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(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR VAPORIZING FUEL**

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(75) Inventors: **Leslie A. Newhouse**, Mount Horeb, WI (US); **Randolph M. Pentel**, Mendota Heights, MN (US)

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Correspondence Address:
NIKOLAI & MERSEREAU, P.A.
900 SECOND AVENUE SOUTH
SUITE 820
MINNEAPOLIS, MN 55402 (US)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

(73) Assignee: **Randolph M. Pentel**, Mendota Heights, MN

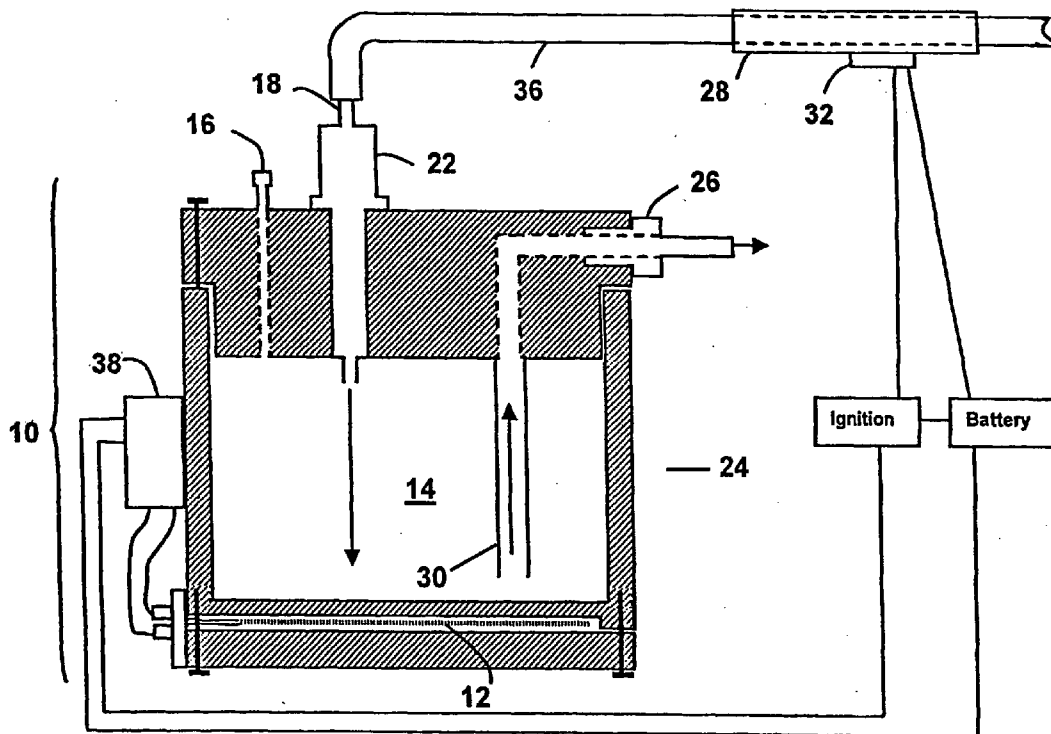
A method and apparatus is provided for the vaporization of liquid hydrocarbon fuel in a closed system prior to its entry into an internal combustion engine's combustion chambers in amounts proportional to the acceleration level of the engine. The apparatus is a fuel vaporizer interposed between an engine's fuel injection system and combustion chambers and forms a canister housing. Liquid fuel enters via an inlet in the housing, is vaporized by heating it to boiling and is drawn out of the canister via an outlet under a partial vacuum to the combustion chambers of the engine. The system is closed except for a vacuum connection with the engine's combustion chambers. Heating means are provided to heat the fuel to boiling without heating it to its flash point, thus avoiding its pre-ignition.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/345,717, filed on Jan. 16, 2003, now Pat. No. 6,769,421, which is a continuation-in-part of application No. 09/674,863, filed on Nov. 7, 2000, now abandoned, filed as 371 of international application No. PCT/US00/22999, filed on Aug. 22, 2000.



