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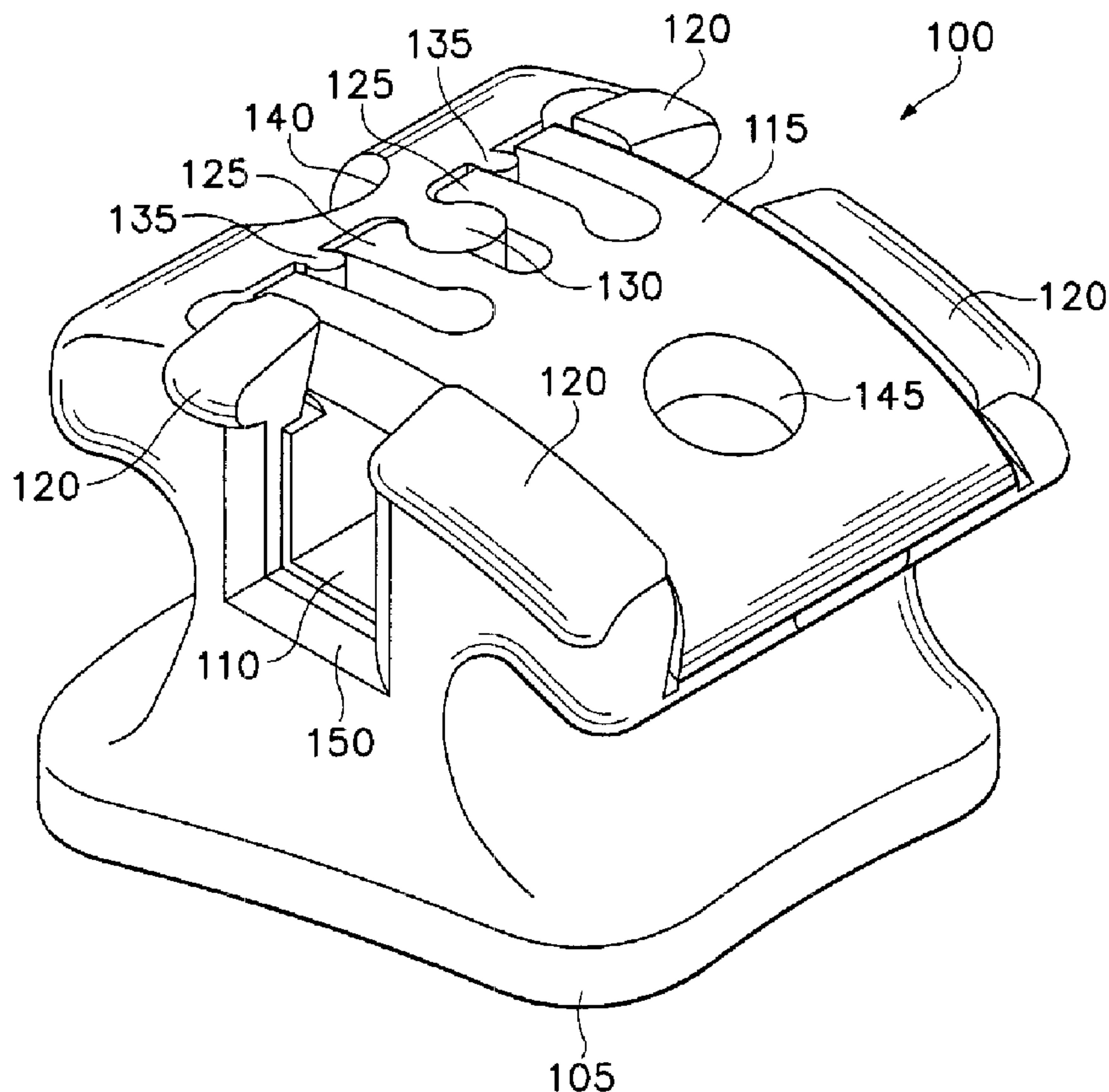
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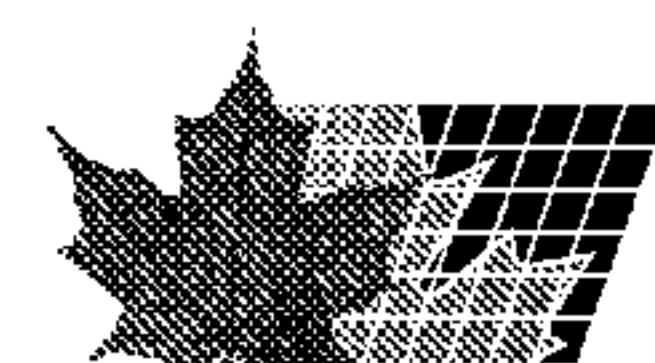
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(54) Title: IMPROVED ORTHODONTIC BRACKET



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

The present invention provides an improved self-ligating orthodontic bracket. According to one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket includes a mounting base for attachment to a tooth surface, an archwire slot formed upon the base and sized



(57) **Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):**

for receiving an orthodontic archwire, a channel formed upon the base and transversely oriented to the archwire slot, and a ligating slide member slideably retained within the channel and closeable over the archwire slot for retaining the orthodontic archwire therein, and wherein the ligating slide member includes at least one coplanar resilient retention mechanism for exerting retention forces coplanar with the ligating slide member for holding the ligating slide member in a closed position. In one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket comprises a bracket with a ligating slide member slideably retained within a dovetail shaped channel.

IMPROVED ORTHODONTIC BRACKET

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present invention provides an improved self-ligating orthodontic bracket. According to one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket includes a mounting base for attachment to a tooth surface, an archwire slot formed upon the base and sized for receiving an orthodontic archwire, a channel formed upon the base and transversely oriented to the archwire slot, and a ligating slide member slideably retained within the channel and closeable over the archwire slot for retaining the orthodontic archwire therein, and wherein the ligating slide member includes at least one coplanar resilient retention mechanism for exerting retention forces coplanar with the ligating slide member for holding the ligating slide member in a closed position. In one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket comprises a bracket with a ligating slide member slideably retained within a dovetail shaped channel.

IMPROVED ORTHODONTIC BRACKET**[0001] BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

5 **[0002]** This disclosure relates to improved self-locking or ligatureless orthodontic brackets.

[0003] Orthodontic treatment generally comprises dental work to correct irregularities of the teeth or of the relation of the teeth to surrounding anatomy. The irregularities may involve malocclusions with varying degrees of severity. Class 1 malocclusions, for example, 10 may involve spacing irregularities such as excessive crowding or diastema (a gap between two adjacent teeth). Class 2 malocclusions may involve overbite conditions where the upper anterior teeth project labially over the lower anterior teeth. Class 3 malocclusions, in contrast, may involve underbite conditions where the upper anterior teeth close within the lingual side of the lower anterior teeth. For these and other observed irregularities treatment 15 typically involves installation of braces or mechanical aids for repositioning the teeth into correct orthodontic alignment.

[0004] Braces generally include orthodontic brackets configured for attachment to the labial or lingual surfaces of the teeth or for attachment to metallic bands secured around the teeth. The brackets typically include archwire slots within which a flexible yet resilient 20 archwire may be engaged. Each bracket is typically bonded to the tooth surface so that the bracket's archwire slot is oriented for engagement with the archwire. Various techniques are used for orienting the brackets. For example, an edgewise appliance comprises braces

whereby each bracket is oriented and bonded to the tooth so that the archwire slot is perpendicular to the long axis of the root of the tooth. Alternatively, a straight-wire appliance includes braces whereby each bracket is oriented and bonded to the tooth so that the archwire slot is parallel to the occlusal plane (the biting surfaces of the teeth).

- 5 **[0005]** The archwire is typically a curved metallic wire having a rectangular or circular cross section that is bent or twisted prior to engagement with the brackets. The memory or restoring force exerted by the archwire upon the brackets serves to move the teeth into the desired alignment. Throughout the duration of orthodontic treatment the orthodontist periodically adjusts the shape of the archwire (as well as the configuration of other
10 attachments such as elastic bands and so forth) to achieve the correct orthodontic alignment.

- [0006]** Most brackets in current use incorporate tie wings or extensions that project upwardly and downwardly in a gingival-occlusal orientation and require the use of ligatures or ligating modules to hold the archwire within the archwire slots. The ligatures or ligating modules are typically donut-shaped elastomeric rings or wires that are stretched around or
15 twisted around the tie wings.

- [0007]** The use of such ligatures or ligating modules presents a number of inherent disadvantages, some of which are mentioned herein. The small size of the ligatures or ligating modules requires substantial time for installation of the archwire. Because the orthodontist will typically make numerous adjustments to the archwire throughout
20 orthodontic treatment, the orthodontist will likely remove and replace the ligatures or ligating modules numerous times. Hygiene is another problem since the use of ligatures or ligating modules increases the areas where food particles may be trapped. Further, with movement due to chewing or other activities, the ligatures or ligating modules may become detached altogether, allowing the archwire to disengage from the archwire slots.

- 25 **[0008]** Ligatures or ligating modules also present other limitations in terms of the forces exerted upon the brackets. For example, the labial or outward force that may be applied to a tooth having a bracket bonded to its labial surface is limited to the strength of the ligature or ligating module in the labial direction. On the same tooth, the force that may be applied in the lingual direction is not so constrained (because the force is applied against the bracket

structure rather than the ligature or ligation module). Similarly, the longitudinal (or mesial-distal) forces which may be applied along the direction of the archwire may be limited or defined by the friction between the ligature or ligation module and the archwire. By contrast, a means for locking the archwire within the archwire slot would enhance the forces that may be exerted along the direction of the archwire. Likewise, a means for slideably retaining the archwire within the archwire slot would allow greater flexibility than available from brackets requiring the use of ligatures or ligation modules.

[0009] Several self-locking or self-ligating (ligatureless) orthodontic brackets have been designed. However, most of those have complex designs, incorporating features requiring prohibitively expensive machining operations or comprising multiple separate parts, which in turn increases the number of failure modes for such brackets. Other designs have been rejected in the marketplace due to poor quality or poor design, a lack of available features, difficulty of use, or other factors.

[0010] What is needed, therefore, is an improved orthodontic bracket that incorporates a self-ligating capability and that offers a different style of bracket than those available today.

[0011] The foregoing and other objectives, features, and advantages of the invention will be more readily understood upon consideration of the following detailed description of the invention taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL DRAWINGS

[0012] For a more complete understanding of the present invention, the drawings herein illustrate examples of the invention. The drawings, however, do not limit the scope of the invention. Similar references in the drawings indicate similar elements.

Fig. 1 illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 2 illustrates an exemplary frontal view of an improved orthodontic bracket placed upon a tooth and engaged with an archwire.

Fig. 3 illustrates a sectional view of an improved orthodontic bracket actively engaged with an archwire according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 4 illustrates a sectional view of an improved orthodontic bracket with a ligating slide member in an open position, according to one embodiment of the invention.

5 **Fig. 5** illustrates a sectional view of an improved orthodontic bracket passively engaged with an archwire according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 6 illustrates an isometric top view of a ligating slide member according to one embodiment of the invention.

10 **Fig. 7** illustrates an isometric bottom view of a ligating slide member according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 8 illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket with its ligating slide member removed, according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 9 illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket engaged with an archwire according to one embodiment of the invention.

15 **Fig. 10** illustrates a ligating slide member placed within a channel of an improved orthodontic bracket, according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 11 illustrates a ligating slide member placed within a channel of an improved orthodontic bracket following a coining operation for retaining the ligating slide member within the channel, according to one embodiment of the invention.

