower collar 174 can be effectively locked in its rotated state.

[0058] Such state, and blocking position of the plunger 224 relative to the bores 214 and retaining members 86, in turn enhances ease by which a new punch 50 can be inserted into recess 226 and subsequently locked therein (via retaining members 186). To that end, such insertion/locking of punch 50 with the holder 170 can be performed without corresponding

rotation of the lower collar 174, but instead with application of a single vertical force applied to the punch 50 as it is inserted into the recess 226. For example, in subsequently coupling a further punch 50 to the holder 170, the hub 52 of such punch 50 can be inserted in the inner hub recess 226 and forced against plunger 224 until the plunger 224 is vertically pushed out of alignment with the bores 214. Once such clearance is established in the recess 226 at the bores 214, the recoiling force of the biasing member 236 causes the lower collar 174 to rotate to its pre-rotated position. This rotation of the collar 174 thereby slides the shallow-depth regions of cavities 188 into alignment with retaining members 186, driving the members 186 (via contact with floor region 188a of cavities 188) to project out of bores 214 and into hub recess 226, thereby locking punch 50 via the members 186. As described above, once locked to the holder 170, the punch 50 is prevented from being released without corresponding rotation of the lower collar 174, and the collar 174 is predisposed to be in a non-rotated position via the biasing member 236 being in its recoiled (or expanded state).

[0059] Turning to FIGS. 9A-9D, as described above, they illustrate differing views of an alternate version of the punch 50 when retained in the punch holder 170 in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, with FIG. 9C showing cross-sectional view of FIG. 9B along lines 9C-9C. Given the above, it should be appreciated that the same punch adjustment/release steps already described with regard to the holder 170 and punch 50 of FIGS. 8A-8H are equally applicable with the punch holder 170 and alternate punch 50' of FIGS. 9A-9D. However, as noted above, the punch 50' differs in its configuration from the punch 50. In particular, the punch 50', as opposed to being a solid integral body such as punch 50, is shown with an exemplary tip 150 having ejector portions 152 and mechanism for ejecting (e.g., spring 154) that are configured to mate with and in part be secured to coupling portion 156 of the punch 50'. To that end, in certain embodiments, the punch 50' is configured to utilize other tips as desired, by readily removing/replacing the tip 150.

[0060] FIG. 10 shows a flow diagram 300 of method of releasing and replacing a punch within punch holders 70, 170 relating to yet not constituting embodiments of the invention. For example, with reference back to FIGS. 5A-5G, the punch holder 70 is provided with an upper portion (head or head unit) 76 and a lower portion (holder coupler) 96, wherein the head 76 is operably coupled to the lower portion 96. The lower collar 74 encircles a lateral extent (e.g., hub 112) of the lower portion 96, and the collar 72 is movable in position relative to the portion 96. Thus, with reference to the punch holder 70, an initial step 302 of the flow diagram includes providing punch holder having collar 74 operably held to a lower portion 96 thereof. A subsequent step 304 of the flow diagram includes moving the collar 74 relative to the lower portion 96, whereby the lower portion 96 is correspondingly shifted from a locked configuration to an unlocked configuration relative to a punch 50 held by the lower portion 96. Thus, following step 304, the punch 50 is released from the punch holder 70. A further step 306 of the flow diagram includes moving a further punch (e.g., 50') into contact with the lower portion 96 (plunger 124) of the punch holder 70 with force being applied on the lower portion 96, whereby movement of the further punch correspondingly shifts lower portion 96 from unlocked configuration to locked configuration relative to the further punch. As shown, following step 306, the diagram loops back to step 304 with regard to further punch replacement on the

holder 70.

[0061] As described above, the flow diagram of FIG. 10 also corresponds to releasing and replacing a punch within punch holder 170. For example, with reference back to FIGS. 8A-8H, the punch holder 170 is provided with an upper portion (head or head unit) 176 and a lower portion (index collar) 192, wherein the head 176 is operably coupled to the lower portion 192. The lower collar 174 encircles a lateral extent (e.g., hub 212) of the lower portion 192, and the collar 72 is movable in position relative to the portion 192. Thus, with reference to the punch holder 170, the initial step 302 of the flow diagram includes providing punch holder having collar 174 operably held to a lower portion 192 thereof. The subsequent step 304 of the flow diagram includes moving the collar 174 relative to the lower portion 192, whereby the lower portion 192 is correspondingly shifted from a locked configuration to an unlocked configuration relative to a punch 50 held by the lower portion 192. Thus, following step 304, the punch 50 is released from the punch holder 170. A further step 306 of the flow diagram includes moving a further punch (e.g., 50') into contact with the lower portion 192 (plunger 224) of the punch holder 170 with force being applied on the lower portion 192, whereby movement of the further punch correspondingly shifts lower portion 192 from unlocked configuration to locked configuration relative to the further punch. Again, following step 306, the diagram loops back to step 304 with regard to further punch replacement on the holder 170.

[0062] While not shown, it would be understood from FIGS. 4A-4E, 5A-5G, and 6A-6D and the corresponding description that alternative punch holders could be configured with only one of the upper collar 72 or lower collar 74. For example, a punch holder could be configured with upper collar 72 and use other punch release mechanisms, whether needing tools or not, to remove the punch from the punch holder. FIG. 11A illustrates an elevation view of such alternate punch holder 70a in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, while FIG. 11B illustrates an elevation view of further alternate punch holder 70b. As shown, each punch holder 70a and 70b is shown holding an exemplary punch (shown in dashed lines).

[0063] Starting with FIG. 11A, the punch holder 70a is configured with only a single collar, i.e., the upper collar 72 as already described herein. Operation of the collar 72 and corresponding vertical adjustment of punch 50 secured by the holder 70a is similar to that already described herein; however, in certain embodiments, the holder coupler (visibly hidden under head 76a of holder 70a in FIG. 11A, but described with reference to FIGS. 4A-4E, 5A-5G, and 6A-6D) is configured to be part of the punch 50 to form a single body. In certain embodiments, the holder coupler is detachable from upper end of punch 50. However, when the coupler is secured to the punch upper end, the punch 50 can be operably coupled/released following steps similar to those already described herein for the punches 12, 12' of FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C, as the punch 50 (via coupler 96a) would have a threaded upper end that is configured to mate with threaded recess of the head 76a of the holder 70a. It should be further understood with reference to FIGS. 5A-5G that such a threaded connection between punch 50 (via coupler 96a) and holder 70a would further enable the collar's rotation to correspondingly adjust vertical position of the punch 50.

[0064] Looking to FIG. 11B, the punch holder 70b is likewise configured with only a single collar, i.e., the lower collar 74 as already described herein. Operation of the collar 74 and corresponding release/securement of punch 50 with respect to the head 76b of the holder 70b is similar to that already described herein; however, the head 76b of the holder 70b can be formed as a single body (from head to lower end), with lower end formed as a hub having features similar to those already described herein for the hub 112 of FIGS. 5A-5G. To that end, it should be understood with reference to FIGS. 5A-5G how rotation of the collar 74 correspondingly serves to release/secure punch 50 with respect to such hub of holder 70b.

