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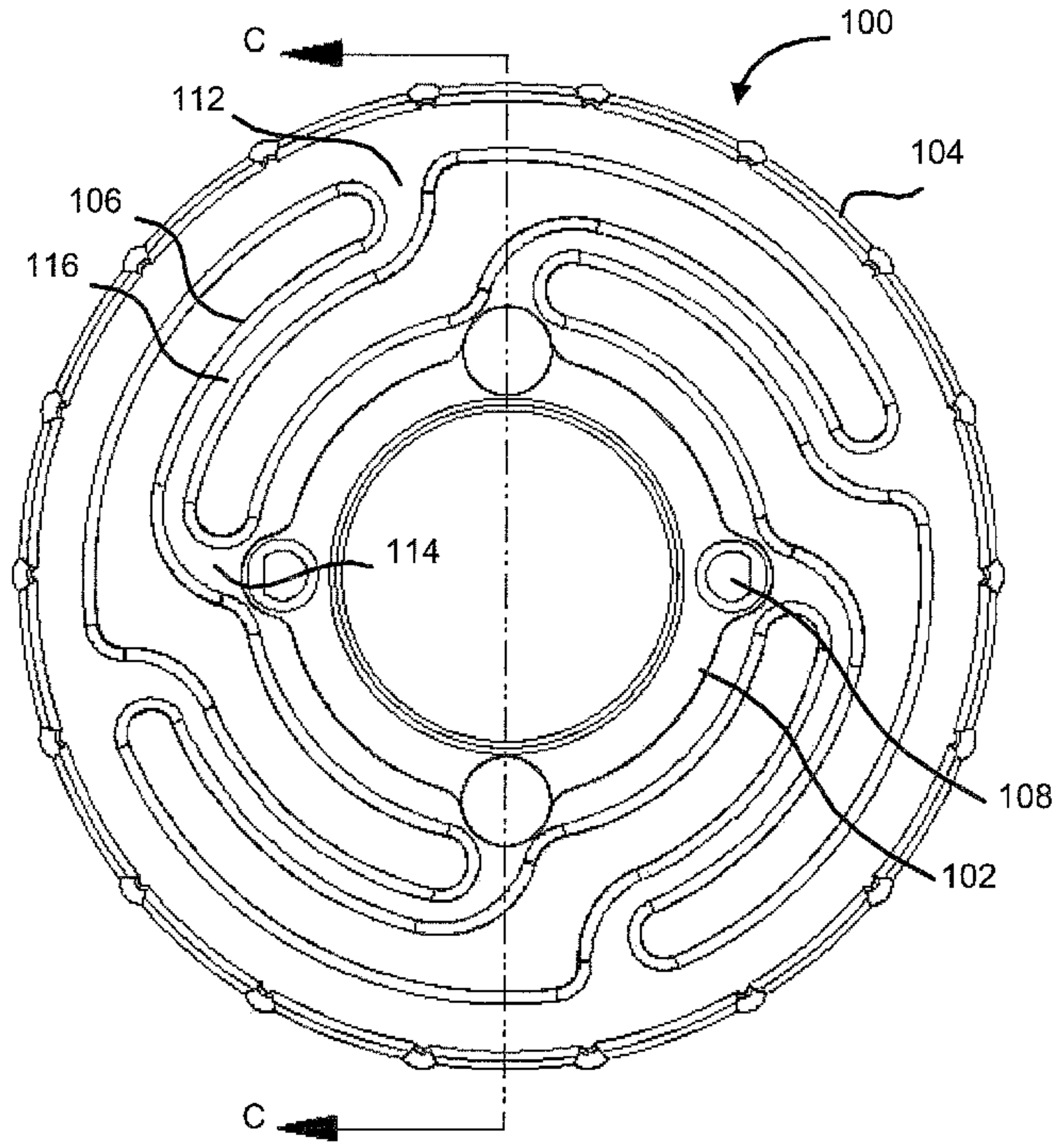
(54) Title: SHOCK ABSORBENT ROLLER THUMB WHEEL



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A shock absorbing roller thumb wheel is disclosed. The shock absorbing thumb wheel includes a central hub that can be secured to an electro-mechanical switch, a rim encircling the central hub, and force dispersion spokes extending from the central hub and connected to the rim. The configuration of the force dispersion spokes and the resilient material of the force dispersion spokes and the rim allow for radial and lateral deflection of the rim in response to an applied impact force. The impact force is thereby at least partially absorbed by the radial and lateral deflection of the rim and spokes, such that less impact force is transferred to connections between the electro-mechanical switch and any assembly to which the switch is attached. Hence, the probability of connection failures is reduced, and the lifetime of a device that uses the thumb wheel can be extended.