20 **Fig. 12** illustrates a top view of a parallelogram version of an improved orthodontic bracket with a ball hook, according to one embodiment of the invention.

Fig. 13 illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket with a ligating slide member in an open position, according to one embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0013] In the following detailed description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a thorough understanding of the present invention. However, those skilled in the art will understand that the present invention may be practiced without these specific
 5 details, that the present invention is not limited to the depicted embodiments, and that the present invention may be practiced in a variety of alternate embodiments. In other instances, well known methods, procedures, components, and systems have not been described in detail.

[0014] Various operations will be described as multiple discrete steps performed in turn
 10 in a manner that is helpful for understanding the present invention. However, the order of description should not be construed as to imply that these operations are necessarily performed in the order they are presented, nor even order dependent.

[0015] Turning now to the several drawings, **Fig. 1** illustrates an isometric view of a self-ligating orthodontic bracket **100** according to one embodiment of the invention. The self-ligating orthodontic bracket **100** includes a mounting base **105** for attachment to a tooth
 15 surface, an archwire slot **110** formed upon the mounting base **105** and sized for receiving an orthodontic archwire (not shown), and a ligating slide member **115** (shown in a closed position) for retaining an orthodontic archwire within the archwire slot **110**. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the ligating slide member **115** may slide within a channel
 20 formed between sides **120** and oriented transverse to the archwire slot **110**. The ligating slide member **115** preferably includes one or more coplanar resilient retention features (or mechanism) **125** for holding the ligating slide member **115** in a closed position thereby retaining an orthodontic archwire within the archwire slot **110**.

[0016] As shown in **Fig. 1**, the one or more coplanar resilient retention features **125**
 25 may comprise resilient portions of the ligating slide member **115** suitably formed to allow coplanar deflection and subsequent locking with one or more mating protrusions **130** and **135**. Here, the resilient retention features **125** have been designed to deflect outward, perpendicular to the channel formed by sides **120**, for lockable engagement with a larger (mating) protrusion **130** and smaller (secondary) protrusions **135**. In this configuration, the

resilient retention features **125** deflect and engage with the mating protrusions **130** and **135** transverse to and coplanar with the channel formed between sides **120**. Consequently, forces exerted normal to the ligating slide member **115**, as may arise due to movement of an archwire retained within the archwire slot **110**, are not likely to affect the retention of the archwire within the archwire slot **110**. Thus, the self-ligating orthodontic bracket **100** more securely retains an archwire than other bracket designs.

[0017] Also shown in **Fig. 1**, the bracket **100** may include orthodontic tool features such as the recess **140** on the top area of the bracket and the recess **145** on the ligating slide member **115**. Such features may improve the ease of use of the bracket **100**. For instance, an orthodontic tool such as an explorer or scaler may be used with the recess **145** to open or close the ligating slide member **115** to expose or cover the archwire slot **110**. Likewise, pliers or another orthodontic tool may be used with the recesses **140** and **145** to close the ligating slide member **115**. Further, the recesses **140** and **145**, in combination with the protrusion **130** and other visual aspects of the bracket **100**, provide a centerline for the bracket **100** useful to aid the orthodontist in the placement of the bracket **100** upon the patient's tooth.

[0018] The bracket **100** preferably includes rounded edges, chamfered archwire slot ends **150**, and an overall convex shape to improve comfort for the patient wearing the orthodontic appliance. As shown and as will be depicted in many of the illustrations herein, the ligating slide member **115**, the channel formed by sides **120**, and other features which may define the outer surfaces of the bracket **100** opposite the mounting base **105**, preferably follow a convex shape to improve patient comfort and minimize the overall side profile or outward dimension of the bracket **100** from the bonding surface of the mounting base **105**.

[0019] **Fig. 2** illustrates an exemplary frontal view of a self-ligating orthodontic bracket **200** placed upon a tooth **205** and engaged with an archwire **210**. The bracket **200** is shown mounted to the labial surface of an upper anterior tooth **205** (one of the upper centrals, laterals, or cuspids). However, the bracket **200** may also be mounted to the lingual surface of a tooth **205**, and the tooth **205** may comprise any tooth such as one of the upper or lower centrals, laterals, cuspids, bicuspid, molars, and so on.

- [0020] As shown, the archwire **210** is retained within the self-ligating bracket **200** and runs parallel to the occlusal surface (the cutting or incisal edge) of the tooth **205**. Other orientations may be used with the bracket **200**. However, this orientation is typical of a straight-wire (or Roth) appliance whereby crown angulation and crown inclination are engineered into the bracket **200** thereby allowing use of an archwire that is "straight" or parallel to the cutting edge of each tooth (when the teeth are positioned in correct orthodontic alignment). Crown angulation is generally the mesial-distal to gingival-occlusal orientation of the tooth and is affected by the mesial-distal orientation of the archwire slot (or slot tip). The crown angulation for the bracket **200** as shown in **Fig. 2** is perpendicular. The archwire **210** in **Fig. 2** runs along a mesial-distal line parallel to the incisal edge of tooth **205** and is oriented perpendicular to the gingival-occlusal axis (or long axis) of the clinical crown. Other non-perpendicular crown angulations may be engineered into the bracket **200** resulting in a bracket **200** with a rhomboid or parallelogram frontal profile instead of the rectangular frontal profile depicted in **Fig. 2**.
- 15 [0021] Crown inclination is generally the labial-lingual to gingival-occlusal orientation of the tooth and is affected by the rotational orientation of the archwire slot (or slot torque) along the mesial-distal (or archwire) axis. The rotational orientation of the archwire slot will be discussed in greater detail below in the context of axial or sectional views of the bracket along the mesial-distal axis.
- 20 [0022] Whereas a straight-wire appliance typically includes individually engineered brackets with each bracket having the desired crown inclination (slot torque) and crown angulation (slot tip) for a particular tooth, other techniques may be used which require different orientations. For example, a standard edgewise appliance typically includes brackets having a rectangular profile and an orientation such that the centerline of the bracket is aligned along the gingival-occlusal axis (or long axis) of the clinical crown and perpendicular with the archwire slot. Typically, the brackets in a standard edgewise appliance have archwire slots that are not parallel to the incisal edges of the teeth (when the teeth are positioned in correct orthodontic alignment). Instead, the archwire is angled, bent, and twisted to define the desired position of the teeth.
- 25

[0023] Still referring to **Fig. 2**, the mounting base **215** of the bracket **200** may be sized to fit the particular tooth surface **205**. For example, the mounting base **215** may be wider at the incisal end of the tooth **205** to match the shape of the tooth surface. The bracket **200** may be bonded to the surface of tooth **205**, or, alternatively, to a band assembly (not shown) which is attached to the tooth **205**. As shown, the bracket **200** is oriented so that the ligating slide member **220** slideably opens in the gingival direction and closes in the occlusal direction. However, the bracket may be oppositely oriented so that the ligating slide member **220** slideably opens in the occlusal direction and closes in the gingival direction. The ligating slide member **220** is shown in a closed position for retaining the archwire **210**.

[0024] As in **Fig. 1**, the ligating slide member **220** may slide within a channel formed between sides **225** and oriented transverse to the archwire slot. The ligating slide member **220** preferably includes one or more coplanar resilient retention features (or mechanism) **230** for holding the ligating slide member **220** in a closed position thereby retaining the archwire **210**. The one or more coplanar resilient retention features **230** may comprise resilient portions of the ligating slide member **220** suitably formed to allow coplanar deflection and subsequent locking with one or more mating protrusions **235** and **240**. Here, the resilient retention features **230** have been designed to deflect outward in the mesial-distal direction, perpendicular to the (gingival-occlusal) channel formed by sides **225**, for lockable engagement with a larger (mating) protrusion **235** and smaller (secondary) protrusions **240**. In this configuration, the resilient retention features **230** deflect and engage with the mating protrusions **235** and **240** transverse to and coplanar with the channel formed between sides **225**.

[0025] More particularly, in one embodiment, the resilient retention features **230** resemble coplanar fingers within the ligating slide member **220** which deflect outward in a mesial-distal direction around a mating protrusion **235** within the bracket **200**. As the ligating slide member **220** slides downward (in the occlusal direction), the resilient retention features **230** deflect outward and then return toward their former positions as they lock about the mating protrusion **235**. Just before the resilient retention features **230** reach their former positions a small portion of the outer ends of the resilient retention features **230**

make contact with the smaller protrusions **240** which improve the (inward and coplanar) locking forces exerted on the resilient retention features **230**.

[0026] Finally with regard to **Fig. 2**, the mating protrusion **235**, other symmetrical aspects of the bracket **200** such as the sides **225**, and the recesses **245** and **250**,

5 individually or in combination, provide a visual centerline for the bracket **200** useful to aid the orthodontist in the placement of the bracket **200** upon the tooth **205**.

[0027] Next, **Fig. 3** provides a sectional view (referenced in **Fig. 2**) of an improved orthodontic bracket **300** with active engagement protrusions **305** for actively engaging an archwire **310**, according to one embodiment of the invention. The bracket **300** is shown

10 with a ligating slide member **315** in a closed position for retaining the archwire **310** within the archwire slot **320**. The underside of the ligating slide member **315** includes one or more active engagement protrusions **305** that forcibly restrain (or actively engage) the archwire **310** when the ligating slide member **315** is closed over the archwire **310**. Active engagement of the archwire **310** within the archwire slot **320** effectively locks the archwire
15 **310** within the archwire slot **320**, thus improving mesial-distal control. With active engagement of the archwire **310** the forces exerted from the archwire **310** in the mesial-distal direction may be transmitted to the bracket **300** through the one or more active engagement protrusions **305**. For example, a bracket **300** with active engagement may be used adjacent to another bracket without active engagement for closure of a diastema.

20 [0028] Active engagement of the archwire **310** (particularly a rectangular archwire, as shown) within the (rectangular) archwire slot **320** also permits improved control of crown inclination. With the archwire **310** locked into the archwire slot **320**, twists along the archwire **310** may be transmitted to the bracket **300** through the one or more active engagement protrusions **305** as well as contacts between the lengthwise edges of the
25 rectangular archwire **310** and the surfaces of the correspondingly rectangular archwire slot **320**. As previously mentioned, crown inclination is generally the labial-lingual to gingival-occlusal orientation of the tooth and is affected by the rotational orientation of the archwire slot **320** (or slot torque) along the mesial-distal (or archwire) axis. **Fig. 3** shows an axial (or sectional) view of the bracket **300** along the mesial-distal axis. Here, the archwire slot **320**
30 is shown angled (or rotated) slightly such that the labial-lingual sides of the archwire slot **320**

(which are normal to the ligating slide member **315**) are not perpendicular (or not normal) to the tooth surface **325**. This is a typical rotational orientation for the archwire slot used in a straight-wire appliance where slot torque is engineered into the bracket. A standard edgewise appliance, in contrast, typically includes an archwire slot with sides perpendicular to the mounting surface of the tooth.

[0029] In addition to the one or more active engagement protrusions **305** which may be formed upon the underside of the ligating slide member **315**, one or more slide member stops **330** may be formed upon the underside of the ligating slide member **315** for preventing the ligating slide member **315** from sliding beyond the limits of a slide path **335** formed as a recessed area within the channel.

[0030] Other features of the bracket **300** illustrated in **Fig. 3** include the convex shape of the ligating slide member **315** and other features defining the outer most surfaces of the bracket **300**, a pair of tie wings **330** extending transverse to the archwire slot **320** (one extending in a gingival direction and the other extending in an occlusal direction), and a recessed area **335** (indicated by broken lines) corresponding to the recess **250** shown in **Fig. 2**. As previously mentioned, the convex gingival-occlusal contour of the bracket **300** improves comfort for the appliance-wearing patient. The tie wings **330** provide additional utility and flexibility for the orthodontist in applications where the use of standard elastomeric ligatures or other attachments requiring tie wings may be desired.