[0065] Continuing with the above, it would be understood from FIGS. 7A-7E, 8A-8H, and 9A-9D and the corresponding description that alternate punch holders could just as well be configured with only one of the upper collar 172 or lower collar 174. FIG. 12A shows an elevation view of such alternate punch holders 170a in accordance with certain embodiments of the invention, and FIG. 12B shows an elevation view of further alternate punch holder 170b. As shown, each punch holder 170a and 170b is shown holding an exemplary punch (shown in dashed lines).

[0066] Starting with FIG. 12A, the punch holder 170a is configured with only a single collar, i.e., the upper collar 172 as already described herein. Operation of the collar 172 and corresponding vertical adjustment of head 176a is similar to that already described herein; however, in certain embodiments, the punch 50 is threaded within recess of index collar (visibly hidden under head 176a of holder 170a in FIG. 12A, but described with reference to FIGS. 7A-7E, 8A-8H, and 9A-9D) to form a single body. In certain embodiments, the index collar is detachable from upper end of punch 50. However, when the index collar is secured to the punch upper end, the punch 50 can be operably coupled/released following steps similar to those already described herein for the punches 12, 12' of FIGS. 1A-1C and 2A-2C as the punch 50 would have a threaded upper end that is configured to mate with threaded recess of the index collar. It should be further understood with reference to FIGS. 8A-8H that such a threaded connection between punch 50 and index collar would further enable rotation of the upper collar 172 to correspondingly adjust vertical position of the head 176a relative to the index collar and punch 50.

[0067] Looking to FIG. 12B, the punch holder 170b is likewise configured with only a single collar, i.e., the lower collar 174 as already described herein. Operation of the collar 174 and corresponding release/securement of punch 50 with respect to the head 176b of the holder 170b is similar to that already described herein; however, the head 176b of the holder 170b can be formed as a single body (from head to lower end), with lower end formed as a hub having features similar to those already described herein for the hub 212 of FIGS. 8A-8H. To that end, it should be understood with reference to FIGS. 8A-8H how rotation of the collar 174 correspondingly serves to release/secure punch 50 with respect to such hub of holder 170b.

[0068] other designs can perhaps involve alternate mechanisms for releasing/securing a punch, e.g., pressing a button and then rotating punch to remove from the punch holder, or by vertically moving tab and then rotating punch to remove from the punch holder. These other

designs would relate to the embodiments described herein, e.g., as each includes a rotating step, although the punch (instead of a collar) would be rotated instead in these designs. Furthermore, despite the release/securement mechanism for the punch, the embodied designs described herein for vertical adjustment of the punch (via collar 72 of FIGS. 4A-4E, 5A-5G, and 6A-6D) or holder head (via collar 172 of FIGS. 7A-7E, 8A-8H, and 9A-9D) would also be fully applicable to such designs.

[0069] The disclosed embodiments are presented for purposes of illustration and not limitation, and the invention is limited only by the claims that follow.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

Cited references

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Patent documents cited in the description

- DE19505754 [0004]

Patentkrav**1. Stempelholder (70, 170) omfattende:**

et øvre afsnit (76, 176) og et nedre afsnit (96, 192), idet det øvre afsnit omfatter hovedenhed (76, 176) til stempelholderen, og idet det nedre
 5 afsnit omfatter stempelkoblingsenhed (96, 192) til stempelholderen, idet det øvre afsnit er operativt koblet og samtidig selektivt justerbart i forhold til det nedre afsnit; og

kendetegnet ved, at en første krave (72, 172) omslutter en lateral udstrækning af det øvre afsnit (76, 176), idet den første krave (72, 172) i
 10 sin position er bevægelig i forhold til det nedre afsnit (96, 192), hvorved bevægelse af den første krave (72, 172) tilvejebringer en tilsvarende justering af den samlede højde af stempelholderen (70, 170), idet den første krave (72, 172) er operativt koblet til det øvre afsnit (76, 176), hvor bevægelse af den første krave resulterer i tilsvarende bevægelse af det
 15 øvre afsnit, idet den første krave (72, 172) delvist fastholder et forbindelseselement (78a, 178a), som er yderligere delvist fastholdt af det øvre afsnit (76, 176), idet den første krave (72, 172) kun er bevægelig via rotation, hvor påføring af en rotationskraft på den første krave er en enkelt handling, som er påkrævet af en bruger, for at justere højden af stempel-
 20 holderen (70, 170), hvorved rotationskraften på den første krave (72, 172) svarer til rotationskraft på det øvre afsnit (76, 176) via forbindelseselementet (78a, 178a), som fastholdes mellem den første krave (72, 172) og en flange (84, 184) af hovedenheden (76, 176).

25 **2.** Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 1, hvor påføring af rotationskraften kan udføres i et enkelt trin via en enkelt hånd af en bruger uden brug af et værktøj.

3. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 1, hvor den første krave (72, 172) er operativt koblet til det øvre afsnit (76, 176) ved et hoved af det øvre afsnit.

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4. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 3, hvor rotation af den første krave (72, 172) svarer til vertikal justering af det øvre afsnit (76, 176) i forhold til det nedre afsnit (96, 192).

5. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 4, hvor det øvre afsnit (76, 176) omfatter et nav med et ydre gevind, og det nedre afsnit (96, 192) omfatter en udsparring med et indre gevind, hvor det øvre afsnit via indgreb og justering af navgevindet i forhold til udsparringsgevindet er operativt koblet og samtidig
5 justerbart i en vertikal position i forhold til det nedre afsnit.

6. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 4, hvor hovedet af det øvre afsnit (176) har en flerhed af fordybninger (192a) defineret i lateral ydre overflade af hovedet, fordybningerne er ensartet fordelt omkring en omkreds af den laterale ydre
10 overflade.

7. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 6, yderligere omfattende et eller flere indekselementer (178b) fastholdt mellem den første krave (172) og hovedet (176), hvor det ene eller flere indekselementer er indrettet til at bevæge sig
15 omkring omkredsen af den laterale ydre overflade af hovedet og ind og ud af flerheden af fordybninger (192a) som reaktion på rotation af den første krave, hvor bevægelse af indekselementet mellem tilgrænsende fordybninger er repræsentativ for et tilsvarende omfang af højdejustering af det øvre afsnit (176) i forhold til det nedre afsnit (192).

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8. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 1, hvor den første krave (72) er operativt koblet til det øvre afsnit (76) under et hoved af det øvre afsnit.

9. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 8, hvor rotation af den første krave (72)
25 svarer til vertikal justering af det nedre afsnit (96) i forhold til det øvre afsnit (76).

10. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 9, hvor det øvre afsnit (76) omfatter en udsparring (98) med indre gevind (100), idet det nedre afsnit (96) omfatter et
30 nav (104) med ydre gevind (102), hvor det øvre afsnit er operativt koblet til det nedre afsnit via indgreb af navgevindet i udsparringsgevindet.

11. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 10, yderligere omfattende et koblingslegeme (92), som holdes operativt til den nedre ende af det øvre afsnit
35 (76), og som omslutter en øvre udstrækning af det nedre afsnit (96), hvor

koblingslegemet holdes til det øvre afsnit for at tillade rotation af det øvre afsnit i forhold til koblingslegemet og samtidig forhindrer vertikal justering af det øvre afsnit i forhold til koblingslegemet, hvor koblingslegemet omfatter en nøgle (106), som strækker sig fra legemet ind i nøglekanalen (108) af det nedre afsnit, således

5 at rotation af det øvre afsnit tilsvarende resulterer i sænkning eller løft af navet (104) af det nedre afsnit i udsparingen (98) af det øvre afsnit.

12. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 11, hvor koblingslegemet (92) af det øvre afsnit (76) har en flerhed af fordybninger (92a) defineret i den laterale ydre

10 overflade af legemet, hvor fordybningerne er ensartet fordelt omkring en omkreds af den laterale ydre overflade.

13. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 12, yderligere omfattende et eller flere indekselementer (78b) fastholdt mellem den første krave (72) og koblingslegemet

15 (92), hvor det ene eller flere indekselementer er indrettet til at bevæge sig omkring omkredsen af den laterale ydre overflade af koblingslegemet og ind og ud af flerheden af fordybninger (92a) som reaktion på rotation af den første krave, hvor bevægelse af indekselementet mellem tilgrænsende fordybninger er repræsentativ for et tilsvarende omfang af højdejustering af det nedre afsnit (96)

20 i forhold til det øvre afsnit (76).

14. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 1, yderligere omfattende:

en anden krave (74, 174) som omslutter en lateral udstrækning af det nedre afsnit (96, 192), idet den anden krave i sin position er bevægelig i forhold til det

25 nedre afsnit, hvorved bevægelse af den anden krave svarer til et skift fra en låst konfiguration til en ulåst konfiguration for det nedre afsnit i forhold til et stempel (50), som holdes deraf, idet den anden krave holdes operativt omkring en fremspringende ende af det nedre afsnit, hvor den anden krave kun kan bevæges via rotation.

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15. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 14, hvor den anden krave (74, 174) kan roteres via rotationskraft, som påføres den anden krave, hvor påføring af rotationskraften kan udføres i et enkelt trin via en enkelt hånd af en bruger uden brug af et værktøj.

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16. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 14, hvor den fremspringende ende af det nedre afsnit (96, 192) er et nav (112, 212), hvor navet er defineret med et eller flere borehuller (114, 214), som tilsvarende er på linje med et eller flere hulrum (88, 188) defineret i en indre overflade (118, 218) af den anden krave (74, 174); og yderligere omfattende et eller flere fastholdelseselementer (86, 186), som holdes delvist i tilsvarende af borehullerne (114, 214) og hulrummene (88, 188), hvor omfanget, hvormed det ene eller flere fastholdelseselementer holdes i de tilsvarende borehuller og hulrum afhænger af positionen af den anden krave (74, 174).

17. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 16, hvor navet (112, 212) er defineret med en indre udsparring (126, 226) for at rumme en koblingsende (54) af et stempel (50), idet hvert af borehullerne (114, 214) åbner indad til udsparringen, hvor længden, hvormed det ene eller flere fastholdelseselementer (86, 186) rager frem fra borehullerne og ind i udsparringen, afhænger af positionen af den anden krave (74, 174), hvorved skiftet fra låst konfiguration til ulåst konfiguration for det nedre afsnit (96, 192) svarer til, at hvert af fastholdelseselementerne glider tilbage for at have en mindre længde, som rager ind i udsparringen og en større længde, som strækker sig ind det tilsvarende af hulrummene (88, 188).

18. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 17, yderligere omfattende et pressestempel (124, 224) fastholdt i den indre udsparring (126, 226) i den låste konfiguration for det nedre afsnit (96, 192), og hvor pressestemplet er konfigureret til at blive frigivet i udsparringen via rotation af den anden krave (74, 174), hvor pressestemplet, når det frigives, er indrettet til at presse fastholdelseselementerne (86, 186) ud af udsparringen og yderligere presse et stempel (50) ud af udsparringen.

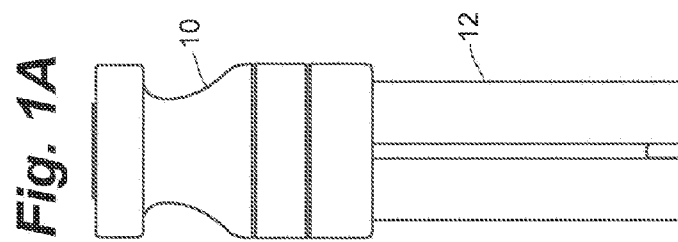
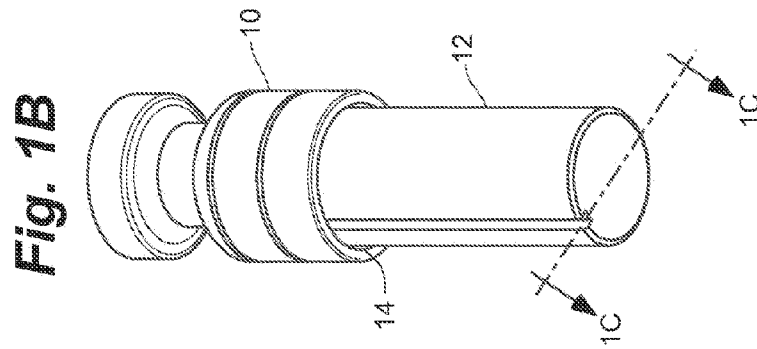
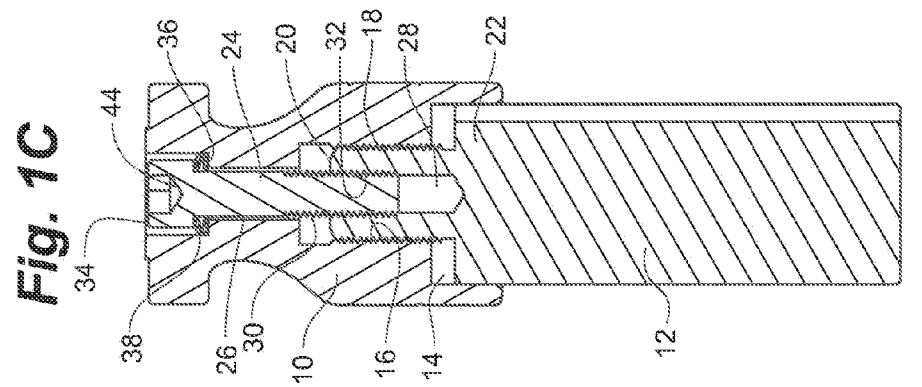
19. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 18, hvor pressestemplet (124, 224), når det frigives i den indre udsparring (126, 226), er konfigureret til at være på linje med borehullerne (114, 214), for derved at forhindre fremspring af fastholdelseselementerne (86, 186) fra de tilsvarende borehuller og ind i udsparringen, idet justeringen af pressestemplet efter borehullerne resulterer i, at den anden krave (74, 174) bliver låst i den roterede position, og det nedre afsnit

(96, 192) er i den ulåste konfiguration.

20. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 18, hvor pressestemplet (124, 224) er selektivt bevægeligt i den indre udsparing (126, 226), og den anden krave (74, 174) er forspændt til at rotere tilbage til en for-roteret position, hvor bevægelse af pressestemplet fra frigivelsesposition tilbage til udsparing resulterer i rotation af den anden krave tilbage til den for-roterede position og udstrækning af fastholdelselementerne (86, 186) fra de tilsvarende borehuller (114, 214) til udsparingen, idet den anden krave i den for-roterede position svarer til, at det nedre afsnit (96, 192) er i den låste konfiguration.

