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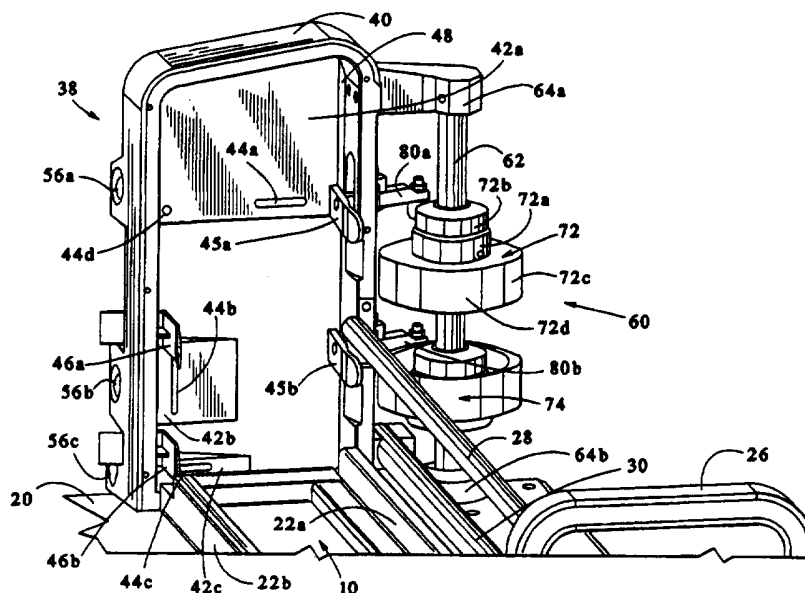
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(54) Title: VACUUM ASSISTED GATE ASSEMBLY FOR THE CARTON BLANK MAGAZINE OF A PACKAGING MACHINE



(57) Abstract

An improved gate assembly (38) for the carton blank magazine (10) of a packaging machine includes a frame (40) fixedly mounted on the magazine (10). The frame (40) has a longitudinal opening (48) formed therein for permitting the passage of a single carton blank therethrough. The frame (40) has air ducts (56) extending therethrough and receiving members (42) extending from the air ducts (56). Each of the receiving members has at least one slot (44) formed in the surface thereof facing the magazine (10). Each of the receiving members (42) also has an interior channel formed therein for communicating air between the slots (44) and the respective air duct (56). In operation, negative air pressure applied to the air ducts (56) induces a carton blank from the magazine (10) into contact with the receiving members (42).

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**VACUUM ASSISTED GATE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
CARTON BLANK MAGAZINE OF A PACKAGING MACHINE**

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present invention relates to packaging machines. In particular, the present invention relates to a vacuum assisted gate assembly for introducing carton blanks held in a magazine of the packaging machine.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

In packaging machines that produce sealed cartons containing food products or liquids, the carton blanks are typically introduced to the machine from a magazine.

10 The magazine usually holds a stack of carton blanks in an unerected and compressed state, and urges the carton blanks toward a gate. The gate positions and holds the carton blanks so they can be picked one at a time by a mechanism that unfolds and erects the blanks to form

15 cartons having side walls and unsealed top and bottom panels. After the bottom panel of the erected carton blank is sealed, a food product or a liquid can be received in the carton, the top panel of the carton can then be formed and sealed, and the filled and sealed

20 carton can be dispensed from the packaging machine for eventual shipment to the consumer.

Many of today's carton blank magazines require the application of high pressure by the magazine's pusher mechanism to overcome the friction of the stack of

25 carton blanks against the interior surfaces of the

magazine, and to urge the stack of blanks toward the gate. Under such high pressure, blanks can become compressed to the extent that the blanks can become difficult to separate when they reach the gate. In such instances, two or more carton blanks can be improperly fed simultaneously to the packaging machine, thereby creating the potential for misalignment of the carton blanks in subsequent portions of the packaging machine and fouling of the packaging machine. When carton blanks are misaligned, food product can be wasted if the misalignment persists through the filling area. If the machine becomes fouled, then valuable production time can be lost during the time required to service the machine.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An improved gate assembly for the carton blank magazine of a packaging machine comprises a frame fixedly mounted on the magazine. The frame has a longitudinal opening formed therein for permitting the passage of a single carton blank therethrough. The frame has at least one air duct extending therethrough and a plurality of receiving members extending from the at least one air duct. Each of the receiving members has at least one slot formed in the surface thereof facing the magazine. Each of the receiving members also has at least one interior channel formed therein for communicating air between the at least one slot and the at least one air duct. In operation, negative air pressure applied to the at least one air duct induces a carton blank from the magazine into contact with the receiving member.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a carton blank magazine portion of a packaging machine which includes a vacuum assisted gate assembly.

