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(54) **Racetrack-shaped container with lid**

(57) A container comprises a bottom (14), a sidewall extending up therefrom, and a top opening (15) opposite the bottom. The sidewall of the container has a uniform racetrack dimension from the bottom to proximate the top opening. The top opening has the same racetrack shape as the bottom and the top opening is in the form of a complete racetrack defined by the sidewall of the container body. In one advantageous form, one or more lip portions (22a,22b), in the form of one or more flanges, extends radially outwardly from the sidewall along the opposing parallel sides which form a perimeter around the top opening.

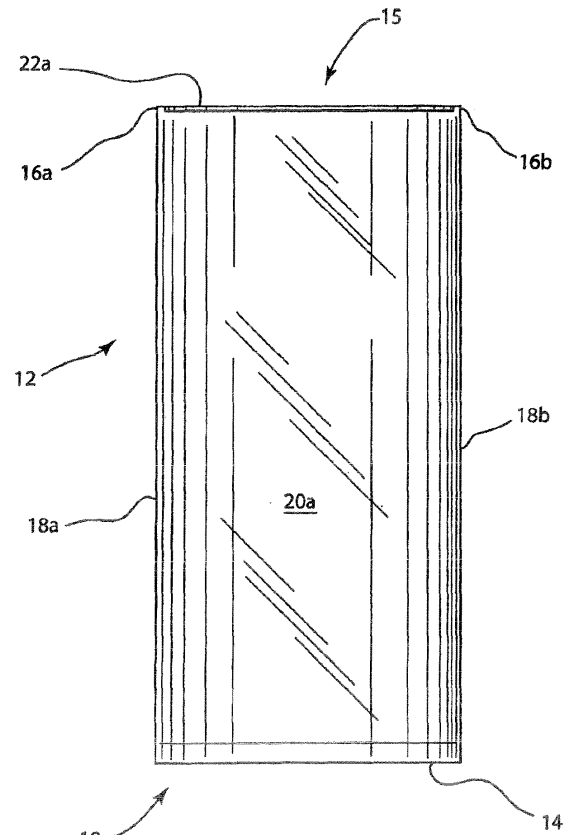


Fig. 1

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Description

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a container and, in particular, a racetrack-shaped container with lid.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Containers, such as containers for storing food products, come in all different sizes and shapes and are composed of various materials. The most common food container shapes include rectangular, square, circular, oval and tub-shaped. Manufacturers select a particular shape of container based on various factors, including what food product will be stored in the container, ease of use of the container and manipulation and handling of the container, as well as visual aesthetics.

[0003] Two commonly used food container shapes are cylindrical and oval. However, cylindrical and oval-shaped containers have drawbacks which may render their respective shapes less than optimal. For example, with regard to both cylindrical and oval-shaped containers, when these containers are packaged in a shipping box or crate and placed side-by-side, due to their round shape, there is empty or void airspace in the shipping container between the respective cylindrical or oval containers. As a result, a significant percentage of each shipping box is filled with void airspace, rather than with the respective containers.

[0004] An additional disadvantage with both cylindrical and oval-shaped containers is that, when these items are placed on a store shelf front-to-back, the cylindrical and oval containers can rotate, spin or pivot, relative to each other, on the store shelf. Thus, the containers on the store shelf may not be properly aligned with their labels facing directly forward.

[0005] Often food containers include a snap tight lid, which is firmly attached to a top opening of the container. The tight fit ensures that the lid will remain attached to the container and, in some cases, provides an airtight engagement between the lid and a container body. One disadvantage of having such a tight fitting lid is that it may be difficult to remove the lid to gain access to the contents contained therein.

[0006] There is a need in the art for a new and improved container which overcomes the deficiencies of prior art containers.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] The present invention relates to a container which, in cross-section, is advantageously the shape of a racetrack and, as such, its sidewalls contain two opposing parallel sides and two opposing curved, semicircular sides, thus forming the racetrack. Preferably, the dimensions of the racetrack-shaped sidewall are maintained from a bottom of the container uniformly to prox-

imate a top opening opposite the bottom. As a result, the top opening has the same racetrack-shaped dimensions as the bottom of the container.

