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(54) **METHOD AND DEVICE FOR MEASURING THE ANGLE OF A FIRST ROTATABLE BODY**

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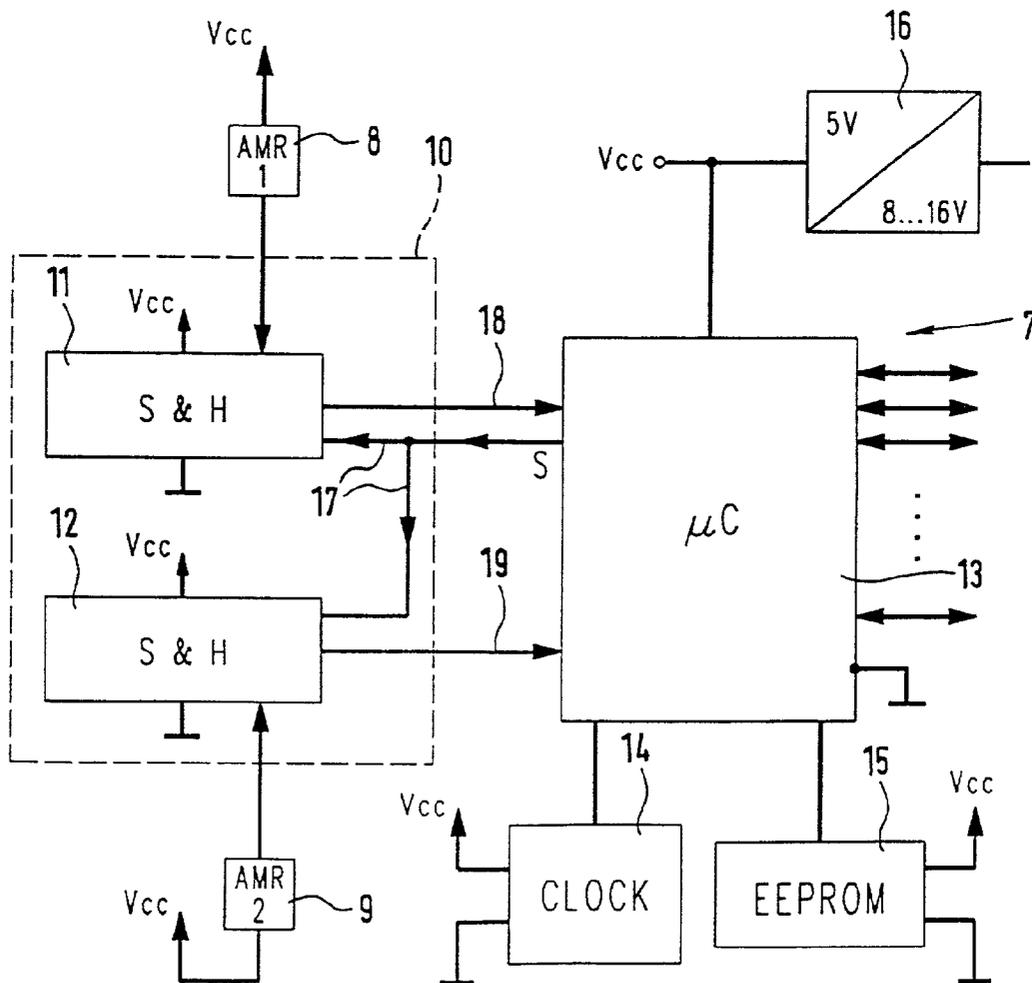
(57) **ABSTRACT**