5 FIG. 2 is an enlarged perspective view of the gate assembly illustrated in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the portion of the packaging machine containing the carton blank magazine including the gate assembly, the bending cam mechanism,
10 the rotary picker including the vacuum elements for displacing the carton blanks from the magazine, and the erected carton blank receiving conveyor.

FIG. 4 is a top plan view of the portion of the packaging machine containing the carton blank magazine,
15 bending cam mechanism, rotary picker, and erected carton blank receiving conveyor illustrated in FIG. 8.

FIG. 5 is an enlarged perspective view of another embodiment of a vacuum assisted gate assembly for use in conjunction with a smaller capacity carton than that for
20 the gate assembly of FIGS. 1 and 2.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Turning first to FIG. 1, a carton blank magazine portion 10 of a packaging machine includes a magazine surface 20. Magazine surface 20 has a pair of oppositely facing, generally L-shaped rails 22a, 22b for receiving and containing a stack of carton blanks above magazine surface 20 and between rails 22a, 22b. A shelf 24 conveniently supports the carton blanks (not shown in FIG. 1) prior to being loaded between rails 22a, 22b.

As shown in FIG. 1, magazine 10 further includes a pusher 26 and a gate assembly 38. Pusher 26 is supported above magazine surface 20 by tubular support element 30. Tubular element 28 maintains the alignment of the carton blanks between pusher 26 and gate assembly 38. Pusher 26 is pneumatically biased on tubular element 30 so as to urge a stack of carton blanks loaded between rails 22a, 22b toward gate assembly 38. Pusher 26 also maintains the stack of carton blanks in an unerected and compressed state prior to their being presented to gate assembly 38.

Gate assembly 38 includes a frame 40 having a longitudinal opening 48 formed therein for permitting the passage of a single carton blank therethrough. Frame 40 also has a receiving member 42a extending therefrom. Receiving member 42a has a slot 44a formed in the surface thereof facing the magazine. An interior channel (not shown in FIG. 1) is formed in receiving member 42a for communicating air between slot 44a and an air duct (not shown in FIG. 1) extending through frame 40. Frame 40 also has additional receiving members 42b, 42c extending therefrom, each of which has an interior

channel for communicating air between its slot and an air duct. In operation, negative air pressure applied to the frame air ducts induces a carton blank (not shown in FIG. 1) from the magazine into contact with the receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c.

Stationary guide fingers 46a, 46b direct carton blanks into proper position with respect to gate assembly 38 as the carton blanks are urged toward gate assembly 38 by pusher 26. When a carton blank is in contact with receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c, a vacuum element of the rotary picker (not shown in FIG. 1) located behind gate assembly 38 laterally displaces the carton blank from gate assembly 38 through longitudinal opening 48. At the same time, moveable guide fingers 45a, 45b are urged forward by cammed drive members 80a, 80b, respectively, from their normally rearward positions to uncover opening 48 to permit passage of a single carton blank therethrough. Once displaced through opening 48, the carton blank passes to succeeding portions of the packaging machine where the carton blank is unfolded and erected prior to being filled with a food product or a liquid and then sealed.

In FIG. 1, switch 52 activates the moveable components of magazine 10. Switch 54 deactivates the moveable components of magazine 10 in the event of an emergency or other reason to cease operation of magazine 10.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the gate assembly 38 of a carton blank magazine 10 and the adjacent bending cam mechanism 60. The carton blank magazine 10 includes a magazine surface 20. Magazine surface 20 has

a pair of oppositely facing, generally L-shaped rails 22a, 22b for receiving and containing a stack of carton blanks above magazine surface 20 and between rails 22a, 22b. The magazine 10 further includes a pusher 26 and
5 a gate assembly 38. Pusher 26 is supported above magazine surface 20 by tubular support element 30. Tubular element 28 maintains the alignment of the carton blanks between pusher 26 and gate assembly 38. Pusher 26 is pneumatically biased so as to urge a stack of
10 carton blanks loaded between rails 22a, 22b toward gate assembly 38. Pusher 26 also maintains the stack of carton blanks in an unerected and compressed state prior to their being presented to gate assembly 38.

