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Barsanti et al.

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[54] DEVICE FOR GENERATING A REFERENCE VOLTAGE FOR A SWITCHING CIRCUIT INCLUDING A CAPACITIVE BOOTSTRAP CIRCUIT

[58] Field of Search 326/80, 92, 88; 327/541, 589

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[73] Assignee: SGS-Thomson Microelectronics S.r.l., Agrate Brianza, Italy

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[21] Appl. No.: 395,135

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[22] Filed: Feb. 27, 1995

Related U.S. Patent Documents

Reissue of:

[64] Patent No.: 5,138,200
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Appl. No.: 423,288
Filed: Oct. 18, 1989

Primary Examiner—David R. Hudspeth
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Wolf, Greenfield & Sacks, PC;
James H. Morris

U.S. Applications:

[63] Continuation of Ser. No. 289,489, Aug. 11, 1994, abandoned.

[57] ABSTRACT

This device for generating a reference voltage for a capacitive bootstrap circuit of an output stage can be easily integrated. The output stage comprises a driving block, a capacitive bootstrap circuit and a reference voltage generating block generating a floating reference voltage which is referred to the output voltage signal and switches in accordance thereto.

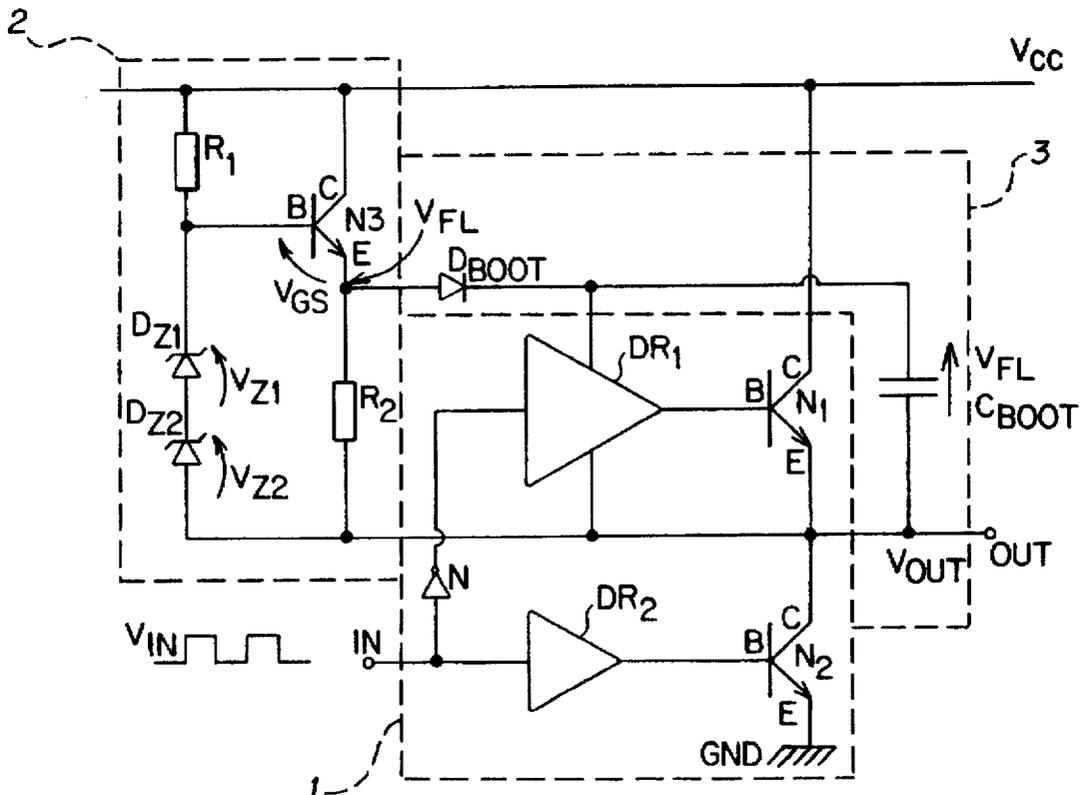
[30] Foreign Application Priority Data

Oct. 28, 1988 [IT] Italy 22466 A/88

[51] Int. Cl.⁶ H03K 17/10

[52] U.S. Cl. 326/88; 327/541; 327/589

21 Claims, 2 Drawing Sheets



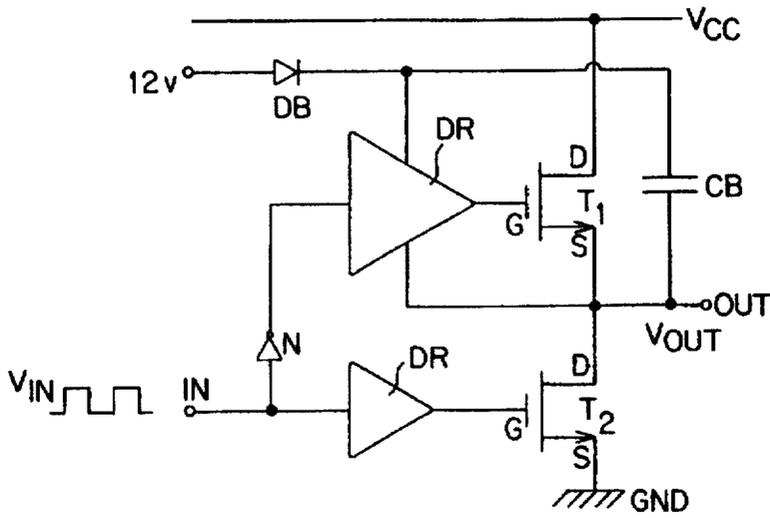


FIG. 1
(PRIOR ART)

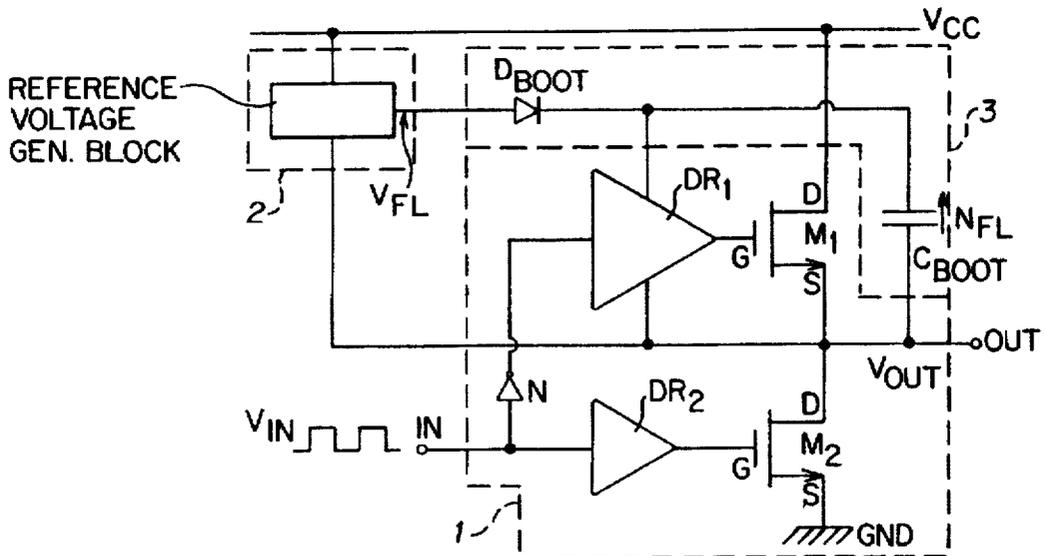


FIG. 2

DEVICE FOR GENERATING A REFERENCE VOLTAGE FOR A SWITCHING CIRCUIT INCLUDING A CAPACITIVE BOOTSTRAP CIRCUIT

Matter enclosed in heavy brackets [] appears in the original patent but forms no part of this reissue specification; matter printed in italics indicates the additions made by reissue.

This reissue application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 08/289,489, filed Aug. 11, 1994, now abandoned, which was a reissue application of U.S. Pat. No. 5,138,200, issued on Aug. 11, 1992.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a device for generating reference voltage for a switching circuit including a driving block controlled by an input switching signal and a capacitive bootstrap circuit, in particular for an output stage.