ABSTRACT

A shock absorbing roller thumb wheel is disclosed. The shock absorbing thumb wheel includes a central hub that can be secured to an electro-mechanical switch, a rim encircling the central hub, and force dispersion spokes extending from the central hub and connected to the rim. The configuration of the force dispersion spokes and the resilient material of the force dispersion spokes and the rim allow for radial and lateral deflection of the rim in response to an applied impact force. The impact force is thereby at least partially absorbed by the radial and lateral deflection of the rim and spokes, such that less impact force is transferred to connections between the electro-mechanical switch and any assembly to which the switch is attached. Hence, the probability of connection failures is reduced, and the lifetime of a device that uses the thumb wheel can be extended.

SHOCK ABSORBENT ROLLER THUMB WHEEL

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention generally relates to roller thumb wheels for electronic devices.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Many mobile electronic devices such as personal digital assistants, cell phones, and other wireless devices utilize various input means for allowing a user to select or execute functions upon the device. Such input means can include keyboards for entering alpha-numeric text, dedicated function buttons, directional keypad buttons and roller thumb wheels.

[0003] Roller thumb wheels are desirable since they permit single-handed operation of the device. In particular, the thumb wheel is placed at a position on the device such that the user can actuate the thumb wheel with a thumb while holding the device in the palm of their hand. The thumb wheel can be rolled to highlight an icon displayed on an LCD panel of the device, and depressed to select the highlighted icon. Roller thumb wheels can be positioned on a device for left or right handed operation, and protrude from the device.

[0004] When the mobile device is accidentally dropped, the impact can occur at the protruding rolling thumb wheel. The impact force applied to the thumb wheel can damage an assembly the thumb wheel is attached to, rendering the mobile device unusable. More specifically, the impact force can cause the thumb wheel assembly to break off a printed circuit board or other device element to which it is attached.

[0005] There exists, therefore, a need for a thumb wheel that can absorb impact damaging loads and minimize damage to elements or assemblies to which it is coupled.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] In a first aspect, the present invention provides a shock absorbing roller thumb wheel for actuating an electromechanical switch, comprising a hub for attachment to the switch, a resilient outer rim encircling the hub, and force dispersion spokes connecting the resilient outer rim to the hub, each force dispersion spoke having a predetermined length and cross-sectional shape for radially and laterally deforming in response to an impact force applied to the resilient outer rim.

[0007] In a second aspect, the present invention provides a mobile device comprising an LCD panel for displaying information and a shock absorbing roller thumb wheel for actuating an electromechanical switch and changing the display information on the LCD panel. The shock absorbing roller thumb wheel comprises a hub for attachment to the switch, a resilient outer rim encircling the hub, and force dispersion spokes for connecting the resilient outer rim to the hub, each force dispersion spoke having a predetermined length and cross-sectional shape for radially and laterally deforming in response to an impact force applied to the resilient rim.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the attached Figures, wherein:

Figure 1 is a block diagram of a mobile device having a rolling thumb wheel;

Figure 2 is a cross sectional diagram of the electronic device shown in Figure 1 along line A-A;

Figure 3 is frontal view of a known rolling thumb wheel;

Figure 4 is a cross sectional diagram of the thumb wheel of Figure 3 along line B-B;

Figure 5 is a frontal view of a shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel according to an embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 6 is a cross sectional diagram of the shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel of Figure 4 taken along line C-C;

Figure 7 is a frontal view of a shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel according to another embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 8 is a cross sectional diagram of the shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel of Figure 7 taken along line D-D;

Figure 9 is a frontal view of a shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel according to another embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 10 is a cross sectional diagram of the shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel of Figure 9 taken along line E-E;

Figure 11 is an orthogonal view of the shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel of Figure 9 subjected to an impact force;

Figure 12 is a frontal view of the shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel of Figure 11; and,