[0031] In one embodiment, a vertical slot **350** may be incorporated into the bracket **300**. The vertical slot **350** (indicated by broken lines) is shown oriented transverse to the archwire slot **320** in a gingival-occlusal direction and positioned between the archwire slot **320** and the mounting base of the bracket **300**. Such a vertical slot (such as vertical slot **350**) allows placement of auxiliaries in the vertical slot to facilitate tooth inclination, angulation, and rotation, if needed.

[0032] **Fig. 4** illustrates a sectional view of an improved orthodontic bracket **400** with one or more active engagement protrusions **405** and a ligating slide member **415** in a fully opened position, according to one embodiment of the invention. In the fully opened position, the one or more slide member stops **430** formed upon the underside of the ligating slide

member **415** prevents the ligating slide member **415** from sliding beyond the end of the slide path **435**.

[0033] **Fig. 5** illustrates a sectional view of an improved orthodontic bracket **500** passively engaged with an archwire **505** according to one embodiment of the invention.

5 Whereas the bracket **400** shown in **Fig. 4** represents the bracket **300** with the ligating slide member shown in a fully opened position, the bracket **500** represents a similar sectional view of a different bracket. The bracket **500** includes a ligating slide member **510** illustrated in a closed position covering the archwire **505** such that the archwire **505** is not forcibly restrained within the archwire slot **515**. Here, the archwire **505** is retained within the
10 archwire slot **515** and allowed to move within the archwire slot **515**. Hence, the bracket **500** is said to be passively engaged with the archwire **505**. As previously mentioned, a bracket **500** with passive engagement may be used for closure of a diastema. For instance, elastics may be used to urge teeth together where the brackets bonded to those teeth have freedom to move along the mesial-distal (archwire) axis.

15 [0034] Next, **Figs. 6** and **7** illustrate top and bottom views, respectively, of a ligating slide member according to one embodiment of the invention. The ligating slide member **600** comprises a convex shaped archwire slot cover with resilient retention features **605** and **610** at one end. The resilient retention features **605** and **610** may comprise different shapes from those illustrated in **Fig. 6**. However, the resilient retention features **605** and **610** are
20 preferably shaped to allow deflection transverse to and coplanar with the direction of travel of the ligating slide member **600** so as to permit deflection about one or more mating protrusion features formed within the receiving (or closing) end of the channel holding the ligating slide member **600**. As shown, the resilient retention features **605** and **610** comprise coplanar fingers formed at the locking end the ligating slide member **600**. The resilient
25 retention feature **605** is designed to deflect outward from the centerline of the ligating slide member **600** toward the outer edge **615**. Likewise but with opposite direction, the resilient retention feature **610** is designed to deflect outward from the centerline of the ligating slide member **600** toward the outer edge **620**. Both resilient retention features **605** and **610** spring back toward their former shapes prior to deflection thereby lockably retaining the
30 ligating slide member **600** in a closed position.

[0035] The underside of the ligating slide member **600** is illustrated in **Fig. 7**. The ligating slide member may include elongated protrusions **705** and **710** for actively engaging an archwire within the archwire slot of a bracket (such as bracket **300**). The ligating slide member preferably includes slide stop protrusions **715** and **720** for retaining the ligating slide member **600** in an open position, exposing the archwire slot of a bracket (such as bracket **300**).

[0036] **Fig. 8** illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket with its ligating slide member removed, according to one embodiment of the invention. The bracket body **800**, as shown, incorporates a convex gingival-occlusal contour extending from the tie wing **805** across the archwire slot **810** to the tie wing **815**. Although not shown, in one embodiment, the bracket body **800** incorporates a convex mesial-distal contour extending along the archwire slot **810**. The mounting base **820** may be contoured in either or both gingival-occlusal and mesial-distal directions to improve adhesion to a tooth surface.

[0037] The slide paths **825** and **830**, in one embodiment, are sized to receive the slide member stops **715** and **720** as well as (particularly where an active engagement ligating slide member is used) the elongated protrusions **705** and **710**. The slide paths **825** and **830** preferably extend to the other side of the archwire slot **810** to accommodate the elongated protrusions **705** and **710** when the ligating slide member is in a closed position. The larger mating protrusion **835** and smaller locking protrusions **840** may be as described previously and illustrated in **Figs. 1** and **2**.

[0038] Still referring to **Fig. 8**, relief grooves **845**, **850**, **855**, and **860** may be formed into the bracket base **800** to facilitate a coining operation to capture and retain a ligating slide member within a dovetail channel formed by crimping the channel sides **865**, **870**, **875**, and **880** inward. The relief grooves **845**, **850**, **855**, and **860** are formed lengthwise along the edges of the channel at the base of the channel sides **865**, **870**, **875**, and **880**.

[0039] **Fig. 9** illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket **900** engaged with a rectangular archwire **905** according to one embodiment of the invention. The channel sides **910**, **915**, **920**, and **925** have been crimped inward to capture a ligating

slide member **930**. The ligating slide member **930** may be lockably retained in a closed position as previously described and illustrated in **Figs. 1** and **2**.

[0040] Next, **Figs. 10** and **11** illustrate exemplary details pertaining to a channel within which a ligating slide member may be slideably retained. **Fig. 10** illustrates a ligating slide member **1000** placed within a channel, according to one embodiment of the invention. The channel comprises sides **1005**, **1010**, **1015**, and **1020** which are then crimped inward to slideably mate with the correspondingly tapered edges **1025** and **1030** of the ligating slide member **1000**. Relief grooves **1035** and **1040** may be formed lengthwise within the channel proximate to the lengthwise transition point where sides **1005**, **1010**, **1015**, and **1020** extend upward from the bracket base **1045**.

[0041] **Fig. 11** illustrates a ligating slide member **1100** placed within a channel of an improved orthodontic bracket following a coining operation for retaining the ligating slide member **1100** within the channel, according to one embodiment of the invention. As shown, the sides **1105**, **1110**, **1115**, and **1120** are crimped inward to slideably mate with the correspondingly tapered edges of the ligating slide member **1100**. The result comprises a slide-type joint (sometimes referred to as a dovetail joint or dovetail shaped joint) between the sides **1105**, **1110**, **1115**, and **1120** and the ligating slide member **1110**. The relief grooves **1135** and **1140** may be slightly reduced in size after the coining operation to crimp the sides **1105**, **1110**, **1115**, and **1120** inward. Among other benefits, the relief grooves improve the dimensional quality of the dovetail shaped channel and provide additional clearance within which the ligating slide member **1110** may slide within the channel.

[0042] As commonly practiced in orthodontic treatment, brackets may be fabricated for a particular patient by prescription. The brackets may be engineered to include the appropriate slot torque and slot tip for each individual tooth for the particular patient. For example, specifically engineered brackets may be fabricated for the upper left central, the upper left lateral, the upper left cuspid, and so forth moving distally toward the upper left molars (using Palmer's notation for designating individual teeth). Each bracket typically incorporates a particular slot torque and slot tip as well as other features as may be needed. For instance, the bracket for the upper left cuspid may include a slot tip of, perhaps, 9° and include a ball

hook for use with elastics or other features of the orthodontic appliance. Such a bracket may have the features as in **Fig. 12**.

[0043] As shown, **Fig. 12** illustrates a top view of a parallelogram version of an improved orthodontic bracket **1200** with a ball hook **1205**, according to one embodiment of the invention. The bracket **1200** includes an engineered slot tip **1210** so that the bracket parallels tooth angulation for easy placement. The ball hook **1205** is shown formed upon the mesial gingival portion of the gingival tie wing **1215**. The ligating slide member **1220** is shown oriented to open in a downward direction toward the incisal edge of the tooth (as opposed to previously illustrated brackets which were oriented to open in the gingival direction, toward the gums). The archwire **1225** and occlusal edge **1230** of the bracket **1200** are both parallel to the incisal edge of the tooth, and the centerline **1235** of the bracket **1200** aligns with the long axis of the clinical crown.

[0044] As will be appreciated, variations of the improved orthodontic bracket described herein may be apparent. For example, **Fig. 13** illustrates an isometric view of an improved orthodontic bracket **1300** with a ligating slide member **1305** in an open position, according to one embodiment of the invention. The self-ligating orthodontic bracket **1300** includes a mounting base **1310** for attachment to a tooth surface, an archwire slot **1315** formed upon the mounting base **1310** and sized for receiving an orthodontic archwire (not shown), and the ligating slide member **1305** (shown in an open position) for retaining an orthodontic archwire within the archwire slot **1315**. The ligating slide member **1305** may slide within a channel formed between sides **1320** and oriented transverse to the archwire slot **1315**. The ligating slide member **1305** preferably includes one or more coplanar resilient retention features **1325** for holding the ligating slide member **1305** in a closed position thereby retaining an orthodontic archwire within the archwire slot **1315**.

[0045] As shown in **Fig. 13**, the one or more coplanar resilient retention features (or mechanism) **1325** may comprise resilient portions of the ligating slide member **1305** suitably formed to allow coplanar deflection and subsequent locking with one or more mating indents **1330** and **1335**. Here, the resilient retention features **1325** have been designed to deflect inward, perpendicular to the channel formed by sides **1320**, for engagement with indents **1330** and **1335**. In this configuration, the resilient retention features **1325** deflect and

engage with the mating indents **1330** and **1335** transverse to and coplanar with the channel formed between sides **1320**. Consequently, forces exerted normal to the ligating slide member **1305**, as may arise due to movement of an archwire retained within the archwire slot **1315**, are not likely to affect the retention of the archwire within the archwire slot **1315**.

5 Thus, the self-ligating orthodontic bracket **1300** more securely retains an archwire than other bracket designs.

[0046] Slide stops to prevent the ligating slide member **1305** from pulling completely away from the rest of the bracket **1300** may be provided by suitably formed sides **1320** as shown in **Fig. 13** or as described and illustrated **Figs. 4, 5, 7, and 8**. Also referring back to
10 **Figs. 4, 5, 7, and 8**, the bracket **1300** may incorporate protrusions formed upon the ligating slide member **1305** and corresponding relief areas for active engagement with an archwire within archwire slot **1315**.

[0047] Although not shown, the bracket **1300** may incorporate sides **1320** that may be crimped inward as with sides **1105, 1110, 1115, and 1120** in **Fig. 11**. Further, the
15 mounting base **1310** may include an uneven or rough bonding surface **1340** as shown. As will be appreciated, many or all of the foregoing features may be incorporated in to the bracket **1300**. For instance, the bracket **1300** may include a ball hook attachment to one of the tie wings such as tie wing **1345**, a vertical slot transverse to the archwire slot **1315** and between the archwire slot **1315** and the mounting base **1310**, and a parallelogram shape as
20 in **Fig. 12**.

[0048] The improved orthodontic bracket described herein may comprise any of a wide variety of materials suitable for use in an orthodontic appliance. Such materials have commonly included plastics, ceramics, stainless steel, titanium, or other metal alloys. The bracket preferably comprises a biocompatible material with corrosion resistive properties, and
25 the bracket preferably comprises materials which may be formed into the structure shown yet maintain suitable strength characteristics for retaining commonly used orthodontic archwires or other components of an orthodontic appliance.

[0049] Nickel may be the most common metal associated with contact dermatitis in orthodontics. Recent figures suggest that perhaps 10% of patients are sensitive to nickel.