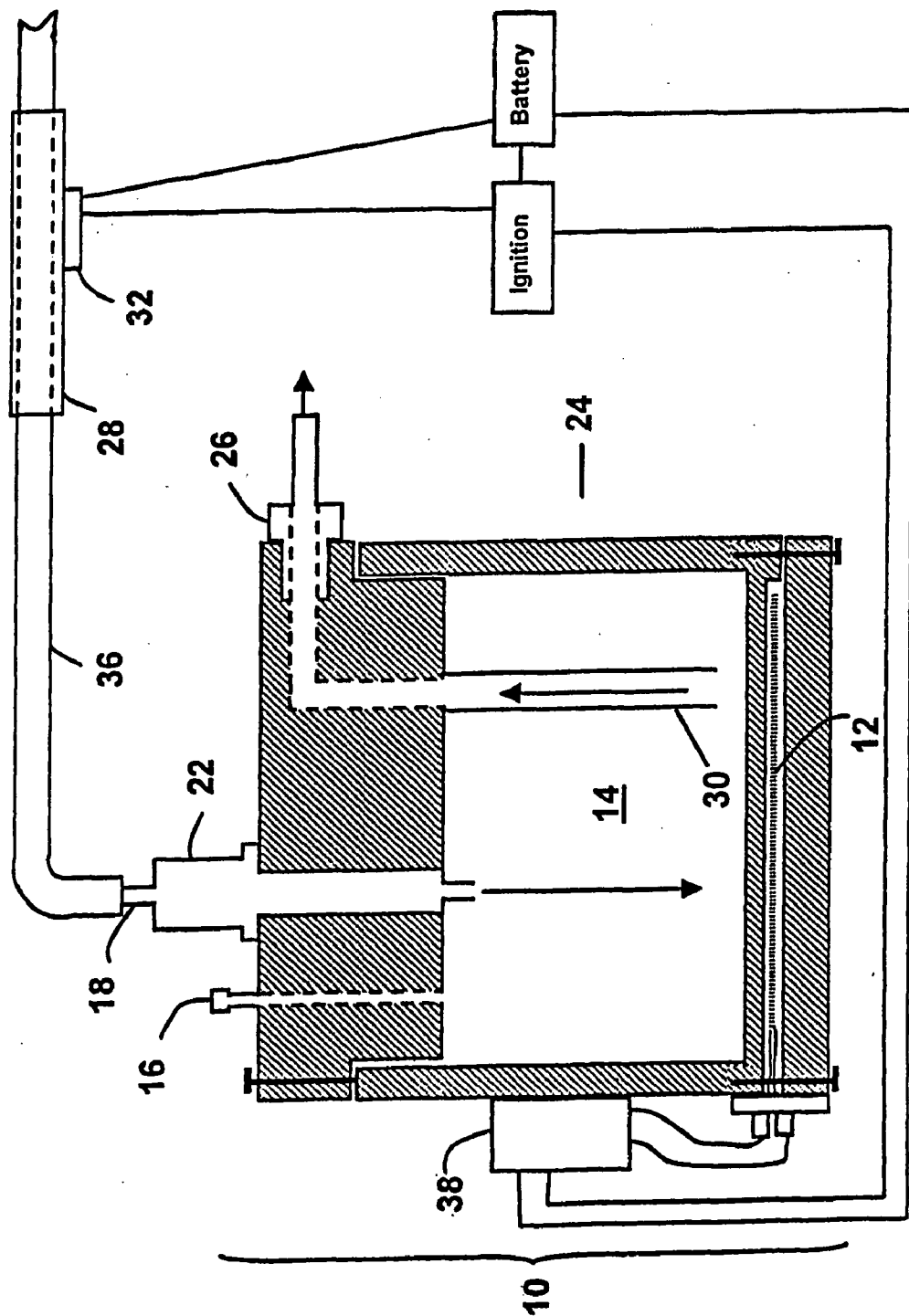


FIG. 1

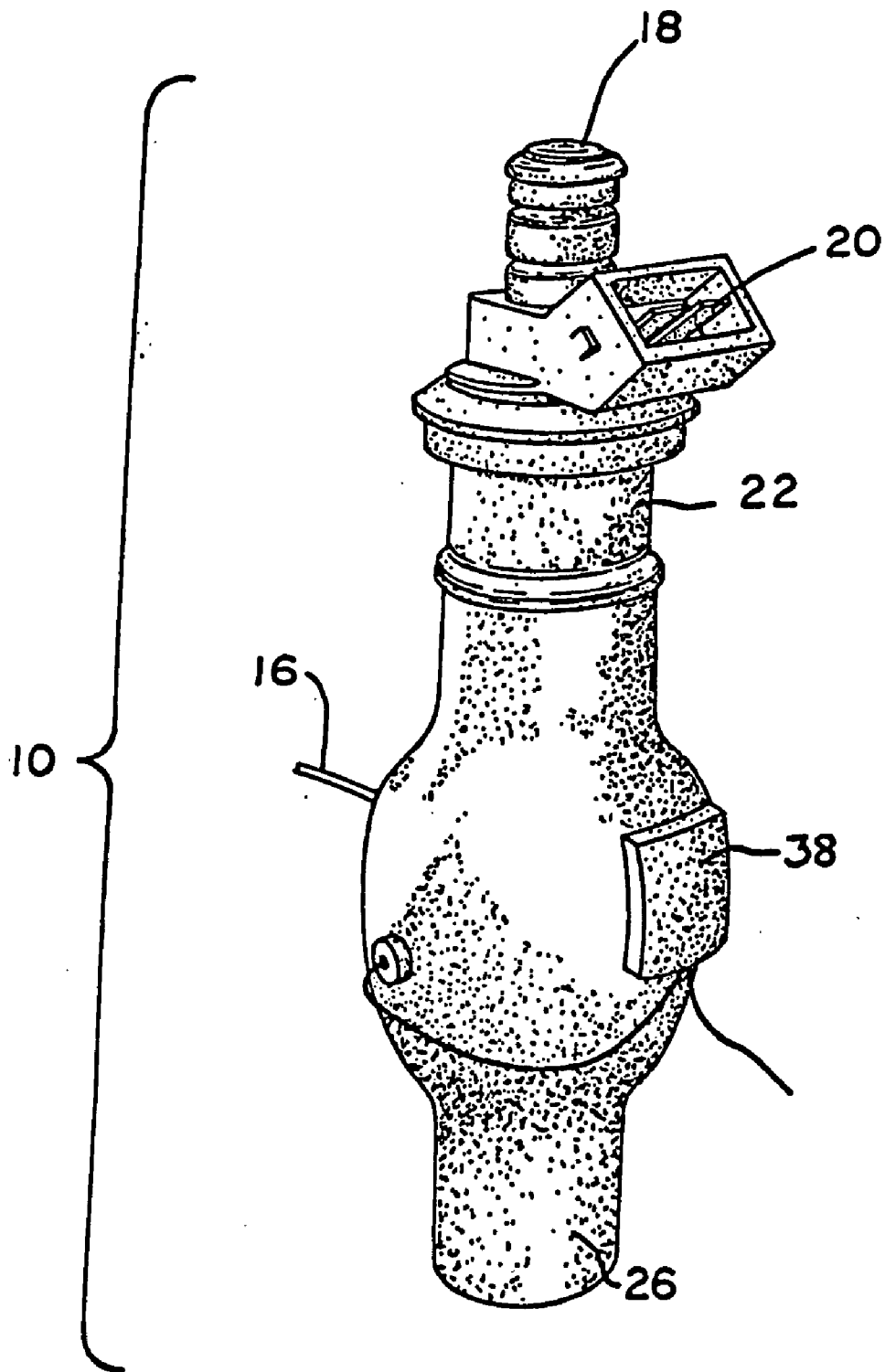


FIG. 2

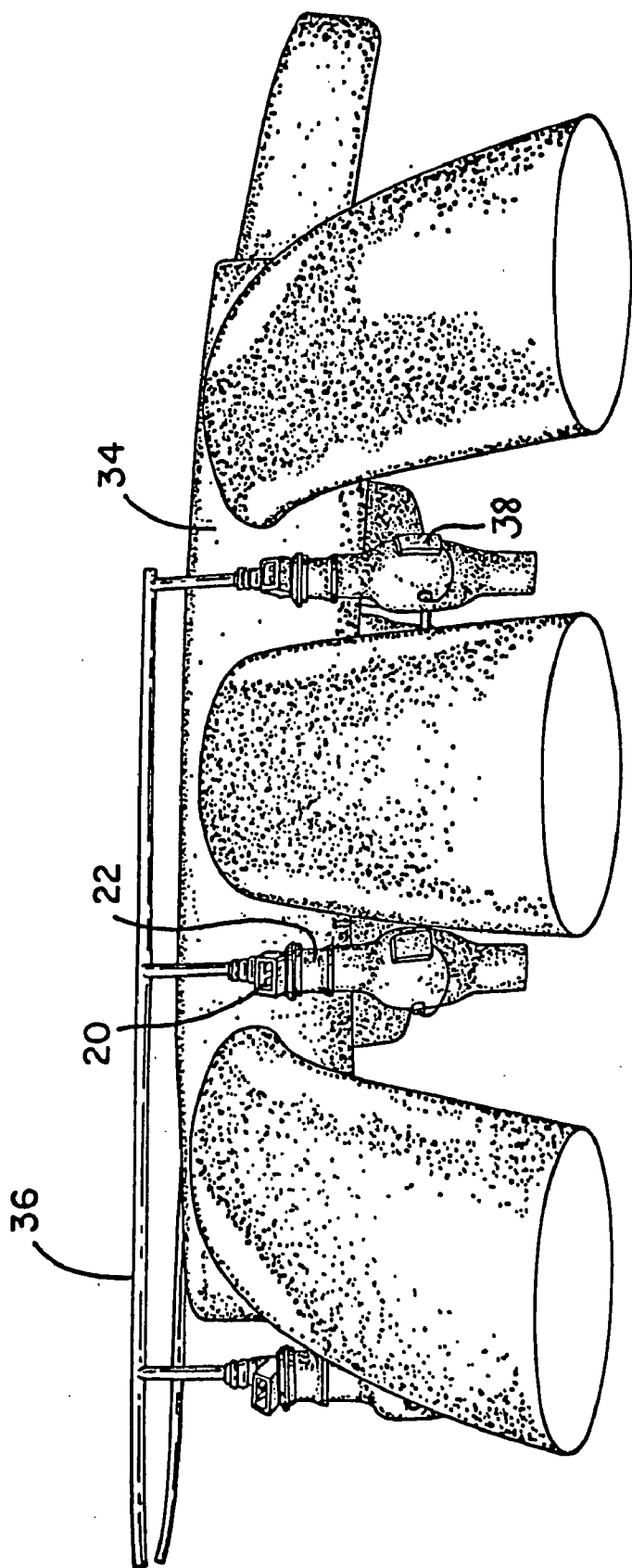


FIG. 3

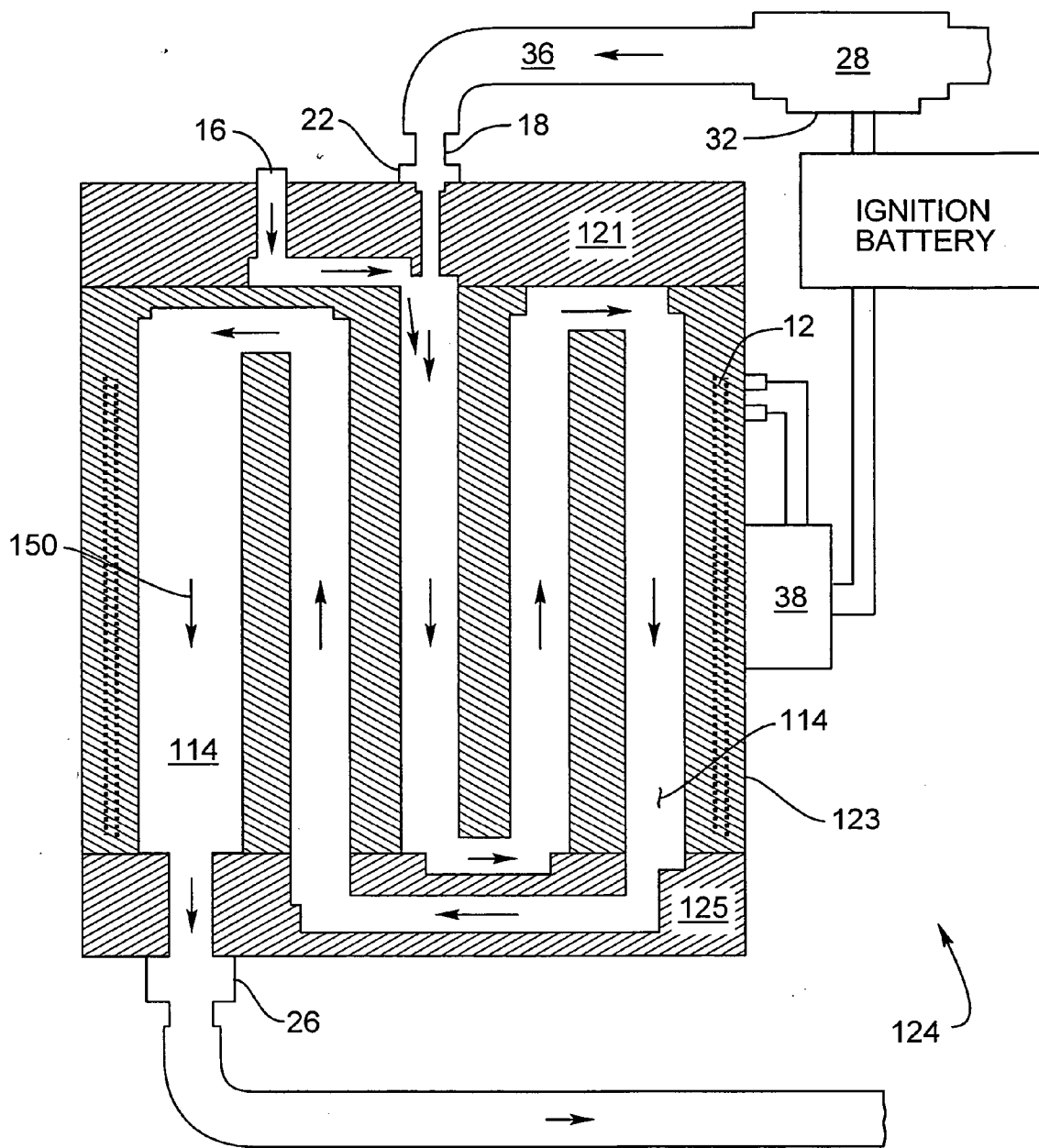


FIG 4

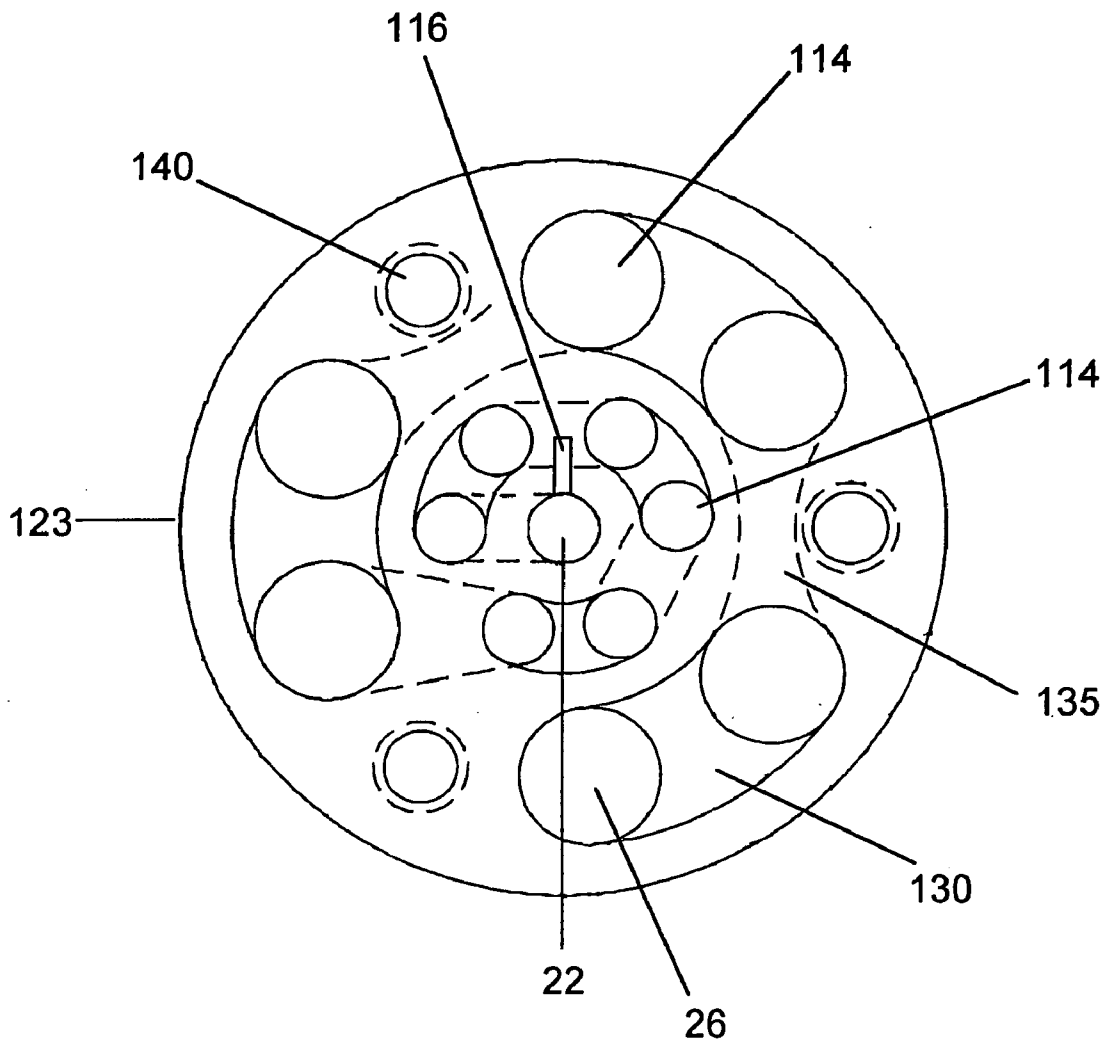


FIG 5

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR VAPORIZING FUEL

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[0001] This is a continuation of Ser. No. 10/345,717 filed Jan. 16, 2003 and issued as Pat. No. 6,769,421 on Aug. 03, 2004 which is a continuation-in-part of Ser. No. 09/674,863 filed Nov. 07, 2000 which was entitled to the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/150,421, filed Aug. 24, 1999 and is a U.S. National filing from International Application PCT/US00/22999. Applicant requests that Disclosure Document no. 458891, filed at U.S. Patent and Trademark Office on Jul. 10, 1999 be associated with this application.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention is directed to fuel vaporizer devices for vaporizing liquid fuel supplied to an internal combustion engine, and more specifically to a method and apparatus for efficiently vaporizing liquid hydrocarbon fuel in a closed system prior to its entry into an internal combustion engine's combustion chambers in amounts proportional to the acceleration level of the engine, thereby increasing the engine's fuel efficiency and decreasing the engine's emissions of pollutants to the environment.

BACKGROUND ART

[0003] In an internal combustion engine, combustion of a fuel takes place in a confined space, producing expanding gases that are used directly to provide mechanical power. In the confined space, or combustion chamber, a portion of the liquid hydrocarbon fuel is converted to a gas because of the partial vacuum formed therein during the intake portion of the engine's cycle of operation. During the following compression portion of the engine's cycle, the compression of the gases (in diesel engines) and/or the heat of a spark (as in gasoline engines) functions to ignite the gaseous portion of the fuel. The resulting expansion of gases during the power portion of an engine's cycle forces movement of a piston and resulting conversion of chemical to mechanical energy.

[0004] The fuel must be in a gaseous state to combust. This is true whether the fuel is gasoline, diesel, liquid petroleum, wax, wood or any other combustible material. This is why the liquid fuel used in an internal combustion engine is first converted to its gaseous state before being combusted under the pressure of compression and/or by the heat of a spark.