21. Stempelholderen (70, 170) ifølge krav 1, yderligere omfattende et forspændingselement (108, 208) placeret mellem den første krave (72, 172) og det øvre afsnit, hvor forspændingselementet (108, 208) er konfigureret til at rotere den første krave (72, 172) i modsat rotationsretning efter frigivelse af rotationskraften, idet forspændingselementet (108, 208) fastholdes mellem en udsparing (79c 179c) i undersideoverfladen (80, 180) af den første krave og en åbning (82c, 182c) i undersideoverfladen i flangen (84, 184) af hovedenheden (76, 176).

DRAWINGS



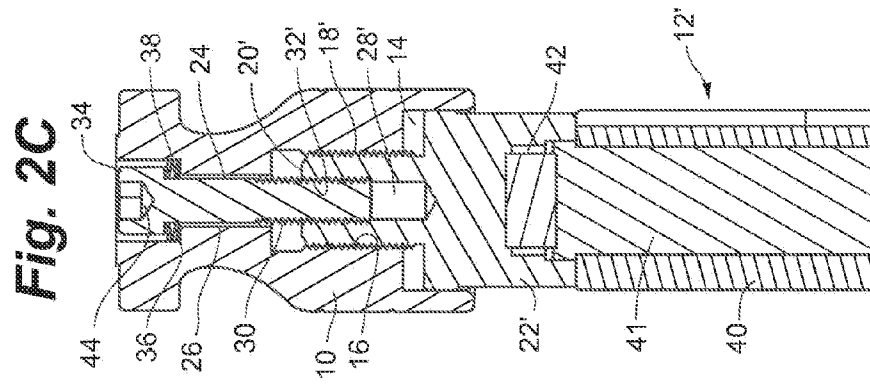
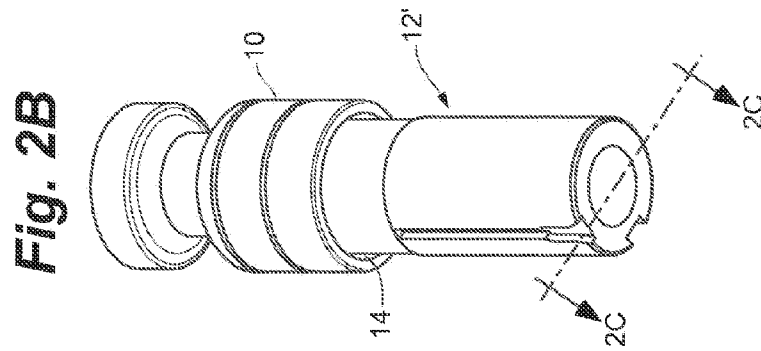
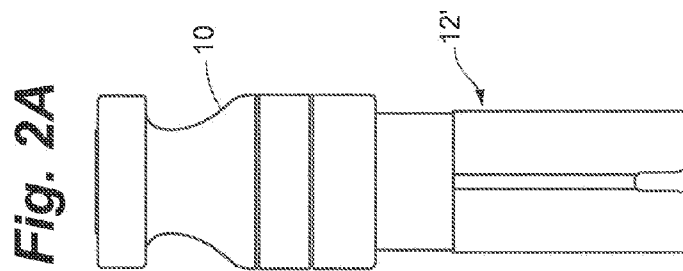