As is known, transistors implemented in MOS technology are often used to manufacture output stage circuits. Such output stages comprise N-channel MOS transistors which are driven by a high supply voltage, the drain of said transistors being connected to a positive supply line.

It is also known that a problem which occurs with such output stages is that of ensuring a correct driving voltage for the gate electrode of the MOS transistors, so as to ensure the operation of the device as a low-resistance switch (with a gate-source voltage V_{GS} above 10 V).

To this end, a capacitive bootstrap circuit is provided. An example of a prior art applied to a half-bridge is shown in FIG. 1; said circuit comprises capacitive bootstrap circuitry and output stage circuitry, the output stage being driven so as to generate a periodic wave-form signal V_{OUT} which oscillates between a low voltage, which is about 0 V in the example being considered, and a high voltage substantially equal to a first supply voltage V_{CC} .

In particular, two output transistors T_1 and T_2 are provided in order to generate the periodic wave-form signal and are driven by two driving elements DR.

According to the input signal V_{IN} , said two transistors T_1 and T_2 are alternately switched in the ON and OFF state so that the output signal switches between the low voltage of 0 V and the high voltage V_{CC} .

The bootstrap circuitry substantially comprises two elements, i.e. the bootstrap capacitor C_B and the bootstrap diode D_B . When the transistor T_1 is off and the transistor T_2 is on, V_{OUT} is connected to the ground and therefore is in the LOW state.

In this condition, the bootstrap capacitor C_B is charged through the bootstrap diode D_B at a voltage equal to the difference between a second supply voltage, for example 12 V, and the voltage drop across the bootstrap diode D_B .

In the reverse condition, i.e. with the transistor T_1 in the ON state and the transistor T_2 in the OFF state, the potential of the source electrode of the transistor T_1 rises toward the value of the first reference voltage V_{CC} , and the bootstrap capacitor maintains the supply to the driving elements DR at about $V_{CC}+12$ V.

As can be seen, in this stage the bootstrap diode is reverse, biased, and its reverse biasing voltage is equal to the first supply voltage (V_{CC}), thus decoupling the bootstrap capacitor from the second supply voltage.

The problem which arises in the above described circuit is that of satisfying two contrasting requirements.

In fact, an output signal having a good dynamic behavior (i.e. considerable amplitude) is required on one hand, while on the other hand it may be possible to integrate the bootstrap diode.

In order to satisfy the first of the above mentioned requirements, the bootstrap diode D_B must have a high breakdown voltage, since, as said, when the output voltage V_{OUT} is high, the diode D_B has applied thereto a reverse biasing voltage which is equal to the first reference voltage V_{CC} . This condition is troublesome (in view of the required integration) when the required breakdown voltage of the diode is in the range of hundreds of volts.

On the other hands, in the direct biasing state, the bootstrap diode must have low losses toward the substrate. This is a problem when the diode is implemented by a base to collector junction in order to have high breakdown: in fact in this case the diode is associated with a parasitic vertical PNP transistor.

Therefore the problem arises that it is difficult to integrate a small size diode with a high breakdown and low current losses toward the substrate, and this problem becomes the bigger, the higher is the supply voltage V_{CC} .

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, the aim of the present invention is to provide a device for generating a reference voltage for a bootstrap circuit, in particular for an output stage, which allows said output stage to generate and supply at the output a high-amplitude voltage signal.

Within this aim, a particular object of the present invention is to provide a device which can be easily integrated and can be manufactured with conventional technologies, i.e. bipolar or MOS technology.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a device for generating a reference voltage for the bootstrap circuit which is able to eliminate the problems associated with a high breakdown voltage and affecting the prior art.

Not least object of the present invention is to provide an integrated device producible with conventional methods, as mentioned above, can be obtained at a cost which is relatively low and in any case comparable to that of known similar circuits.

The above described aim and objects, as well as others which may become apparent hereinafter, are achieved by a device for generating a reference voltage for a bootstrap circuit having the features of the characterizing part of claim 1.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The characteristics and advantages of the invention will become apparent from the following detailed description of a preferred but not exclusive embodiment of the present invention, illustrated only by way of non-limitative example in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

FIG. 1 is a circuit diagram of an output stage with a prior art bootstrap circuit;

FIGS. 2 is a block diagram of the output stage and of the bootstrap circuit according to the teachings of the present invention; and

FIG. 3 is a circuit diagram of an embodiment of the present invention, implemented in MOS technology.

