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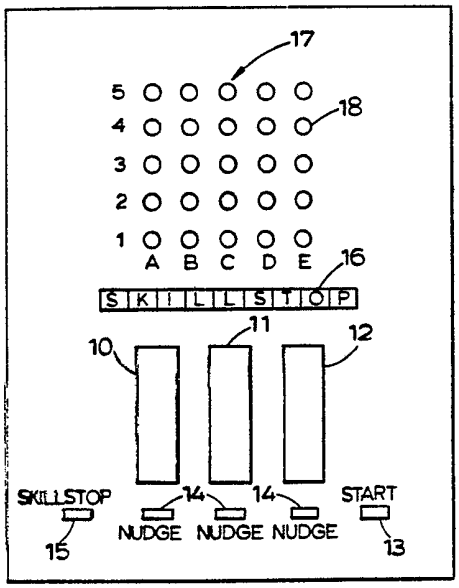
(54) Gaming and amusement machines

(57) A fruit machine is provided with a special 'skill stop' or 'pseudo skill stop' feature in the form of a display 17 of a grid or matrix of symbols 18 representing coins, tokens, nudges etc, the special feature comprising a first 'skill stop' operation in which the symbols in a first row 1 of the matrix 17 are individually illuminated for a brief period of time and the player attempts to press a skill stop button 15 at the instant when the symbol at the end of the row is illuminated, the entire row lighting up if the attempt is successful. The player then has the chance to illuminate further rows of the matrix and an award is given in accordance with the total number of symbols illuminated at the end of the special feature. The machine includes reels 10, 11, 12, a start button 13 and three nudge buttons 14 which are each associated with a reel. The first row of the matrix is illuminated at the end of rotating the reels or on completion of a trail 16, steps on the trail being illuminated as a result of certain symbols appearing in a line on the reels.



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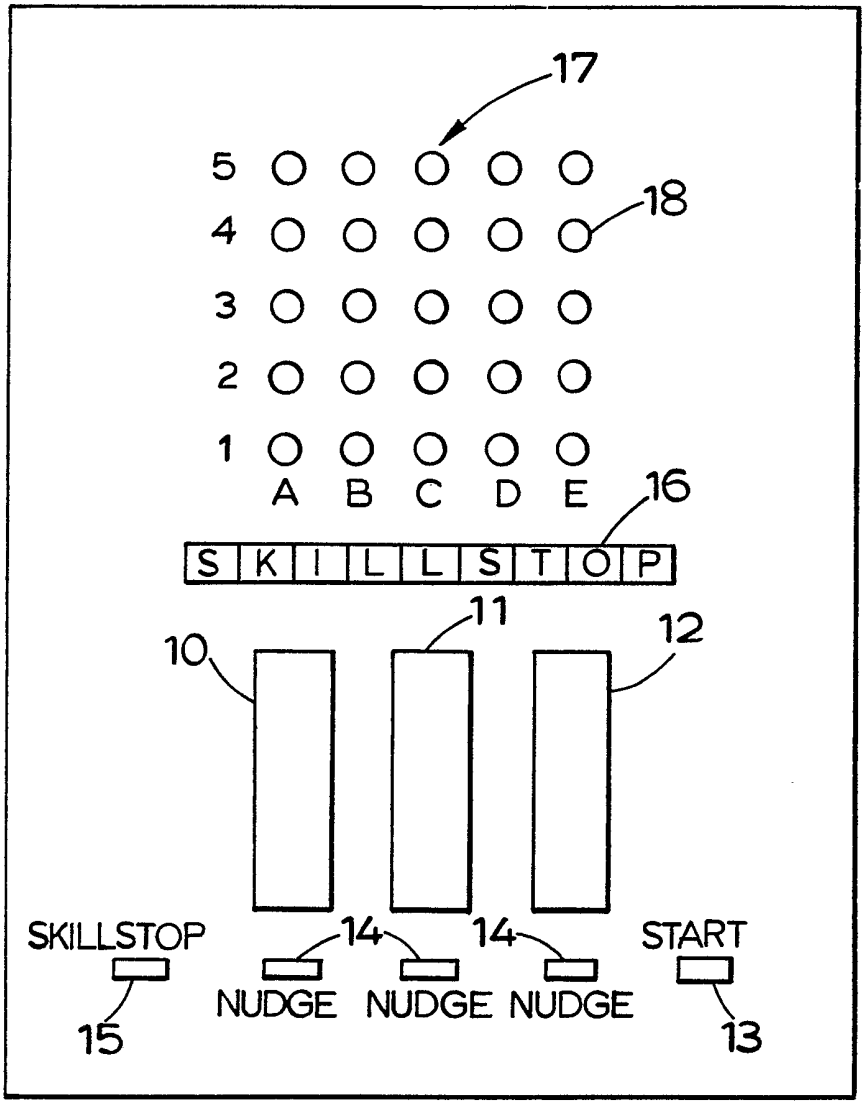
At least one drawing originally filed was informal and the print reproduced here is taken from a later filed formal copy.