Figure 13 is a side view of the shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel shown in Figure 11.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0009] A shock absorbing roller thumb wheel is disclosed. The shock absorbing thumb wheel includes a central hub that can be secured to an electro-mechanical switch, a rim encircling the central hub, and force dispersion spokes extending from the central hub and connected to the rim. The configuration of the force dispersion spokes and the resilient material of the force dispersion spokes and the rim allow for radial and lateral deflection of the rim in response to an applied impact force. Therefore, as an impact force is absorbed by the radial and lateral deflection of the rim and spokes, less impact force is transferred to solder joints connecting the electro-mechanical switch to a printed circuit board, such as in a typical switch installation. Hence the probability of solder joint failures is reduced and the lifetime of the device that uses the thumb wheel can be extended.

[0010] Figure 1 is a block diagram of a mobile device having a roller thumb wheel. The device **20** includes an LCD display area **22** for displaying information, a keypad area **24** having at least one function button, and a thumb wheel **26** protruding from the right side of the device. Some electronic devices do not require a keypad area **24** for inputting information. Thumb wheel **26** can be connected to an electro-mechanical switch via ultrasonic welds or heat stakes (not shown), which is itself typically connected to a printed circuit board via solder joints. Those of skill in the art will understand that LCD display area **22** can display information such as application icons and menu items. Through actuation of thumb wheel **26**, the electro-mechanical switch changes the information displayed on LCD display area **22**, by highlighting a particular menu item or application icon, for example. Those of skill in the art will understand that actuation of thumb wheel **26** can affect various types of LCD display changes as the signals from the electro-mechanical switch are converted or decoded into predetermined actions by a processor in device **20**. The mobile device **20** may, for example, be a wireless mobile data communication device, a personal digital assistant (PDA), a mobile telephone with or without data communication functionality, or a one-way or two-way pager.

[0011] Figure 2 shows a cross-sectional diagram of device **20** along line A-A to show the thumb wheel assembly. Figure 2 shows casing **28** of device **20**, thumb wheel **26**, electro-mechanical switch **30**, and printed circuit board **32**. Printed circuit board **32** is attached to casing **28**, and electro-mechanical switch **30** is soldered to printed circuit board **32** at solder area **34**. Thumb wheel **26** can be ultrasonically welded to electro-mechanical switch **28** at weld area **36**.

[0012] Figure 3 is a frontal view of a conventional thumb wheel **26**. Thumb wheel **26** is typically formed as a disc of plastic material. Weld areas **36** are shown as two circular holes in the hub area **38** of thumb wheel **26**. Weld areas **36** are shaped to receive protrusions extending from the electro-mechanical switch (not shown) to anchor the thumb wheel **26** and ensure that rotational movement of the thumb wheel **26** is transferred to the electro-mechanical switch. An outer rim **40** encircles the hub area **38**, which is connected to the hub area **38** with the plastic material. Knurls **42** formed on the surface of outer rim **40** facilitates rotation of thumb wheel **26** by the user.

[0013] Figure 4 is a cross section of thumb wheel **26** of Figure 3 along line B-B to show the relative dimensions of thumb wheel **26**. Rim **40** has a predetermined thickness and depth, and is joined to the hub area **38** by the material. A circular shroud **44** extends from the hub area to further anchor and stabilize thumb wheel **26** onto the electro-mechanical switch **30**. Thus, when thumb wheel **26** is secured to the electro-mechanical switch **30**, a user can actuate the electro-mechanical switch **30** by rotating thumb wheel **26** with a thumb or finger.

[0014] Since thumb wheel **26** protrudes from the casing of device **20**, it can be damaged when device **20** is accidentally dropped upon a hard surface and the impact point occurs at thumb wheel **26**. More specifically, any impact upon thumb wheel **26** can cause the electro-mechanical switch **30** to break off the printed circuit board. This is due to the fact that the full impact force experienced by the thumb wheel **26** is transferred to solder area **34**, with sufficient strength to break the solder joints. The ultrasonic welds between the thumb wheel **26** and the electro-mechanical switch **30** have a much higher resistance to failure than the solder joints, which is why most failures occur at the weaker solder joints. In certain cases, the solder joints might not be fractured after impact, but sufficiently weakened to the point where they can fail under normal use. When the electro-mechanical switch **30** is electrically separated from the printed circuit board, device **20** is considered damaged and effectively unusable since many features accessible using the thumb wheel **26** are no longer available to the user.