As shown in detail in FIG. 2, gate assembly 38
15 includes a frame 40 fixedly mounted on magazine surface 20. Frame 40 has a longitudinal opening 48 formed therein for permitting the passage of a single carton blank (not shown in FIG. 2) therethrough. Frame 40 has air ducts 56a, 56b, 56c extending therethrough.
20 Receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c extend from air ducts 56a, 56b, 56c, respectively.

Each of receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c has at least one slot formed in the surface thereof facing the magazine 10. As shown in FIG. 2, receiving member 42a
25 has slots 44a, 44d formed therein. Receiving member 42b has a slot 44b formed therein. Receiving member 42c has a slot 44c formed therein. Each of receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c has at least one channel formed in its interior (not shown in FIG. 2) for communicating air
30 between the slot(s) and the respective air duct. In this regard, a channel formed in the interior of

receiving member 42a communicates air between slots 44a, 44d and air duct 56a. An interior channel in receiving member 42b communicates air between slot 44b and air duct 56b. An interior channel in receiving member 42c communicates air between slot 44c and air duct 56c.

FIG. 2 shows stationary guide fingers 46a, 46b, which direct the carton blanks into their proper position with respect to gate assembly 38 as the carton blanks are urged toward gate assembly 38 by pusher 26.

Negative air pressure applied to air ducts 56a, 56b, 56c induces a carton blank from the magazine 10 into contact with receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c. The negative air pressure may, for example, be supplied by a fan (not shown in FIG. 2).

When a carton blank is in contact with receiving members 42a, 42b, 42c, a vacuum element of the rotary picker (shown for example in FIG. 3 as vacuum element 282) located behind gate assembly 38 laterally displaces the carton blank from gate assembly 38 through longitudinal opening 48. At the same time, moveable guide fingers 45a, 45b are urged forward (toward pusher 26) by cammed drive members 80a, 80b from their normally rearward positions to uncover opening 48 sufficiently to permit passage of a single carton blank through opening 48. The downwardly extending wheel of each of the cammed drive members 80a, 80b are urged to rotate by the frictional contact of the wheel against drive collar 72b secured to rotating shaft 62. Moveable guide fingers 45a, 45b are urged forward as each carton blank is displaced from gate assembly 38.

As shown in FIG. 2, cam mechanism 60 includes

substantially identical first and second cam members 72, 74 mounted on a rotatable shaft 62. Shaft 62 is rotatably mounted between bushings 64a, 64b. Upper bushing 64a is fixedly mounted on and extends laterally from frame 40 of gate assembly 38. Lower bushing 64b is fixedly mounted on magazine surface 20.

Cam member 72 in FIG. 2 comprises an annular fastening collar 72a for retaining cam member 72 on shaft 62, and an adjacent annular drive collar 72b which imparts rotational force to cammed drive member 80a. Cam member 72 also comprises longitudinally extending side walls, one of which is designated in FIG. 2 as side wall 72c, and apex portions interconnecting the side walls, one of which is designated in FIG. 2 as apex portion 72d. Cam member 74 is substantially identical in configuration to cam member 72, and imparts rotational force to cammed drive member 80b.

FIG. 2 also shows the respective locations of rails 22a, 22b, as well as pusher 26 and tubular support elements 28, 30, with respect to gate assembly 38.

Regarding the negative air pressure or vacuum applied to the air ducts, it has been found more advantageous to induce a high air flow, low negative pressure stream to counteract the leakage that occurs when a carton blank is urged laterally away from the slot(s) in the receiving members by the moveable members. In this regard, a low air flow, high negative pressure stream has been found less desirable to maintain carton blanks in contact with the receiving members when the blanks are urged laterally away from the slot(s) by the moveable members, thereby exposing

the slot(s) to atmospheric pressure. Both schemes, however, provide negative air pressure for operation of the system, although the first noted scheme is preferred.