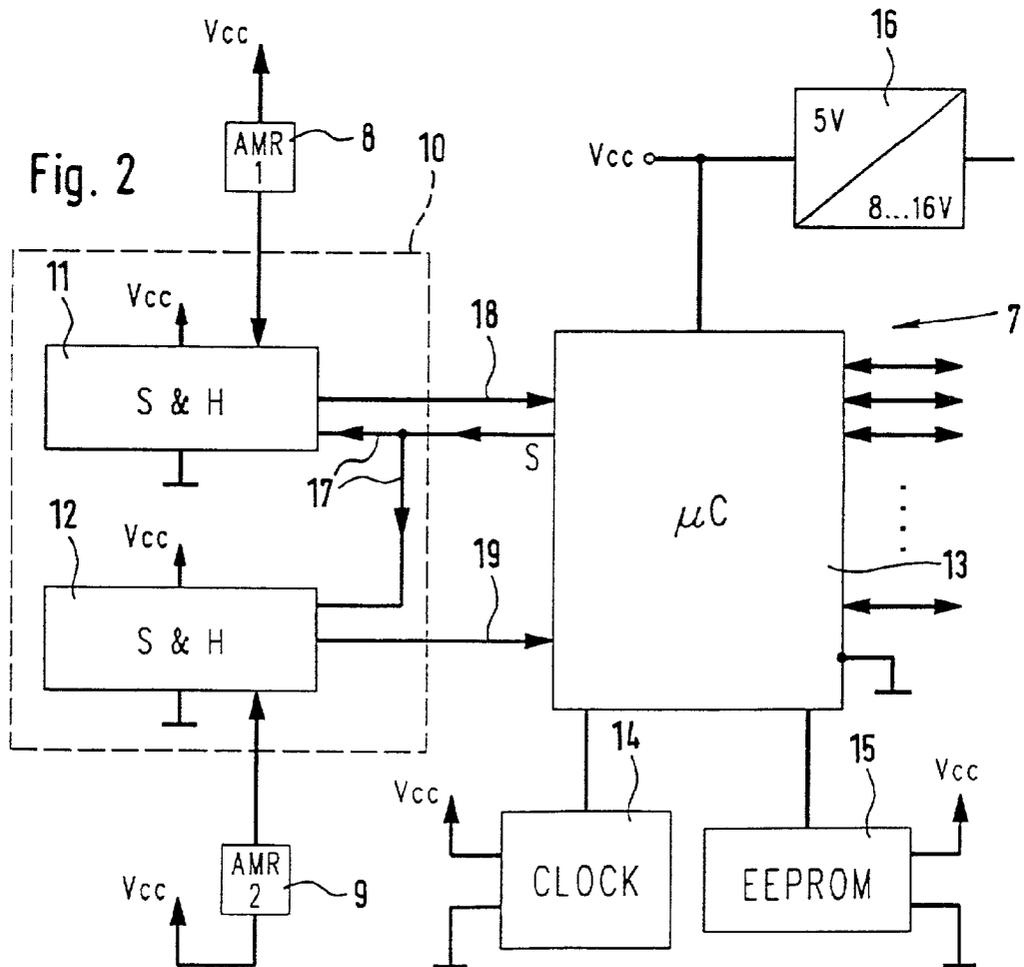
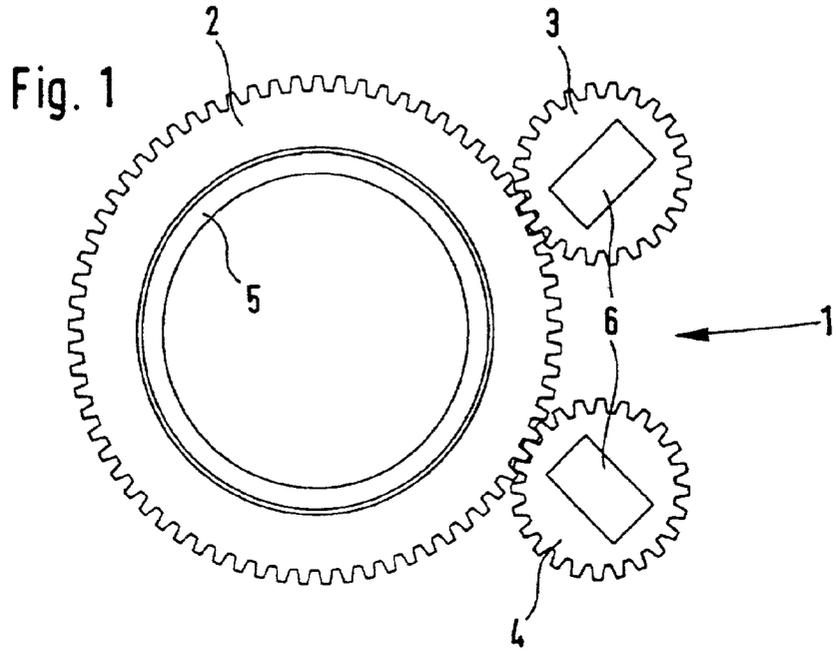
An apparatus (1) is described for determining the angle of a first rotatable body which coacts with two further rotatable bodies. The angle of the two further bodies can be measured, and the angle of the first body can be calculated therefrom. According to the present invention, means are provided with which simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies can be achieved. The accuracy of the determination of the angle of the first body is thereby improved.