FIG. 4 is a circuit diagram of a further embodiment of the present invention, implemented in bipolar technology.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

With specific reference to FIG. 2, the output stage comprises a driving block 1, a reference voltage generating block 2 and a bootstrap circuit 3.

In particular, the driving block 1 has an input IN receiving a switching input signal V_{IN} , having for example a square wave-form, and an output OUT supplying output voltage V_{OUT} .

Said input switching signal is sent to the input of a driving element DR2 and the same switching signal is also sent to a further driving element DR1 after being inverted by an inverter element indicated at N.

The outputs of the driving elements are applied to the gate electrodes of first switching transistors M1 and a second switching transistor M2; more specifically, the output of the driving element DR2 is applied to the gate electrode of the switching transistor M1 while the output of the driving element DR1 is applied to the gate electrode of the first switching transistor M1.

As is apparent, the switching transistors illustrated in FIG. 1 are manufactured with MOS technology, but this must not be regarded as a limitation, since said transistors may naturally be manufactured according to any other conventional technology.

As can be seen, the source electrode of the first transistor M1 is connected to the drain electrode of the second transistor M2 so as to supply said output OUT, while the source electrode of the second transistor M2 is connected to the ground and the drain electrode of the transistor M1 is connected to a first supply voltage indicated at V_{CC} .

The output signal V_{OUT} is feedback to said reference voltage block 2 and said bootstrap circuit 3; said reference voltage block 2 is also connected to the first supply voltage line V_{CC} and feeds a reference voltage V_{FL} to the bootstrap diode D_{BOOT} and to be bootstrap capacitor C_{BOOT} .

According to the invention, reference voltage V_{FL} is floating and referred to the output voltage V_{OUT} and more precisely V_{FL} follows the output voltage V_{OUT} so as to have a convenient charging level for the bootstrap capacitor C_{BOOT} when the output is low (near 0 V) and to have a high level (about V_{CC}) when the output is high. Therefore, when the output is low, the bootstrap capacitor can be charged at the desired level, while when the output is high, the voltage drop across the bootstrap diode D_{BOOT} is low. Therefore, this diode may be easily integrated with low losses (e.g. by the emitter to base junction), while allowing the output stage to supply an output signal having high dynamics.

FIGS. 3 illustrates in detail a possible implementation of the reference voltage generating block 2.

As illustrated, said block comprises two Zener diodes, more specifically a first zener diode DZ_1 and a second Zener diode DZ_2 , having respective Zener voltages V_{Z1} and V_{Z2} ; said Zener diodes are mutually connected in series, with the anode of the diode second Zener diode DZ_2 being connected to the output OUT and the cathode thereof being connected to the anode of the first Zener diode DZ_1 .

Said circuit furthermore comprises a third transistor M3 preferably of the MOS type, the drain electrode whereof is connected to the first supply voltage line V_{CC} ; its gate electrode is connected to the cathode of the first Zener diode DZ_1 and its source electrode is connected to the output OUT through a resistor R_2 .

As can be seen, a further resistor R_1 is interposed between the gate electrode of the third transistor M3 and the first supply voltage line V_{CC} .

The source electrode S of the transistor M3 is also connected to the anode of the bootstrap diode D_{BOOT} to supply the floating reference voltage V_{FL} , which, as said, is referred to the output.

In fact, when the input signal V_{IN} causes the second transistor M2 to switch on, the first transistor M1 is off. The output voltage V_{OUT} is low, since the point OUT is connected to the ground, and the bootstrap capacitor C_{BOOT} is charged, through the bootstrap diode, to the voltage level of the source electrode of the third transistor M3, i.e. to the value V_{FL} which is now equal to $V_{Z1} + V_{Z2} - V_{GS}$ (V_{GS} being the gate-source voltage of the third transistor M3 which is on in this operating mode).