5 FIGS. 3 and 4 show the portion of the packaging machine containing the carton blank magazine 10 including gate assembly 38, bending cam mechanism 60, rotary picker 280 including vacuum elements 282 for displacing carton blanks (not shown in FIGS. 3 and 4)
10 away from magazine 10, and erected carton blank receiving conveyor 290. As shown in FIG. 3, a band 286 interconnects shaft 62, which extends from bending cam mechanism 60, and shaft 284, which extends from rotary picker 280. Band 286 synchronizes the rotation of shaft
15 62 with that of rotary picker 280.

FIG. 5 illustrates another embodiment of a vacuum assisted gate assembly 138 suitable for use in conjunction with a smaller capacity carton (not shown in FIG. 5) than that for gate assembly 38 of FIGS. 1 and 2.
20 As shown in FIG. 5, gate assembly 138 includes a frame 140 which is fixedly mounted at the end of a carton blank magazine of the type shown as magazine 10 in FIGS. 1 and 2. Frame 140 has a cut-out portion 140a which forms a longitudinal opening 148 for permitting the
25 passage of a single carton blank therethrough. Frame 140 has air ducts 156a, 156b, 156c extending therethrough. Receiving members 142a, 142b, 142c extend from air ducts 156a, 156b, 156c, respectively.

Each of receiving members 142a, 142b, 142c has at
30 least one slot formed in the surface thereof facing the magazine. As shown in FIG. 2, receiving member 142a has

slot 144a formed therein. Receiving member 142b has five slots formed therein, one of which is designated in FIG. 5 as slot 144b. Receiving member 142c has a slot 144c formed therein. Each of receiving members 142a, 142b, 142c has at least one channel formed in its interior (not shown in FIG. 5) for communicating air between the slot(s) and the respective air duct. In this regard, a channel formed in the interior of receiving member 142a communicates air between slot 144a and air duct 156a. An interior channel in receiving member 142b communicates air between slot 144b and air duct 156b. An interior channel in receiving member 142c communicates air between slot 144c and air duct 156c.

FIG. 5 shows stationary guide fingers 146a, 146b, which direct the carton blanks into their proper position with respect to gate assembly 138 as the carton blanks are urged toward gate assembly 138 by pusher 126. Negative air pressure applied to air ducts 156a, 156b, 156c induces a carton blank from the magazine (not shown in FIG. 5) into contact with receiving members 142a, 142b, 142c. The negative air pressure may, for example, be supplied by a fan (not shown in FIG. 5).

When a carton blank is in contact with receiving members 142a, 142b, 142c, a vacuum element of the rotary picker (shown for example in FIG. 3 as vacuum element 282) located behind gate assembly 138 laterally displaces the carton blank from gate assembly 138 through longitudinal opening 148. At the same time, moveable guide fingers 145a, 145b are urged forward (toward the pusher) by cammed drive member 180 from their normally rearward positions to uncover opening 148

sufficiently to permit passage of a single carton blank through opening 148. The downwardly extending wheel of cammed drive member 180 is urged to rotate by the frictional contact of the wheel against a drive collar
5 secured to the rotating shaft of the adjacent bending cam mechanism (not shown in FIG. 5). Moveable guide fingers 145a, 145b are urged forward as each carton blank is displaced from gate assembly 138.

Negative air pressure applied to air ducts 156a,
10 156b, 156c induces a carton blank from the adjacent magazine (not shown in FIG. 5) into contact with receiving members 142a, 142b, 142c. The negative air pressure may, for example, be supplied by a fan (not shown in FIG. 5).

15 Regarding the location of the receiving members and their respective slots, it has been found advantageous to locate the slots so that the carton blank is vacuum gripped in a substantially balanced manner. In this regard, the vacuum gripping of a carton blank by slots
20 on one edge of the blank should preferably be offset by vacuum gripping by slots on an opposite edge so that the carton blank maintains its alignment within the gate assembly.

While particular elements, embodiments and
25 applications of the present invention have been shown and described, it will be understood, of course, that the invention is not limited thereto since modifications may be made by those skilled in the art, particularly in light of the foregoing teachings. It is therefore
30 contemplated by the appended claims to cover such modifications as incorporate those features which come

within the spirit and scope of the invention.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A gate assembly for the carton blank magazine of a packaging machine comprising a frame fixedly mounted on said magazine, said frame having a longitudinal opening formed therein for permitting the passage of a single carton blank therethrough, said frame having at least one air duct extending therethrough and at least one receiving member extending from said at least one air duct, each of said at least one receiving member having at least one slot formed in the surface thereof facing the magazine and at least one interior channel formed therein for communicating air between said at least one slot and said at least one air duct, whereby negative air pressure applied to said at least one air duct induces a carton blank from said magazine into contact with said at least one receiving member.