Nevertheless, nickel-containing metal alloys, such as nickel-titanium and stainless steel, are widely used in orthodontic appliances. Nickel-titanium alloys may have nickel contents above 50% and may potentially release enough nickel in the oral environment to elicit manifestations of an allergic reaction. Stainless steel has a much lower nickel content, perhaps around 8%, and, because the nickel is bound in a crystal lattice within stainless steel, the nickel may be less available to react. Consequently, stainless steel orthodontic components may be less likely to cause nickel hypersensitivity.

[0050] However, because of the remaining uncertainty regarding a particular patient's sensitivity to nickel, it may be desirable to provide nickel-free orthodontic brackets to avoid nickel hypersensitivity altogether. Therefore, the improved orthodontic bracket described herein preferably comprises a nickel-free material. In one embodiment, the bracket comprises a nickel-free cobalt-chromium alloy.

[0051] Several methods may be used to manufacture the improved orthodontic bracket described herein. For example, the bracket may be cast, machined, injection molded and so on. Injection molding of plastics may be used as may be ceramic injection molding (CIM) or metal injection molding (MIM) depending upon the materials chosen. Further, the bracket may comprise multiple assembled components. For instance, the bracket may comprise the assembly of a formed bracket body and a formed ligating slide member, the ligating slide member retained within the channel of the bracket body following a coining operation whereby the channel sides are crimped inward along the sides of the ligating slide member (forming a dovetail joint). A ball hook may be welded to the bracket assembly, and a wire mesh may be adhered to the mounting base of the bracket to improve its bonding surface.

[0052] In one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket base is formed of nickel-free cobalt chromium using a metal injection molding process whereby the ligating slide member is similarly constructed and attached using a coining operation to crimp the sides of the bracket base (bracket body). In one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket comprises a one-piece molded bracket body and a one-piece molded ligating slide member, the ligating slide member assembled to the bracket body using the aforementioned coining operation.

[0053] As described herein, the present invention provides an improved self-ligating orthodontic bracket. According to one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket may include a mounting base for attachment to a tooth surface, an archwire slot formed upon the base and sized for receiving an orthodontic archwire, a channel formed upon the base and transversely oriented to the archwire slot, and a ligating slide member slideably retained within the channel and closeable over the archwire slot for retaining the orthodontic archwire therein, wherein the ligating slide member includes at least one coplanar resilient retention mechanism for exerting retention forces coplanar with the ligating slide member for holding the ligating slide member in a closed position. In one embodiment, the improved orthodontic bracket comprises a bracket with a ligating slide member slideably retained within a dovetail shaped channel.

[0054] The terms and expressions which have been employed in the forgoing specification are used therein as terms of description and not of limitation, and there is no intention in the use of such terms and expressions of excluding equivalence of the features shown and described or portions thereof, it being recognized that the scope of the invention is defined and limited only by the claims which follow.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A self ligating orthodontic bracket comprising:
a mounting base for attachment to a tooth surface, said mounting base including a lingual tooth bonding surface and a labial outer surface interrupted by a mesio-distally oriented archwire slot and a gingival-occlusally oriented channel spanning and labially above said archwire slot, said channel defined between labially projecting sides extending from said mounting base;
a ligating slide member slideably retained in said channel between said sides and moveable along a path of travel defined by said channel between an open position where the ligating slide member allows access to the archwire slot and a closed position projecting over said archwire slot for retaining the orthodontic archwire therein, said ligating slide member and said base cooperatively having at least one resilient retention mechanism located within said channel and co-planar with said ligating slide member, said resilient retention mechanism deflecting in a direction transverse to said path of travel and exerting retention forces in a direction generally coplanar with said ligating slide member to hold said ligating slide member in said closed position.
2. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said sides include an inside surface inclined to define a dovetail shaped channel.
3. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said channel includes relief grooves formed lengthwise at a junction of said sides and said base.

4. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said ligating slide member comprises at least one engagement protrusion for engaging an orthodontic archwire received in said archwire slot.
5. The bracket of claim 1, further comprising a vertical slot transverse to said archwire slot and formed between said archwire slot and said tooth bonding surface.
6. The bracket of claim 1, comprising at least one pair of tie wings extending from said base.
7. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said ligating slide member includes one or more portions configured to deflect perpendicular to said path of travel to engage a mating protrusion extending from said bracket body.
8. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said bracket comprises an injection molded base.
9. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said resilient retention mechanism includes a slot parallel with said path of travel and a projection received in said slot, said slot and projection mating to retain said ligating slide member in said closed position.
10. The bracket of claim 1, wherein surfaces of said bracket opposite said tooth bonding surface and including said labial outer surface comprise a convex shape for improving patient comfort.
11. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said ligating slide member and said base include an interfitting groove and protrusion, said groove aligned with said path of travel and receiving said protrusion to guide said ligating slide member along said path of travel, said protrusion abutting an end of said groove to limit movement of said ligating slide

member in an opening direction and retain said ligating slide member within said channel.

12. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said ligating slide member includes a recess for slidably manipulating said ligating slide member within said channel using an orthodontic tool.

13. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said base is injection molded and said sides are crimped inward to define a dovetail shaped channel and retain said ligating slide member to said base in both said closed and open positions and during movement therebetween.

14. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said ligating slide member and said channel comprise a convex shape.

15. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said bracket includes an indent feature opposite said archwire slot from said ligating slide member when said ligating slide member is in an open position exposing said archwire slot, said indent feature for slideably manipulating said ligating slide member within said channel using an orthodontic tool.

16. The bracket of claim 1, wherein said channel extends across said archwire slot and includes major and minor channel portions on opposite sides of said archwire slot.

17. The bracket of claim 16, wherein said ligating slide member is retained in said major channel portion on one side of said archwire slot when said ligating slide member is in the open position and said ligating slide member includes a closure end configured to extend into said minor channel portion when said ligating slide member is in said closed position.

18. The bracket of claim 17, wherein said resilient retention mechanism is arranged on said closure end and said minor channel portion.

19. The bracket of claim 17, wherein said resilient retention mechanism comprises a spaced pair of resilient members defining a slot on said closure end of said ligating slide member and a protrusion in said minor channel portion and aligned with said slot, said spaced resilient members deflecting perpendicular to said path of travel to engage said protrusion to retain said ligating slide member in said closed position.

20. An improved self-ligating orthodontic bracket, comprising: a mounting base for attachment to a tooth surface; an archwire slot formed upon said base and sized for receiving an orthodontic archwire; a channel formed upon said base and transversely oriented to said archwire slot; and a ligating slide member slideably retained within said channel and moveable along a path of travel defined by said channel between a closed position projecting over said archwire slot for retaining said orthodontic archwire therein and an open position clear of said archwire slot, said base having sides defining said channel for receiving said ligating slide member with an upper portion of said sides inclined inward to form a dovetail shaped channel, said ligating slide member and said base cooperatively having at least one resilient retention mechanism resiliently deflecting in a direction transverse to said path of travel and in a plane parallel to said ligating slide member and exerting retention forces in a direction generally coplanar with said ligating slide member to hold said ligating slide member in said closed position.

21. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said channel includes relief grooves formed lengthwise along a junction of said base and said sides of said channel.

22. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said ligating slide member further comprises at least one active engagement protrusion for restrainably engaging said orthodontic archwire within said archwire slot.

23. The bracket of claim 20, wherein features of said bracket define a centerline transverse to said archwire slot and useful as a visual aid for positioning said bracket on said tooth surface.

24. The bracket of claim 20, further comprising a vertical slot defined in said base transverse to said archwire slot and formed between said archwire slot and a tooth bonding surface of said mounting base, said tooth bonding surface for bonding said bracket to said tooth surface.

25. The bracket of claim 20, further comprising at least one pair of tie wings formed upon said base transverse to said archwire slot.

26. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said ligating slide member includes one or more portions configured to deflect outwardly perpendicular to said path of travel to engage a mating protrusion extending from said bracket body.

27. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said bracket comprises an injection molded bracket body.

28. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said resilient retention mechanism includes a slot parallel with said path of travel and a projection received in said slot, said slot and projection mating to retain said ligating slide member in said closed_position.

29. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said ligating slide member includes a recess for slideably manipulating said ligating slide member within said channel using an orthodontic tool.

30. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said bracket includes an indent feature opposite said archwire slot from said ligating slide member when said ligating slide member is in an open position exposing said archwire slot, said indent feature for slideably manipulating said ligating slide member within said channel using an orthodontic tool.

31. The bracket of claim 20, wherein surfaces of said bracket opposite a tooth bonding surface of said mounting base comprise a convex shape for improving patient comfort, said tooth bonding surface for bonding said bracket to said tooth surface.

32. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said ligating slide member and said channel comprise a convex shape.

33. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said ligating slide member comprises at least one slide stop protrusion for holding said ligating slide member within said channel when said ligating slide member is in a fully open position exposing said archwire slot.

34. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said mounting base comprises a tooth bonding surface having grooves for improving adhesion to said tooth surface.

35. The bracket of claim 20, wherein said bracket comprises a one-piece injection molded bracket body having said ligating slide member slideably retained within said channel.

36. A self ligating orthodontic bracket comprising:

a mounting base for attachment to a tooth surface, said mounting base defining an archwire slot having an opening facing away from said tooth for receiving an orthodontic archwire and a channel above said archwire slot in a labial direction and generally perpendicular to and extending across said archwire slot, said channel defined between sides projecting in a labial direction from said mounting base; and

a ligating slide member retained in said channel and moveable along a path of travel between said sides from a closed position over said archwire slot where said ligating slide member retains the orthodontic archwire therein and an open position clear of said archwire slot, said ligating slide member and said mounting base cooperatively having at least one resilient retention mechanism located within said channel and aligned in parallel relation to said ligating slide member, said resilient retention mechanism including portions of said ligating slide which resiliently deflect in a direction transverse to said path of travel and parallel with said ligating slide member to exert retaining forces coplanar with said ligating slide member on a mating feature of said base, thereby holding said ligating slide member in said closed position,

wherein said ligating slide member is retained in said channel in both said closed and open positions and during movement therebetween.

37. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 36, wherein said portions of said ligating slide comprises a pair of spaced resilient members defining a space and said mating feature of said base comprises a projection received in said space and engaged by said resilient members which exert said retaining forces on said projection to retain said ligating slide member in said closed position.

38. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 37, wherein said pair of spaced resilient members are located on a leading edge of ligating slide member and said projection is located on said base.

39. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 37, wherein said pair of spaced resilient members are coplanar with said ligating slide member.

40. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 36, wherein said ligating slide member includes an underside facing a bottom surface of said channel, one of said underside or bottom surface including a protruding stop and the other of said underside or bottom surface including a groove parallel with said path of travel, said stop being received in and moving along said groove during movement of the ligating slide member between said open and closed positions.

41. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 40, wherein said groove and stop cooperate to limit movement of said ligating slide member along said path of travel in an opening direction.

42. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 36, wherein said channel includes major and minor channel portions on opposite sides of said archwire slot.

