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(54) LIGHT-WEIGHT UTILITY VEHICLE SEAT

(75) Inventors: **Donald S. Hanson**, Evans, GA (US); **Richard Krall**, Augusta, GA (US); **Bradley J. Hanson**, North Augusta, SC (US)

Correspondence Address:
HARNESS, DICKEY & PIERCE, P.L.C.
P.O. BOX 828
BLOOMFIELD HILLS, MI 48303 (US)

(73) Assignee: **Textron Inc.**, Providence, RI

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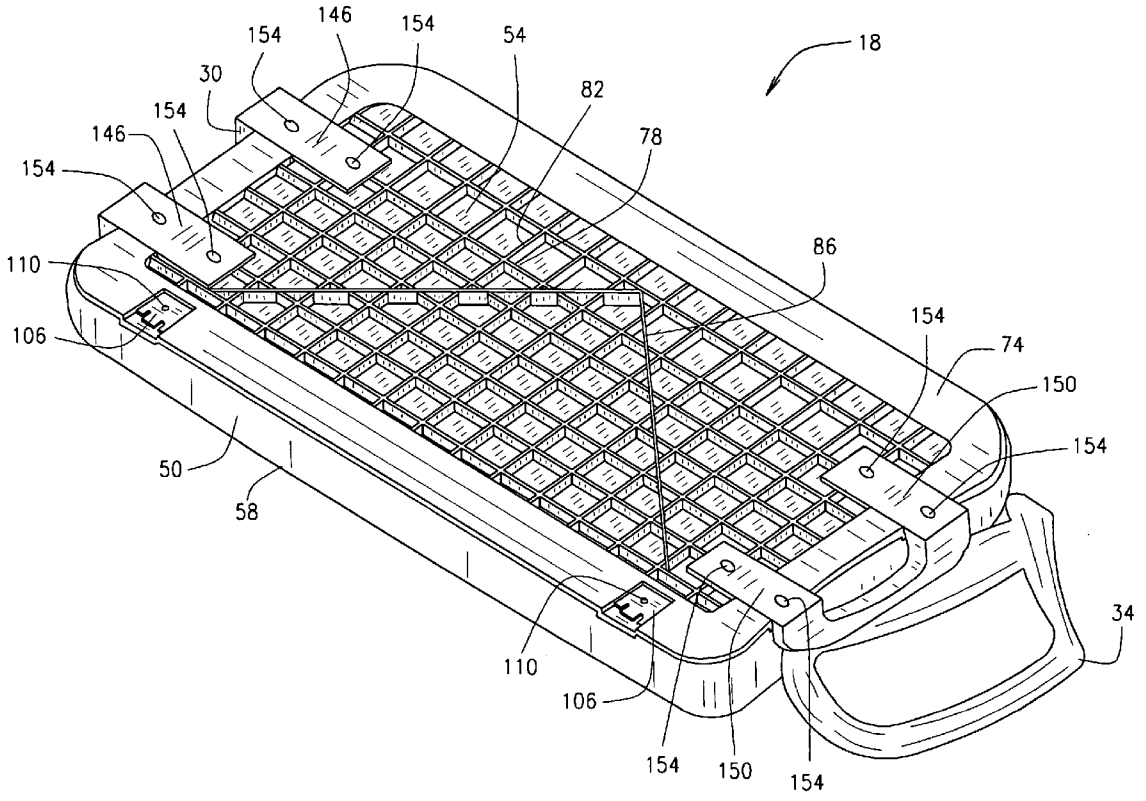
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A utility vehicle seat assembly includes a seat cushion subassembly having a plastic base that includes a substantially flat or smooth perimeter portion on an underside of the plastic base. The substantially flat perimeter is suitable for accepting fasteners. The seat cushion subassembly additionally includes, a foam cushion that is positioned on a top surface of the plastic base and a seat cushion covering that is positioned over the foam cushion. The seat cushion covering is wrapped around a circumferential edge of the plastic base and fastened to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the underside of the plastic base using a plurality of fasteners. A fastener cover is positioned over the fasteners and connected to the underside of the plastic base to conceal the fasteners and the fastened portion of the seat cushion covering.