By appropriately selecting the Zener diodes, the voltage V_{FL} may be in the range of 12 V, like the second supply voltage, as is known in the art.

Thus, the bootstrap capacitor charges at a voltage which is equal to the floating voltage V_{FL} .

Vice versa, when the input signal V_{IN} causes the second transistor M2 to switch off and the first transistor M1 on, the potential of the output OUT starts to rise toward the value of the first reference voltage line V_{CC} , and the bootstrap capacitor maintains a constant voltage equal to the previous value of the floating voltage V_{FL} so as to increase the supply of the driving elements.

Since the floating voltage V_{FL} is always related to the output voltage V_{OUT} , until said output voltage V_{OUT} remains lower than the first reference voltage V_{CC} , the bootstrap diode is directly biased, and the problem of breakdown cannot therefore occur.

Vice versa, when the output voltage V_{OUT} reaches a value proximate to that of the reference voltage V_{CC} , the third transistor M3 switches off, since the voltage across its drain and source electrodes becomes substantially equal to 0 V.

In this condition, the anode of the bootstrap diode is connected through R_2 to the output voltage V_{OUT} and is thus reversely biased; but the reverse voltage across said diode is now equal to 12 V, thus avoiding the problems due to the high breakdown voltage which are characteristic of the prior art.

As is evident from the preceding description, the invention fully achieves the intended aim and objects.

A circuit structure has in fact been provided which has, on one hand, no problems in integration, since the voltage between the anode and the cathode of the bootstrap diode during the diode reverse-biasing is low, and has, on the other hand, an output voltage with a high maximum or peak value, since value is equal to the first supply voltage V_{CC} .

Therefore, the diode is not required to have a high breakdown voltage and thus may be implemented by the emitter-base junction, which has no vertical PNP parasitic transistors associated therewith.

The invention as described is susceptible to numerous modifications and variations, all of which are within the scope of the inventive concept.

In particular, the fact is stressed that though the described circuit structure has been implemented in MOS technology, the MOS transistors may naturally be replaced with bipolar transistors, for example of the NPN type. FIG. 4 illustrates the above-mentioned bipolar implementation of the circuit shown in FIG. 3. All circuit elements of FIG. 4 are identical to those of FIG. 3 and are designated by the same reference signs, except for the three MOS transistor M_1 , M_2 and M_3 which are here replaced by respective bipolar NPN-type transistors designated by N_1 , N_2 and N_3 . The bipolar circuit works in an analogous manner to the circuit of FIG. 3. Furthermore, though the circuit as described is intended to be used in an output stage, the invention may be applied to any circuitry with similar problems.

The described resistors may also be replaced with controlled current sources.

In addition, all the details may be replaced with other technically equivalent ones.

We claim:

1. In a circuit including a driving block having an input receiving an input switching signal and an output generating a switching output voltage signal which switches between a low level and a high level, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit having a fast terminal connected to said output of said driving block and a second terminal, a device for generating a floating reference voltage is connected between said output of said driving block and said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit, said device generating said floating reference voltage so as to follow said switching output voltage signal and avoid damage to said bootstrap circuit, said floating reference voltage switching to a low state, higher than said low level of said switching output voltage signal for charging said capacitive bootstrap circuit, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said low level, said floating reference voltage switching to a high state, near to said high level, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said high level.

2. In a circuit including a driving block having an input receiving an input switching signal and an output generating a switching output voltage signal, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit having a first terminal connected to said output of said driving block and a second terminal, a device for generating a floating reference voltage is connected between said output of said driving block and said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit, said floating reference voltage switching in accordance with said switching output voltage signal, wherein said device comprises Zener diode means having an anode and a cathode, said anode being connected to said output of said driving block, and a transistor having a source and a gate terminal; said gate terminal being connected to said cathode of said Zener diode means and to a reference potential line through first resistor means, said source terminal being connected to said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit and to said output of said driving block through control means controlling switching on and off of said transistor.

3. A device according to claim 2, wherein said control means for said transistor comprises further resistor means.

4. A device according to claim 2, wherein said capacitive bootstrap circuit defines a feedback connection interposed between said source terminal of said transistor and said output of said driving block, said bootstrap circuit including a further diode having an anode connected to said source terminal of said transistor and a cathode connected to said output through a bootstrap capacitor.