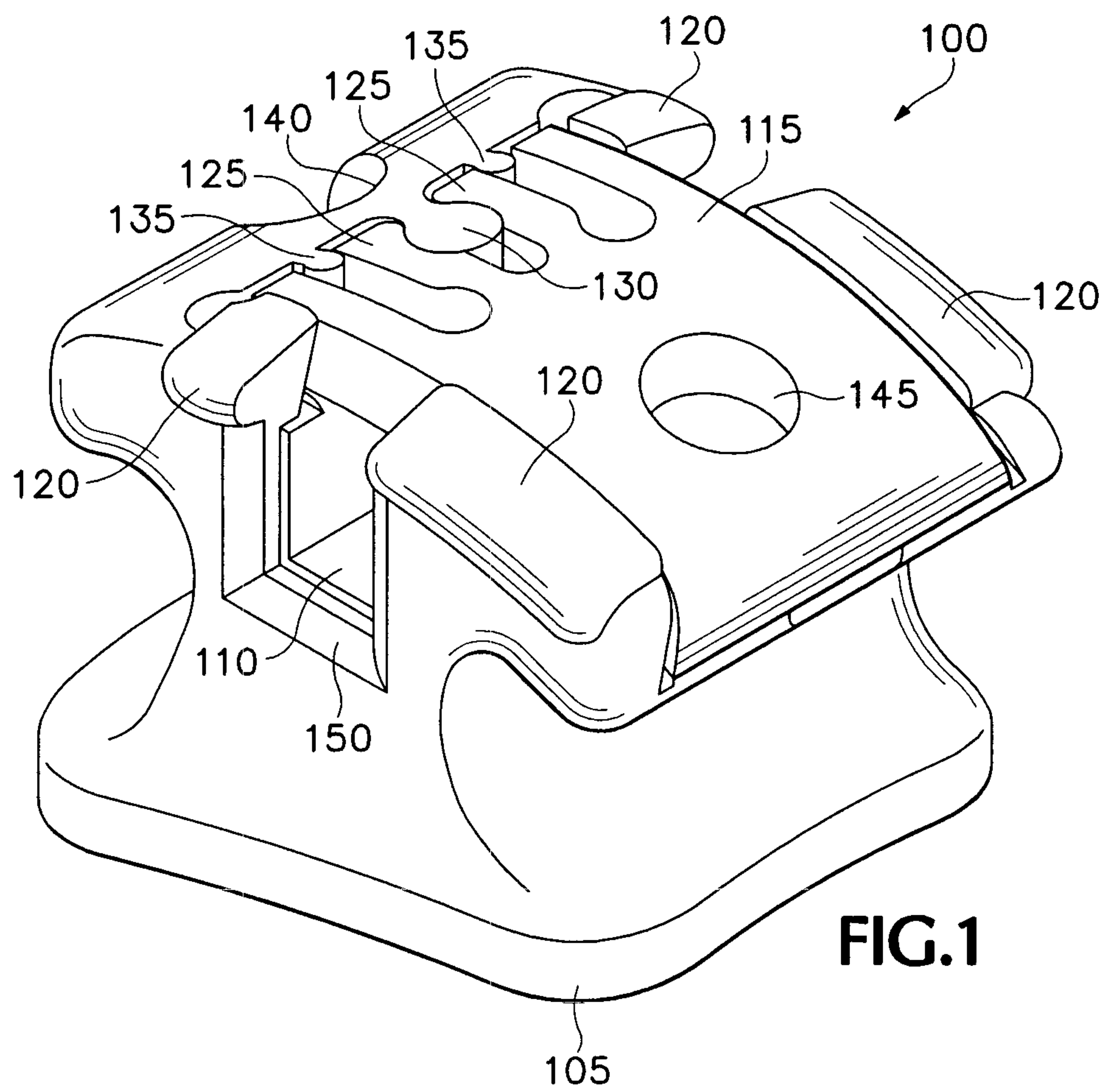
43. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 42, wherein said ligating slide member is retained in said major channel portion on one side of said archwire slot when said ligating slide member is in the open position and said ligating slide member includes a closure end configured to extend into said minor channel portion when said ligating slide member is in said closed position.

44. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 43, wherein said resilient retention mechanism is arranged on said closure end and said minor channel portion.

45. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 36, wherein an inside surface of each said side wall meets a bottom surface of said channel to form a junction, each

said inside surface extending from said junction to a top edge, said channel having a width between said inside surfaces that is greater at said junction than at said top edge.

46. The self ligating orthodontic bracket of claim 45, wherein said channel includes relief grooves formed at the junction of each side wall with said channel bottom surface.