2. The gate assembly of claim 1 wherein said at least one air duct comprises a plurality of air ducts.

3. The gate assembly of claim 1 wherein said at least one receiving member comprises a plurality of receiving members.

4. The gate assembly of claim 1 wherein said at least one slot comprises a plurality of slots.

5. The gate assembly of claim 4 wherein said at least one interior channel comprises a plurality of

interior channels.

6. The gate assembly of claim 1 wherein said negative air pressure is supplied by a fan.

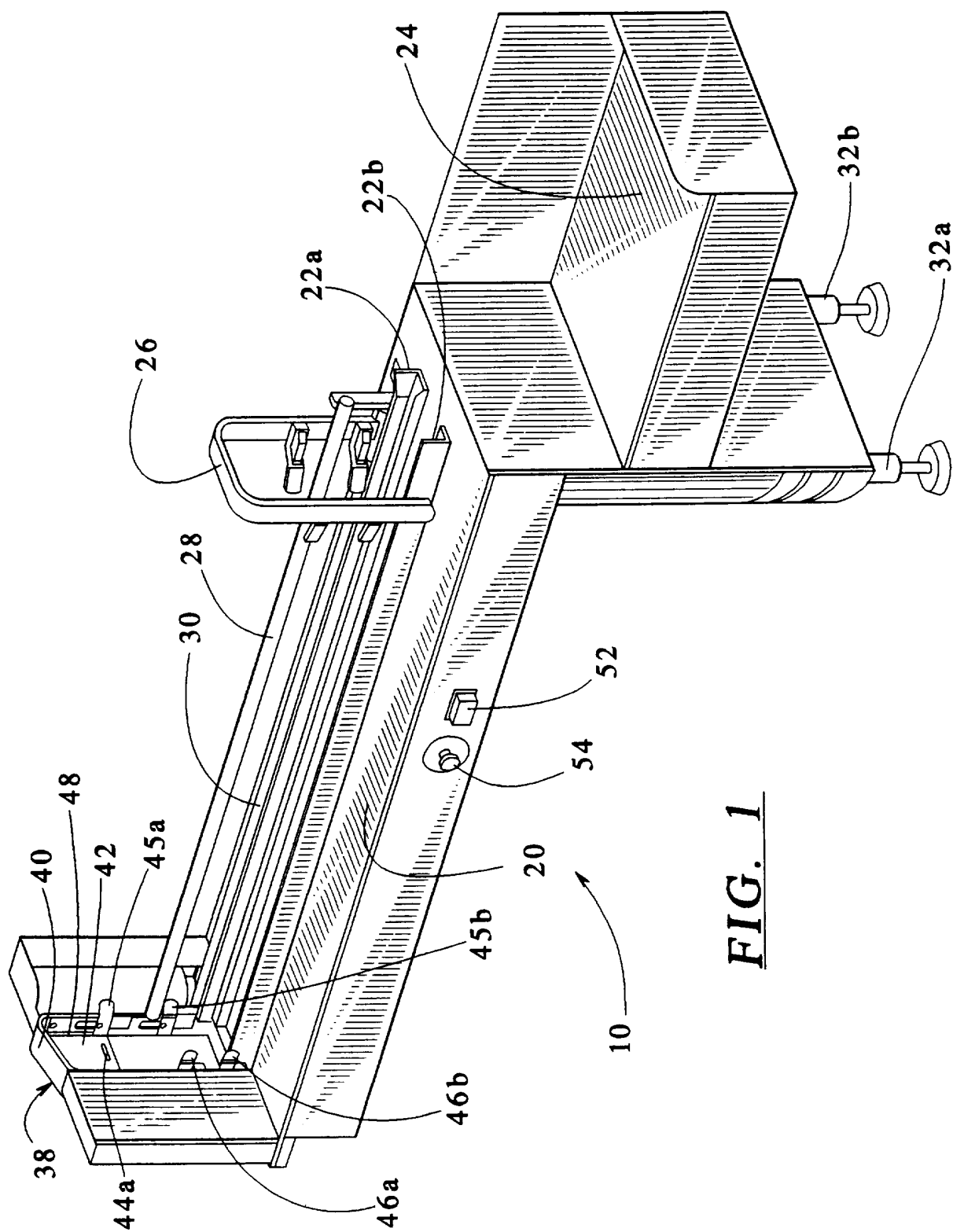
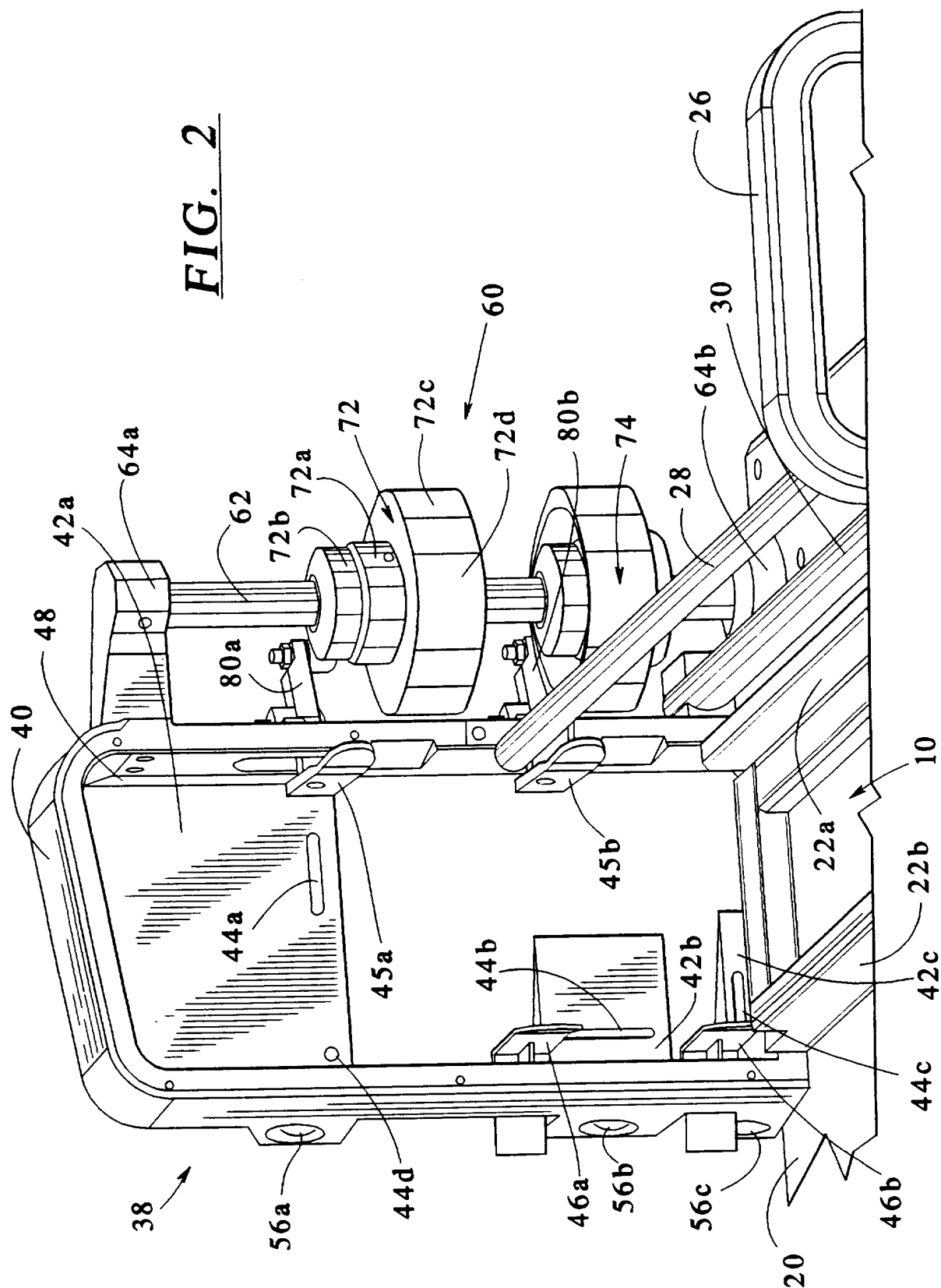
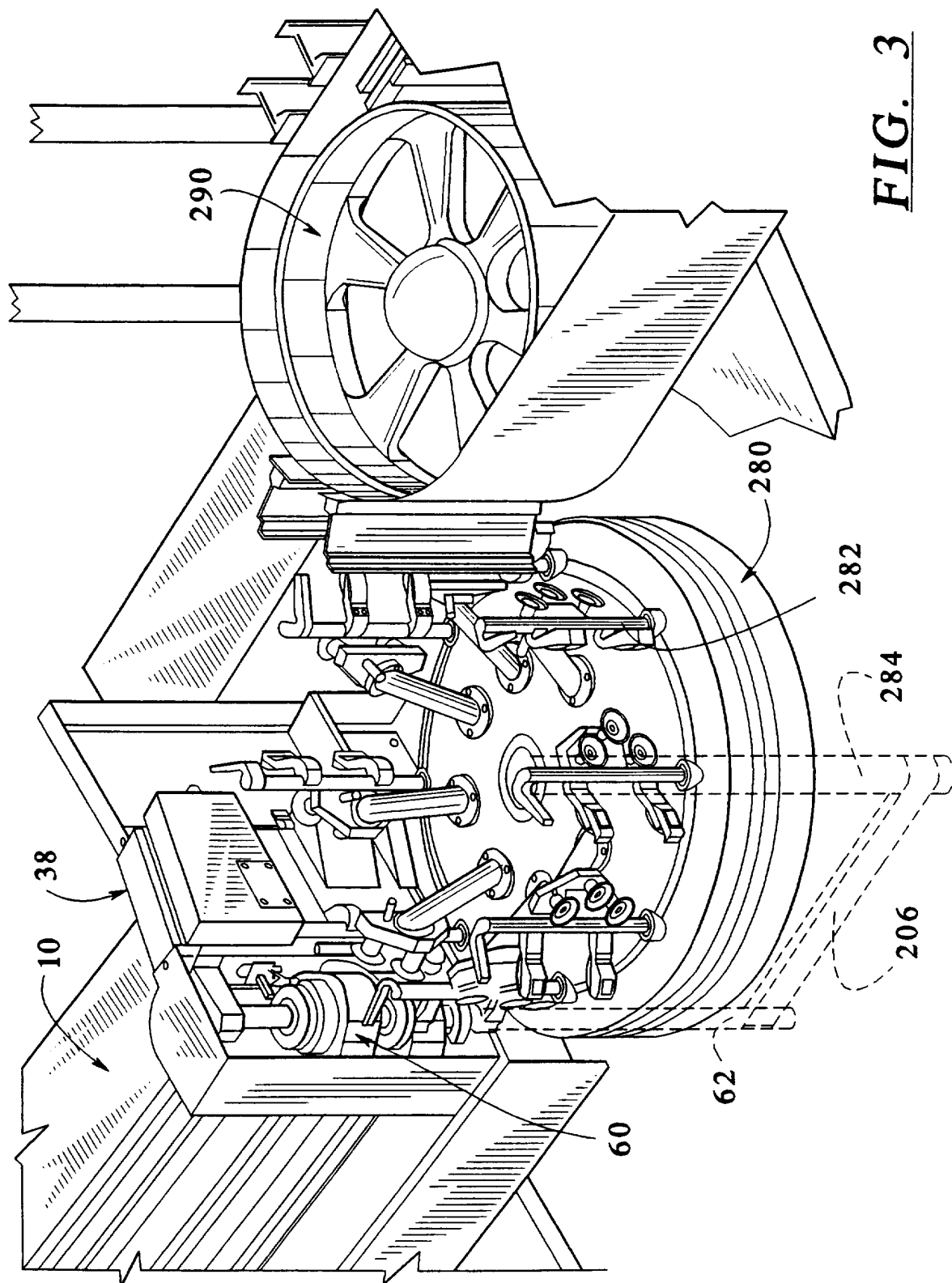