5. A device according to claim 2, wherein said transistor is a MOS transistor.

6. A device according to claim 2, wherein said Zener diode means comprises a plurality of Zener diodes connected in series.

7. A device according to claim 2, wherein said control means for said transistor comprise current source means.

8. A device according to claim 2, wherein said transistor is an NPN-type bipolar transistor.

9. An output stage, comprising a driving block interposed between a first reference potential line and a second reference potential line, said driving block having a signal input receiving an input switching signal, a reference input connected to a further reference potential line and an output generating an output switching signal which switches between a low level that is substantially equal to said second

reference potential line and a high level that is substantially equal to said first potential reference line, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit connected between said output of said driving block and said further reference potential line, said stage including means for generating a floating reference voltage connected to said further reference potential line, said means generating said floating reference voltage so as to follow said output switching signal and avoid damage to said bootstrap circuit said floating reference voltage switching to a low state, higher than said low level of said switching output voltage signal for charging said capacitive bootstrap circuit, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said low level, said floating reference voltage switching to a high state, near to said high level, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said high level.

10. In a circuit including a driving block having an input receiving an input switching signal and an output generating a switching output voltage signal, said switching output voltage signal switching between a low level and a high level, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit having a first terminal connected to said output of said driving block and a second terminal, a device for generating a floating reference voltage is connected between said output of said driving block and said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit, said floating reference voltage switching to a low state for charging said capacitive bootstrap circuit when said switching output voltage signal switches to said low level, said low state being higher than said low level of said switching output voltage signal, and said floating reference voltage switching to a high state, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said high level, said high state being near to said high level, wherein said device comprises Zener diode means having an anode and a cathode, said anode being connected to said output of said driving block, and a transistor having a source and a gate terminal, said gate terminal being connected to said cathode of said Zener diode means and to a reference potential line through first resistor means, said source terminal being connected to said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit and to said output of said driving block through control means controlling switching on and off of said transistor.

11. An output stage, comprising a driving block interposed between a first reference potential line and a second reference potential line, said driving block having a signal input receiving an input switching signal, a reference input connected to a further reference potential line and an output generating an output switching signal which switches between a low level that is substantially equal to said second reference potential line and a high level that is substantially equal to said first potential reference line, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit including a bootstrap diode, said bootstrap circuit being connected between said output of said driving block and said further reference potential line, said stage including means for generating a floating reference voltage connected to said further reference potential line, said means generating said floating reference voltage so as to follow said output switching signal and minimize inverse bias voltage on said bootstrap diode, said floating reference voltage switching to a low state, higher than said low level of said switching output voltage signal for charging said capacitive bootstrap circuit, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said low level, said floating reference voltage switching to a high state, near to said high level, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said high level.

12. In a circuit including a driving block having an input receiving an input switching signal and an output generating

a switching output voltage signal which switches between a low level and a high level, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit having a first terminal connected to said output of said driving block and a second terminal, a device for generating a floating reference voltage is connected between said output of said driving block and said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit, said device generating said floating reference voltage so as to follow said switching output voltage signal and avoid damage to said bootstrap circuit, said floating reference voltage switching to a low state, higher than said low level of said switching output voltage signal for charging said capacitive bootstrap circuit when said switching output voltage signal switches to said low level, and said floating reference voltage switching to a high state when said switching output voltage signal switches to said high level.

13. In a circuit including a driving block having an input receiving an input switching signal and an output generating a switching output voltage signal, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit having a first terminal connected to said output of said driving block and a second terminal, a device for generating a floating reference voltage is connected between said output of said driving block and said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit, said floating reference voltage switching in accordance with said switching output voltage signal, wherein said device comprises a zener diode having an anode and cathode, said anode being connected to said output of said driving block, and a transistor having an output terminal and a control terminal, said control terminal being connected to said cathode of said zener diode and to a reference potential line through at least one resistor, said output terminal being connected to said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit and to said output of said driving block through control means controlling switching on and off of said transistor.