Fig. 3A

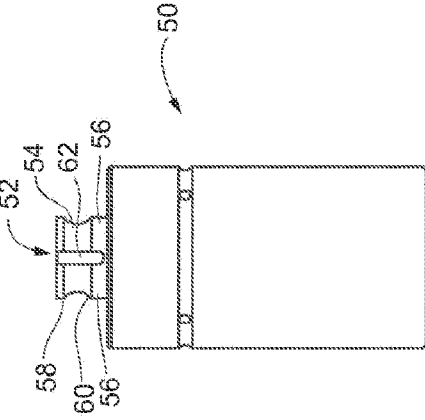


Fig. 3B

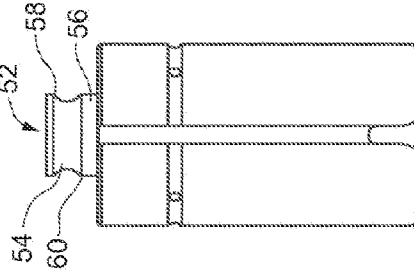


Fig. 3C

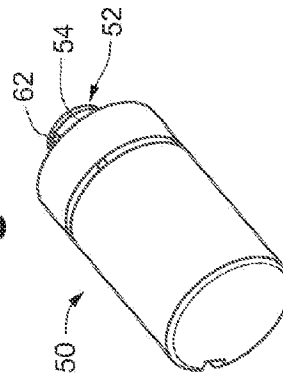
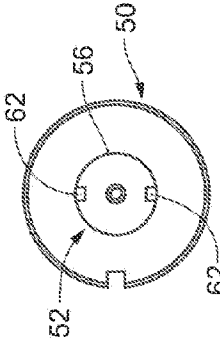
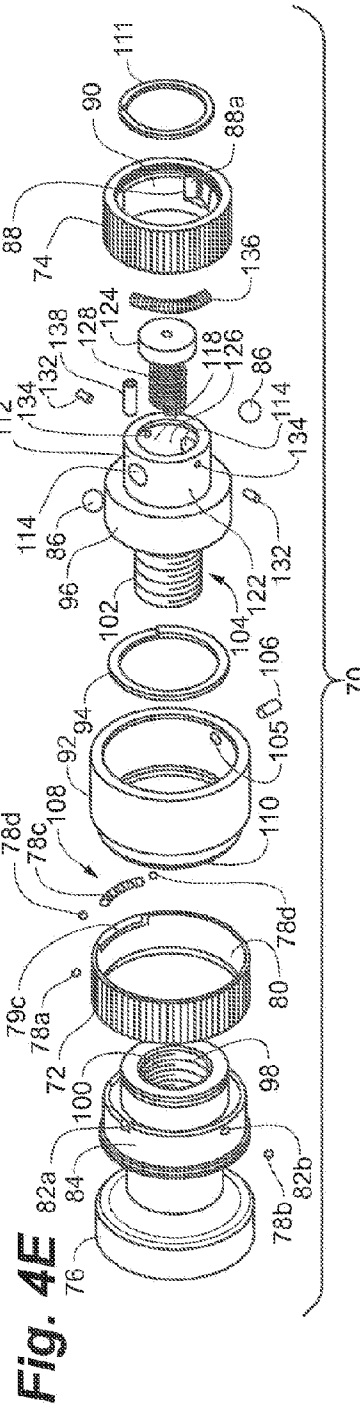
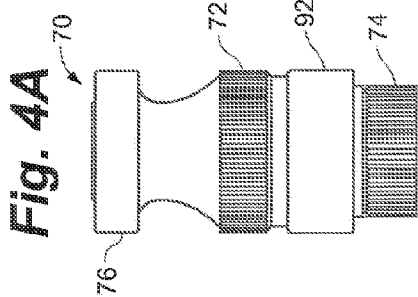
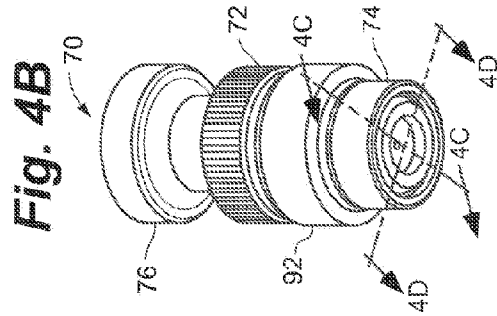
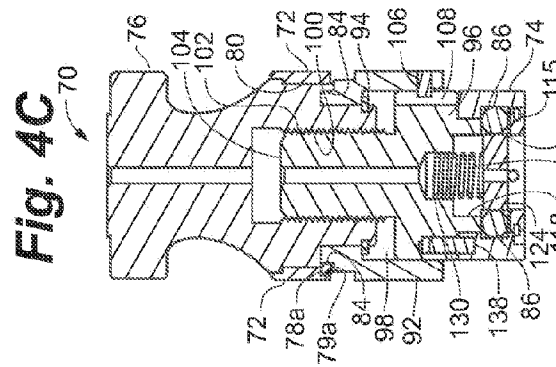
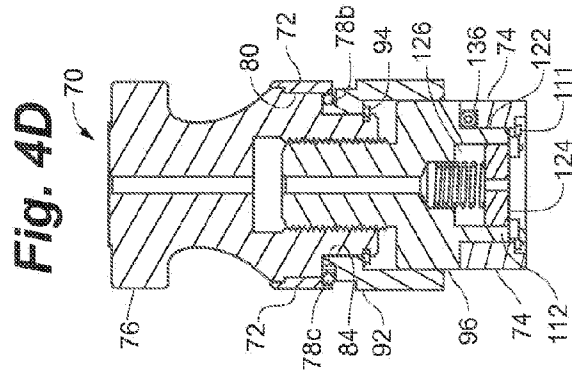
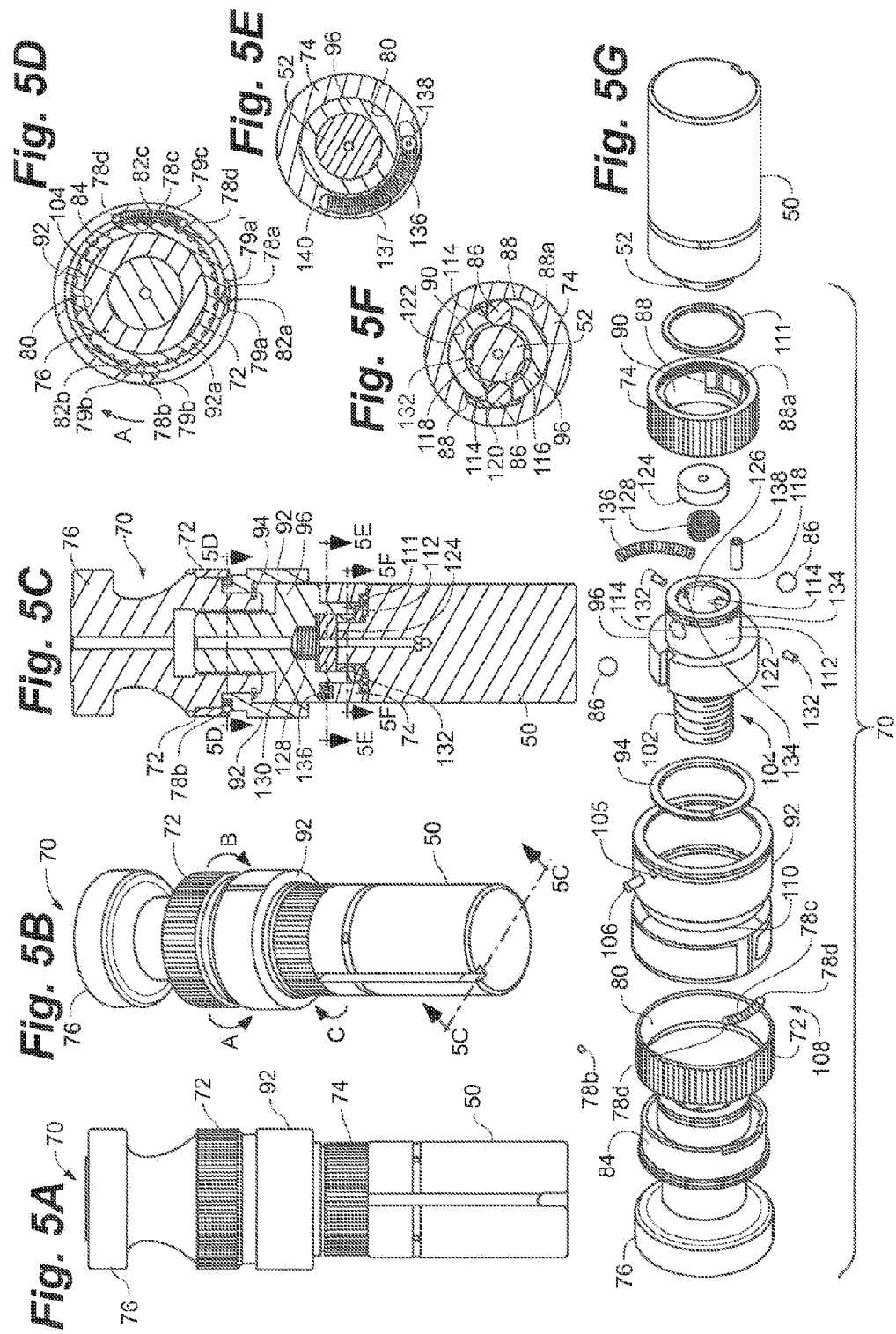
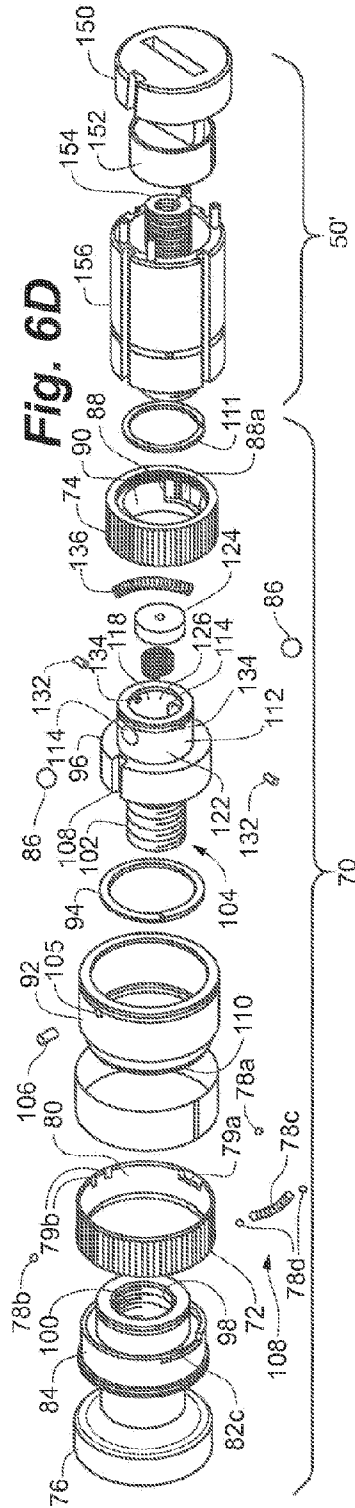
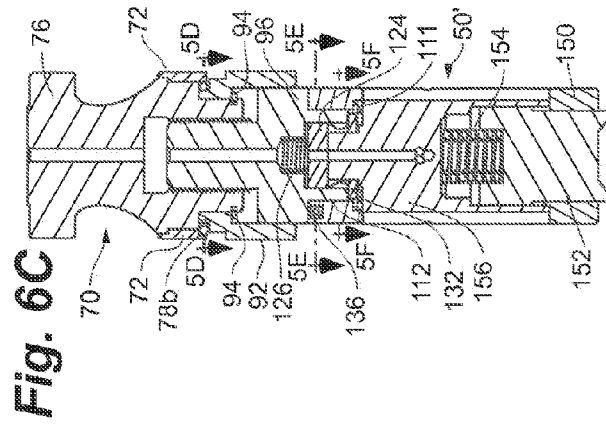
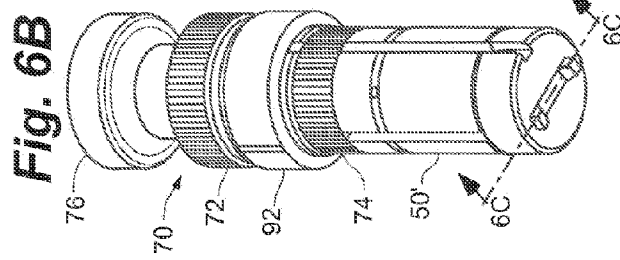
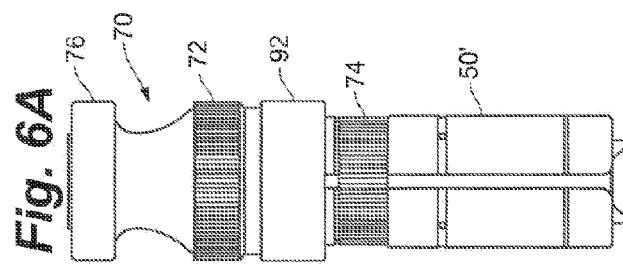