[0008] Advantageously, the container is made of a transparent or translucent material, such as a plastic material, so that one can see the contents of the container through its sidewalls. In one preferable form, a lip in the form of a flange extends from the opposing parallel sides and a portion of the curved sides of the racetrack-shaped top opening of the container, while a central portion of the curved sides does not include a lip. The absence of a lip on a central portion of the curved sides allows one to more easily remove a lid attached to the container over the top opening.

[0009] The present invention, in one form, relates to a container comprising a container body having a bottom, a sidewall extending up therefrom, and a top opening opposite the bottom. The sidewall has a uniform racetrack dimension from the bottom to proximate the top opening, wherein the top opening has the same racetrack shape as the bottom, and the top opening is in the form of a complete racetrack shape defined by the sidewall of the container body.

[0010] The present invention, in another form thereof, relates to a container comprising a container body having a bottom, a sidewall extending up therefrom, and a top opening opposite the bottom. The sidewall has a racetrack shape comprising two opposed parallel sides and two opposed curved sides. One or more lip portions exteriorly extend from a perimeter of the top opening along the opposed parallel sides.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

[0011] Figure 1 is a front elevation view of a container, with the lid not shown, in accordance with the present invention;

[0012] Figure 2 is a side elevation view of the container of Figure 1;

[0013] Figure 3 is an exploded perspective view of the container and lid, in accordance with the present invention;

[0014] Figure 4 is a plan view of the container of Figure 1, shown from above;

[0015] Figure 5 is a plan view of the lid of Figure 3, shown from below;

[0016] Figure 6 is a partial side elevation of the container of Figure 3, shown with the lid disposed on the container body;

[0017] Figure 7 is a top plan view of the container of Figure 6;

[0018] Figure 8 is a cross-sectional view of the container, taken along line 8-8 of Figure 7; and

[0019] Figure 9 is a cross-sectional view of the container, taken along line 9-9 of Figure 7.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0020] Referring now to Figures 1-9, container 10 comprises container body 12 and lid 30 (Figure 3). Container body 12 has a bottom 14 and a sidewall extending upward therefrom comprising two opposing curved sides 18a, 18b and two opposing parallel sides 20a, 20b. Opposite the bottom 14 is a top opening 15. The container body 12, in cross-section, has a racetrack shape defined by the two opposing curved sides 18a, 18b and the two parallel sides 20a, 20b. The racetrack-shaped dimensions are uniformly maintained from the bottom 14 to proximately the top opening 15, where lips 22a, 22b extend slightly outwardly from the sides 20a, 20b and from a portion of sides 18a, 18b of the container body 12. The perimeter of the top opening 15 is in the shape of a complete racetrack defined by opposing curved sides 18a, 18b and opposing parallel sides 20a, 20b.

[0021] Advantageously, the exterior surface of sides 18a, 18b, 20a, 20b are smooth and non-contoured. Preferably, the material which comprises container body 12 is transparent or translucent so that one can see the contents disposed within container 10. The material may be any suitable transparent or translucent material including, but not limited to, thermoplastics such as polypropylene and polyethylene.

[0022] The dimensions of the container 10 allow a user to hold the container in the palm of one's hand. In particular, the curved sides 18a, 18b, i.e. semicircular-shaped portions, allow the container 10 to securely fit in the palm of one's hand.

[0023] Lips 22a, 22b are in the form of flanges which extend radially outward from the perimeter of the top opening 15. Advantageously, lips 22a, 22b extend along the entire perimeter of sides 20a, 20b, respectively, and approximately half the perimeter of the curved sides 18a, 18b. Lips 22a, 22b are absent from central portions 16a, 16b of the curved sides 18a, 18b, respectively. The presence of lips 22a, 22b provides a sufficient snap tight arrangement between the lid 30 and container body 12, while the absence of lips 22a, 22b on the center portions 16a, 16b allows for easy removal of lid 30.