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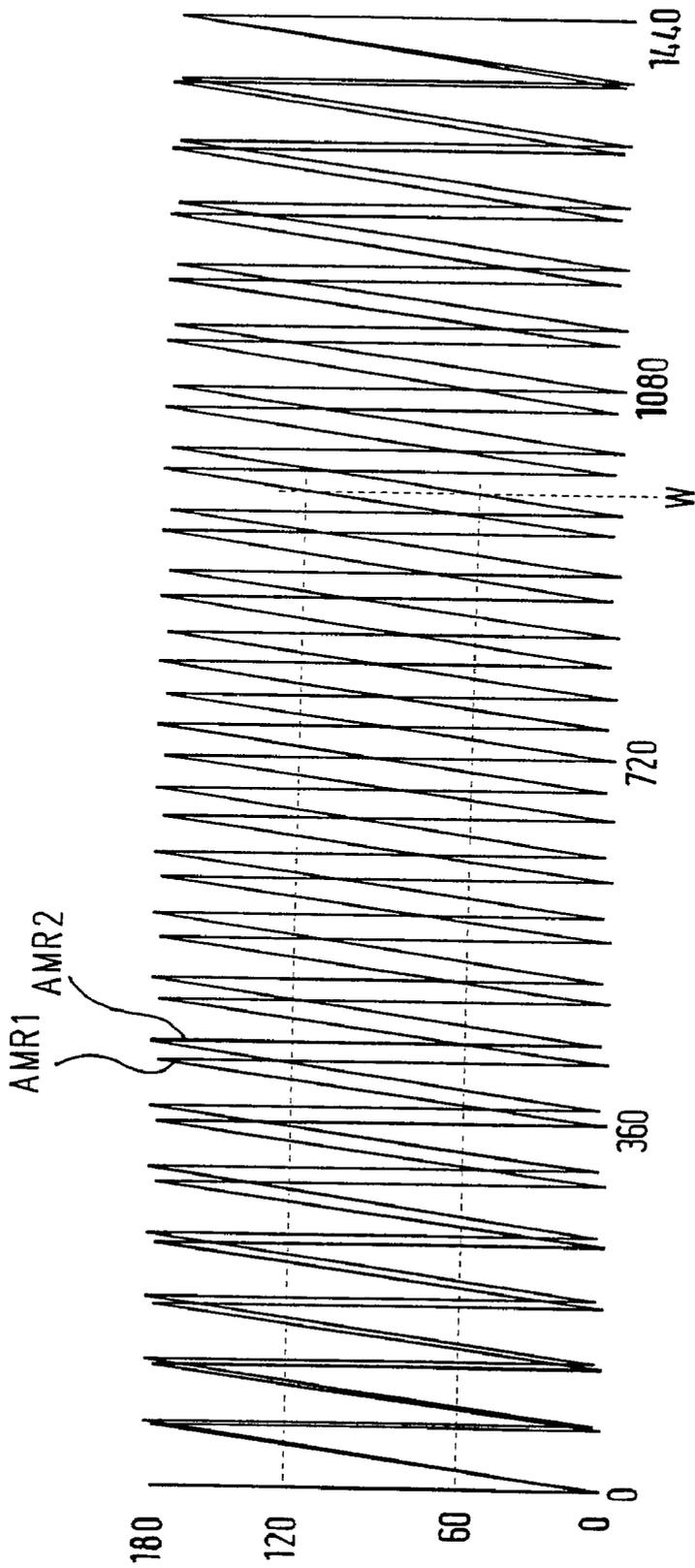


Fig. 3

METHOD AND DEVICE FOR MEASURING THE ANGLE OF A FIRST ROTATABLE BODY

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

[0001] The present invention relates to a method and an apparatus for measuring the angle of a first rotatable body which coacts with two further rotatable bodies, the angle of the two further bodies being measured and the angle of the first body being determined therefrom.

[0002] A method and an apparatus of this kind are known from German Unexamined Patent Application 195 06 938 A1, in which a first gear which is equipped with a number of teeth and is rotatably through more than 360° is provided as the first rotatable body. The two further rotatable bodies are also gears, which are in engagement with the first gear and whose numbers of teeth is less than the number for the first gear. In addition, the numbers of teeth of the two further bodies differ, for example, by one tooth.

[0003] Associated with each of the two further bodies is a sensor with which the angle of the body can be measured absolutely, i.e. even when the body is stationary. The angle of the first body can be determined from the measured angles of the two further bodies.

[0004] The accuracy of the angle determined for the first body can be influenced by an appropriate selection of the number of teeth of the first body and of the two further bodies. It has been found, however, that even after optimization in this regard, the angle determined for the first body still exhibits inaccuracies.