[0005] Unfortunately, the internal combustion engine currently accomplishes this task inefficiently by the partial vacuum created in the combustion chamber (or cylinder) during the intake portion of an engine's cycle. In that partial vacuum, liquid fuel and air is drawn into the cylinder where a portion of the liquid fuel is vaporized because of the vacuum and thus combustible when exposed to the heat of a spark or under compression. Unfortunately, less than 40% of the liquid fuel is typically vaporized in this process and combusted to provide power and heat. Most of the remaining liquid fuel is converted to vapor after the initial combustion, too late to be converted to mechanical power and heat, and is instead released to the environment during the exhaust phase of the cycle as a pollutant. Some 60% or more of the

liquid fuel entering the combustion chamber is, therefore, wasted and exhausted to the environment.

[0006] Numerous attempts have been made in the prior art to more completely vaporize the liquid fuel supplied to internal combustion engines in order to improve their performance and/or efficiency, or to reduce the pollutants discharged into the atmosphere with the exhaust from the engine. The higher the proportion of fuel entering an engine's cylinder as vapor rather than liquid, the higher the proportion of fuel combusted and the less fuel required to achieve the same amount of mechanical energy. Given the ever increasing costs of fossil fuels and the unreliability of foreign sources, it is understandable that much effort would be expended to increase energy efficiency to conserve energy as well as decrease pollution.

[0007] Several U.S. Patents were found that attempt to increase the proportion of fuel entering the combustion chambers as a gas to improve an engine's efficiency and limit the amount of fuel emitted as pollutants. They each fail to achieve this goal adequately, however, for reasons noted below.

[0008] U.S. Pat. No. 4,350,134, to Sparks, relates to a method and apparatus for producing an air/fuel vapor mixture for use in the combustion chambers of an internal combustion engine. The apparatus includes an enclosure into which ambient air is introduced with a heater for heating the ambient air together with a fuel vaporizer for vaporizing fuel injected into the enclosure and for mixing with the heated air and another heater for heating the resulting air/fuel vapor mixture which is subsequently conducted out of the enclosure to the combustion chambers of the internal combustion engine. The invention fails to provide means by which the amount of fuel entering the vaporization device is regulated to match the engine's precise requirements at any given time.