[0024] Lid 30 also has a racetrack shape, having exterior dimensions only slightly larger than that of the container body 12. A plurality of ribs 32 may be provided to form a textured surface on the exterior surface, around the perimeter of lid 30, to provide a friction surface, which enables one to more easily grasp and remove lid 30 from container body 12.

[0025] Referring now specifically to Figures 5-9, lid 30 has a center portion 34, a ridge portion 35 and a skirt 36. A plurality of tabs 37 extend radially outwardly from an interior wall which forms the ridge 35. A continuous bead 38 around the entire periphery of the lid 30 extends radially inward from an interior facing surface of the skirt towards the center portion 34. When lid 30 is disposed on the container body 12, the bead 38 is disposed below the lip portions 22a, 22b and the plurality of tabs 37 about

an interior facing surface of the sides 18a, 18b, 20a, 20b, as shown in Figures 8 and 9. To close the container 10, one places the lid 30 over the top opening 15 and presses the lid downward onto the container body 12 until the lid 30 snaps into place.

[0026] The absence of lips, such as 22a, 22b on central portions 16a, 16b, allows the lid to be more easily removed from the container body, since no lips engage with the bead 38 adjacent the center portions 16a, 16b.

The resiliency of the material which comprises lid 30, which can be any suitable thermoplastic, allows the ridge 35 to form a hinge between skirt 36 and center portion 34, thereby allowing the skirt to resiliently move radially outward, thus permitting the bead 38 to ride up and over the lips 22a, 22b when the lid 30 is removed from and applied to the container body 12.

[0027] The present container can be used to store food items. Examples of food items include, but are not limited to, powdered beverage sticks. Other food items include individually wrapped food items which do not need to be stored in an airtight food container.

[0028] The racetrack shape of the present container 10 provides advantages and features to the container 10 which are absent in prior art containers having different shapes. For example, the non-curved sides defined by the opposing parallel sides 20a, 20b allow one to apply graphics to these sidewalls, and thereby provide for better graphic placement than on curved surfaces of cylindrical-shaped and oval-shaped containers.

[0029] In addition, the parallel sidewalls 20a, 20b allow one to align a series of containers front-to-back on a store shelf in perfect alignment. The flat sidewalls 20a, 20b ensure that abutting containers will not spin or rotate relative to each other while on a store shelf. Therefore, the present container provides for a more orderly and efficient use of space on a store shelf.

[0030] Further, the dimensions of the present container, being in the form of a racetrack, allow for a more efficient packing of a plurality of containers 10 into a shipping box or crate, as compared with cylindrical or oval-shaped containers. The parallel sides 20a, 20b allow more containers 10 to be packed within the same space, as there will be less void airspace between individual containers 10 packed within the shipping box. As a result, transportation costs to ship the present container are reduced since more containers can be packed within the same shipping space. In addition, the parallel sides of the racetrack-shaped container allow for a more efficient use of store shelf space, maximizing the amount of product which can be stored on a shelf and minimizing the amount of wasted airspace or voids. Further, the present container has more capacity when compared to an oval-shaped container having the same length and width, again due to the parallel sides of the racetrack.

[0031] Yet an additional advantage of the present container is that the material is transparent or translucent, which allows a user to view the contents of the container without removing the lid. As a result, a user looking at

the container can inventory its contents.

[0032] Although the invention has been described above in relation to preferred embodiments thereof, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that variations and modifications can be effected in these preferred embodiments without departing from the scope and spirit of the invention.

Claims

1. A container comprising:

a container body having a bottom, a sidewall extending up therefrom, and a top opening opposite the bottom, the sidewall having, in cross-section, a uniform racetrack dimension from the bottom to proximate the top opening, wherein the top opening has the same racetrack shape as the bottom, and the top opening is in the form of a complete racetrack shape defined by the sidewall of the container body.

2. The container of claim 1, further comprising a lip extending exteriorly from a portion of a perimeter of the top opening.

3. The container of claim 2, wherein the lip is absent from a central portion of at least one curved sidewall which comprises the racetrack shape of the top opening.

4. The container of claim 3, wherein the lip is absent from both central portions of the curved sidewalls comprising the racetrack shape of the top opening.