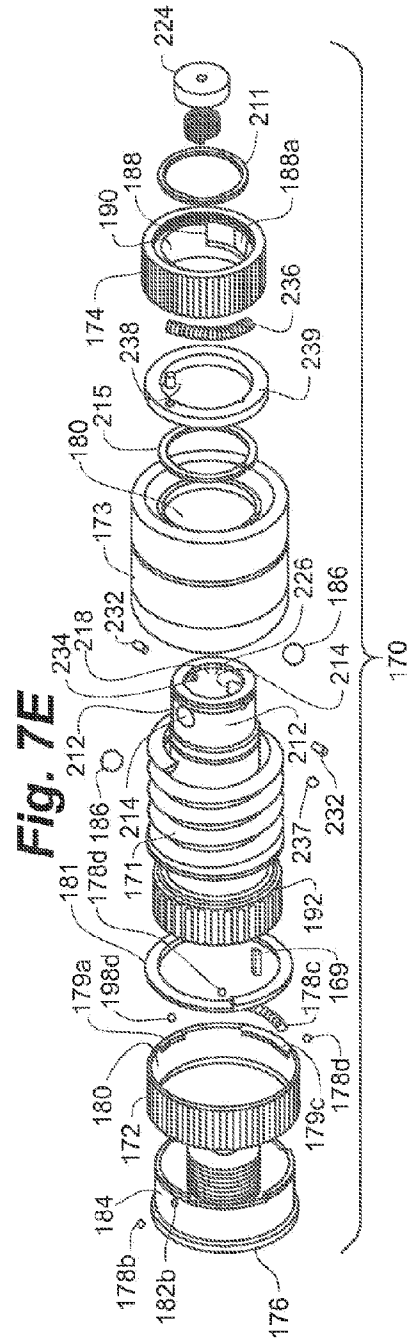
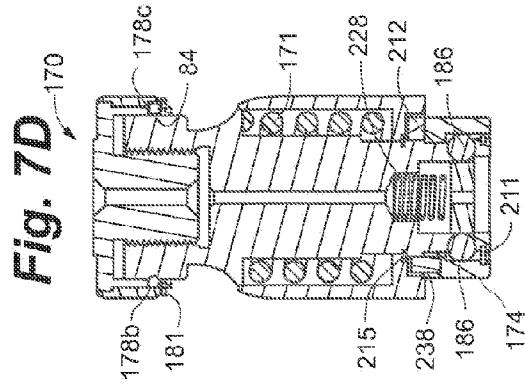
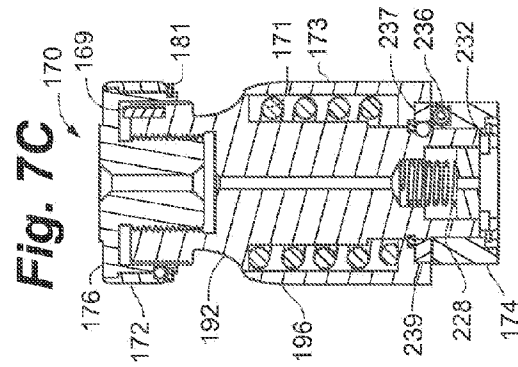
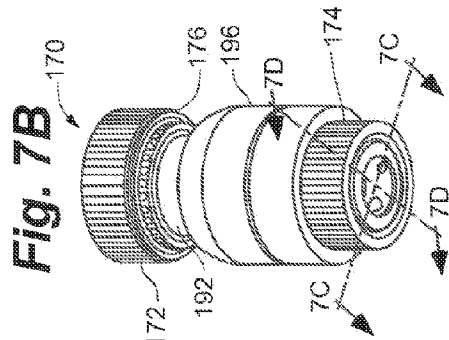
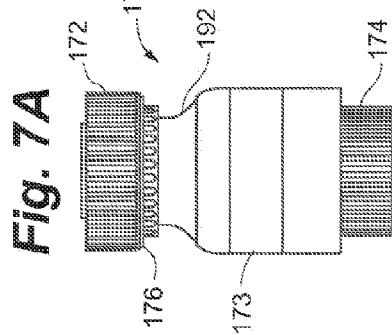
Fig. 3D