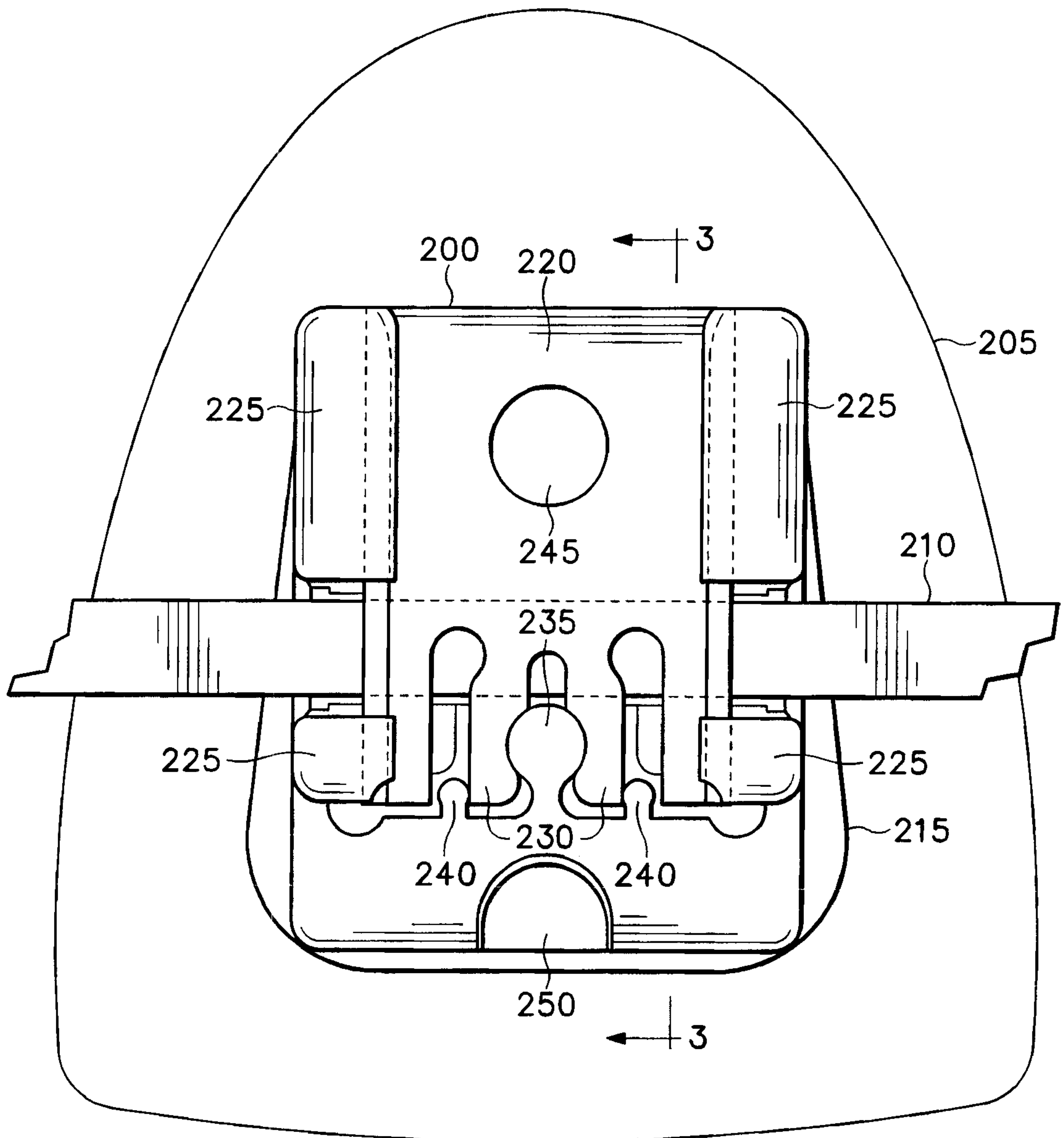


FIG.2

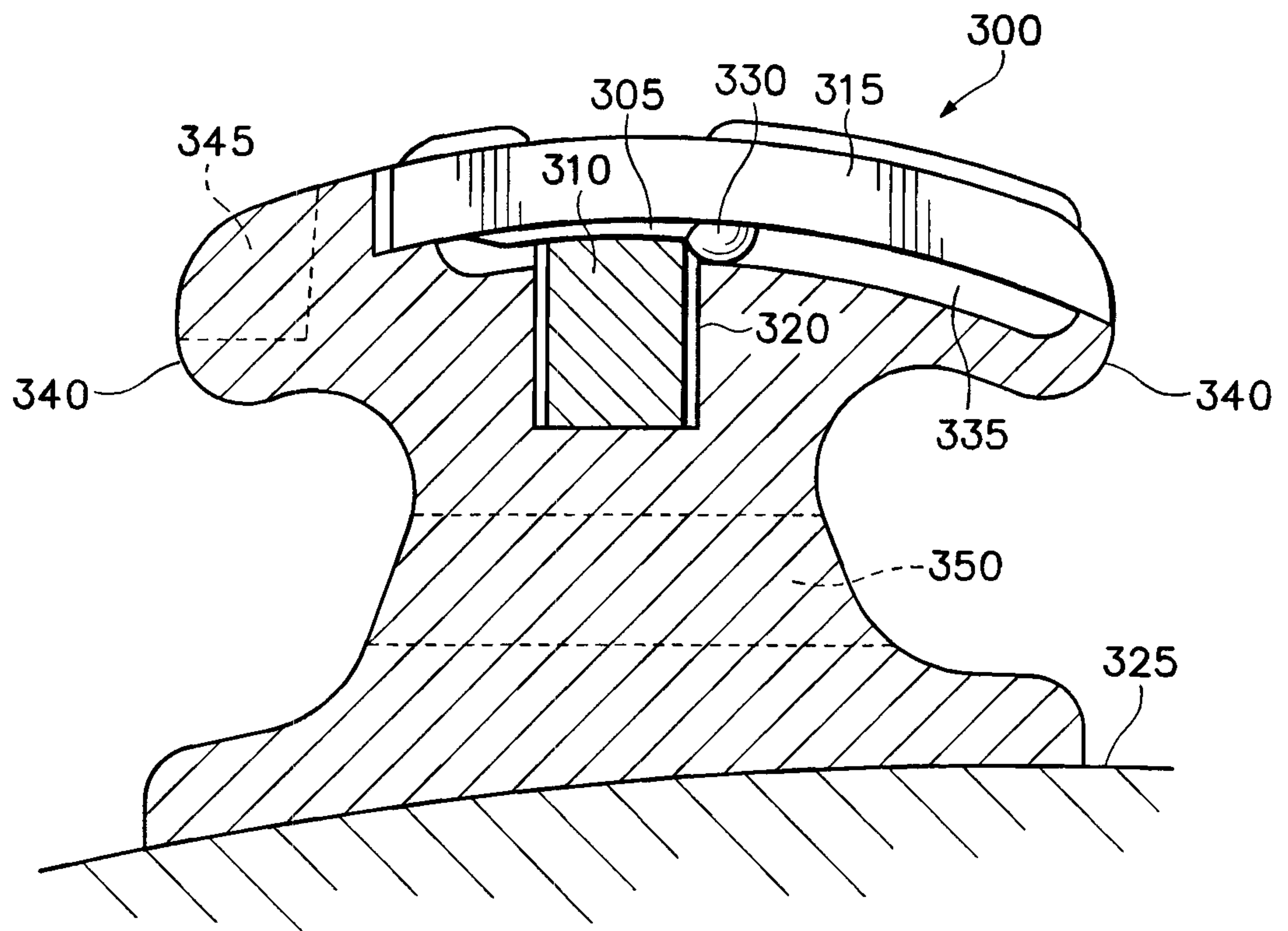


FIG.3

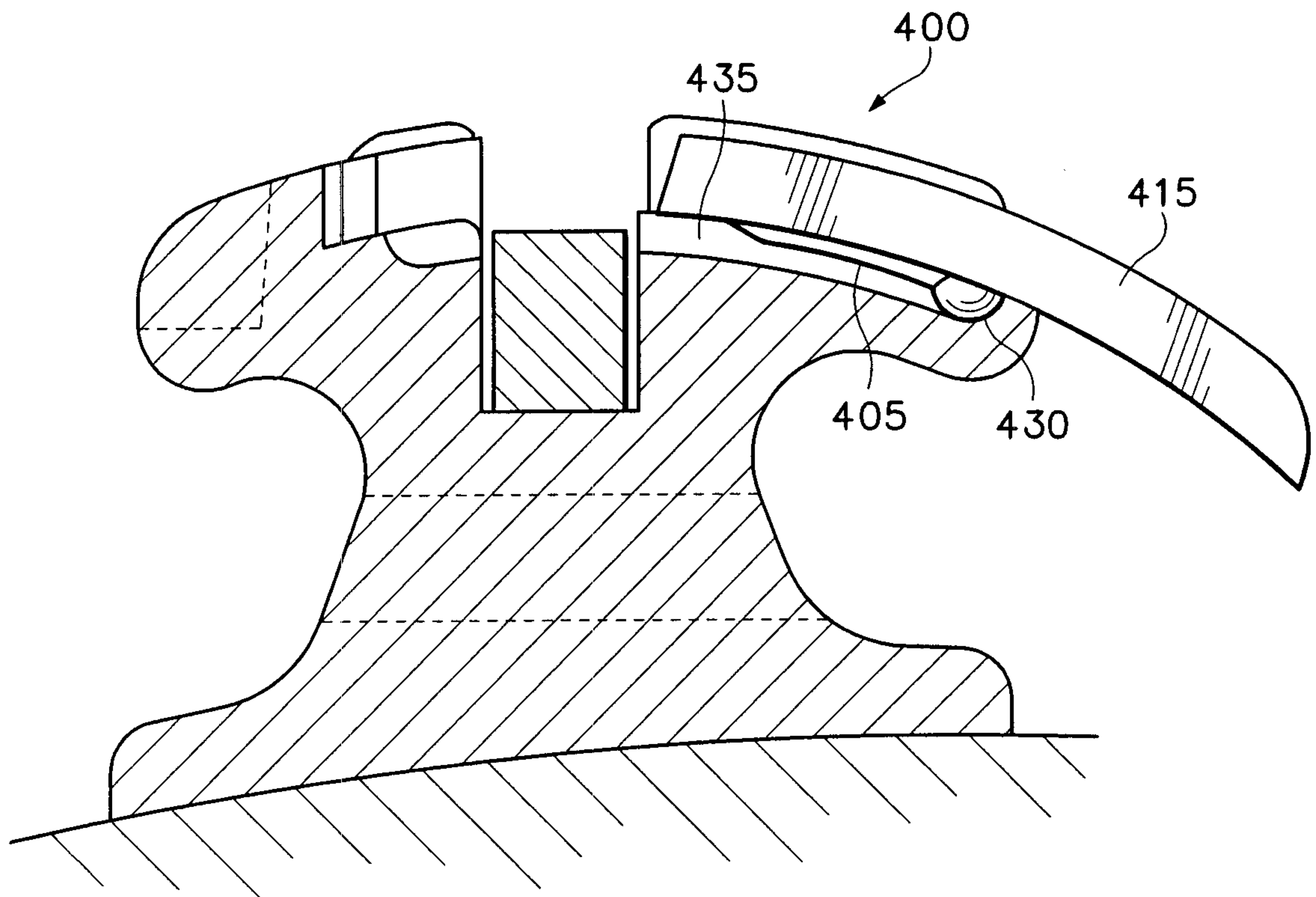


FIG. 4

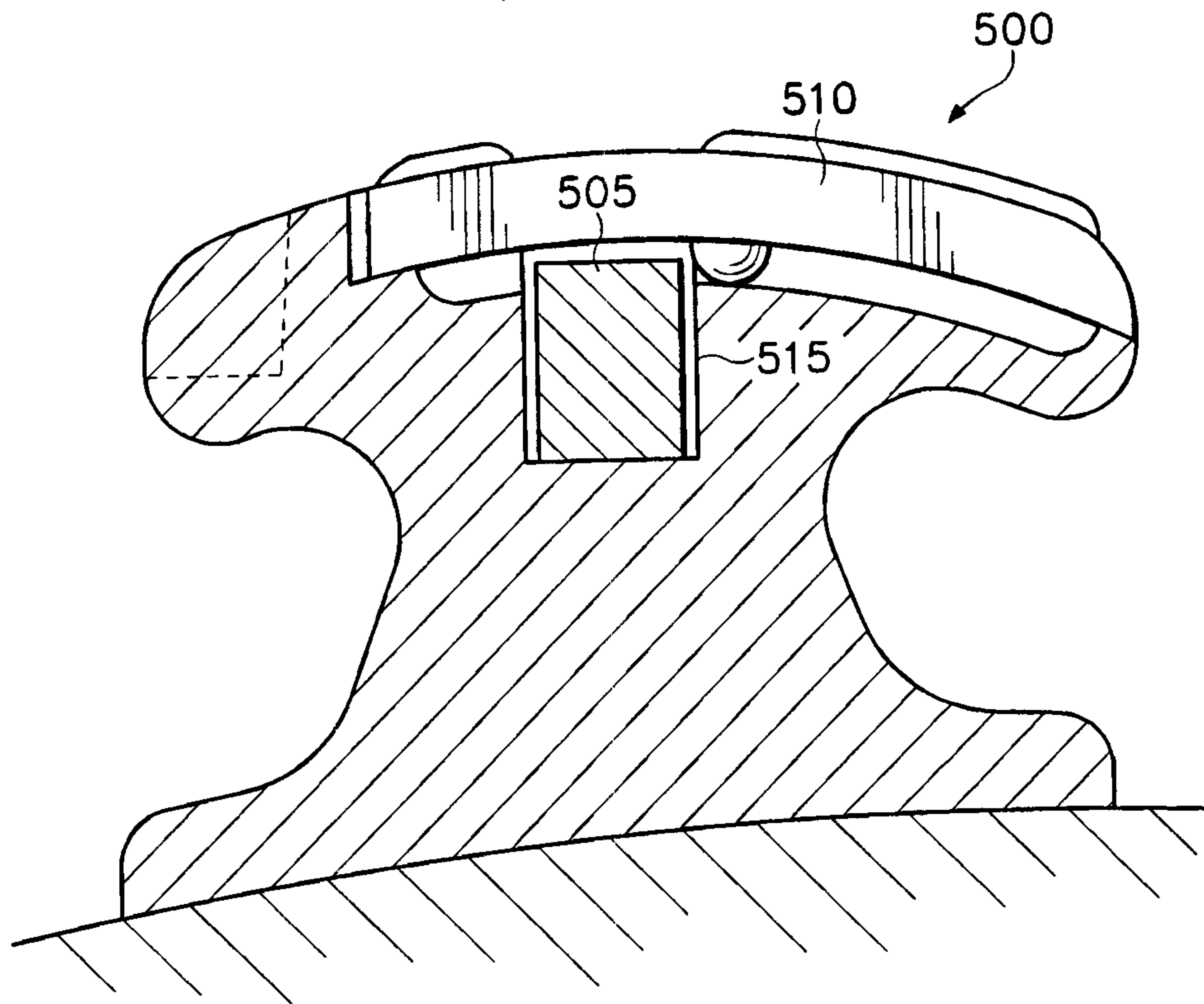
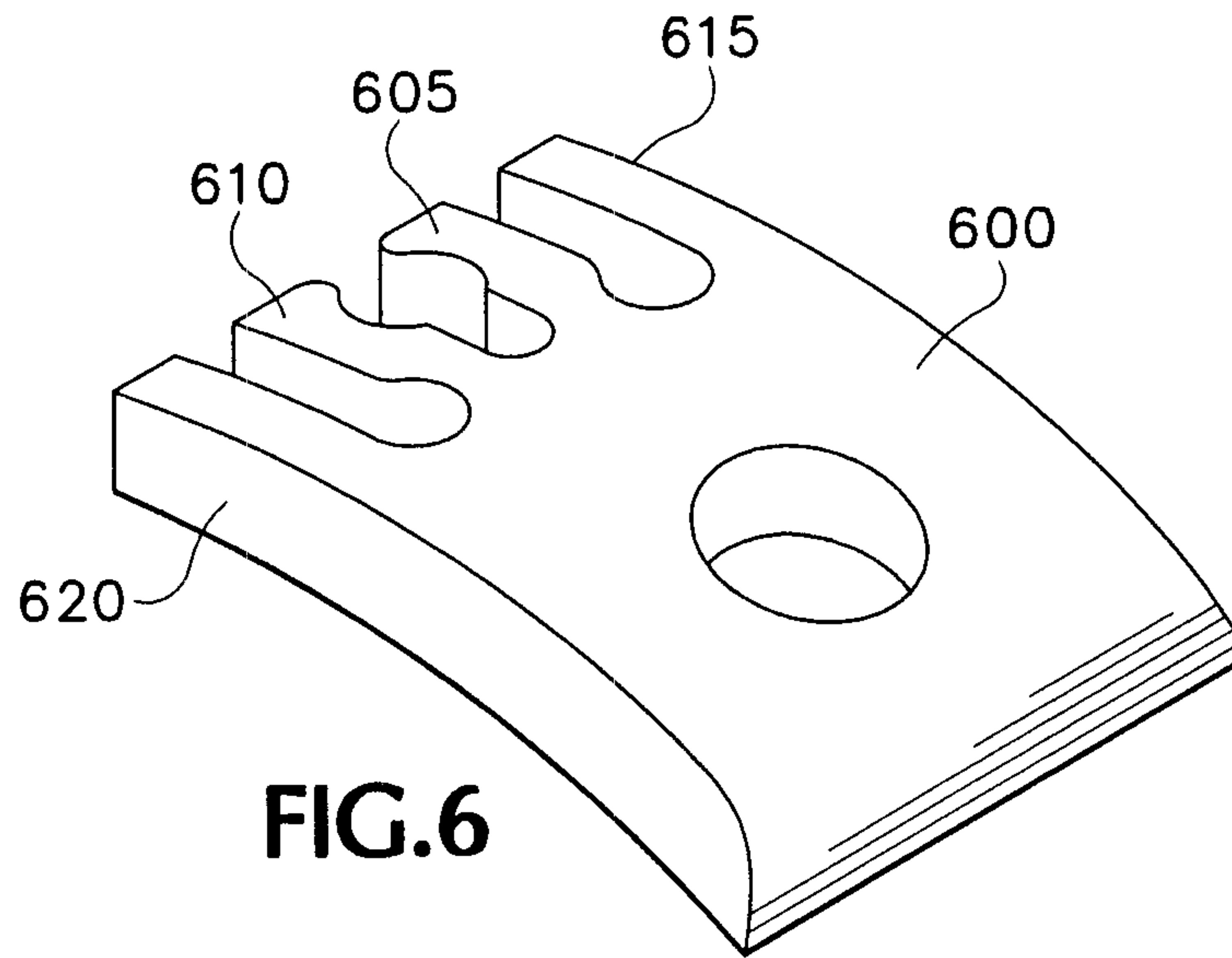