[0009] U.S. Pat. No. 4,538,583, to Earl, and its Continuation-in-Part U.S. Pat. No. 4,622,944, relate to a system for supplying fuel to an internal combustion engine that includes a two-stage evaporator serially mounted within the fuel supply system of the engine. This device provides no precise fuel control and may produce more fuel vapor than needed at low speeds and not enough at higher speeds. The device provides no idle control and no way to move the vehicle until the device heats the fuel to its vapor point. The device also may be hazardous in that it contains glow plugs that could potentially heat some of the fuel to its flash point and cause a fire.

[0010] U.S. Pat. No. 4,550,706, to Hoffman, relates to a fuel vaporizer comprising an air/fuel heating and mixing chamber which vaporizes liquid hydrocarbon fuel to a heated, dry vaporous state and mixes it with heated air for introduction of the mixture into a primary or main air stream for supply to the cylinders of the engine. This device contains design flaws, one involving the location of a float relative to nozzles that will result in little to no fuel flow in the device, and another that will result in a buildup of fuel at the device's atomizer. Such a buildup of fuel could pose an explosion hazard if the vehicle is involved in an accident.

[0011] U.S. Pat. Nos. 4,665,879 and 4,622,944, to Earl, relates to a fuel evaporation apparatus which comprises a two-stage evaporator designed to receive fuel such as gaso-

line in a liquid form and to completely transform the liquid fuel into its vapor state so as to increase the efficiency of operation of the associated internal combustion engine. The main flaw in this device is its lack of a fuel flow control so that fuel flow can be regulated to match the vehicle's speed. The device also could result in a buildup of fuel that would pose a danger of explosion in an accident.

[0012] U.S. Pat. No. 4,898,142, to Van Wechem, et al., relates to a combustion engine with fuel injection system, having at least one cylinder with an air inlet passage, into which passage opens a fuel spray valve which is connected to a fuel pipe with pump, the fuel pipe containing a heating element. The heating element of the device, however, does not heat the fuel sufficiently for vaporization.

[0013] U.S. Pat. No. 5,398,663, to Kulasinghe and Estate, relates to an internal combustion engine comprising a heated chamber with heating element in which liquid fuel is gasified. This device fails to incorporate a means by which fuel flow can be regulated to match the requirements of the engine at variable speeds.