[0005] Proceeding therefrom, it is the object of the invention to develop a method and an apparatus of the kind cited initially in such a way that exact determination of the angle of the first rotatable body is possible.

[0006] In the case of a method and an apparatus of the kind cited initially, this object is achieved according to the present invention in that the angle of the two further bodies is measured simultaneously.

[0007] Simultaneous measurement ensures that even when the angles of the two further bodies are measured during rotation of the bodies, an exact determination of the angle of the first body is possible. If the angles of the two further bodies were not measured simultaneously, the result, especially in the event of rotation of the bodies, could be that the body measured later would already have rotated further by a slight "delta." This delta is in itself very small, but can nevertheless mean that the requisite accuracy can no longer be obtained in the subsequent determination of the angle of the first body. This is reliably avoided by simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies. Measurement of the angles of the two further bodies is thus synchronized, with the substantial advantage that the accuracy of the determination of the angle of the first body is thereby improved.

[0008] Because of the synchronization, the angles of the two other bodies are measured at a single sampling time, i.e. simultaneously. Synchronization and definition of the single sampling time, and thus simultaneous measurement, are achieved with the aid of a signal with which measurement of the two angles is started.

[0009] In an advantageous embodiment of the invention, the measured angles of the two further bodies are stored. The result of this is that determination of the angle of the first rotatable body is independent of measurement of the angles of the two further bodies. It is thus unnecessary to process the measured angles of the two further bodies immediately; rather it is possible, because the measured angles are stored, to process these measured angles regardless of the time at which measurement occurred.

[0010] It is particularly useful if each of the two further bodies is equipped with a magnet, associated with which is an AMR sensor that is provided for measuring the angle of the associated further body; and if an analysis circuit is provided which is coupled to the two AMR sensors and is provided for analyzing and optionally for transforming the measured angles of the two further bodies. The aforesaid AMR sensors are suitable for making an absolute measurement of the angles of the two further bodies. The angles can thus be measured with no need to impart any rotation to the two bodies. The analysis circuit associated with the two AMR sensors is provided in order to process the measured angles further in a first step. In particular, it is possible for the analysis circuit to transform the measured angles, for example, into pulse-length modulated signals or other digital signals.

[0011] In an advantageous development of the invention, the analysis circuit is equipped with means, in particular with sample-and-hold elements, for storing the measured angles of the two further bodies. The aforesaid decoupling of the measurement of the angles of the two further bodies from the determination of the angle of the first body is thereby accomplished in simple fashion.

[0012] It is particularly useful if a calculation device, in particular a programmable microprocessor, is provided for determining the angle of the first body. This makes it possible, in particularly simple fashion, to adapt the determination of the angle of the first body, for example, to the geometry of the two further bodies. All that is necessary in this context is to modify the corresponding values in the program of the microprocessor.

[0013] In an advantageous embodiment of the invention, the calculation device can generate a start signal with which simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies by the two AMR sensors can be triggered. The calculation device is thus responsible for the simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies. The calculation device triggers this simultaneous measurement by generating a single start signal which brings about measurements at both AMR sensors. This represents a reliable but nevertheless very simple possibility for achieving simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies.

[0014] The result of this common start signal is that the angles of the two further bodies are measured at a single sampling time, i.e. simultaneously. The single sampling time is defined by the start signal.

[0015] In an advantageous development of the invention, a line is provided with which the calculation device is connected to the analysis circuit, and on which the start signal can be delivered to the analysis circuit. The analysis circuit is acted upon by the start signal by way of this line.

[0016] Further features, potential applications, and advantages of the invention are evident from the description below and from exemplary embodiments of the invention which are depicted in the Figures of the drawings. In this context, all features described or depicted constitute, of themselves or in any combination, the subject matter of the present invention, regardless of their summarization in the claims or references thereto, and regardless of their wording or depiction in the description or the drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0017] FIG. 1 shows a schematic depiction of an exemplary embodiment of an apparatus according to the present invention for determining the angle of a first rotatable body;

[0018] FIG. 2 shows a schematic block diagram of an electrical circuit for the apparatus of FIG. 1; and

[0019] FIG. 3 shows a schematic diagram of two signals occurring in the circuit of FIG. 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] FIG. 1 depicts an apparatus 1 which has a first rotatable body and two further rotatable bodies. A gear 2 having a number of teeth n is provided as the first rotatable body. The two further rotatable bodies are also configured as gears 3, 4, gear 3 having a number of teeth m , and gear 4 a number of teeth $m+1$.