14. A bootstrap circuit for boosting an input signal of a drive transistor, the drive transistor including a first terminal coupled to a supply voltage, a second terminal providing an output of the drive transistor, and a third terminal receiving the input signal from a driving element, the driving element having an input and an output that provides the input signal to the third terminal of the drive transistor, the bootstrap circuit comprising:

a diode having a cathode terminal and an anode terminal;
 a capacitor, having a first terminal coupled to the cathode terminal of the diode, and a second terminal coupled to the second terminal of the drive transistor; and
 means for providing a bootstrap reference voltage to the anode terminal of the diode that limits an inverse bias voltage of the diode.

15. A bootstrap circuit for boosting an input signal of a drive transistor, the drive transistor including a first terminal coupled to a supply voltage, a second terminal providing an output of the drive transistor, and a third terminal receiving the input signal from a driving element, the driving element having an input and an output that provides the input signal to the third terminal of the drive transistor, the bootstrap circuit comprising:

a bootstrap diode having a cathode terminal and an anode terminal;

a capacitor, having a first terminal coupled to the cathode terminal of the bootstrap diode, and a second terminal coupled to the second terminal of the drive transistor; and

a bootstrap reference voltage generator, having a first input coupled to the supply voltage, a second input coupled to the second terminal of the drive transistor, and an output coupled to the anode terminal of the bootstrap diode.

16. The bootstrap circuit of claim 15, wherein:

the bootstrap diode has an inverse bias voltage when a voltage at the cathode terminal of the bootstrap diode is greater than a voltage at the anode terminal of the bootstrap diode; and

the output of the bootstrap reference voltage generator limits the inverse bias voltage of the bootstrap diode.

17. The bootstrap circuit of claim 15, wherein the bootstrap reference voltage generator comprises:

a bootstrap transistor, having a first terminal coupled to the supply voltage, a second terminal providing the output of the bootstrap reference voltage generator, and a third terminal;

a first resistive element, coupled between the supply voltage and the third terminal of the bootstrap transistor;

a second resistive element, coupled between the second terminal of the bootstrap transistor and the second input of the bootstrap reference voltage generator; and

a Zener diode having a cathode terminal coupled to the third terminal of the bootstrap transistor and an anode terminal coupled to the second input of the bootstrap reference voltage generator.

18. The bootstrap circuit of claim 17, wherein the bootstrap transistor is a MOS transistor.

19. The bootstrap circuit of claim 17, wherein the bootstrap transistor is a bipolar transistor.

20. The bootstrap circuit of claim 17, wherein the Zener diode is at least two zener diodes connected in series.

21. A reference voltage generator for providing a bootstrap reference voltage to a bootstrap circuit, the bootstrap reference voltage being generated from a supply voltage and an input voltage, the reference voltage generator comprising:

a bootstrap transistor, having a first terminal coupled to the supply voltage, a second terminal providing the bootstrap reference voltage, and a third terminal;

a first resistive element, coupled between the supply voltage and the third terminal of the bootstrap transistor;

a second resistive element, coupled between the second terminal of the bootstrap transistor and the input voltage; and

a Zener diode having a cathode terminal coupled to the third terminal of the bootstrap transistor and an anode terminal coupled to the input voltage.

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : Re 35,745
DATED : March 17, 1998
INVENTOR(S) : Andrea Barsanti, Claudio Diazzi and Fabio Vio

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Column 5,

Lines 6-23, claim 1 should read as shown below:

1. In a circuit including a driving block having an input receiving an input switching signal and an output generating a switching output voltage signal which switches between a low level and a high level, and a capacitive bootstrap circuit having a first terminal connected to said output of said driving block and a second terminal, a device for generating a floating reference voltage is connected between said output of said driving block and said second terminal of said capacitive bootstrap circuit, said device generating said floating reference voltage so as to follow said switching output voltage signal and avoid damage to said bootstrap circuit, said floating reference voltage switching to a low state, higher than said low level of said switching output voltage signal for charging said capacitive bootstrap circuit, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said low level, said floating reference voltage switching to a high state, near to said high level, when said switching output voltage signal switches to said high level.

Signed and Sealed this

Third Day of December, 2002

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James E. Rogan", written over a horizontal line.

JAMES E. ROGAN
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office