[0014] U.S. Pat. No. 5,746,188, to Cooke, relates to an apparatus for heating and vaporizing a liquid hydrocarbon fuel supplied to an internal combustion engine that includes a housing having an inlet and outlet. The heating wire of this device will not provide enough heat to vaporize the fuel and will potentially short out. The fuel vapor that is formed in this device is not transported to the engine quickly enough to be responsive to changes in acceleration.

[0015] U.S. Pat. No. 5,778,860, to Garcia, relates to a system for partially vaporizing the fuel to a vehicle internal combustion engine comprising a set of fittings for passing the fuel from the fuel pump or injection pump through a vaporization chamber which is placed adjacent the engine to heat the fuel, partially vaporizing it. This device's heat source will not heat the fuel adequately to vaporize it.

[0016] The present invention is directed to overcoming one or more of the problems as set forth above.

DISCLOSURE OF INVENTION

Brief Summary of the Invention

[0017] The fuel vaporizer of the present invention is interposed between an internal combustion engine's fuel injection system and intake manifold. It functions to vaporize a substantial portion of the liquid fuel injected into it by the fuel injector, thereby dramatically increasing the proportion of fuel supplied to the combustion chambers of the engine as a gas rather than liquid. Since it is only in its gaseous form that the fuel is combusted, increasing the proportion of fuel in the combustion chamber as gas greatly increases the proportion combusted during the compression portion of an engine's cycle. The invention thus achieves a substantial improvement in fuel economy with a coincident reduction in pollutants through nearly complete combustion of the fuel. The invention will thus achieve enormous energy savings with fuel-injected engines of all kinds (both old and new) by an elegantly simple, safe and efficient means.

Objects and Advantages

[0018] Accordingly, a method and apparatus for vaporizing fuel prior to its entry into the cylinders of a fuel-injected

internal combustion engine is provided. Several objects and advantages of the present invention are to provide:

[0019] a) means by which fuel may be more efficiently combusted and converted to mechanical energy in an internal combustion engine, thereby significantly increasing a vehicle's fuel efficiency and decreasing a vehicle's emission of pollutants to the environment;

[0020] b) heating means by which fuel may be largely converted to its gaseous state prior to entry into an engine's combustion chambers by first heating the fuel to its boiling point using heating means powered by the vehicle's electrical power source;

[0021] c) means by which the vaporization of fuel is achieved safely without risk of fire by heating the fuel to boiling, but not to its flash point;

[0022] d) means by which the vaporization of fuel is achieved in a closed system, thereby preventing the emission of excess fuel vapor to the environment and providing for its storage for later use at engine startup;

[0023] e) means by which the amount of fuel being vaporized at any one moment is regulated and may be varied to meet the precise power output needs of the vehicle by use of the engine's fuel injection system;

[0024] f) means by which engine start is assured in both warm and cold climates; and,

[0025] g) means by which the present invention may be easily adapted and tooled to fit most engines, including both old and new engines.

[0026] Further objects and advantages of the present invention will become apparent from a consideration of the drawings and ensuing description.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

[0027] For a better understanding of the present invention, reference may be made to the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0028] **FIG. 1** is a cross-sectional schematic view of an embodiment of the present invention showing its internal components.

[0029] **FIG. 2** is a frontal view of an embodiment of the present invention as it may be designed to fit an intake manifold.

[0030] **FIG. 3** is a side view of a six-cylinder intake manifold showing orientation of fuel vaporizers thereto.

[0031] **FIG. 4** is a cross sectional view of the vaporization canister.

[0032] **FIG. 5** is a top view of the cylinder.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0033] Referring now specifically to the figures, in which identical or similar parts are designated by the same reference numerals throughout, the first referring to **FIG. 1**, the components of the apparatus of one embodiment of the present invention are depicted and described. It should be understood that the following detailed descriptions relate to various of the currently known embodiments of the present

invention. However, the present invention can assume numerous other embodiments, as will become apparent to those skilled in the art.

Embodiments—Apparatus

[0034] Referring to **FIG. 1**, the basic components of one embodiment of the present invention, a fuel vaporizer **10**, are depicted. **FIG. 1** is a cross-sectional view of a fuel vaporizer **10** in its more generic configuration for purposes of depicting its internal components. In this embodiment, the fuel vaporizer **10** is adapted for use in a fuel-injected internal combustion engine and is interposed between the engine's fuel injection system and intake manifold.

[0035] A fuel line connection **18** connects a fuel injector **22** to the engine's fuel line **36**. Liquid fuel enters the fuel vaporizer **10**'s internal vaporization chamber **14**, via the fuel injector **22**. The fuel injector **22** contains a fuel injector control **20** (see **FIG. 2**) to control the amount of liquid fuel entering the fuel vaporizer **10**.

[0036] In this embodiment, the liquid fuel is pre-heated before it reaches the fuel vaporizer **10** by means of a fuel line heater **28** inserted at a point in the fuel line prior to its connection to the fuel vaporizer **10**. Other embodiments are possible that do not require pre-heating of the fuel prior to entry into the fuel vaporizer **10**. The fuel line heater **28** is controlled by a thermostatic temperature control **32** powered by the vehicle's battery and activated upon ignition. The fuel line heater **28** may comprise any of several commonly available alternative types of fuel line heaters. They may simply comprise a metal tube that warms the fuel as it passes through en route to the fuel vaporizer **10**, or be of more elaborate design.

[0037] The main body of the fuel vaporizer **10** consists of a heating and vaporization canister housing **24**, made of aluminum, or other material having a high thermal conductivity and able to disperse heat evenly, and defining an internal vaporization chamber **14**. The surfaces of the internal chamber **14** may be smooth, as depicted in **FIG. 1**, or may contain protrusions into the interior of the chamber **14** to increase the surface area for heating the fuel. For example, the interior surface of the chamber **14** may form fin-like or other sorts of protrusions into the interior.

[0038] The heating and vaporization canister housing **24** may be formed of a solid cup-shaped portion fitted securely with a cap portion as depicted in **FIG. 1**. However, many configurations and shapes are possible, including the single piece design depicted in **FIGS. 2 and 3**.

[0039] In this particular embodiment, the cap portion of the canister housing **24** is fitted securely to the cup portion by means of screws and sealants, or other similar means, to ensure an airtight seal that will resist the pressure of the vaporizing fuel within. The housing **24** defines an inlet, an outlet and an air intake hole. In this particular embodiment the inlet, outlet and air intake hole are defined in the cap portion of the housing **24**. The air intake hole is fitted with a one-way air intake valve **16**, the inlet is fitted with the fuel injector **22**, and a connector **26** is fitted to the outlet, forming a vacuum connection ultimately with the engine's combustion chambers. In this particular embodiment, the fuel vapor enters the intake manifold **34** en route to the engine's combustion chambers.

[0040] In this particular embodiment, the vaporized fuel-air mixture is siphoned from the vaporization chamber **14** through a siphon tube **30** which extends down into the vaporization chamber **14** communicating the chamber **14** with the connector **26**. The fuel-air mixture is siphoned away from the fuel vaporizer **10** through a hose attached to the connector **26** to the engine's combustion chambers. In this embodiment, the fuel vapor first enters the intake manifold **34** en route to the combustion chambers of the engine's cylinders. Air moves into the chamber **14** through the air intake valve **16** to allow the siphoning of gases and liquid therefrom under the partial vacuum. Thus, the fuel vaporizer **10** is a completely self-contained unit in which liquid fuel is injected into the vaporization chamber **14** where the fuel is heated and vaporized and subsequently siphoned to the engine's combustion chambers with no leakage to the outside environment.