5. The container of any one of Claims 1 to 4, further comprising a removable lid adapted to snap onto the container body over the top opening.

6. The container of claim 5, wherein the lid has substantially the same racetrack shape as the container body.

7. The container of Claim 5 or 6, wherein the lid has a textured exterior surface.

8. The container of any one of Claims 1 to 7, wherein the sidewall has a substantially smooth and non-contour surface along its entire length.

9. The container of any of Claims 1 to 8, wherein the sidewall is transparent or translucent so that one can view the contents inside the container body through the sidewall.

10. A container comprising:

a container body having a bottom, a sidewall extending up therefrom, and a top opening opposite the bottom, the sidewall having a racetrack shape comprising two opposed parallel sides and two opposed curved sides; and one or more lip portions exteriorly extending from a perimeter of the top opening along the opposed parallel sides.

11. The container of claim 11, wherein the lip is absent from a central portion of at least one of the curved sides of the perimeter of the top opening.

12. The container of claim 12, wherein the lip is absent from both central portions of the curved sides which comprise the perimeter around the top opening.

13. The container of any one of Claims 10 to 12, further comprising a removable lid adapted to snap onto the container body over the top opening and wherein the lid comprises a skirt with an interiorly facing bead, wherein when the lid is disposed on the container body, the bead engages the container body below the one or more lip portions.

14. The container of any one of Claims 10 to 13, wherein the lid comprises a plurality of tabs extending radially outward from a central portion of the lid toward the skirt.

15. The container of any one of Claims 10 to 14, wherein the sidewall is transparent or translucent so that one can view contents inside the container body through the sidewall.