[0021] Gear 2 is, for example, coupled to a steering wheel of a motor vehicle. In particular, gear 2 is mounted on a shaft 5 which constitutes a component of the aforesaid steering wheel.

[0022] Each of the two gears 3, 4 is equipped with a magnet 6, each of magnets 6 generating a magnetic field oriented in a specific direction.

[0023] The two gears 3, 4 and gear 2 are in engagement, so that a rotation of gear 2 causes corresponding rotations of gears 3, 4. Because of the different numbers of teeth on gears 2, 3, 4, the rotation angles of gears 2, 3, 4 upon rotation are different.

[0024] The rotation angle of gear 2 can be less than 360° . Especially when apparatus 1 is used for a steering wheel of a motor vehicle, gear 2 can perform multiple rotations. In particular, the rotation angle of gear 2 is, for example, 1440° . The rotation angles of the two gears 3, 4 are preferably not limited.

[0025] FIG. 2 depicts a circuit 7 which is associated with apparatus 1 of FIG. 1. Circuit 7 of FIG. 2 has two so-called AMR sensors 8, 9, which are elements having a variable resistance (AMR = anisotropic magnetic resistance). AMR sensors are sensors whose resistance changes depending on how the sensor is oriented in an external magnetic field. AMR sensors are therefore suitable for sensing the rotation angles of bodies on which, for example, a magnet is mounted. The two AMR sensors 8, 9 are connected to an analysis circuit 10 which is made up of two blocks 11, 12; first AMR sensor 8 acts on block 11, and second AMR sensor 9 on block 12. Analysis circuit 10 is connected to a calculation device 13, in particular to a microprocessor. A clock 14 and a memory 15 are connected to calculation device 13. A power supply 16 generates a supply voltage VCC which is supplied to calculation device 13, clock 14, memory 15,

the two blocks 11, 12 of analysis circuit 10, and to the two AMR sensors 8, 9. When the circuit is used in a motor vehicle, the aforesaid supply voltage VCC is generated from the battery voltage of the motor vehicle.

[0026] The calculation device is connected to other devices via a plurality of further lines. When circuit 7 is used in a motor vehicle, calculation device 13 is connected by way of the aforesaid lines, in particular, to a control device for controlling and/or regulating the functions of the motor vehicle.

[0027] The two AMR sensors 8, 9 are associated with the two magnets 6 of the two gears 3, 4. Each of magnets 6 generates in the associated stationary AMR sensor 8, 9 a voltage which depends on the angle of the associated gear 3, 4. Rotation of the respective gear 3, 4 causes a voltage profile which rises over an angle of approximately 180° , and then declines again over an angle of approximately 180° . After one revolution of gear 3, 4, i.e. after 360° , this voltage profile repeats.

[0028] FIG. 3 depicts the voltage profile generated by the two AMR sensors 8, 9 when gears 3, 4 rotate. The rotation of gear 2, which extends over a range from 0° to 1440° , is plotted on the horizontal axis. A rotation of this kind of gear 2 brings about a plurality of rotations of gears 3, 4. This plurality of rotations of gears 3, 4 in turn causes the voltages generated by the AMR sensors 8, 9 to change. This is plotted on the horizontal axis of the diagram of FIG. 3. A rise in the voltage profile means a 180° -degree rotation of the associated gear 3, 4.

[0029] Because of the differing numbers of teeth on gears 3, 4, different voltage profiles occur for the two AMR sensors 8, 9. As depicted in FIG. 3, the voltage for the two AMR sensors 8, 9 when gear 2 is at an angle of 0° is also 0° . When gear 2 then rotates, the voltage of the two AMR sensors 8, 9 rises. Because of the differing numbers of teeth on the two gears 3, 4, this rise occurs with differing slopes. The consequence is that the two voltage profiles generated by AMR sensors 8, 9 are not identical. This is evident from FIG. 3 in particular at somewhat greater angles for gear 2, at which the two voltage profiles of AMR sensors 8, 9 differ substantially from one another.

[0030] When apparatus 1 and circuit 7 are in operation, the voltage of the two AMR sensors 8, 9 is measured. This voltage is equivalent to the angles of the two gears 3, 4.

[0031] From these two measured angles of gears 3 and 4, and in particular from the difference between the two aforesaid angles, conclusions can be drawn as to the angle of gear 2. This calculation of the angle of gear 2 involves the numbers n , m , and $m+1$ for gears 2, 3, and 4. The correlation described above is plotted in FIG. 3, as an example, for an angle W .