[0041] The siphon **30** is not required when the fuel vaporizer **10** is made in a straight-through design as depicted in **FIGS. 2 and 3**. When the housing **24**'s inlet is at the top of the vaporizer **10** and the outlet is at the bottom, the danger of unvaporized fuel build-up is minimized, thus removing the need for a siphon. Instead, any fuel vapor and unvaporized fuel will simply pass through the vaporizer **10** to the engine's combustion chambers.

[0042] The fuel vaporizer **10** further consists of a heating means by which the liquid fuel entering the canister housing **24** is heated to boiling and vaporized. In this particular embodiment, the heating means comprises a resistance heating element **12** whose temperature is controlled to a particular temperature setting optimal for a given fuel by its own internal temperature sensor and an externally-mounted thermostatic electronic control means **38**. The heating element **12** may assume various sizes and shapes according to the design and shape of the fuel vaporizer **10**. Also, there may be multiple heating elements **12** to optimally heat the interior surfaces of the chamber **14**. The heating elements may be on the inside or the outside of the housing **24**. In addition, alternative heating means may be used to heat the fuel to boiling according to the most appropriate technologies available. These alternatives may include, for example, the use of microwave radiation to heat the liquid fuel in the interior of the vaporization chamber **14**, and temperature sensors mounted internally to monitor the fuel temperature.

[0043] However, in the embodiment depicted in **FIG. 1**, the electronic control means **38** is connected electrically to the vehicle's ignition so that the resistance heating element **12** is not activated until the vehicle is turned on with the ignition key. The electronic control means **38** is also connected to and powered by the vehicle's battery.

[0044] As here depicted, the resistance heating element **12** is fitted into a groove cut in the bottom outer surface of the canister **24**'s cup portion. In this way the resistance heating element **12** is positioned nearer the inner surface of the canister **24**. The resistance heating element **12** is held in place by a bottom to the canister **24** that is secured to the cup portion, effectively sandwiching the resistance heating element **12** between it and the canister's cup portion, thereby safely holding the resistance heating element **12** in place and unexposed.

[0045] Though as mentioned above, there may be more than one heating element **12** and these may be of varying

sizes and shapes, oriented to the canister housing **24** in ways to optimize heat transfer to the interior surfaces of the vaporization chamber **14**. Likewise, the surface of the interior chamber **14** may be smooth or form fin-like or other shapes protruding inwardly so as to increase the surface area of the chamber **14**'s heated interior at which the liquid fuel may be heated to vaporization.

[0046] The heating and vaporization canister housing **24** is constructed of aluminum because of its ability to transfer heat evenly across its surfaces, thus avoiding the danger posed by hot spots that may otherwise develop. Vaporized fuel may be heated to its flash point and fuel pre-ignition may occur at such hot spots, both of which should be avoided for safe operation of the present invention. Other materials similarly able to disperse heat evenly may also be used.

[0047] FIGS. 2 and 3 show the fuel vaporizers **10** as they would generally be oriented relative to the intake manifold **34** of a vehicle containing a six-cylinder engine. Three of the fuel vaporizers **10** are shown in FIG. 3 as they would be connected to the vehicle's fuel line **36** and relative to the manifold **34**. A spacer may be utilized between the intake manifold **34** and the fuel vaporizer **10** to mount the fuel vaporizer on, particularly when retrofitting an engine which was not designed to have the fuel vaporizer attached. Connections from each fuel vaporizer **10** not illustrated in FIG. 3 are the fuel injector control **20**'s connection to the engine's computer, the electronic control means' **38** connection to the vehicle's 12 V battery, and the connector **26**'s connection to the intake manifold **34** of the engine. As designed to individually serve each cylinder, the fuel vaporizer **10**'s air intake valve **16**, fuel injector **18** and connector **26** are oriented differently than depicted in FIG. 1, in order to more efficiently fit to the intake port for each cylinder. In particular, they are depicted in a straight-through design with the inlet fitted with the fuel injector **22** at the top and the outlet fitted with the connector **26** to the intake manifold **34** at the bottom.

[0048] In an alternative embodiment shown in FIGS. 4 and 5 the fuel vaporizer **10** is a heated cylinder **123** having at least one channel for the fuel air mixture to travel in while it is heated to vaporize the fuel. It is preferred to have multiple channels with the fuel being redirected into a new channel with the help of end caps **121**, **125** at the top and bottom of the cylinder **123**.

[0049] In FIG. 4 the fuel from fuel line **36** enters the fuel injector **22** for injecting fuel into the central channel **114** of the cylinder **123**. The fuel may be preheated by fuel line heater **28** if needed. An air intake **16** and air intake channel **116** allows air to enter the central channel **114** along with the fuel. This allows the vacuum of the engine to pull the fuel air mixture to the engine. Heaters such as electric heaters **12** inside of the cylinder **123** walls can be used to heat the cylinder **123** such that the fuel in the channels is heated. Heaters **12** may alternatively be on the exterior of the cylinders **123**. The longer the path length of the channels the more the fuel will be heated because of its longer time in the channels **114** of the cylinder **123**. The fuel then exits the vaporizer **124** at the intake manifold connector **26** and travels to the manifold for use in an engine.

[0050] The top of the cylinder **123** is shown in FIG. 5, it has a plurality of channels **114**. The inner ring of channels

is smaller than the outer ring of channels in this embodiment for carrying the heated and therefore expanded gasses, as it gets closer to exiting the cylinder. The cylinders **114** may each be of a different diameter or of changing diameters to allow for the expansion of the gas flowing therein. At the top and bottom ends of the cylinder **123** the gas is turned by end caps **121**, **125** and directed to the next adjacent channel in the path. The top connection portion **130** shown by solid lines, connects the channels **114** and at the bottom the connection portion **135**, shown by dashed lines, connects the channels **114**. The top and bottom end caps **121** and **125** respectively have compatible connection portions **130**, **135** to guide the fuel air mixtures between the channels. Bolt holes **140** allow the end caps **121**, **125** to be attached to the cylinders.

Embodiments—Method of Operation

[0051] Referring to FIG. 1, the basic components of the present invention, a fuel vaporizer **10**, are depicted. FIG. 1 is a cross-sectional view of a fuel vaporizer **10** in its more generic configuration for purposes of depicting its internal components. In this embodiment, the fuel vaporizer **10** is adapted for use in a fuel-injected internal combustion engine and is interposed between the engine's fuel injection system and combustion chambers.

[0052] The fuel vaporizer **10** functions to substantially vaporize the liquid fuel that would otherwise be injected by the fuel injection system directly into the engine's intake manifold. By vaporizing a high percentage of the liquid fuel before it enters a vehicle's cylinders, the fuel vaporizer **10** increases the efficiency with which an internal combustion engine converts chemical to mechanical energy. The higher the proportion of fuel entering the engine's combustion chambers as gas vapor, the higher the percentage of fuel combustible during the compression portion of the engine's cycle and the lower the percentage of fuel exhausted as waste.