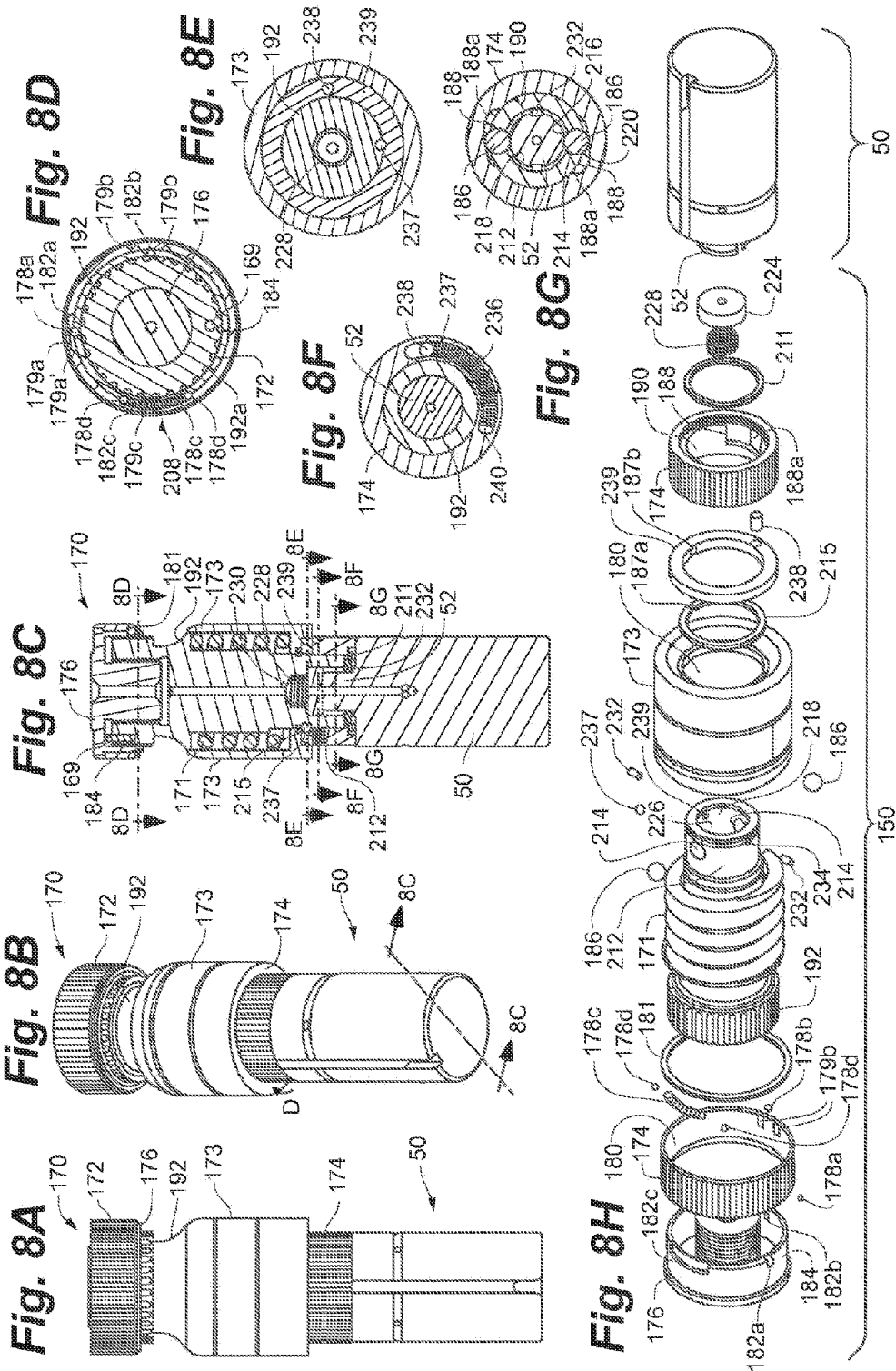


Fig. 9A

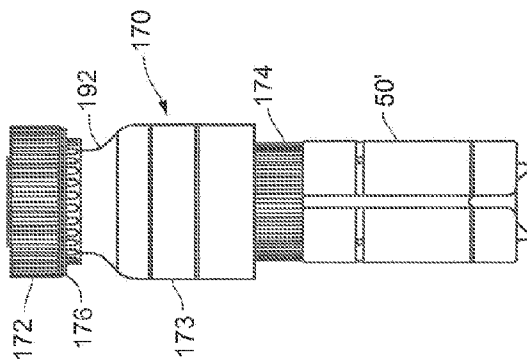


Fig. 9B

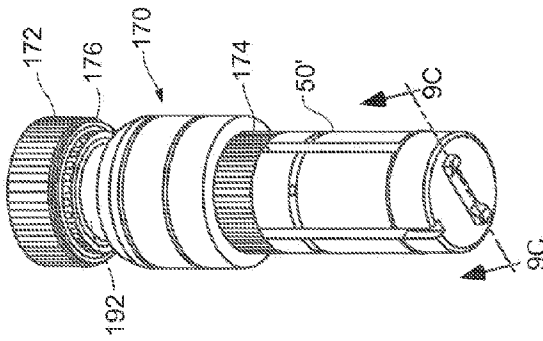


Fig. 9C

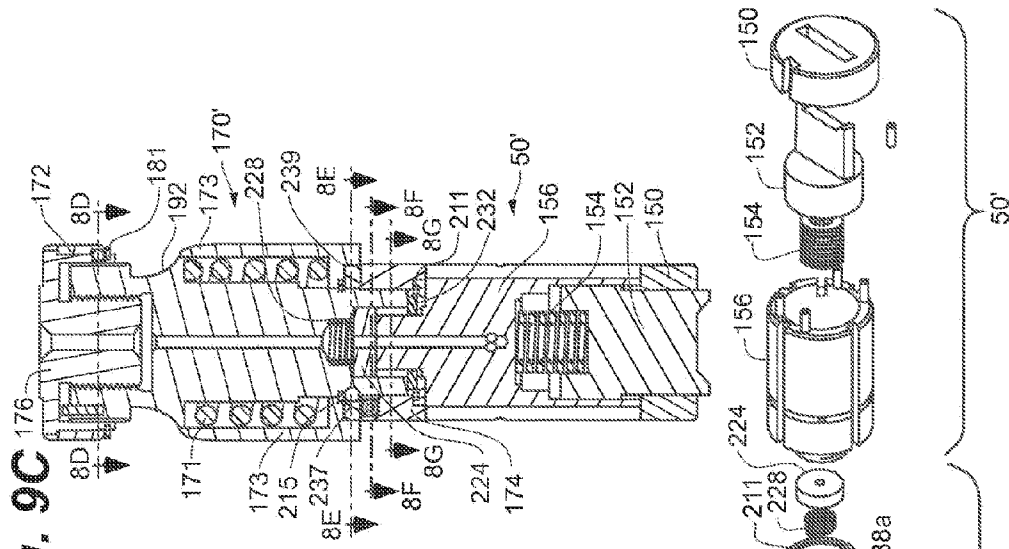


Fig. 9D