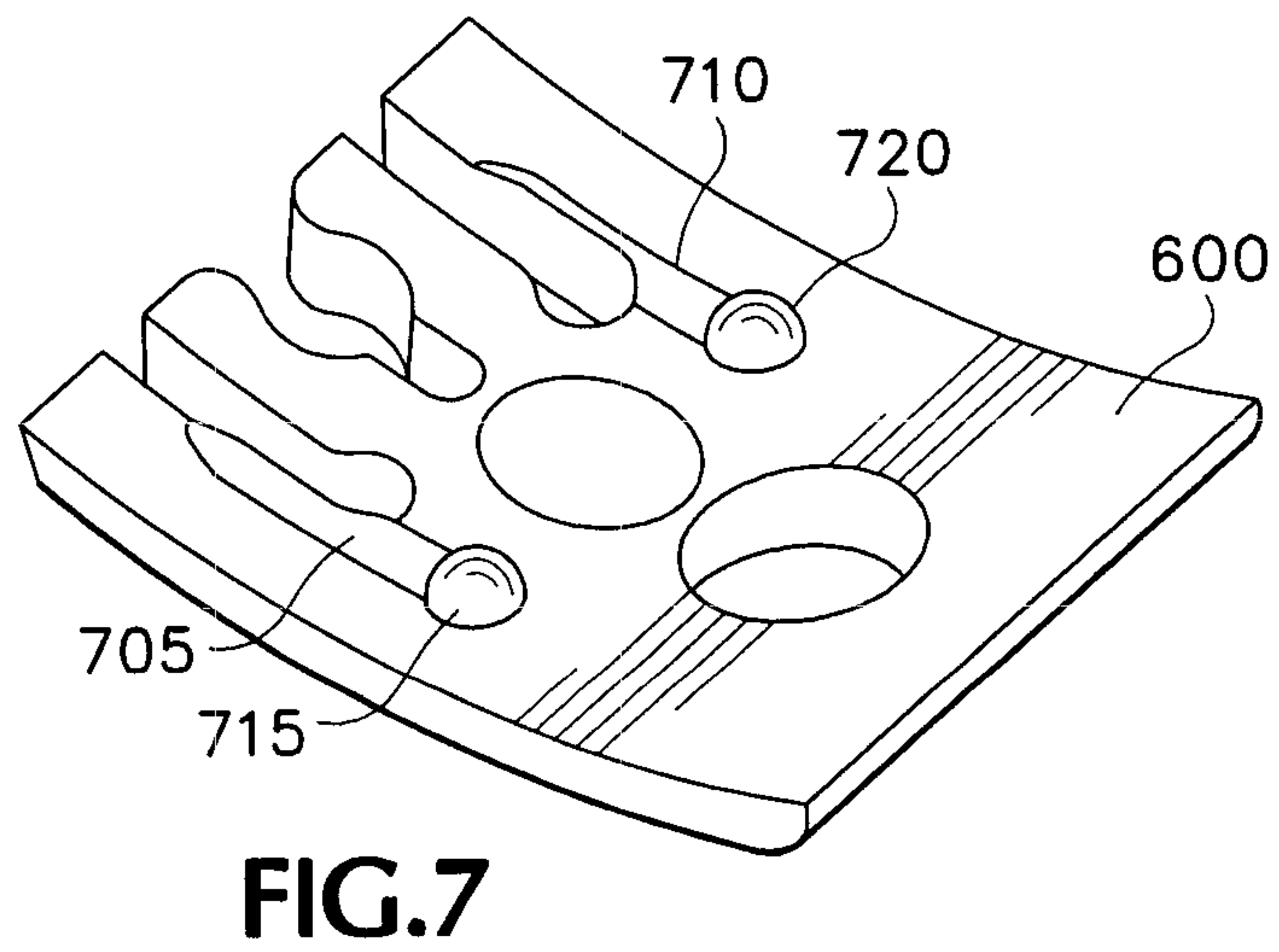
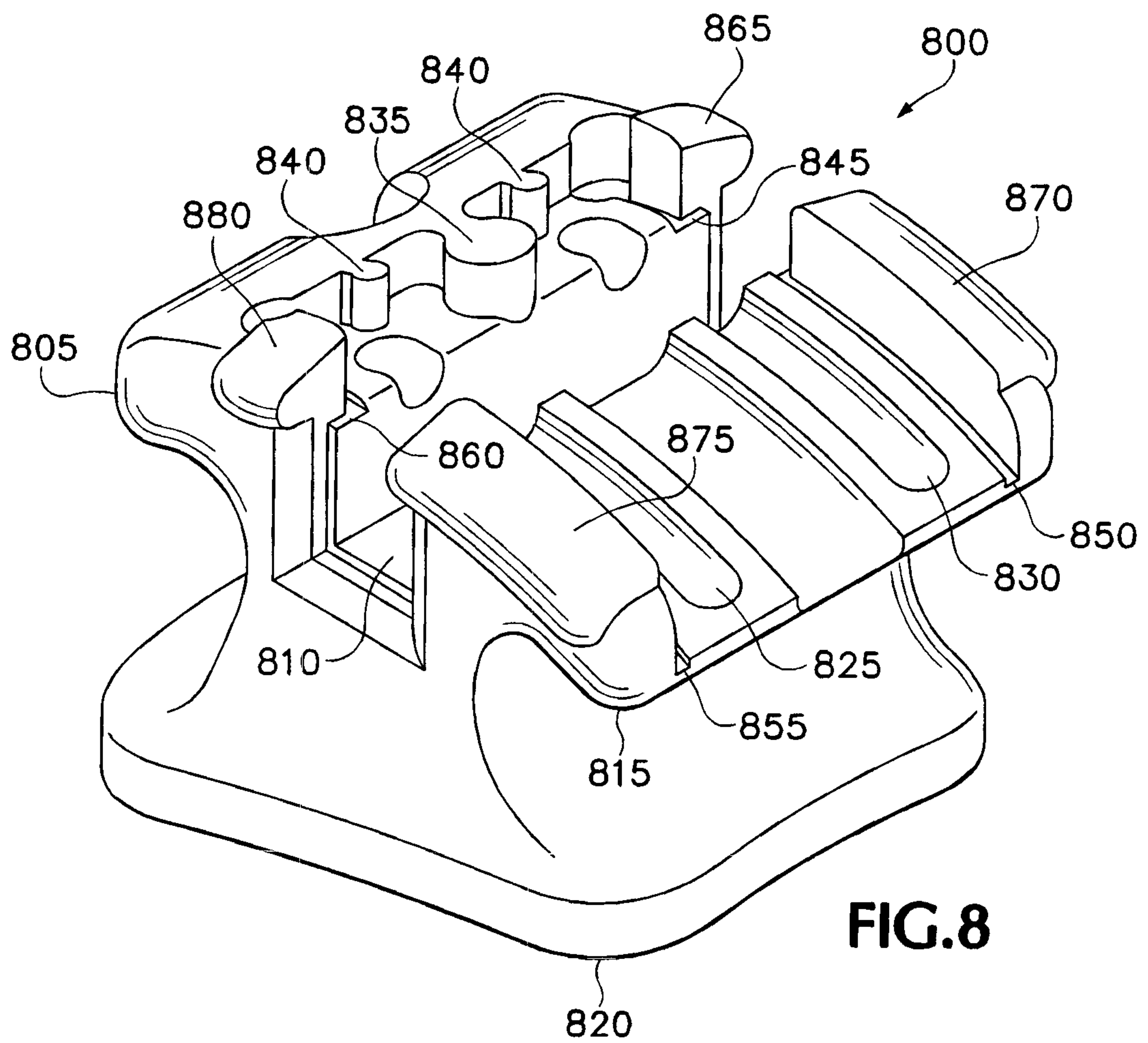
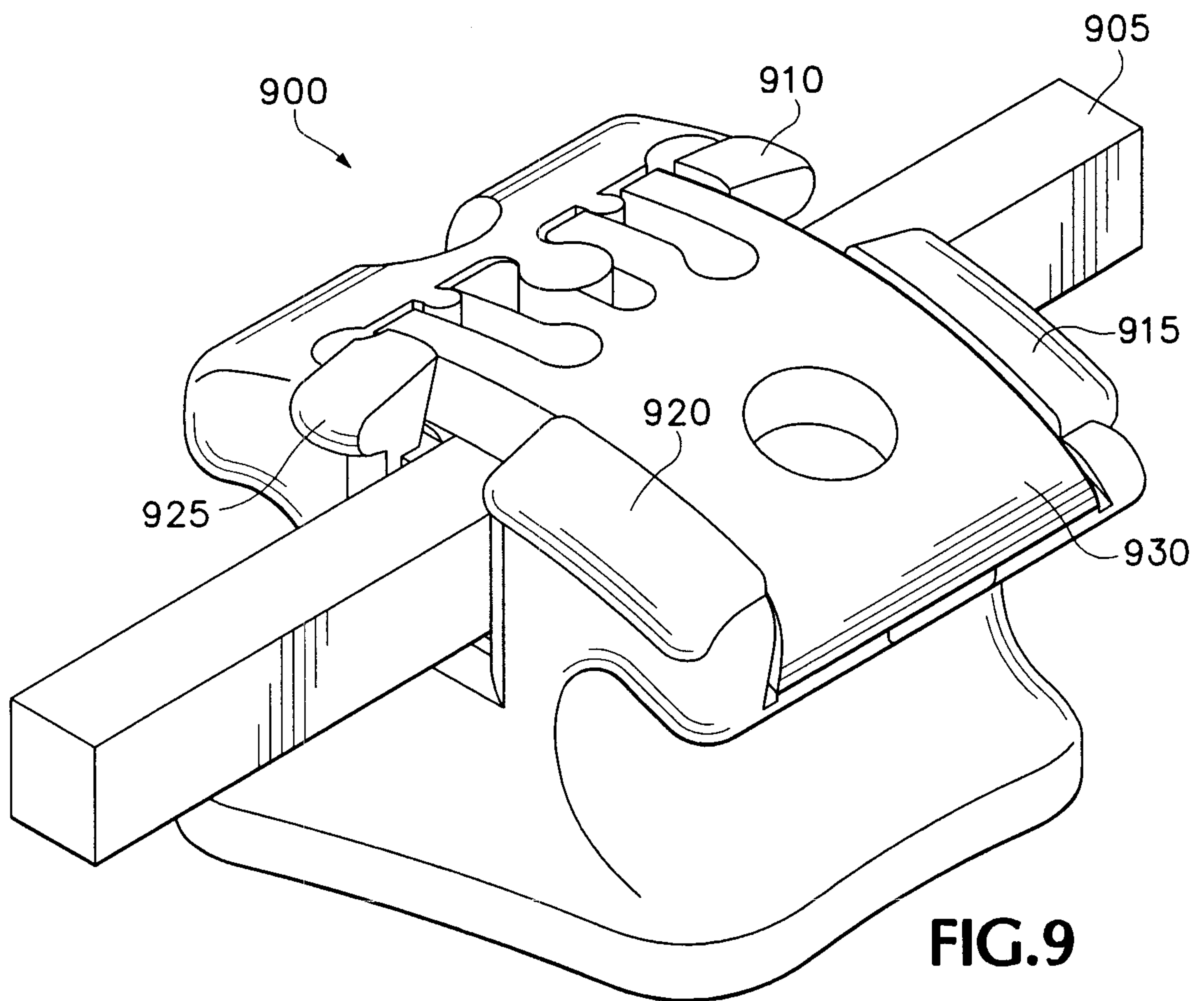
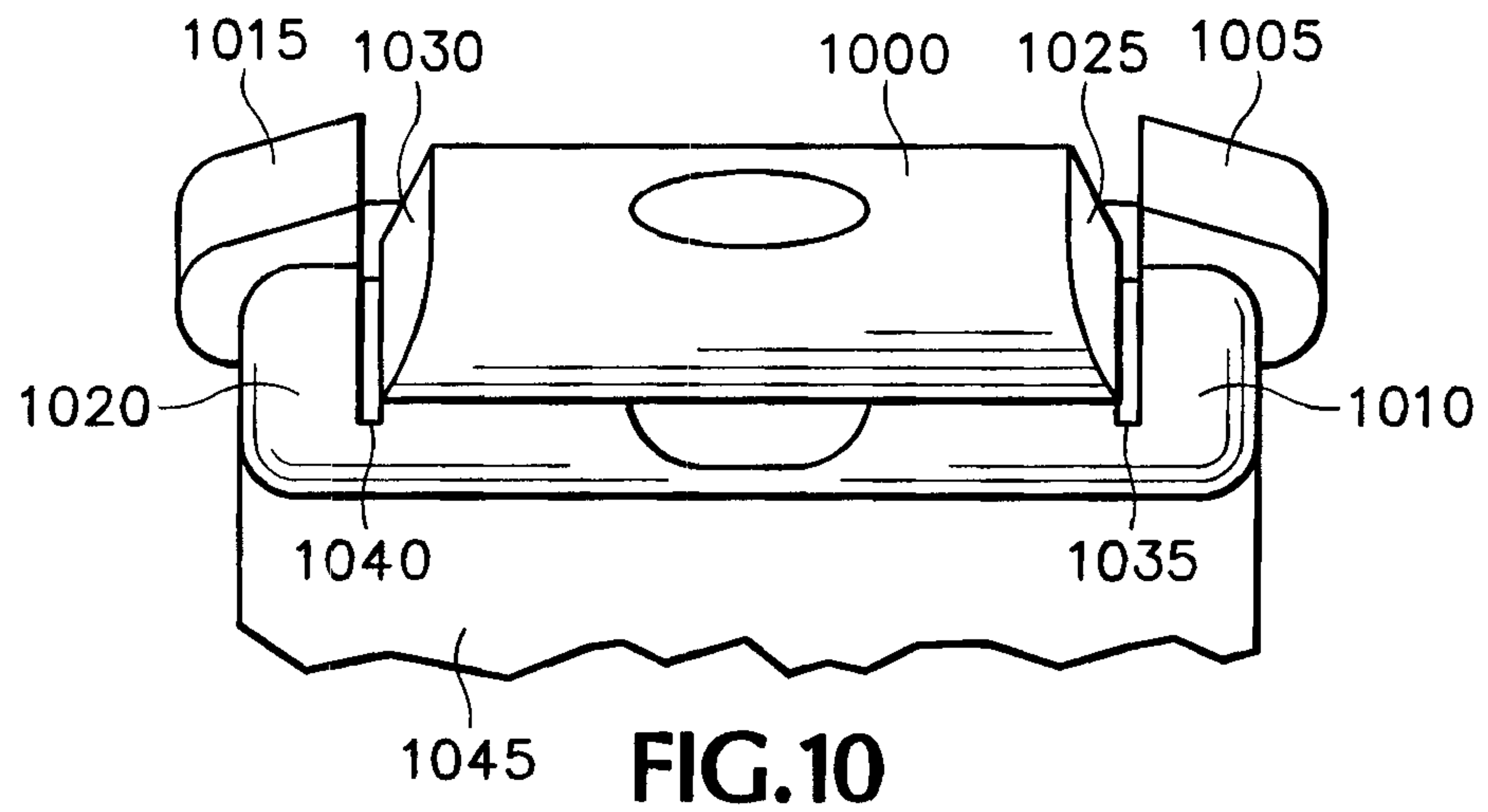
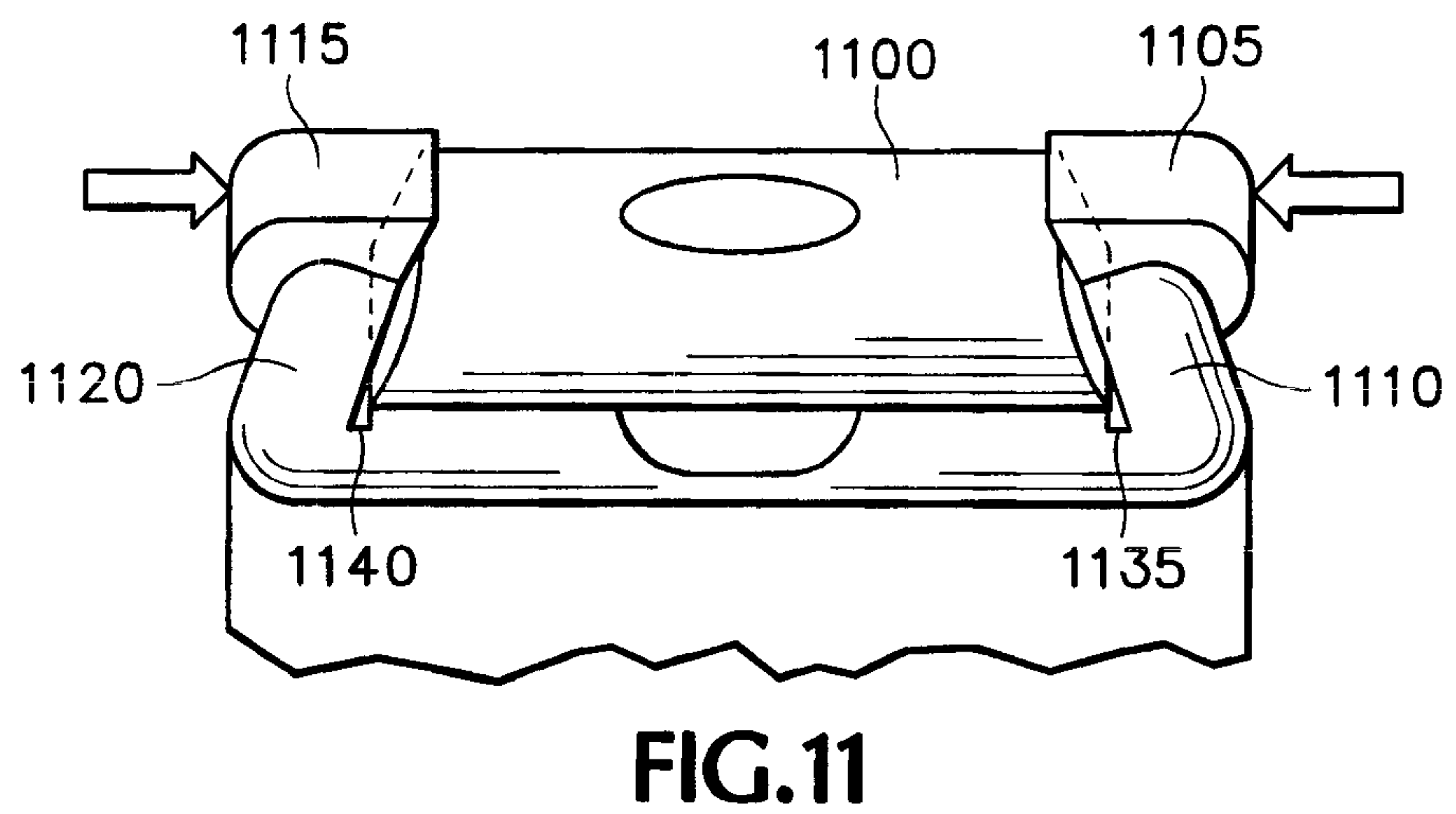