[0053] Referring to FIG. 1, the basic components of the present invention are depicted in a cross-sectional view in order to illustrate their operation. The liquid fuel travels through the fuel line **36** where it is heated at the fuel line heater **28** prior to entering the fuel vaporizer **10**. The fuel line heater **28** pre-heats the liquid fuel so that it is at a fairly high temperature (e.g., approx. 74-79 degrees C for gasoline fuel) as it enters the fuel vaporizer **10**, thus increasing the efficiency with which it may be heated further to vaporization within the vaporization chamber **14**. The pre-heating, though not essential to the operation of the fuel vaporizer **10**, functions to assure efficient operation of the fuel vaporizer **10** in variable external temperature conditions, particularly in cold conditions.

[0054] The pre-heated liquid fuel is injected into the internal vaporization chamber **14** of the heating and vaporization canister housing **24** by the engine's fuel injector **22** in amounts precisely controlled by the fuel injector control **20** (see FIG. 2) which is connected to and controlled by the vehicle's computer. The fuel injector control **20** varies the amount of fuel injected to meet the demands of an engine operating over a broad range of conditions in accordance with such factors as engine rpm, throttle position and rate of opening/closing, barometric pressure or manifold absolute pressure, air temperature, water and/or oil temperature, fuel

pressure, mass airflow and exhaust gas oxygen. Some small portion of the liquid fuel is typically vaporized as it passes through the fuel injector **22**, but the majority remains liquid. Though fuel injection systems have greatly increased the fuel efficiency of engines, there still is only a small portion of fuel (around 40%) actually combusted in an engine's cylinder. The present invention builds on the increased efficiency of fuel-injection systems, by functioning to increase substantially the portion of fuel combusted.

[0055] As shown in **FIG. 1** once injected into the vaporization chamber **14**, the liquid fuel is heated to boiling and vaporized by contact with the internal surfaces of the chamber **14** that have been warmed by a heating means. In this embodiment the heating means comprises a resistance heating element **12**, though more than one may be used. The chamber **14** surfaces are heated to a temperature adequate to produce proper vaporization of the fuel upon contact, but still well below the flash point of the fuel vapor.

[0056] As shown in **FIG. 4** once injected into the vaporization canister housing **124** the fuel travels back and forth in channels **114** to lengthen the path of travel and increase the heat transfer to the fuel to more thoroughly vaporize it.

[0057] The temperature of the one or more resistance heating elements **12** is maintained at that temperature both by their own internal temperature sensors and by an externally mounted thermostatic electronic control means **38**. The electronic control means **38** is powered by the vehicle's battery and is not activated until the key is turned in the ignition to start the vehicle. In that way, the one or more resistance heating elements **12** are only active when the vehicle is in use. No fuel vapor is ignited until it passes to the combustion chambers of the engine, thus enabling the safe operation of the present invention.

[0058] A partial vacuum is created with the downward pull of a piston during the intake portion of the engine's cycle. That partial vacuum causes ambient air to be drawn into the vaporization chamber **14** through the one-way air valve **16**, allowing the air-fuel vapor mixture to be drawn out of the canister **24**, **124** via the fuel vapor siphon tube **30** (in this embodiment), through the connector **26** and via a hose to the engine's combustion chambers. In this particular embodiment, the fuel vapor first enters the engine's air intake manifold **34** (where more air is added to the mix) en route to the combustion chambers of the cylinders. At the cylinders, the air-fuel vapor mixture is efficiently combusted when exposed to the heat of a spark (or under compression in a diesel engine). The fuel vaporizer **10** is a completely self-contained unit in which liquid fuel enters, is vaporized and moves to the engine's combustion chambers with no leakage to the outside environment.

[0059] The air intake valve **16** prevents fuel vapor remaining in the heating and vaporization canister housing **24**, **124** at engine shut off from leaking into the atmosphere because it is a one-way valve allowing air to enter the vaporization chamber **14**, or channels **114** but not allowing air, or fuel, to leave. Any fuel vapor or liquid fuel left in the heating and vaporization canister housing **24** at shut off will go into the intake port of the engine head through the canister **24**'s connector **26** via a hose to the engine's combustion chambers. In this particular embodiment, the fuel vapor first enters the intake manifold **34** from which it is drawn into the engine when the engine is restarted.

[0060] In addition, in the embodiment of **FIG. 1**, the opening of the fuel vapor siphon tube **30** is positioned near the bottom of the vaporization chamber **14** in order to prevent the build-up of unvaporized liquid fuel beyond its level should the one or more resistance heating elements **12** fail. In that way, excess liquid fuel and air will simply be drawn up and out of the canister **24** instead of the air-fuel vapor mix, and be combusted in the engine's cylinders in the usual manner. Note that liquid fuel will also pass to the engine's cylinders in the usual manner at initial engine startup during the very brief time it takes after ignition to heat the one or more resistance heating elements **12** fully. The use of a siphon **30** is not necessary in the straight-through design embodiments, such as in **FIG. 4**, as the fuel entering at the top will simply pass out the bottom of the fuel vaporizer **10** to the engine's combustion chambers without accumulating in the chamber **14**.

[0061] **FIGS. 2 and 3** show the fuel vaporizers **10** as they would be designed to serve each cylinder of an engine individually and oriented relative to an intake manifold **34** of a vehicle containing a six-cylinder engine. They depict the fuel vaporizer **10** in a straight through design with the fuel inlet at the top and the outlet at the bottom.

Further Alternative Embodiments

[0062] There are various other possible alternative embodiments of the present invention. For example:

[0063] a) the fuel vaporizer **10** may assume various sizes and shapes for customized fit to a variety of engine types and makes. The fuel vaporizer canister **24** and the positioning of the air valve **16**, fuel injector **22** and connector **26**, may all be varied to meet the particular requirements of an engine's design;

[0064] b) the fuel vaporizer **10** may be designed as a part integral to newly manufactured engines or as a part retro-fittable to engines already in use;

[0065] c) the fuel vaporizer **10** may be adapted for use with gasoline or diesel engines used to power vehicles of a variety of types including cars, trucks or airplanes;

[0066] d) the fuel vaporizer **10** may be fitted to individual cylinders or to serve all or only a portion of the cylinders of an engine;

[0067] e) the fuel vaporizer **10** may be designed to serve individual cylinders of an engine directly, thus by-passing or replacing the intake manifold **34**;

[0068] f) the heating means employed to heat the interior surfaces of the chamber **14** may consist of one or more resistance heating elements of various sizes and shapes, or may comprise an alternative technology similarly able to heat the fuel inside the vaporizer **10** to boiling, including such as microwave and other technologies

[0069] g) the means by which the temperature of the heating means is controlled may likewise vary with the technology employed to heat the interior surfaces of the chamber **14** or the fuel directly; and,

[0070] h) the material from which the fuel vaporizer **10** is made may be something other than aluminum so long as it is able to likewise disperse heat evenly and avoid the development of hot spots.