FIG. 1

FIG. 2





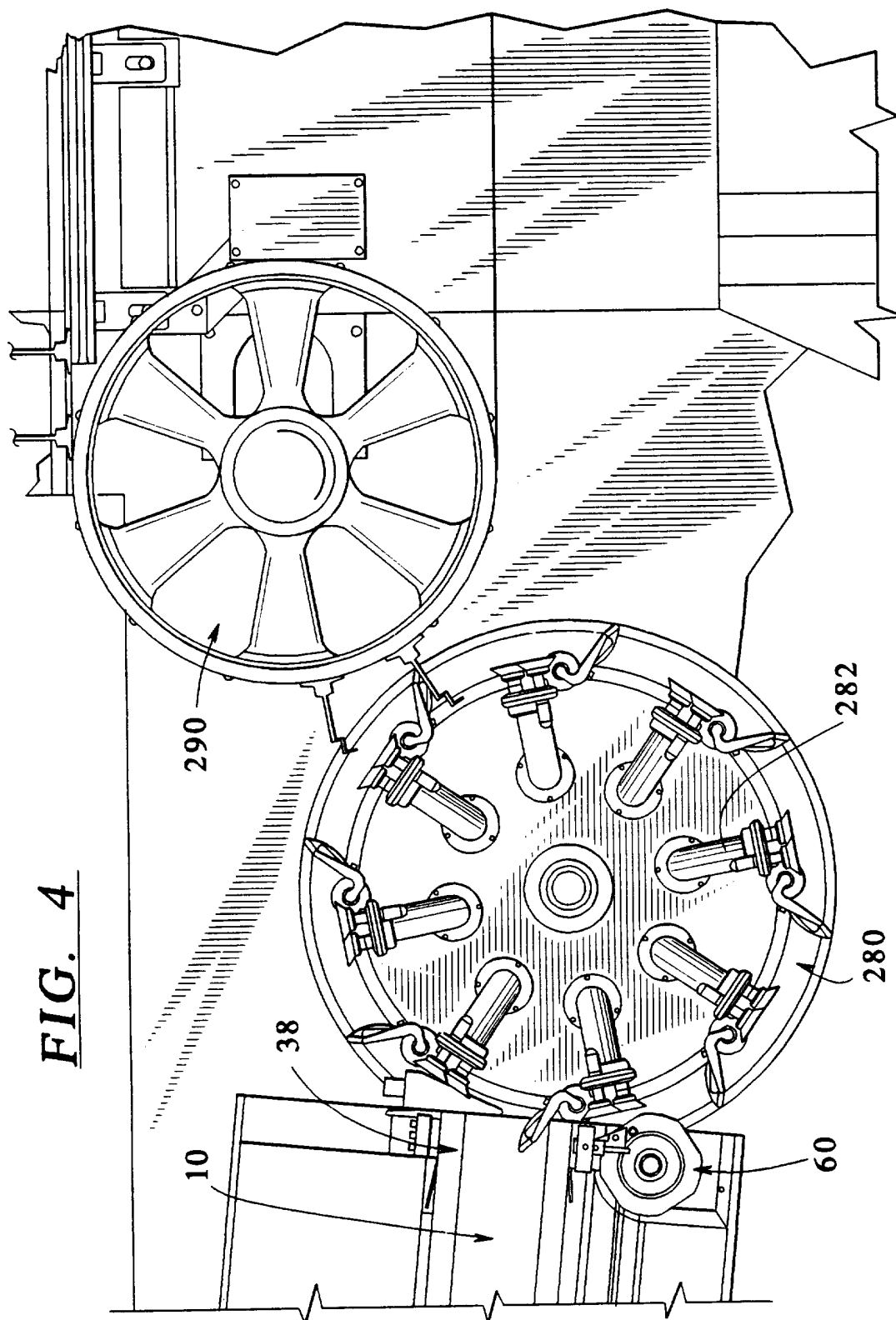


FIG. 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US95/11260

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) : B65G 59/04; B65H 3/08

US CL : 271/94, 105; 221/211; 493/315

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 271/94, 105, 11, 91; 221/211, 259, 305, 224, 226, 230; 493/315, 316, 317

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NONE

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)
NONE

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X ----- Y	US, A, 5,354,045 (Boldrini et al) 11 October 1994, See the entire document.	1 ----- 6
Y	SU, A, 401621 (Soviet Union) 26 February 1974, See the entire document.	6
A	US, A, 4,011,799 (Chidsey) 15 March 1977, See the entire document.	1-6

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