[0015] Figure 5 is a diagram of a shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel according to an embodiment of the present invention. Thumb wheel **100** can be used in place of conventional thumb wheel **26** of Figure 3. Thumb wheel **100** includes a substantially circular hub **102**, an outer rim **104** encircling hub **102**, and four force dispersion spokes **106** extending from hub **102** and connecting rim **104** to hub **102**.

[0016] Formed within hub **102** are weld areas **108** for receiving protrusions from an electro-mechanical switch. Weld areas **108** are substantially the same as weld areas **36** shown for the standard thumb wheel **26** shown in Figure 3. Thumb wheel **100** can be molded using techniques well-known to those of skill in the art, with any resilient plastic material such as Lexan™ EXL9330 by GE, Zytel™ ST801HSBK010 by Dupont, Zytel™ ST801AHSBK010 by Dupont, and PA-46 nylon, for example. Rim **104** can have any suitable, preferably knurled, surface.

[0017] Force dispersion spokes **106** are generally "S" shaped between the outer rim **104** and hub **102**, with the ends of the spokes being connected to the rim and the hub via spoke-rim joints **112** and spoke-hub joints **114** respectively. The main spoke body **116** is formed as an arc about center of hub **102**. The main spoke body has a constant width, but the ends are slightly widened to provide additional structural support to the spoke-hub joint **114** and the spoke-rim joint **112**.

[0018] Figure 6 is a cross section diagram of shock absorbing thumb wheel **100** of Figure 5 along line C-C to show the relative dimensions of its components. The same numbered elements have been previously described in the discussion of Figure 5. It is noted that the cross section of shock absorbing thumb wheel **100** is similar to that of standard thumb wheel **26** shown in Figure 4, except for the spaces between rim **104** and hub **102** that show the absence of material between them in a radial direction. A circular shroud **110** extends from hub **102** for performing the same function as shroud **44** of Figure 4.

[0019] Force dispersion spokes **106**, referred to as spokes from this point forward, can radially deform along the same plane defined by hub **102** and laterally deform away from the hub plane, along a direction perpendicular to the hub plane, for example. Rim **104**, being of the same resilient material as spokes **106**, can itself deform radially in the areas between adjacent spoke contact areas since there is no material between it and the hub to resist deformation. The "S" shaped configuration of spokes **106** allows for compression deformation and expansion deformation since its material is resilient, making it behave similarly to a leaf spring along the radial direction. The thickness and length of each spoke **106** also determines its stiffness in the lateral direction, and consequently, the amount of force it can absorb. The overall length, width, depth, shape and cross sectional shape of each spoke **106** is preferably optimized to absorb a predetermined maximum impact force, which will depend upon the mass of the device it is to be installed within. For example, a preferred design ensures that the spokes do not fully compress, or "bottom out", under a force that is less than the maximum rated impact force. However, even if the spokes do fully compress and the remaining impact force is transferred to the solder joints between the printed circuit board and the electro-mechanical switch, this remaining force should be insufficiently strong to break the solder joints.

[0020] Under an impact force applied to the outer rim **104** along the same plane defined by the hub **102** and outer rim **104**, the resilient outer rim **104** deforms, and the spokes **106** near the area of impact radially deform under compression. At the same time, some of the spokes **106** radially deform under tension. If the impact force is applied from a direction lateral to the hub and rim plane, i.e. perpendicular to the hub, the spokes deform laterally. Therefore, spokes **106** deform radially to absorb a radial component of an impact force, while they can simultaneously deform laterally to absorb a lateral component of the impact force. Hence the damaging impact force is substantially prevented from reaching and damaging the solder joints securing the electro-mechanical switch to the printed circuit board.