Advantages

[0071] From the description above, a number of advantages of the present invention become evident:

[0072] a) it greatly increases the fuel efficiency of fuel-injected internal combustion engines resulting in cost savings to the user, conservation of a limited resource, and decreased pollution;

[0073] b) its ability to increase fuel efficiency by at least 70% in practice (based on early tests of the prototype) and over 100% in theory, will greatly reduce the weight of fuel required by airplanes and other vehicles to travel, thereby addressing one of the main limitations of that industry;

[0074] c) its design can be modified while retaining its basic functioning thereby allowing it to be used to retrofit the millions of cars already on the road in addition to improving the new engines manufactured;

[0075] d) its flexibility of design allows it to be adapted to engines of variable design and number of cylinders;

[0076] e) its closed design prevents fuel from escaping to the environment and from building up under the hood of a vehicle;

[0077] f) its incorporation on a fuel injector controlled by the vehicle's computer allows for the amount of fuel vapor produced to match the engine's requirements at any given moment;

[0078] g) its construction in a material like aluminum prevents hot spots from developing and the premature ignition of fuel vapor, thus together with its closed design, assuring safe operation;

[0079] h) it assures heating of the fuel in such a way as to allow proper functioning no matter what the external temperature; and,

[0080] i) since the vaporizer can be interposed in a fuel line, a manufacturer of internal combustion engines or a mechanic will be able to accept the use of the present invention fairly easily.

Conclusion, Ramifications and Scope

[0081] While the above description contains many specificities, these should not be construed as limitations on the scope of the invention, but rather as an exemplification of one embodiment thereof. It will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art that obvious modifications, derivations and variations can be made to the embodiment without departing from the scope of the invention. For example,

[0082] a) The present invention can be retrofitted to engines of various makes and cylinder numbers as well as integrated in newly manufactured engines;

[0083] b) The resistance heating elements may be composed of a variety of substances and designed and fitted to heat particular surfaces of the vaporizer's internal chamber;

[0084] c) The heating and vaporization canister housing may be constructed of a material other than aluminum so long as it shares its heat dissipation properties and will prevent the development of hot spots;

[0085] d) The size of the present invention may vary to fit a particular engine's design constraints;

[0086] e) The vaporizer may be adapted for use in fuel-injected engines on vehicles of various sorts including cars, trucks, airplanes, and the like; and,

[0087] f) The present invention can be adapted for use with diesel fuel burning engines.

[0088] Accordingly, the scope of the invention should not be determined by the embodiments illustrated.

Industrial Applicability

[0089] As is evident from the above descriptions, the present invention can be used to increase the fuel efficiency of fuel-injected engines in a variety of vehicles including cars, trucks, airplanes and the like. This increased fuel efficiency greatly lowers the cost of transportation of both goods and people alike. The advantage to airlines alone would be enormous given the major constraint fuel weight and cost place on that industry's profitability. The overall advantage to our economy of lowering the demand for imported fossil fuels is unquestionable.

[0090] In addition to the obvious applicability to industries dependent on the efficient use of fossil fuels, the present invention simultaneously decreases the amount of pollutants released to the environment. This will have enormous consequences, particularly in urban and other areas with concentrated fossil fuel use. Lower pollutant emissions by vehicles will decrease the acidity of rainfall and its resultant negative effects on the erosion of buildings and pollution of soil, among other things. It will also help to ease the negative human health effects of that problem.

[0091] The vaporization canister housing 124 of FIG. 4 is shown as a cylinder however any shape housing can be used. Further the channels 114 need not travel the length of the cylinder as shown. The channels may linearly traverse the width of the housing or may spiral through the housing to increase the path length of the fuel air mixture in the housing.

[0092] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

What is claimed is:

1. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine comprising,

a housing constructed of a block of material having a plurality of individual passageways extending from a top surface to a bottom surface, a first end cap on the top of the block having connective passageways linking the individual passageways through the block to other passageways through the block, a second end cap on the bottom of the block having connective passageways linking passageways through the block to other passageways through the block, such that a serpentine pathway is created in the housing,

a fuel injector for injecting fuel into the passageways in the housing, an air intake hole with a one way air intake valve for introducing air into the passageways, and an outlet through which fuel exits the housing,

a heater in the housing for heating the block such that fuel traveling through the passageways will be vaporized

2. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

the heater is an electric resistance heater in block of material.

3. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 2 wherein,

an electronic control means controls the temperature of the heater.

4. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

the air intake passes through the first end cap to access the passageways near the beginning of the serpentine path.

5. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

the fuel injector passes through the first end cap to access the passageways near the beginning of the serpentine path.

6. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

the outlet passes through the first end cap from the passageways near the end of the serpentine path.

7. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

the outlet passes through the second end cap from the passageways near the end of the serpentine path.

8. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

a preheating means disposed in a fuel line connected to the fuel injector, comprising a fuel line heater with an electronic temperature controller attached thereto.

9. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 3 wherein,

the air intake passes through the first end cap to access the passageways near the beginning of the serpentine path.

10. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 9 wherein,

the fuel injector passes through the first end cap to access the passageways near the beginning of the serpentine path.

11. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 10 wherein,

the outlet passes through the first end cap from the passageways near the end of the serpentine path.

12. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 10 wherein,

the outlet passes through the second end cap from the passageways near the end of the serpentine path.

13. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 1 wherein,

a preheating means disposed in a fuel line connected to the fuel injector, comprising a fuel line heater with an electronic temperature controller attached thereto.

14. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine as in claim 12 wherein,

a preheating means disposed in a fuel line connected to the fuel injector, comprising a fuel line heater with an electronic temperature controller attached thereto.

15. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine, comprising:

housing means constructed of a material having high thermal conductivity and defining an interior chamber, the housing means further defining an inlet connected to a fuel injector at which a fuel is injected into the chamber as required by the engine, an air intake hole comprising a one-way air intake valve, and an outlet through which the fuel exits the chamber;

heating means to heat at least one surface of the interior chamber sufficiently to boil the liquid fuel upon contact with the at least one surface, the heating means comprising at least one resistance heating element mounted exterior to the interior chamber and proximate to the at least one surface of the chamber, and, an electronic control means to control the temperature of the at least one resistance heating element, the electronic control means comprising a thermostatic temperature control connected to the heating means; and,

the housing means having a flow path from the fuel injector to the outlet straight through the housing means such that the vaporized fuel, air and any unvaporized fuel exit the outlet and are transported to the engine's combustion chamber.

16. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine, as in claim 15 having

a pre-heating means disposed in a fuel line connected to the fuel injector, comprising a fuel line heater with an electronic temperature controller attached thereto.

17. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine, comprising:

housing means constructed of a material having high thermal conductivity and defining an interior chamber, the housing means further defining an inlet connected to a fuel injector at which a fuel is injected into the chamber as required by the engine, an air intake hole comprising a one-way air intake valve, and an outlet through which the fuel exits the chamber;

heating means to heat at least one surface of the interior chamber sufficiently to boil the liquid fuel upon contact with the at least one surface, the heating means comprising at least one resistance heating element mounted exterior to the interior chamber and proximate to the at least one surface of the chamber, and, an electronic control means to control the temperature of the at least one resistance heating element, the electronic control means comprising a thermostatic temperature control connected to the heating means; and,

the housing means having a serpentine flow path interior chamber where the chamber is a block having straight paths therethrough with redirection paths in caps on either end of the blocks to connect the paths thus extending the path length of the fuel in the chamber to ensure full vaporization by prolonged heating time.

18. A fuel vaporizer for use in an internal combustion engine, as in claim 17 having

a pre-heating means disposed in a fuel line connected to the fuel injector, comprising a fuel line heater with an electronic temperature controller attached thereto.