The calims were filed later than the filing date within the period prescribed by Rule 25(1) of the Patents Rules 1982.


17
5
4
18
3
2
1
A B C D E
16
S K I L L S T O P
11
10
12
SKILLSTOP
14
14
START
NUDGE
NUDGE
NUDGE
15
13

GAMING AND AMUSEMENT MACHINES

This invention relates to gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines of the kind generally known as 'fruit machines', in which three, or sometimes more, reels carrying symbols are set in rotation and then stop in turn at random intervals and if the resulting combination of symbols on the three (or more) reels appearing on a given line in the display, the 'win line', is one which has been designated a winning combination, the player receives an award or a credit. Instead of actual reels, it is known to use other forms of display which simulate rotating reels to a greater or lesser degree, for example the Panascope, or a video screen on which images of the symbols appear. Such machines will hereinafter be referred to as of the kind set forth.

Many special features are provided nowadays in fruit machines, indeed they have to some extent taken over from the basic game, in that most of the bigger wins are obtained by the features rather than by the initial result when the reels first come to a halt. In a so called 'ladder' or 'trail' feature, steps in the ladder or trail may be illuminated as a result of certain symbols, e.g. symbols bearing superimposed numbers, appearing on the win line. When the 'ladder' or 'trail' is completed, a jackpot prize or another feature which may result in a jackpot prize may be awarded.

On certain occasions after a non-winning game, determined for example at random or when a particular symbol such as a "?" appears on the win line, a so called 'skill stop' or 'pseudo skill stop' feature may be provided to assist completion of a ladder or trail.

In a 'skill stop' or 'pseudo skill stop' feature steps in the 'ladder' or 'trail' are illuminated either sequentially along the 'ladder' or 'trail' or for a brief period of time at random positions in the 'ladder' or 'trail' and the player attempts to stop the feature by performing a 'skill stop' operation at the instant when the end step of the 'ladder' or 'trail' is illuminated. In a 'pseudo skill stop' feature the machine itself determines whether or not the end step of the 'ladder' or 'trail' is illuminated, although it appears to the player that the instant the 'skill stop' operation is performed determines whether or not the trail is completed.

Amongst the many special features which are provided nowadays in fruit machines, one which has proved popular is the so-called 'nudge' feature, by which the player is sometimes given the opportunity at the end of a game which did not result in a win, to advance one or more of the reels by a single step, or sometimes more than one step, to bring a fresh symbol onto the win line and thereby change what was a losing combination into a winning one. This feature may be offered apparently at random after a non-winning game, or a number of 'nudges' determined in one of a variety of ways may be awarded as a special feature after completion of a 'ladder' or 'trail'.

One known type of special feature awarded after completion of a 'ladder' or 'trail' involves the illumination of some symbols in a number of rows or columns of symbols representing coins, tokens or nudges and the player is given one or more 50:50 chances to 'link up' the illuminated symbols by pressing a 'gamble' button. The feature ends when the player has exhausted these chances and he is then awarded as a

prize the total number of coins, tokens or nudges which have been linked together during the feature.

The aim of the invention is to provide a still further and particularly attractive special feature on these lines.

According to the invention a gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth is provided which has a display in the form of a grid or matrix of symbols representing, for example coins, tokens or nudges, and on certain occasions, for example randomly at the end of a non-winning game or on completion of a 'ladder' or 'trail', a special 'skill stop' or pseudo skill stop' feature becomes available in which the player has the chance to perform at least one 'skill stop' operation on the matrix and an award is given to the player in accordance with the total number of symbols illuminated on the matrix of the display at the end of the feature when one or more 'skill stop' operations have been performed by the player.