[0021] Figure 7 is a diagram of a shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel according to another embodiment of the present invention. Thumb wheel **200** is stiffer radially and laterally than thumb wheel **100** to absorb a greater maximum amount of impact force. Thumb wheel **200** is similarly configured to thumb wheel **100** shown in Figure 5, and includes a substantially circular hub **202**, an outer rim **204** having a knurled surface encircling hub **202**, and spokes **206/212** extending from hub **202** and connected to rim **204**. Formed within hub **202** are weld areas **208** for receiving protrusions from an electro-mechanical switch. Thumb wheel **200** can be molded in the same way thumb wheel **100** is molded, and with the same previously listed materials. The outer rim **204** is substantially the same as outer rim **104** of Figure 5. Shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** includes enhancements over shock absorbing thumb wheel **100** that increase the overall stiffness of thumb wheel **200** over thumb wheel **100**, and therefore the maximum impact force that it can absorb.

[0022] Shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** of Figure 7 now includes a total of eight spokes connected between hub **202** and outer rim **204**. Spokes **206** are configured essentially the same as spokes **106**, except that their main bodies **220** are shorter in length. Additional spokes **212** that mirror the shape of spokes **206** also connect hub **202** to outer rim **204**. More specifically, spokes **206** extend from the hub **202** towards the outer rim **204** in a clockwise direction, and the additional spokes **212** extend from the hub **202** towards the outer rim **204** in a counter-clockwise direction. Each pair of spokes **206** and **212** that extend towards each other from hub **202** share the same spoke-rim joint **216**. Accordingly, each pair of spokes **206** and **212** that extend away from each other from hub **202** share the same spoke-hub joint **218**.

[0023] Figure 8 is a cross section diagram of shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** of Figure 7 along line D-D to show the relative dimensions of its components. The same numbered elements have been previously described in the discussion of Figure 8. It is noted that the cross section of shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** is similar to that of shock absorbing thumb wheel **100** shown in Figure 5. A circular shroud **210** extends from hub **202** for performing the same function as shroud **110** of Figure 6.

[0024] In the present example, it is assumed that the material and cross sectional dimensions of thumb wheel **100** are the same as thumb wheel **200**. However, the spokes **206** and **212** of thumb wheel **200** will be stiffer radially and laterally than spokes **106** of thumb wheel **100** due mainly to the shorter main body length of spokes **206** and **212**, and the fact that each common spoke-rim joint **216** is connected to two spokes instead of one. Although the total number of spoke-rim joints **216** formed in thumb wheel **200** is the same as for thumb wheel **100**, each spoke-rim joint of thumb wheel **200** is supported by two spokes. Furthermore, the shared spoke-hub joints **218** are highly resistant to lateral deformation due to their relatively large size. Therefore, shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** can disperse or absorb a greater maximum lateral impact force than shock absorbing thumb wheel **100** shown in Figure 5.

[0025] The thumb wheel **200** absorbs different amounts of impact force in the radial direction, depending upon where the impact force is applied. For example, if the impact force is applied to the outer rim **204** near the spoke-rim joint **216**, then a relatively large amount of the impact force is absorbed, as spoke pair **206/212** connected to common spoke-rim joint **216** deform to absorb the impact force. On the other hand, if the impact force is applied to the outer rim **204** between adjacent spoke-rim joints **216**, then a relatively small amount of the impact force is absorbed since only the outer rim **204** deforms.

[0026] Figure 9 is a diagram of a shock absorbing rolling thumb wheel according to another embodiment of the present invention. Shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** of Figure 9 is stiffer than thumb wheel **200** of Figure 7 to absorb a greater maximum impact force.

Thumb wheel **300** is similarly configured to thumb wheel **100** shown in Figure 5. Thumb wheel **300** includes a substantially circular hub **302**, an outer rim **304** having a knurled surface encircling hub **302**, and four spokes **306** extending from hub **302** and connecting rim **304** to hub **302**. Formed within hub **302** are weld areas **308** for receiving protrusions from an electro-mechanical switch. Thumb wheel **300** can be molded in the same way the previously described thumb wheels **26**, **100** and **200** are molded, and with the same materials previously listed. The outer rim **304** is substantially the same as outer rim **104** of Figure 5. The configuration of spokes **306** will now be described in further detail.