[0032] As is evident from FIG. 2, a line 17 is provided which connects calculation device 13 to each of the two blocks 11, 12 and thus to analysis circuit 10. On line 17 it is possible to deliver, to analysis circuit 10 and in particular to the two blocks 11, 12, a start signal S with which simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two gears 3, 4, can be achieved. These simultaneously measured angles of the two gears 3, 4 are then stored.

[0033] For this purpose, the two blocks 11, 12 each contain, in particular, a sample-and-hold element which is

connected to the respectively associated AMR sensor **8, 9**. The sample-and-hold element is also acted upon by start signal S.

[0034] When calculation device **13** then generates start signal S, for example by transferring on line **17** a binary signal from a "low" to a "high" potential, the result is that the two sample-and-hold elements in the two blocks **11, 12** simultaneously read in and store the voltages supplied by the two AMR sensors **8, 9**. This means that the angles measured by the two AMR sensors for the two gears **3, 4** are stored synchronously in the sample-and-hold elements.

[0035] It is possible thereafter for the calculation device, with the aid of further activation signals, to read the stored angles of the two gears **3, 4** out of the sample-and-hold elements of the two blocks **11, 12**, and read them via corresponding lines **18, 19** into calculation device **13** for further processing.

[0036] Start signal S present on line **17** thus results in a synchronization of the two blocks **11, 12**, and thus ultimately in a synchronization of the measurement of the angles of the two gears **3, 4**. This ensures an identical time reference for the measurement of the angles of the two gears **3, 4**. The consequence is that because of the aforesaid identical time reference, a higher accuracy can be achieved in the subsequent calculation of the angle of gear **2**.

[0037] The identical time reference for measuring the angles of the two gears **3** and **4** is achieved with the aid of start signal S. The sampling time, and thus the identical time reference, for the measure of said angles is defined by way of the transition, already mentioned above, in start signal S from a lower to a higher potential. On the basis of start signal S, a common time reference is created which results in a synchronization of the measurement of the two angles and thus in a simultaneous measurement, i.e. a measurement of the two angles at one sampling time. It is entirely possible, in this context, for the sampling time to be identical to a time generated by clock **14**.

1. A method for determining the angle of a first rotatable body which coacts with two further rotatable bodies, the angle of the two further bodies being measured and the angle of the first body being calculated therefrom, characterized in that the angle of the two further bodies is measured simultaneously.

2. The method as defined in claim 1, characterized in that the measured angles of the two further bodies are stored.

3. The method as defined in claim 1 or 2, characterized in that the angles of the two further bodies are measured with a common time reference, in particular at a single sampling time.

4. An apparatus (**1, 7**) for determining the angle of a first rotatable body which coacts with two further rotatable bodies, the angle of the two further bodies being measurable and the angle of the first body being calculable therefrom, characterized in that means are provided for simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies.

5. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in claim 4, characterized in that each of the two further bodies is equipped with a magnet (**6**), associated with which is an AMR sensor (**8, 9**) that is provided for measuring the angle of the associated further body; and that an analysis circuit (**10**) is provided which is coupled to the two AMR sensors (**8, 9**) and is provided for analyzing and optionally for transforming the measured angles of the two further bodies.

6. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in claim 5, characterized in that the analysis circuit (**10**) is equipped with means, in particular with sample-and-hold elements, for storing the measured angles of the two further bodies.

7. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in one of claims **4** through **6**, characterized in that a calculation device (**13**), in particular a programmable microprocessor, is provided for determining the angle of the first body.

8. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in claim 7, characterized in that the calculation device (**13**) can generate a start signal (S) with which simultaneous measurement of the angles of the two further bodies by the two AMR sensors (**8, 9**) can be triggered.

9. The apparatus as defined in claim 8, characterized in that by way of the start signal, the angles of the two further bodies are measured with a common time reference, in particular at a single sampling time.

10. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in claim 5 and claim 8, characterized in that a line (**17**) is provided with which the calculation device (**13**) is connected to the analysis circuit (**10**), and on which the start signal (S) can be delivered to the analysis circuit (**10**).

11. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in one of claims **4** through **10**, characterized in that the first body is equipped with a number (n) of teeth; and that the two further bodies are equipped with different numbers (m, m+1) numbers of teeth differing therefrom.

12. The apparatus (**1, 7**) as defined in one of claims **4** through **11**, characterized in that the first body is coupled to a steering wheel of a motor vehicle.

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