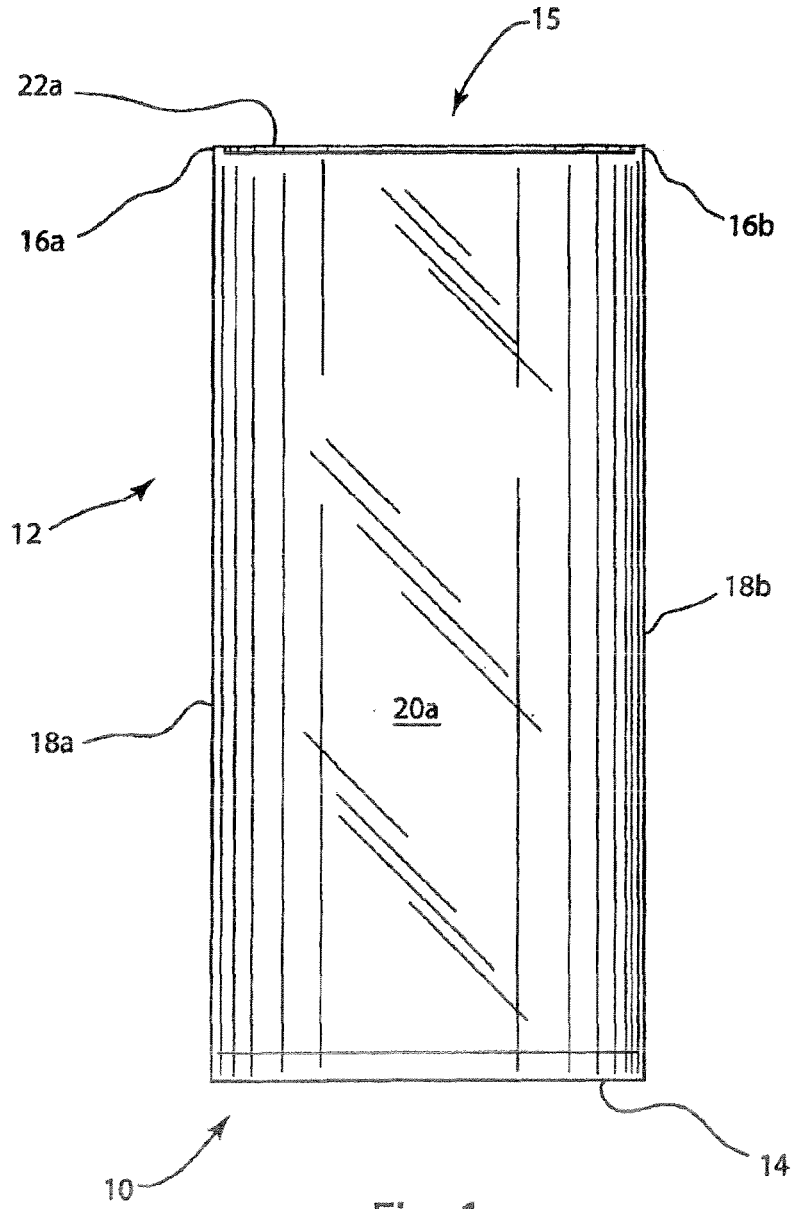


Fig. 1

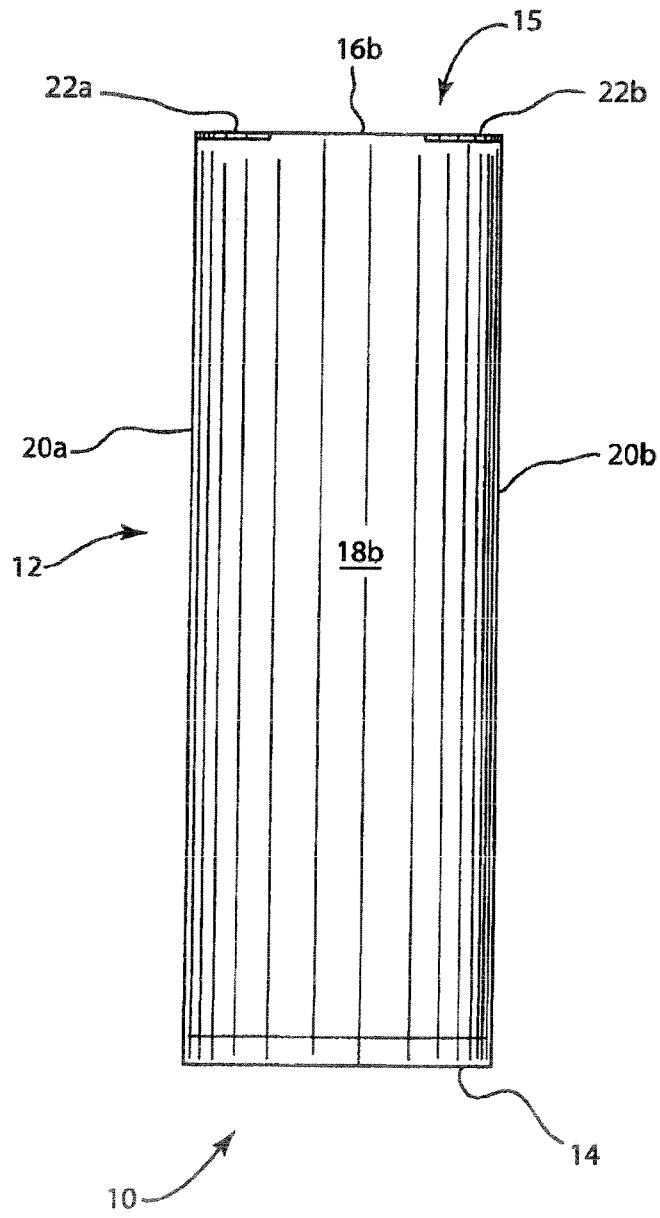


Fig. 2