In a preferred embodiment the special feature involves a first 'skill stop' operation in which the symbols in a first row or column of the matrix are illuminated either individually for a brief period of time at random positions in the row or column or sequentially along the row or column, and the player attempts to press a 'skill stop' button at the instant when the symbol at the end of the row or column is illuminated. The player may then be given the chance to illuminate symbols in further rows or columns in the matrix, e.g. by means of one or more 50:50 gambles or by a further 'skill stop' operation, the total award of coins, tokens or nudges being proportional to the total

number of symbols lit on completion of the feature which preferably is a multiple of the number of symbols lit in the first row or column after the first 'skill stop' operation.

The present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawing. In the drawing a fruit machine has three reels 10, 11, and 12, a start button 13, three 'nudge' buttons 14 each associated with a respective one of the reels 10, 11 and 12, a 'skill stop' button 15, a display in the form of a 'trail' 16 and a special feature display 17 in the form of a 5 x 5 matrix of symbols 18 representing e.g. coins or tokens.

On certain occasions during play of the machine, for example on completion of the trail 16, a special feature is awarded which utilises the matrix display 17 and the 'skill stop' button 15. In the special feature the symbols A,B,C,D,E in row 1 of the matrix are illuminated for a brief period of time in sequence, the process being repeated continuously until the player presses the 'skill stop' button 15. If, for example the 'skill stop' buttons 15 is pressed at the instant when symbol D in row 1 is illuminated, all of the symbols A to D in row 1 are illuminated permanently and the player is given the opportunity to advance up the matrix. The player may be given, for instance, either a 50:50 chance to gain symbols A to D in line 2 in a gamble or a chance to perform a further skill stop operation in which lines 2,3,4 or 5 are illuminated for a brief period of time either in sequence or at random and the player attempts to press the 'skill stop' button 15 at the instant when line 5 is illuminated. The feature is terminated either when the player fails to gain the next line in the matrix or when the further

'skill stop' operation is completed. The player is then awarded a prize equivalent to the total number of symbols illuminated in the matrix. For example, if symbols A to D in row 1 are lit up after the first 'skill stop' operation, and symbols A to D in rows 2 and 3 are subsequently lit up in the second stage of the feature the player is awarded 4 x 3 i.e. 12 coins or tokens in total.

It will be appreciated that the special feature described above may be modified in various ways without departing from the scope of the invention. For instance, the number of rows or columns in the matrix may vary; in the initial 'skill stop' stage of the feature the symbols in row 1 may each be illuminated for a brief period of time at random until the 'skill stop' button is pressed; or instead of coins or tokens, 'nudges' may be awarded with the total number of nudges awarded corresponding to the total number of symbols illuminated in the matrix on completion of the feature.

The special feature of the present invention is particularly attractive because it gives the player the chance of obtaining a large jackpot award if he can display sufficient skill in choosing the best moment to press the 'skill stop' button.

CLAIMS

1. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth which is provided with a display in the form of a grid or matrix of symbols representing for example coins, tokens or nudges, and on certain occasions, for example randomly at the end of a non-winning game or on completion of a 'ladder' or 'trail' a special 'skill stop' or 'pseudo skill stop' feature becomes available in which the player has the chance to perform at least one 'skill stop' operation on the matrix and an award is given to the player in accordance with the total number of symbols illuminated on the matrix of the display at the end of the special feature when one or more 'skill stop' operations have been performed by the player.

2. A machine according to claim 1 in which the special feature comprises a first 'skill stop' operation in which the symbols in a first row or column of the matrix are illuminated either individually for a brief period of time at random positions in the row or column or sequentially along the row or column and the player attempts to press a 'skill stop' button at the instant when the symbol at the end of the row or column is illuminated.

3. A machine according to claim 2 in which the player is given the chance to illuminate symbols in further rows or columns in the matrix.

4. A machine according to claim 3 in which symbols in further rows or columns may be illuminated by means of

one or more 50:50 gambles or by a further 'skill stop' operation.

5. A machine according to claim 3 or claim 4 in which the total number of symbols illuminated is a multiple of the number of symbols lit in the first row or column after the first 'skill stop' operation.

6. A machine according to claim 3 in which the special feature is terminated either when the player fails to gain the next row or column in the matrix or the further 'skill stop' operation is completed.

7. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth substantially as described hereinbefore with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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