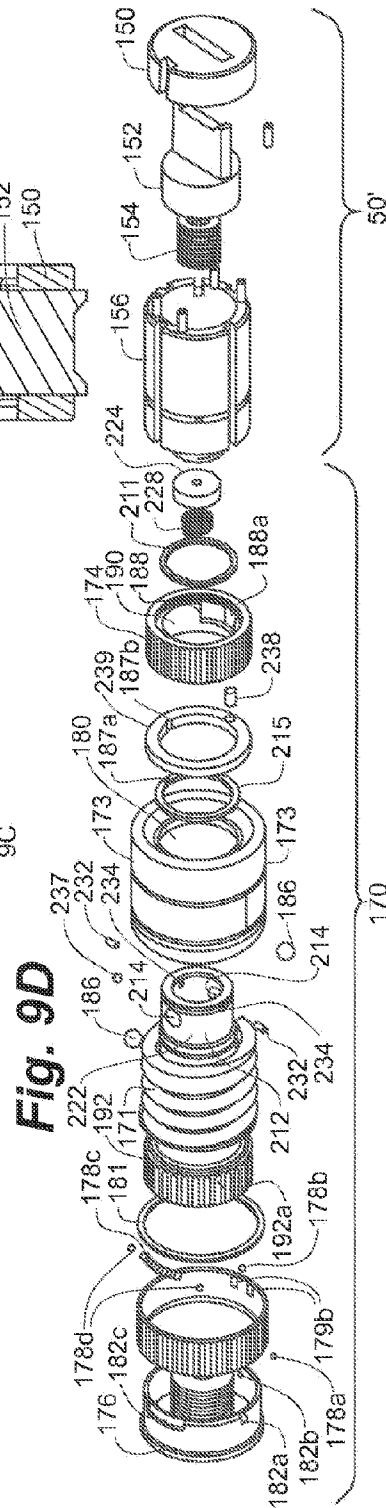
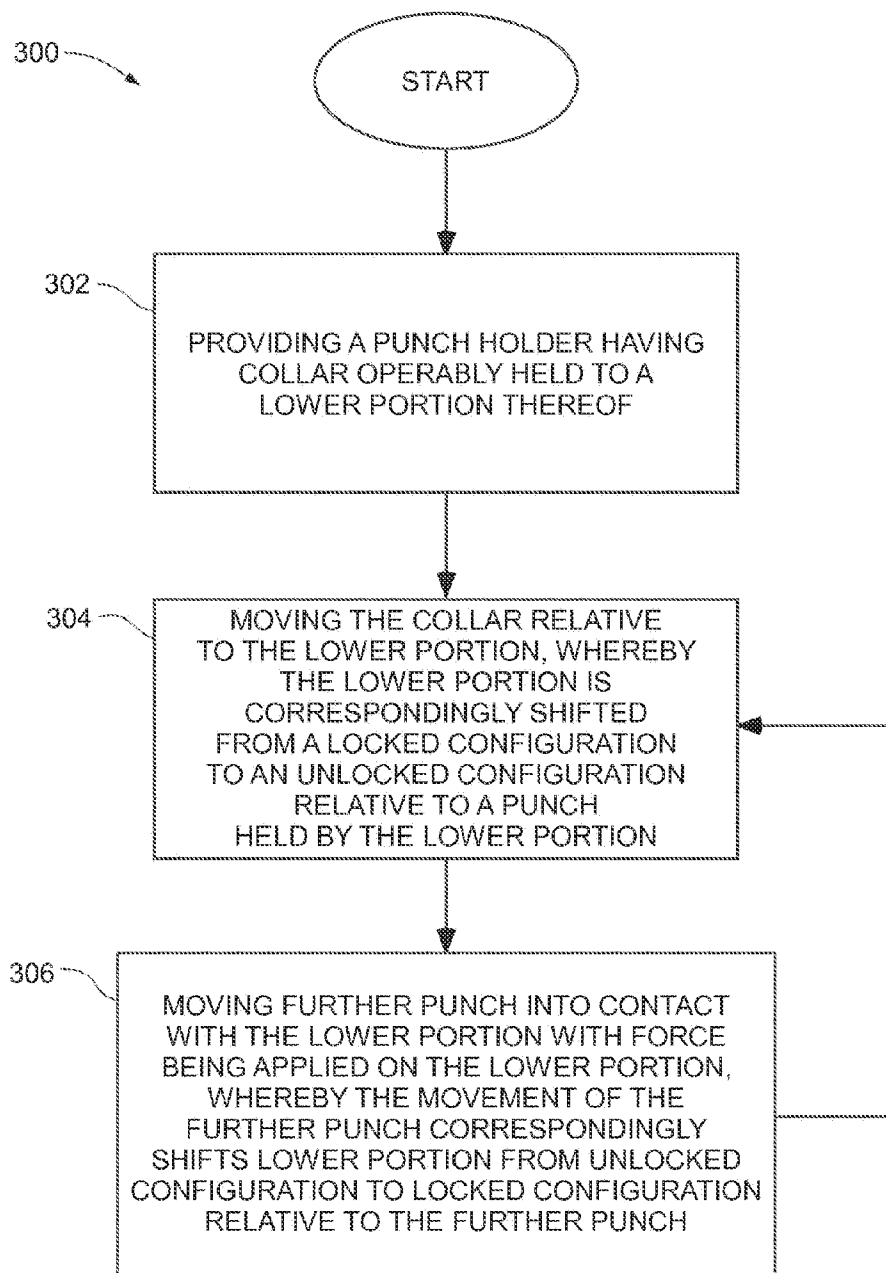


Fig. 10

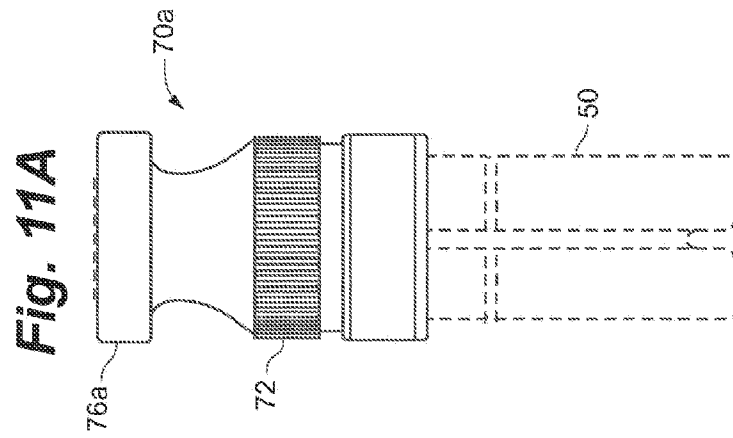
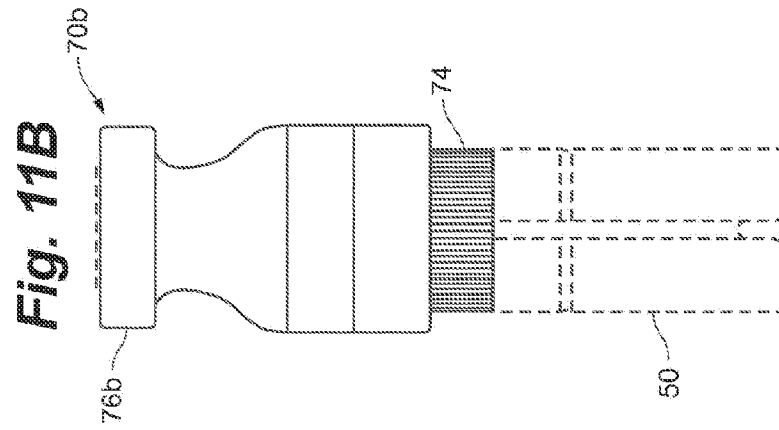


Fig. 12A

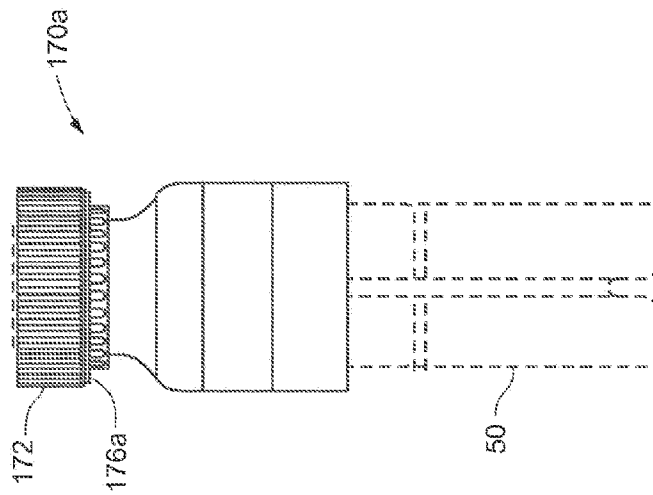


Fig. 12B