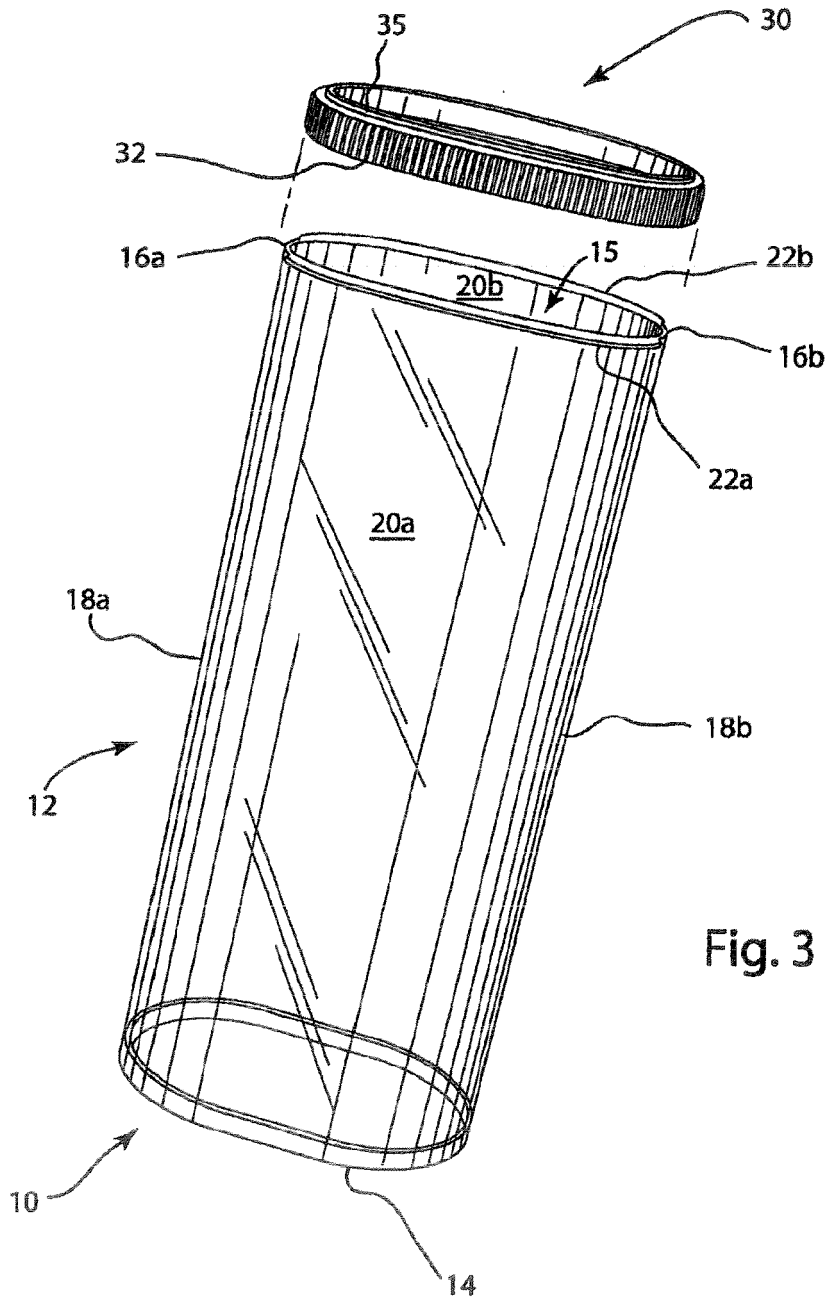


Fig. 3

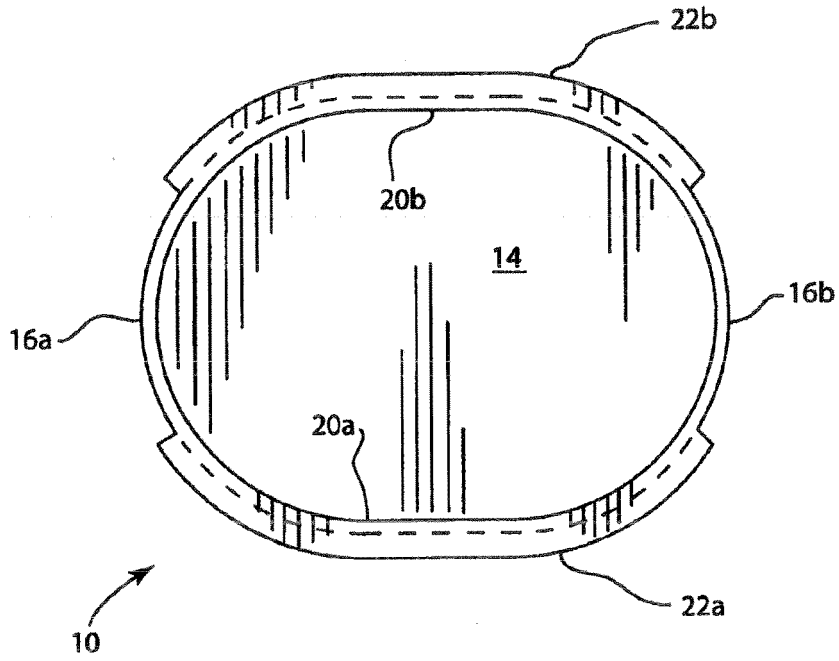


Fig. 4