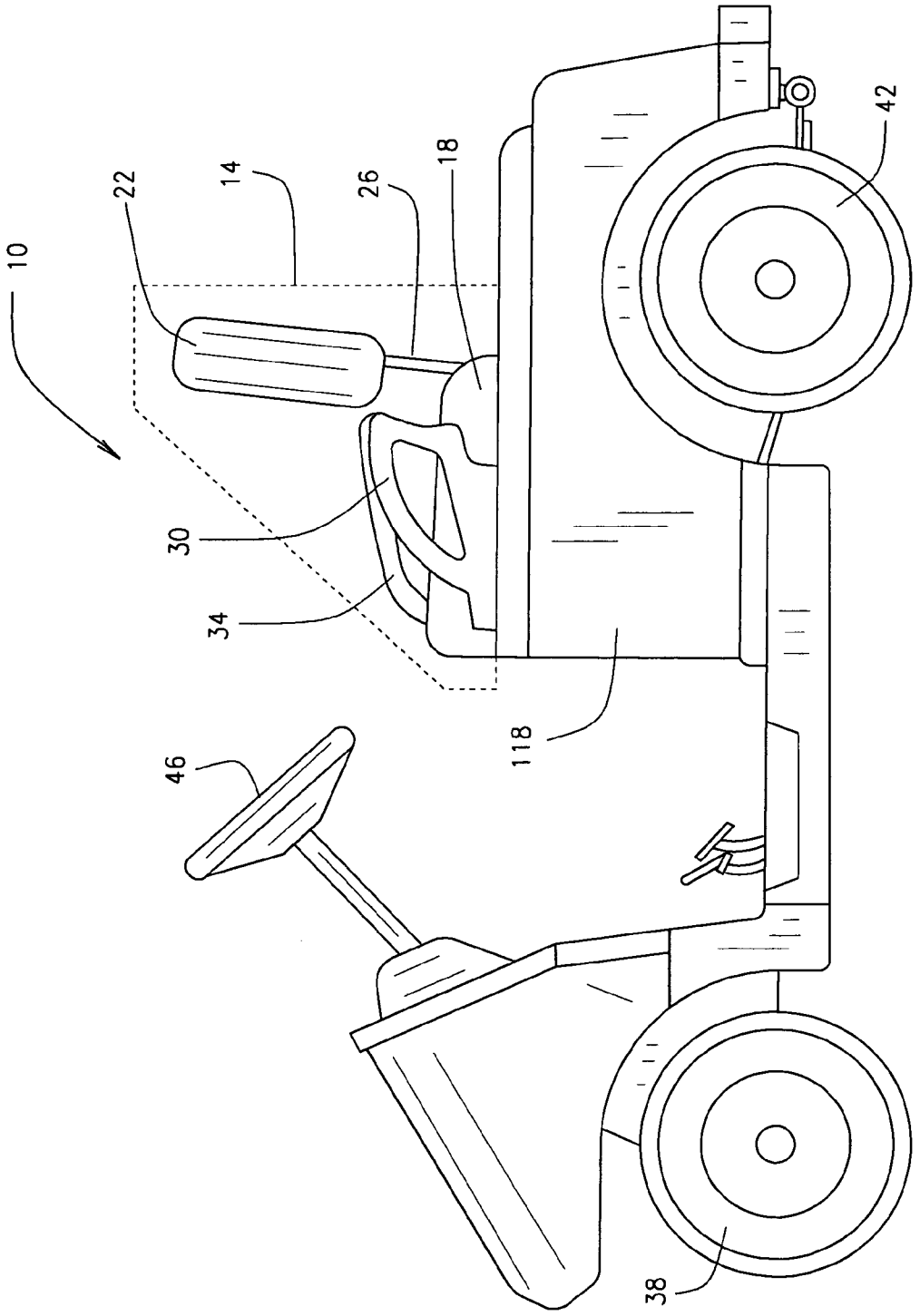


FIG. 1

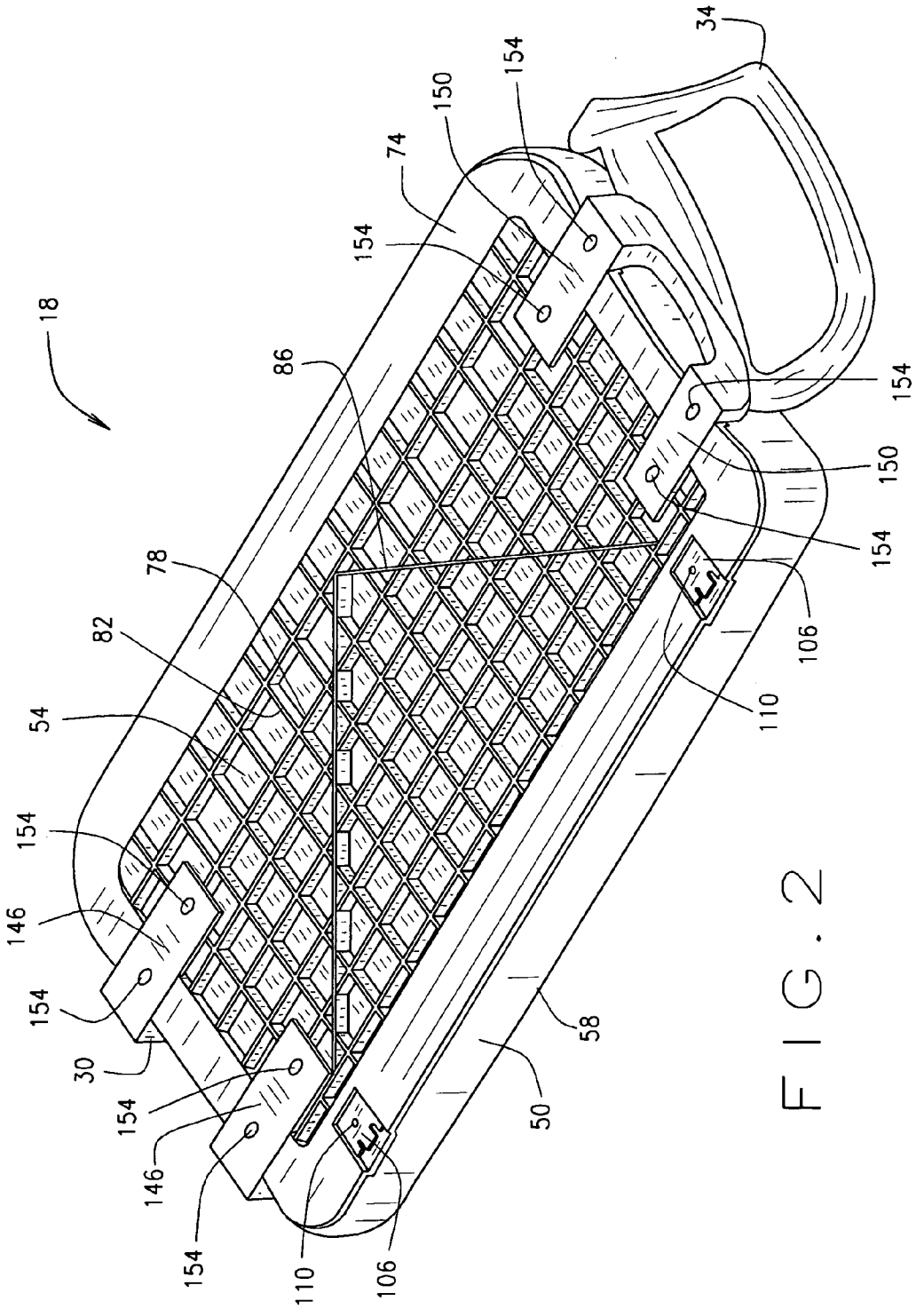

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FIG. 2

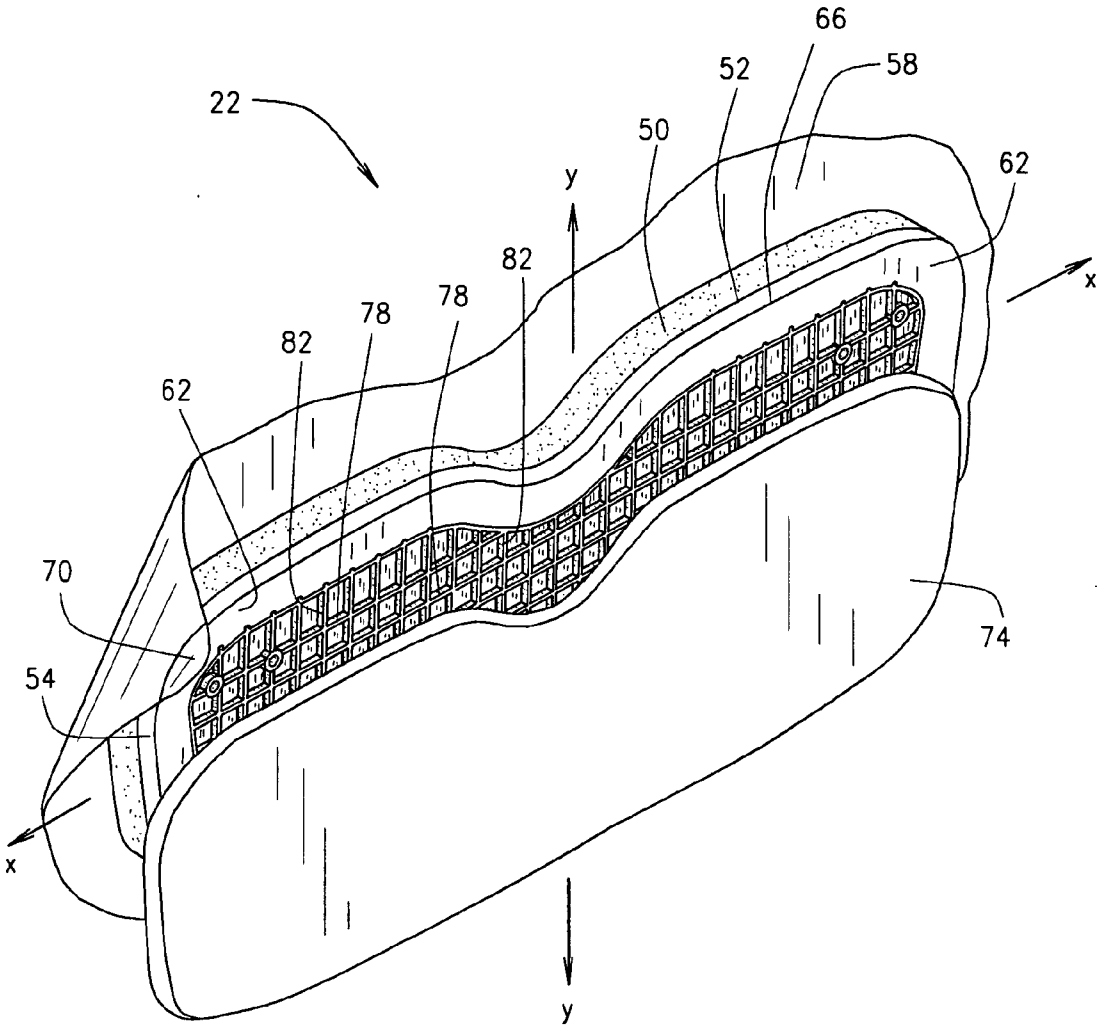

FIG. 3

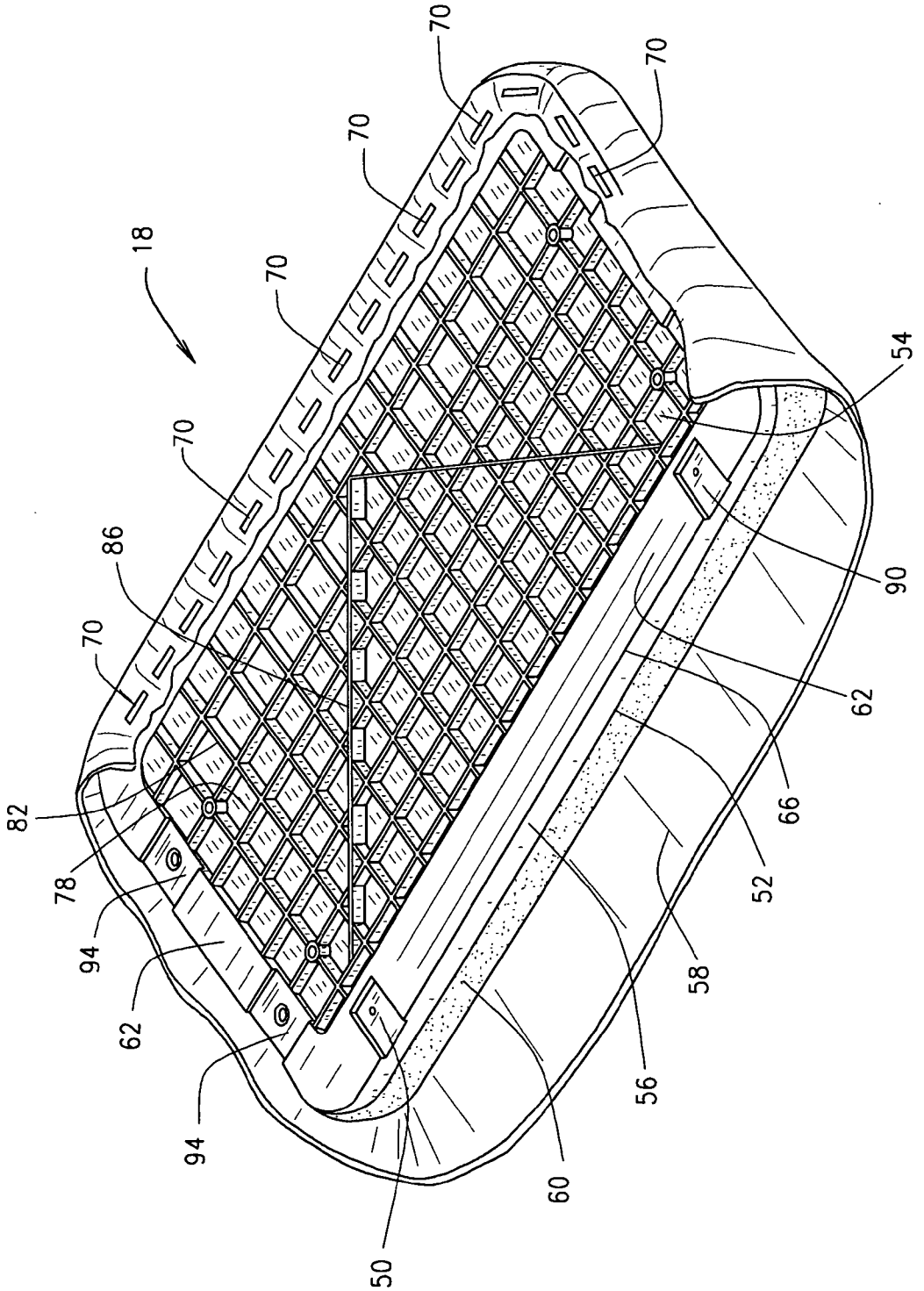

FIG. 4

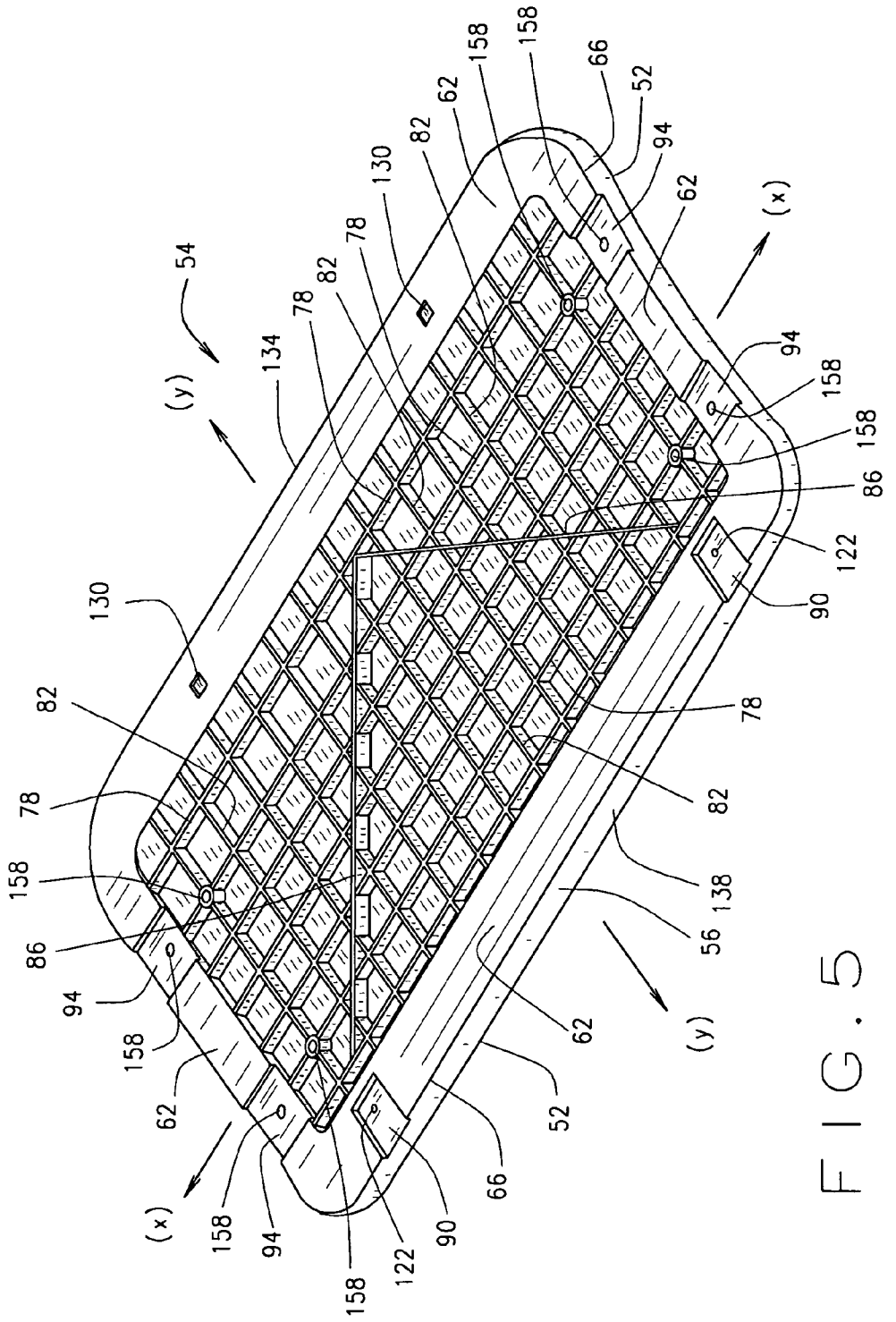

FIG. 5

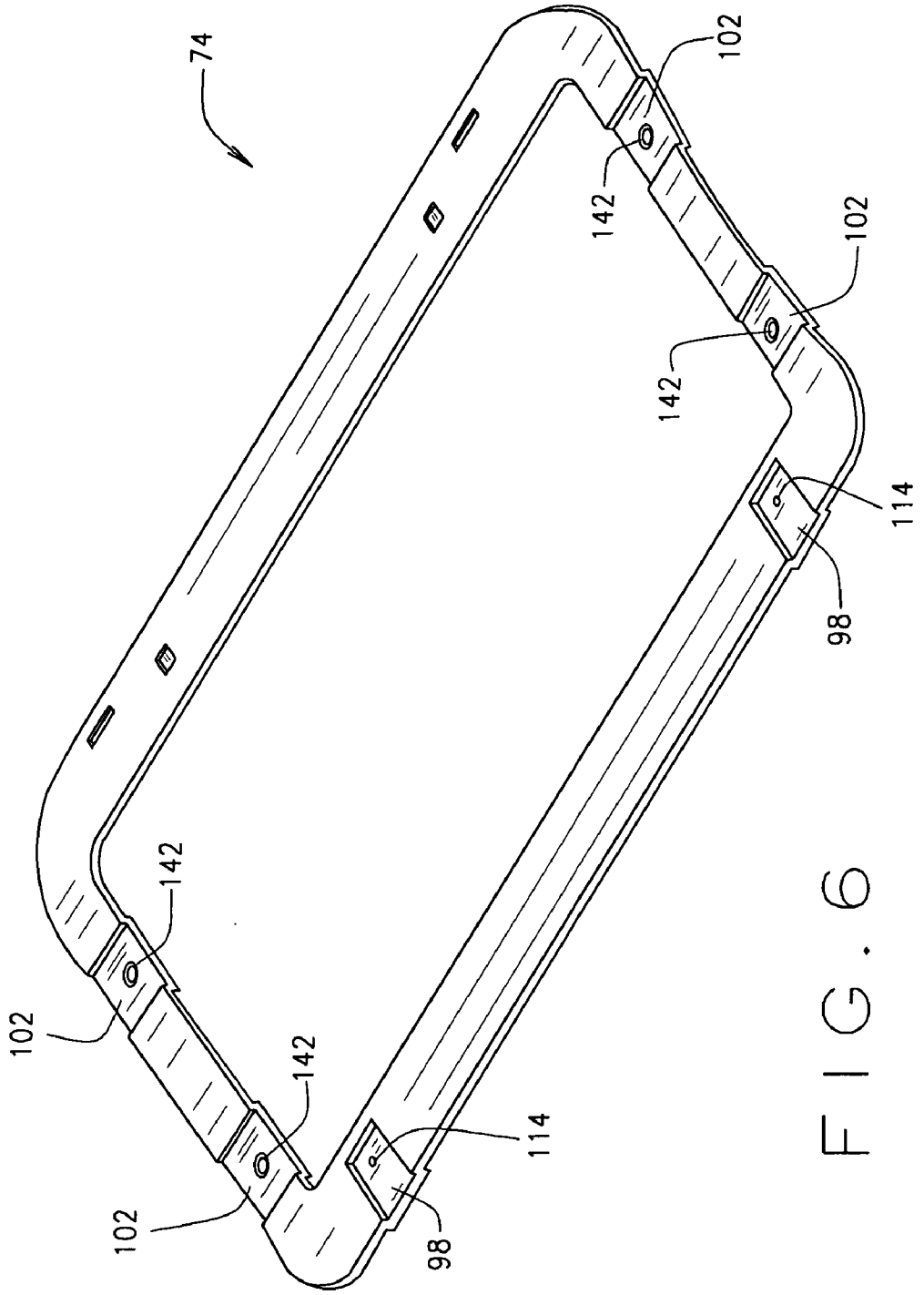

FIG. 6