FIG.5









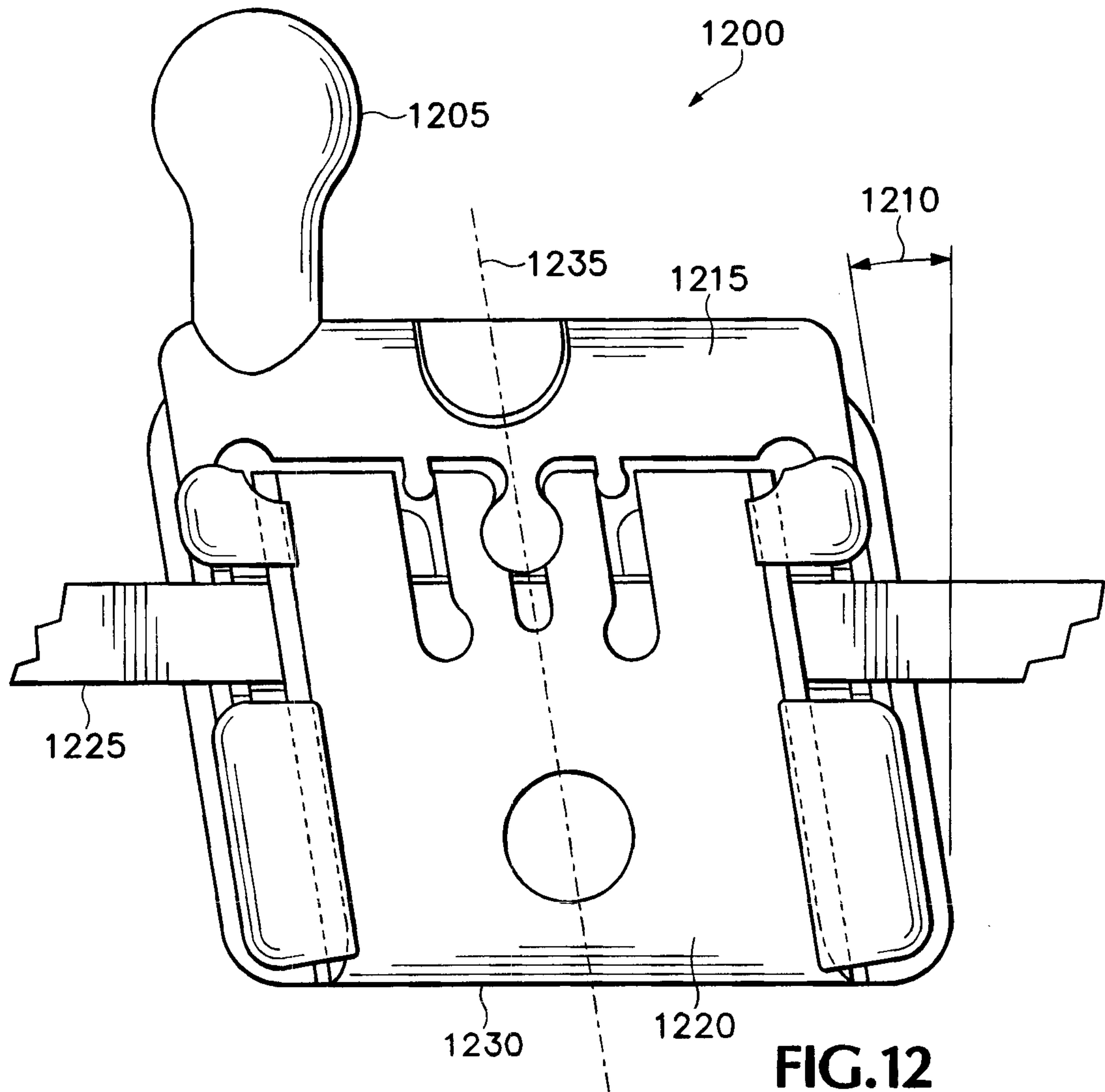


FIG.12