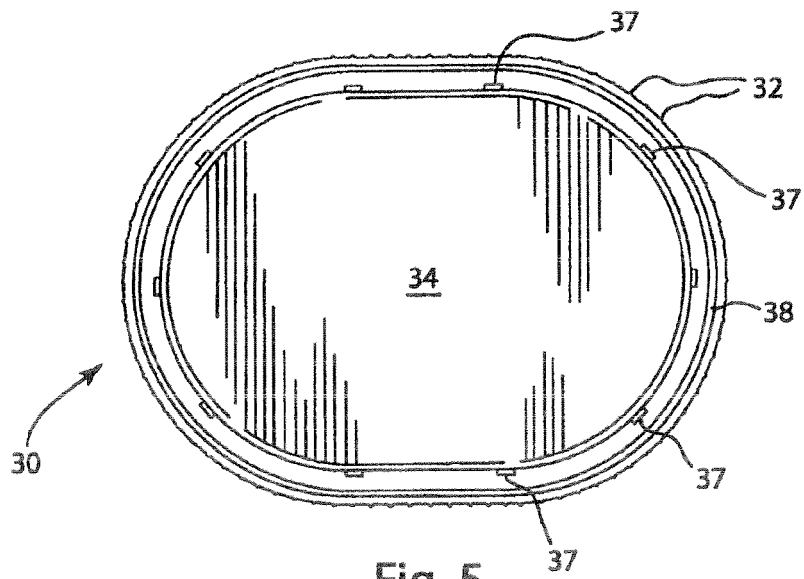
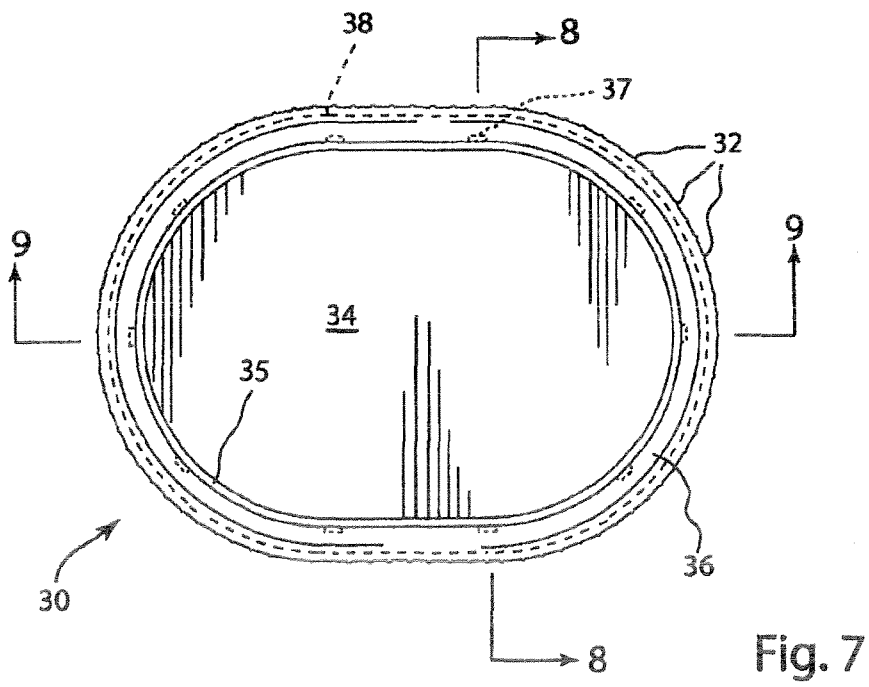
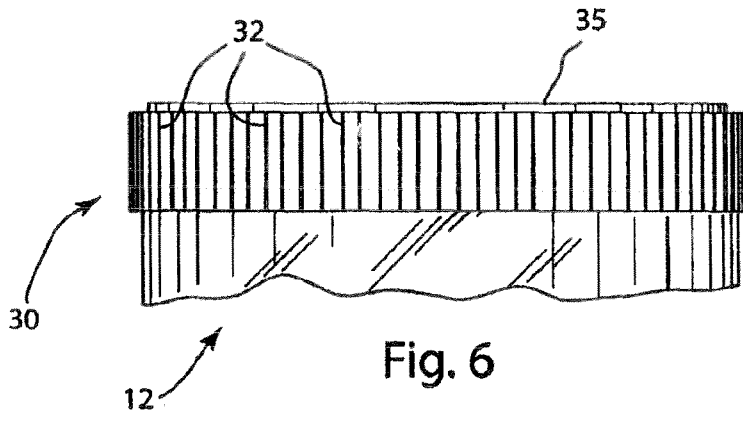