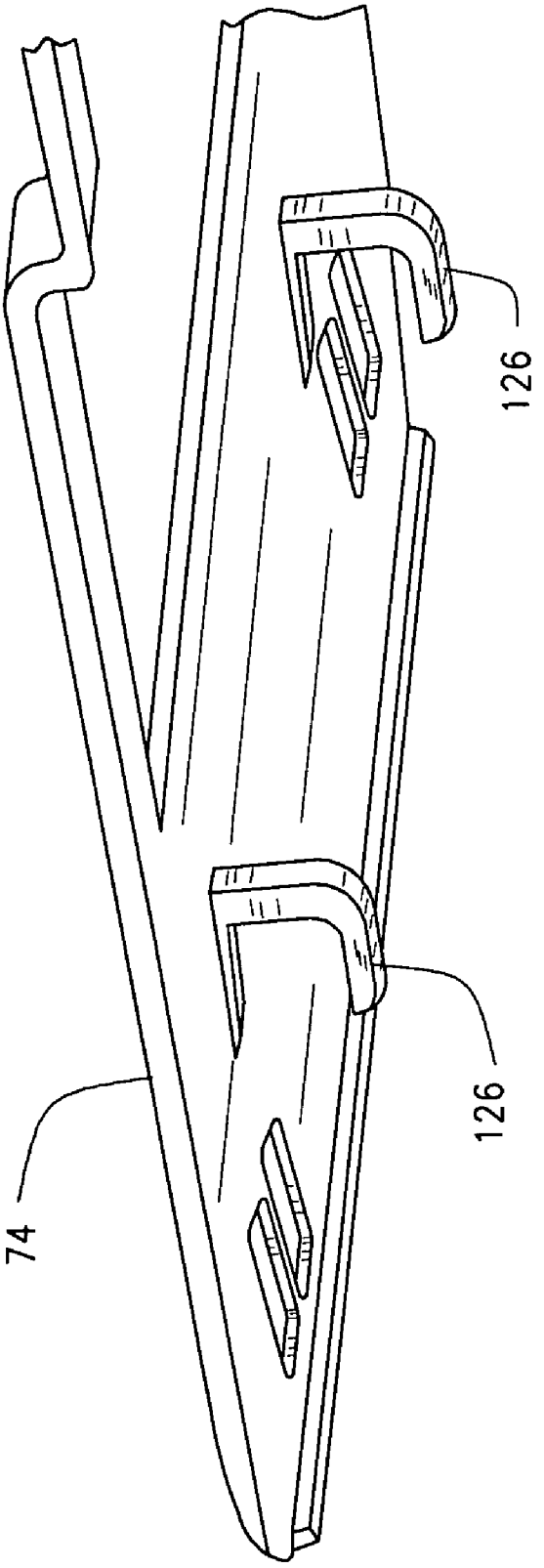

FIG. 7

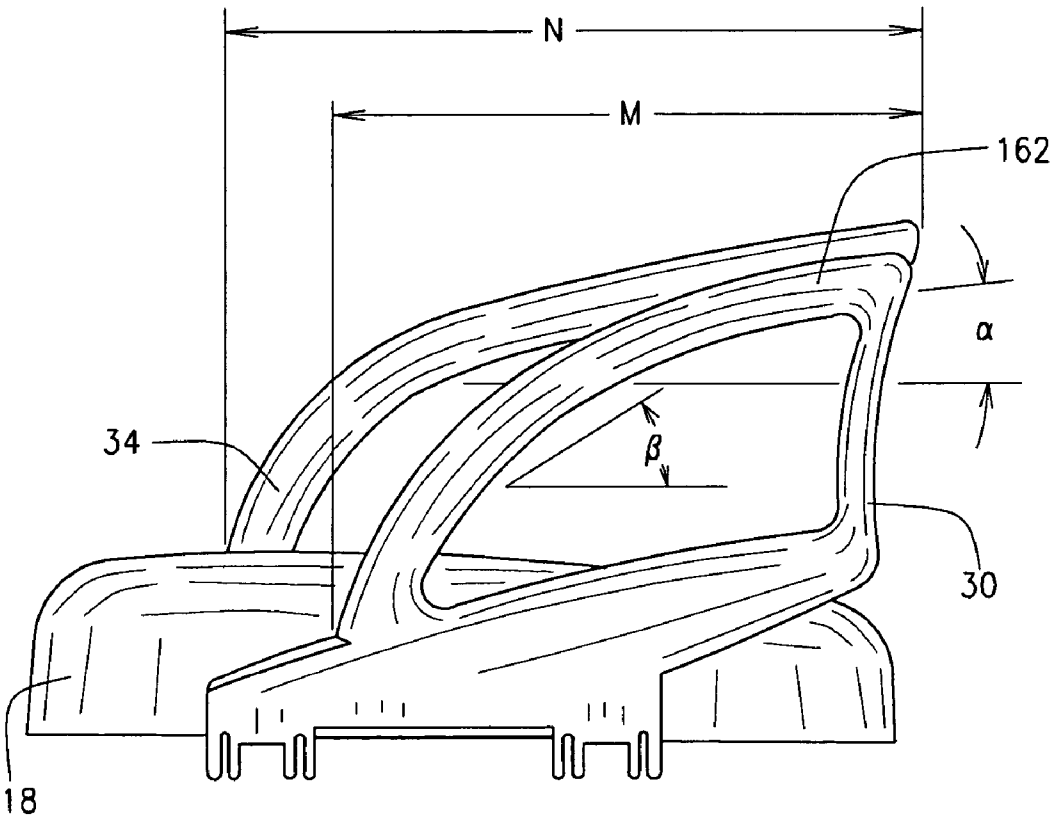

FIG. 8

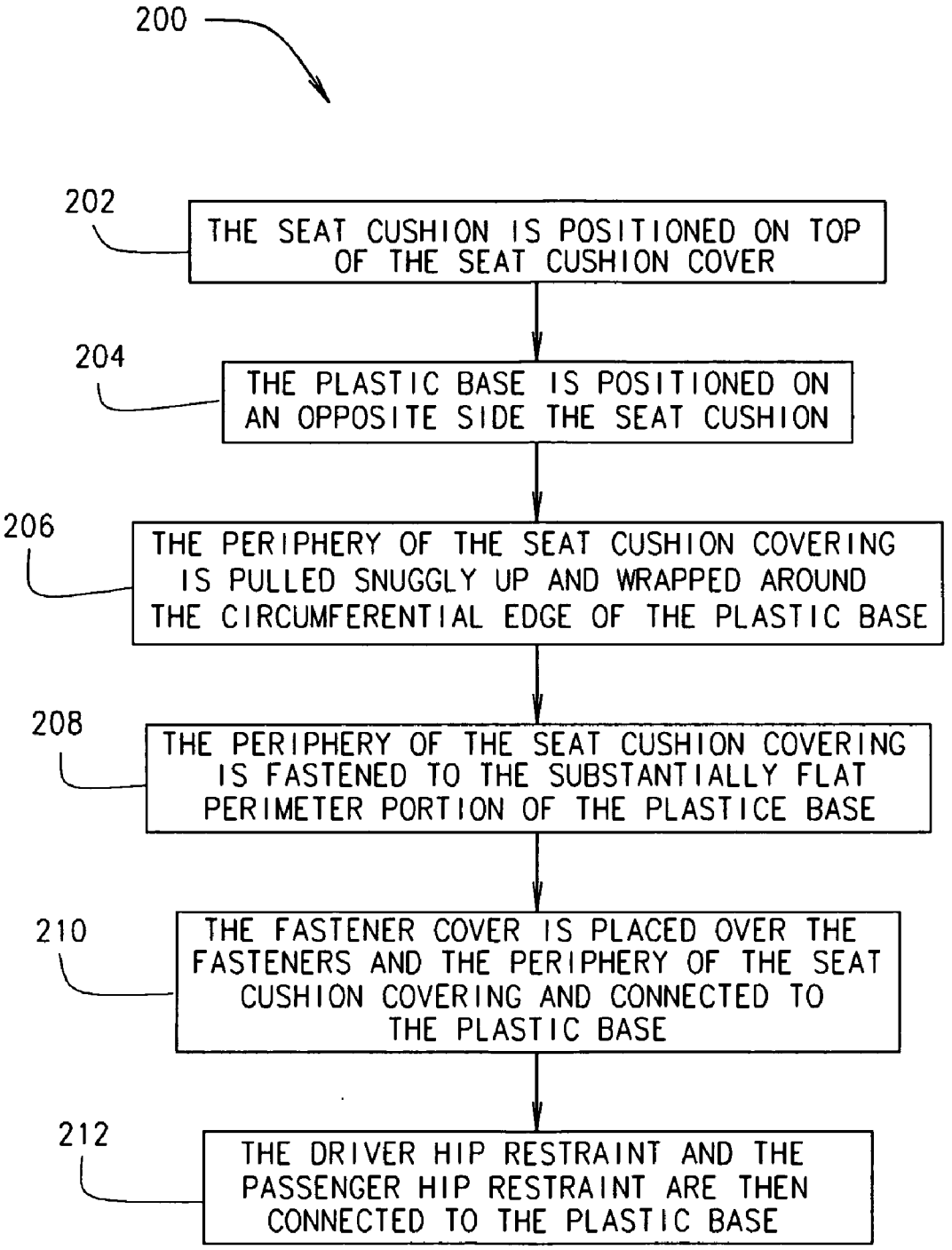
200
202
THE SEAT CUSHION IS POSITIONED ON TOP OF THE SEAT CUSHION COVER
204
THE PLASTIC BASE IS POSITIONED ON AN OPPOSITE SIDE THE SEAT CUSHION
206
THE PERIPHERY OF THE SEAT CUSHION COVERING IS PULLED SNUGGLY UP AND WRAPPED AROUND THE CIRCUMFERENTIAL EDGE OF THE PLASTIC BASE
208
THE PERIPHERY OF THE SEAT CUSHION COVERING IS FASTENED TO THE SUBSTANTIALLY FLAT PERIMETER PORTION OF THE PLASTICE BASE
210
THE FASTENER COVER IS PLACED OVER THE FASTENERS AND THE PERIPHERY OF THE SEAT CUSHION COVERING AND CONNECTED TO THE PLASTIC BASE
212
THE DRIVER HIP RESTRAINT AND THE PASSENGER HIP RESTRAINT ARE THEN CONNECTED TO THE PLASTIC BASE

FIG. 9

LIGHT-WEIGHT UTILITY VEHICLE SEAT

FIELD

[0001] The present disclosure relates to light-weight utility vehicles such as small maintenance and cargo vehicles and golf cars and to a utility vehicle seat having a seat bottom and back that incorporate a molded plastic base.

BACKGROUND

[0002] The statements in this section merely provide background information related to the present disclosure and may not constitute prior art.

[0003] Generally, the bottoms and backs of known light-weight utility vehicle seats are constructed of a piece of molded vinyl cover placed over a molded foam cushion that is placed on a top surface of a machine cut wood base, e.g., a machine cut plywood base. The edges of the vinyl cover are pulled over and around the edges of the wood base and stapled to a bottom surface of the wood base. The seat bottoms are then typically hingedly connected to a portion of the vehicle body that provides a housing or compartment for such things as batteries, tools, engine components or various other vehicle components that are accessible by lifting the seat bottom. The wood base, staples and vinyl cover edges of the seat bottom are usually left exposed, i.e., uncovered, and are unsightly when the seat bottom is lifted.

[0004] Furthermore, the uncovered wood base, staples and vinyl cover edges of the seat bottom are exposed to water from washing the vehicle and to other environmental conditions that exist within the compartment below the seat. For example, when the seat bottom is down, the wood base, staples and vinyl cover edges are exposed to such environmental conditions as exhaust heat, fuel emissions, battery acid and/or battery gases. Exposure to the water and other environmental conditions can cause unsightly damage and discoloration to the wood base, staples and/or vinyl cover edges. Additionally, such exposure can deteriorate or warp the wood base causing structural damage such that the seat bottom must be replaced. The exposed staples are also subject to rust and cause a potential snagging hazard to a person lifting the seat or accessing the compartment below the seat.

SUMMARY

[0005] A utility vehicle seat assembly is provided. The seat assembly includes a seat cushion subassembly having a plastic base that includes a substantially flat perimeter portion on an underside that is suitable for accepting fasteners. The seat cushion subassembly additionally includes a foam cushion that is positioned on a top surface of the plastic base. The seat cushion subassembly further includes a seat cushion covering that is positioned over the foam cushion. The seat cushion covering is wrapped around a circumferential edge of the plastic base and fastened to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the underside of the plastic base using a plurality of fasteners. A fastener cover is positioned over the fasteners and connected to the underside of the plastic base to conceal the fasteners and the fastened portion of the seat cushion covering.

[0006] In other embodiments, a method for assembling a utility vehicle seat cushion assembly is provided. The method includes positioning a foam cushion on a top surface of a plastic base. The plastic base has a substantially flat perimeter portion on an underside suitable for accepting fasteners. A seat cushion covering is placed over the foam cushion and a periphery, or fringe of the seat cushion covering is wrapped around a circumferential edge of the plastic base. The method additionally includes fastening the periphery, or fringe, of the seat cushion covering to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the underside of the plastic base using a plurality of fasteners. The method further includes positioning a fastener cover over the fasteners and the fastened periphery portion of the seat cushion covering. The fastener cover is then connected to the underside of the plastic base, thereby concealing the fasteners and fastened seat cushion covering periphery.

[0007] Further areas of applicability will become apparent from the detailed description provided hereinafter. It should be understood that the detailed description and specific examples, while indicating various embodiments, are intended for purposes of illustration only and are not intended to limit the scope of the disclosure.

DRAWINGS

[0008] The drawings described herein are for illustration purposes only and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure in any way.

[0009] FIG. **1** is a side view of a light-weight utility vehicle including a seat assembly, in accordance with various embodiments;

[0010] FIG. **2** is a bottom isometric view of a seat bottom subassembly of the vehicle seat assembly shown in FIG. **1**;

[0011] FIG. **3** is a partially exploded back isometric view of a seat back subassembly of the vehicle seat assembly shown in FIG. **1**, having a seat cushion covering removed to illustrate the components of the seat back subassembly;

[0012] FIG. **4** is a bottom isometric view of the seat bottom subassembly shown in FIG. **2** absent a fastener cover and having a seat covering partially installed;

[0013] FIG. **5** is an isometric view of a plastic base of the seat bottom subassembly shown in FIG. **2**;

[0014] FIG. **6** is a isometric view of a fastener cover of the seat bottom subassembly shown in FIG. **2**;

[0015] FIG. **7** is a bottom section view of a fastener cover included in the seat assembly shown in FIG. **1**;

[0016] FIG. **8** is side view of a seat bottom subassembly of the seat assembly shown in FIG. **1**, including a driver hip restraint and a passenger hip restraint; and

[0017] FIG. **9** is a flow chart generally describing the process of assembling a seat bottom subassembly and a seat back subassembly of the seat assembly shown in FIG. **1**, in accordance with various embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0018] The following description of the various embodiments is merely exemplary in nature and is in no way intended to limit the present disclosure, its application, or uses. Throughout this specification, like reference numerals will be used to refer to like elements.

[0019] FIG. **1** illustrates a light-weight utility vehicle **10**, such as a small cargo/maintenance vehicle or a golf car, that includes a seat assembly **14**, in accordance with various embodiments. The seat assembly **14** includes a seat bottom subassembly **18** and a seat back subassembly **22** connected to the seat bottom subassembly **18** via at least one seat back support strut **26**. The seat assembly **14** additionally includes a driver hip restraint **30** and a passenger hip restraint **34** coupled to the seat bottom subassembly **18**. The vehicle **10** also generally includes a pair of front wheels **38** that operate to steer the vehicle **10**, a pair of rear wheels **42**, wherein at least one of the rear wheels **42** functions as a drive wheel for propelling vehicle **10**, and a steering wheel **46** used to control a steering angle of the front wheels **38**. Although the seat assembly **14** will be described and illustrated in the various figures herein as a 'bench' seat assembly adapted to simultaneously accommodate a vehicle driver and at least one vehicle passenger, it should be understood that the seat assembly **14** can also be a 'single' seat assembly adapted to accommodate only a single driver or passenger, and remain within the scope of the disclosure.

[0020] Referring now to FIGS. **2** through **6**, the seat bottom subassembly **18** and the seat back subassembly **22** each include a seat cushion **50** positioned on a top surface **52** of a plastic base **54**. Each of the seat bottom and seat back subassemblies **18** and **22** additionally include a seat cushion covering **58** that is positioned over the seat cushion **50** and wrapped around a circumferential edge **56**. Once wrapped around the circumferential edge **56**, the seat cushion covering **58** is fastened to a substantially flat, or smooth, perimeter portion **62** of an underside **66** of the plastic base **54** using a plurality of fasteners **70**. In various embodiments, the fasteners are staples such that seat cushion covering **58** is stapled to the plastic base **54** using a plurality of staples. However, the seat cushion covering can be fastened to the substantially flat perimeter portion **62** of the plastic base **54** using any suitable fastening means, e.g., riveting, screwing, gluing, hooking, tacking or nailing. A fastener cover **74** is positioned over the fasteners **70** and the periphery portion of the seat cushion covering **58** that is fastened to the plastic base **54**. The fastener cover **74** is coupled to the plastic base **54** to thereby conceal the fasteners **70** and the periphery portion of the seat cushion covering **58** that is fastened to, in various embodiments, the polymer or plastic base **54**. In various embodiments, the seat cushion covering **58** is a vinyl material. However, alternatively, the seat cushion covering **58** can be leather, nylon, polyester, or any other suitable seat cushion covering material or fabric.