Fig. 5



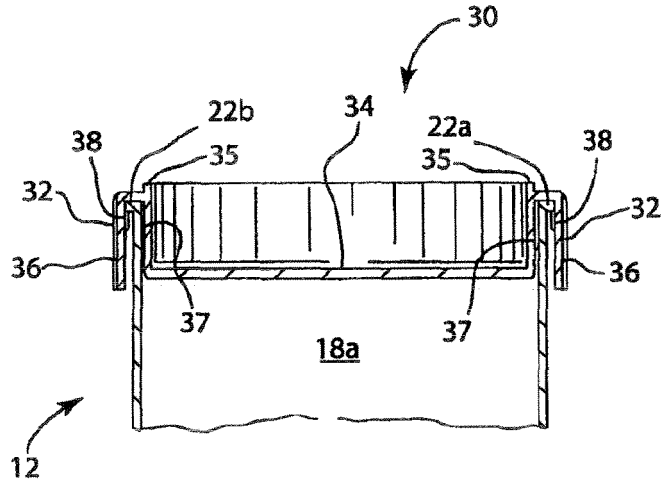


Fig. 8

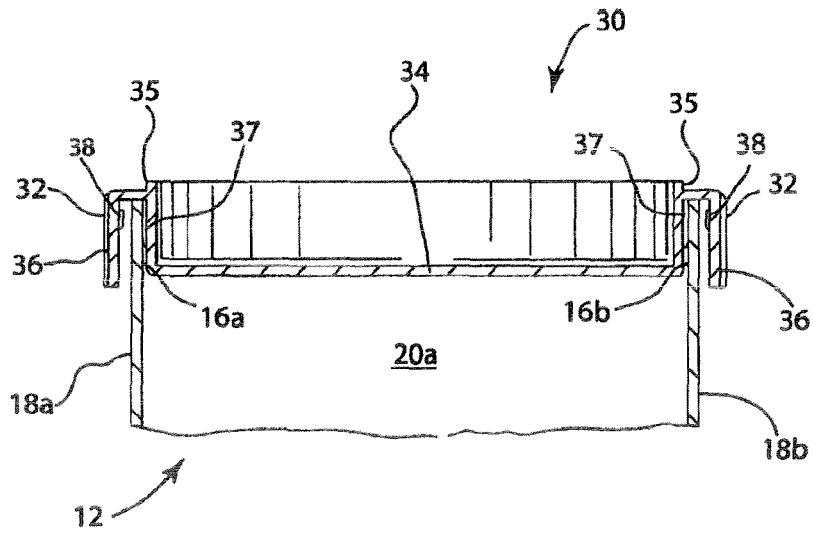


Fig. 9



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Application Number
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The Hague		26 August 2009	Serrano Galarraga, J
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This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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