[0021] Referring now to FIGS. **3** and **5**, the plastic base **54** includes a plurality of first structural ridges or ribs **78** that crisscross with a plurality of second structural ridges **82** formed in the underside **66**. The first structural ridges **78** provide longitudinal support to the respective seat subassembly **18** and/or **22** along a plane in a longitudinal direction X. The second structural ridges **82** provide lateral support along a plane in a lateral direction Y. Additionally, in various embodiments the plastic base **54** includes at least one diagonal structural ridge or rib **86** formed in the underside **66** to provide stability diagonal to the X and Y directions for the respective seat subassembly **18** and/or **22**. More particularly, the diagonal structural ridge **86** provides diagonal stability to resist twisting of the plastic base, and hence, the respective seat subassembly **18** and/or **22**. Although the diagonal structural ridge **86** is only shown throughout the figures with respect to the seat bottom subassembly **18**, it should be understood that the seat back subassembly **22** can also include at least one diagonal structural ridge **86** to provide needed diagonal stability to the seat back subassembly **22**. A depth or height of the first, second and diagonal structural ridges **76**, **82** and **86** can be any dimension suitable to provide a desired stability in the X, Y and diagonal directions. For example, finite element analysis can be employed to determine the depth of the first, second and diagonal structural ridges **76**, **82** and **86** needed to provide a desired amount of rigidity, stability and support for the respective seat subassembly **18** and/or **22**.

[0022] In the illustrated embodiments, the crisscrossing first and second structural ridges **78** and **82** are formed in the underside **66** to have a substantially or orthogonal relationship that results in a square waffle pattern. However, the first and second structural ridges **78** and **82** can crisscross having any angular relationship suitable to provide sufficient longitudinal and lateral support to the respective seat subassemblies **18** and **22** to support the weight, loads and forces generated by a driver and/or passenger utilizing the seat assembly **14**.

[0023] Referring to FIGS. **2**, **4** and **5**, the plastic base **54** of the seat bottom subassembly **18** includes a pair of base hinge recesses **90** formed in the substantially flat, or smooth, periphery portion **62**. The plastic base **54** of the seat bottom subassembly **18** further includes a plurality of base hip restraint recesses **94** formed in the substantially flat, or smooth, periphery portion **62**.

[0024] Referring now to FIGS. **2**, **3** and **6**, the fastener cover **74** of the seat bottom subassembly **18** is formed as a fastener cover rim, as shown in FIGS. **2** and **6**. Alternatively, since the fastener cover **74** of the seat back subassembly **22** is generally visible when the seat assembly **14** is installed in the vehicle **10**, the fastener cover **74** of the seat back subassembly **22** is formed as a concealing panel, as illustrated in FIG. **3**. Thus, the concealing panel **74** of the seat back subassembly **22** covers and conceals the entire underside **66** of the plastic base **54**, including the fasteners **70**, the portion of the cushion covering **58** fastened to the substantially flat portion **62** and the structural ridges **78**, **82** and **86**.

[0025] As illustrated in FIGS. **2**, **5** and **6**, the fastener cover **74** of the seat bottom subassembly **18** includes a pair of cover hinge recesses **98** and a plurality of cover hip restraint recesses **102**. A backside of the cover hinge recesses **98** and the cover hip restraint recesses **102** mate with the base hinge recesses **90** and base hip restraint recesses **94**, respective, to properly align the fastener cover **74** with plastic base **54** when connecting the fastener cover **74** to the plastic base **54**. The seat bottom subassembly **18** additionally includes a pair of hinge legs **106** that are seated within the cover hinge recesses and connected to plastic base **54**. The hinge legs **106** pivotally interlock with mating hinge legs (not shown) that are coupled to a portion **118** of the vehicle body that provides a housing or compartment for such things as batteries, tools, engine components or various other vehicle **10** components that are accessible by lifting the seat bottom subassembly **18**. Each hinge leg **106** is coupled to the plastic base **54** using a single hinge fastener **110** that extends through a respective cover hinge aperture **114** and couples with the plastic base **54**, thereby retaining the fastener cover **74** between the hinge legs **106** and the plastic base **54**.

[0026] The hinge fasteners **110** can be any fastener suitable for securing the hinge legs **106** to the plastic base **54** within the cover hinge recesses **98**. For example, the hinge fasteners **110** can be 'self-threading' or 'self-tapping' screws that extend through the cover hinge apertures **114** and self-thread or self-tap into base hinge apertures **122**. The hinge legs **106** are seated within the cover hinge recesses **98** such that the hinge legs **106** will not pivot or rotate about the hinge fasteners **110** when the hinge fasteners **110** are coupled to the plastic base **54**. Therefore, only a single hinge fastener **110** is utilized to mount the hinge legs **106** to the plastic base **54**.

[0027] Referring now to FIGS. **5** and **7**, the fastener cover **74** can be connected to the plastic base **54** in any suitable manner. In various embodiments, the fastener cover **74** includes a pair of locking fingers **126**. The locking fingers **126** are adapted to interlock with locking apertures **130** in the plastic base **54** located proximate a front edge **134** of the plastic base **54** opposite the base hinge recesses **90**. Therefore, to connect the fastener cover **74** to the plastic base **54**, the locking fingers **126** are interlocked with the locking apertures **130** and the hinge legs **106** are connected to the plastic base **54** with the hinge fasteners **110**, as described above. Thus, the locking fingers **126** connect the fastener cover **74** to the plastic base **54** along the front edge **134** and the hinge fasteners **110** connect the fastener cover **74** to the plastic base **54** along an opposing back edge **138** having the base hinge recesses **90** therein. The fastener cover **74** is further connected to the plastic base **54** when the driver and passenger hip restraints **30** and **34** are connected to the seat bottom subassembly, as described below. When the fastener cover **74** is connected to the plastic base **54**, the fasteners **70** and the periphery of the cushion covering **58** that is fastened to the plastic base **54** are effectively completely concealed from view.

[0028] Referring now to FIGS. **2**, **5**, **6** and **8**, the driver hip restraint **30** includes connecting legs **146** for connecting the driver hip restraint **30** to the plastic base **54**. Similarly, the passenger hip restraint **34** includes connecting legs **150** for connecting the passenger hip restraint **34** to the plastic base **54**. The fastener cover **74** includes a plurality of hip restraint connecting holes **142**. One hip restraint connected hole **142** is located within each of the cover hip restraint recesses **102**. The connecting legs **146** and **150** are seated within the cover hip restraint recesses **102** and connected to the plastic base **54** using hip restraint fasteners **154**. When the hip restraints **30** and **34** are connected to the plastic base **54**, the fastener cover **74** is retained between the hip restraint legs **146** and **150** and the plastic base **54** such that the fastener cover **74** is further secured to the plastic base **54**.

[0029] The hip restraint fasteners **154** can be any fastener suitable for securing the hip restraints **30** and **34** to the plastic base **54** within the cover hip restraint recesses **102**. For example, the hip restraint fasteners **154** can be 'self-threading' or 'self-tapping' screws that extend through the cover hip restraint connecting holes **142** and self-thread or self-tap into base hip restraint apertures **158** that align with the cover hip restraint connecting holes **142**. Additionally hip restraint fasteners **154** can be self-threaded or self-tapped into additional base hip restraint apertures **158** that are located within the crisscrossed structural ridge portion of the plastic base **54**.

[0030] Referring particularly to FIG. **8**, in various embodiments, the driver hip restraint **30** has a different profile than the passenger hip restraint **34**. Specifically, the driver hip restraint **30** has a longitudinal length M that is shorter than a longitudinal length N of the passenger hip restraint **34**. The shorter longitudinal length M of the driver hip restraint **30** provides minimally impaired ingress and egress to the seat assembly **14** by vehicle driver. That is, the longitudinal length M is adapted to provide more room, or space, for the vehicle driver to maneuver around, or avoid, the steering wheel **46** when embarking and disembarking the vehicle **10**. Because a passenger embarking and disembarking the vehicle **10** does not have to contend with maneuvering around a steering wheel, the longitudinal length N can be longer than the longitudinal length M without impairing the ingress and egress of the passenger to the seat assembly **14**. Additionally, an angle of slope P of a top rail **162** of the driver hip restraint **30** is greater than an angle of slope a of a top rail **166** of the passenger hip restraint **34**. The driver hip restraint top rail angle of slope P further provides minimally impaired ingress and egress to the seat assembly **14** by vehicle driver, thereby improving the driver's ease to embark and disembark the vehicle **10**.

[0031] FIG. **9** is a flow chart **200** generally describing the process of assembling the seat subassemblies, i.e., the seat bottom subassembly **18** and the seat back subassembly **22**, in accordance with the various embodiments. Initially, the seat cushion **50** is positioned on top of the seat cushion covering **58**, as indicated at **202**. The plastic base **54** is positioned on the seat cushion **50** such that the top surface **52** of the plastic base **54** contacts a side of the seat cushion **50** opposite the seat cushion covering **58**, as indicated at **204**. The periphery of the seat cushion covering **58** is pulled snuggly up and wrapped around the circumferential edge **56** of the plastic base **54**, as indicated at **206**. The periphery of the seat cushion covering **58** is then fastened to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the plastic base **54** using fasteners **70**, as indicated at **208**. For example, the periphery of the seat cushion covering **58** is then stapled to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the plastic base **54** using a plurality of staples.

[0032] Finally, the fastener cover is placed over the fasteners and the periphery of the seat cushion covering **58** and connected to the plastic base **54**, as indicated at **210**. Thus, the fasteners **70** and the periphery of the cushion covering **58** that is fastened to the plastic base **54** are effectively completely concealed from view.

[0033] For example, with respect to the seat bottom subassembly **18**, the fastener cover **74** is placed over the fasteners **70** and the periphery of the seat cushion covering **58** and the fastener cover locking fingers **126** are interlocked with the plastic base locking apertures **130**. The back side of the cover hinge recesses **98** are mated with the base hinge recesses **90** to properly align the fastener cover **74** on the underside **66** of the plastic base **54**. The hinge legs **106** are then connected to the plastic base **54** using a single hinge fastener **110**, as described above, such that the fastener cover **74** is firmly connected to the plastic base **54**. The driver hip restraint **30** and the passenger hip restraint **34** are then connected to the plastic base **54**, as described above.

[0034] The description herein is merely exemplary in nature and, thus, variations that do not depart from the gist of that which is described herein are intended to be within the scope of the disclosure. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the spirit and scope of the disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A utility vehicle seat cushion assembly comprising:

a plastic base;

a foam cushion positioned on a top surface of the plastic base; and

a covering positioned over the cushion and fastened to an underside of the plastic base using a plurality of fasteners.

2. The assembly of claim 1 further comprising a concealing rim positioned over the fasteners and connected to the underside of the plastic base.

3. The assembly of claim 2, wherein the concealing rim comprises a pair of cover hinge recesses.

4. The assembly of claim 1, wherein the plastic base comprises a substantially flat portion around a perimeter of the plastic base underside.

5. The assembly of claim 1, wherein the plastic base comprises a pair of base hinge recesses in a perimeter portion of the plastic base underside.

6. The assembly of claim 1, wherein the plastic base comprises a plurality of intersecting structural ribs formed in the underside.

7. The assembly of claim 1 further comprising a driver hip restraint and a passenger hip restraint coupled to the plastic base underside, wherein the driver hip restraint has a shorter longitudinal length to provide minimally impaired ingress and egress of the seat cushion assembly.

8. The assembly of claim 1, wherein the seat cushion assembly comprises at least one of a utility vehicle seat bottom and a utility vehicle seat back.

9. The assembly of claim 1, wherein the fasteners comprise staples and the covering is stapled to the plastic base.

10. A method for assembling a utility vehicle seat cushion assembly, said method comprising:

positioning a foam cushion on a top surface of a plastic base having a substantially flat perimeter portion on an underside thereof suitable for accepting fasteners;

placing a seat cushion covering over the foam cushion;

wrapping the seat cushion covering around a circumferential edge of the plastic base; and

fastening the seat cushion covering to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the underside of the plastic base using a plurality of fasteners.

11. The method of claim 10 further comprising:

positioning a fastener cover over the fasteners and the fastened portion of the seat cushion covering; and

connecting the fastener cover to the underside of the plastic base to conceal the fasteners and the fastened portion of the seat cushion covering.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein positioning a fastener cover over the fasteners comprises positioning the fastener cover over the fasteners such that a backside of a pair of cover hinge recesses formed in the fastener cover mate with a pair of base hinge recesses in the underside of the plastic base to properly align the fastener cover on the underside of the plastic base.

13. The method of claim 12 further comprising:

placing one leg of a pair of hinges in each of the cover hinge recesses; and

coupling the leg of each hinge to the plastic base using a single fastener such that the cover hinge recesses prevent the hinge legs from rotating about the respective fasteners.

14. The method of claim 10 further comprising coupling a driver hip restraint and a passenger hip restraint to the plastic base underside, wherein the driver hip restraint has a shorter longitudinal length to provide minimally impaired ingress and egress of the seat cushion assembly.

15. The method of claim 10, wherein fastening the seat cushion covering comprises stapling the seat cushion covering to the substantially flat perimeter portion of the underside of the plastic base using a plurality of staples.

16. A utility vehicle seat assembly comprising:

a seat cushion subassembly including:

a plastic base including a substantially smooth perimeter portion on an underside of the plastic base suitable for accepting fasteners;

a foam cushion positioned on a top surface of the plastic base;

a seat cushion covering positioned over the foam cushion, wrapped around a circumferential edge of the plastic base and fastened to the substantially smooth perimeter portion of the underside of the plastic base using a plurality of fasteners; and

a fastener cover positioned over the fasteners and connected to the underside of the plastic base for concealing the fasteners and the fastened portion of the seat cushion covering.

17. The assembly of claim 16, wherein the plastic base includes a pair of base hinge recesses.

18. The assembly of claim 17, wherein the fastener cover includes a pair of cover hinge recesses for retaining one leg of a pair of hinges and preventing the leg from rotating about a fastener used to connect the leg to the plastic base, wherein a backside of the cover hinge recesses mate with the base hinge recesses to properly align the fastener cover on the underside of the plastic base.

19. The assembly of claim 16, wherein the plastic base includes a plurality of crisscrossing structural ridges formed in the underside for providing longitudinal and lateral stability and strength to the plastic base.

20. The assembly of claim 19, wherein the plastic base further includes at least one diagonal structure ridge intersecting the crisscrossing structural ridges to provide diagonal stability and strength to the plastic base.

21. The assembly of claim 16 further comprising a driver hip restraint and a passenger hip restraint coupled to the plastic base underside, wherein the driver hip restraint has a shorter longitudinal length to provide minimally impaired ingress and egress of the seat cushion subassembly.

22. The assembly of claim 16, wherein the seat cushion subassembly comprises a utility vehicle seat bottom and the fastener cover comprises a concealing rim.

23. The assembly of claim 16, wherein the seat cushion subassembly comprises a utility vehicle seat back and the fastener cover comprises a concealing panel.

* * * * *