[0027] Spokes **306** extend substantially tangentially from hub **302** towards rim **304**, or more specifically, spokes **306** extend away from hub **302** to increase its stiffness in the radial direction. This design allows the spokes **306** to absorb a greater maximum radial impact force than spokes **106** of Figure 5. As shown in the embodiment of Figure 9, spokes **306** are curved in a general "S" shape with the ends of the spokes being connected to the rim and the hub respectively in the same manner as spokes **106** of Figure 5. While the width of each spoke **206** is constant over the length of its main body **316**, its spoke-hub joint **318** and spoke-rim joint **320** are significantly wider due to the addition of joint reinforcements. In particular, spoke **306** includes a hub shoulder reinforcement **312** at its spoke-hub joint and a rim shoulder reinforcement **314** at its spoke-rim joint. Both reinforcements **312** and **314** add structural strength to the spokes, and increase its resistance to radial and lateral deformation in those areas. In particular, hub shoulder reinforcement **312** and rim shoulder reinforcement **314** augment stiffness of the spokes **306** as it undergoes compression. Therefore, shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** can disperse or absorb a greater maximum impact force than shock absorbing thumb wheel **100** shown in Figure 5.

[0028] An additional force dispersion feature of shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** not found in thumb wheels **100** and **200** is the rotational reaction of hub **302** in response to an impact force. Due to the substantial tangential shape of spokes **306** relative to hub **302**, hub **302** will rotate under the impact force to disperse an additional amount of the impact force. Furthermore, shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** shown in Figure 9 has been designed to absorb approximately the same amount of radial impact force regardless of the point of impact along outer rim **304**. Therefore, the overall radial force dispersion performance of shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** is better than shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** shown in Figure 7. While shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** has been shown with force dispersion spokes extending away from the hub in a clockwise direction, they can also extend away from the hub in a counter-clockwise direction in an alternative embodiment.

[0029] Figure 10 is a cross section of shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** of Figure 9 along line E-E to show the relative dimensions of its structures. It is noted that the cross section of shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** is similar to that of shock absorbing thumb wheels **100** and **200**. In alternative embodiments of the present example, the thickness of the spokes **306** can be increased to absorb higher amounts of lateral impact force. A circular shroud **310** extends from hub **302** for performing the same function as shrouds **110** and **210** in Figures 6 and 8.

[0030] As shown in the embodiments of the present invention, the spokes of the shock absorbing thumb wheel do not extend radially between the hub and the outer rim. In other words, the spoke-hub joint and the spoke-rim joint of the spokes do not lie on the same radius of the thumb wheel. In the shock absorbing thumb wheel embodiment shown in Figures 5 and 7, the spoke-hub and spoke-rim joints are formed at non-opposing circumferential positions and in a predetermined size such that the spoke main body can be formed as an arc about the centre of the hub. The main body of the spokes is not limited to an arc shape, as shown in the shock absorbing thumb wheel embodiment of Figure 9. The spoke-hub and spoke-rim joints of the spokes of Figure 9 are formed such that the spoke main body extends away from the hub. As previously described, the dimensions of the spoke, its shape and the material used determine the amount of force the thumb wheel of the present invention can absorb radially and laterally. Preferably, the shock absorbing thumb wheel is designed to be sufficiently stiff to impart the "click" feedback sensation to users once they have pressed the shock absorbing thumb wheel to make a selection. These design specifications will be determined in large part by the size and dimensions of the mobile device, and the desired size of the thumb wheel.

[0031] Figures 11 to 13 illustrate the behavior of the shock absorbing thumb wheel **200** of Figure 7 in response to an applied impact force vector F. Figure 11 shows an orthogonal diagram of shock absorbing thumb wheel **300** under deformation in response to impact force vector F which is applied at an oblique angle to the bottom of thumb wheel **300.** It is assumed that impact force vector F simulates a hard flat surface that the thumb wheel **300** has struck after accidental droppage. The outer rim of thumb wheel **300** deforms both radially and laterally, as shown in Figures 12 and 13 and described below, since impact force vector F has radial and lateral components.

[0032] Figure 12 shows a frontal view of thumb wheel **300** of Figure 11 under radial deformation caused by the radial component of impact force vector F, labeled Fr. Although the outer rim **304** has deformed, spoke **306** has also deformed such that its main body bends towards hub **302.** As spoke **306** bends towards hub **302**, hub is **302** is forced to rotate in a counter-clockwise direction as indicated by rotation vector **400.** The degree of this rotation is limited to a few degrees in the present configuration of thumb wheel **300**, but sufficient to absorb more of impact force Fr. The remaining spokes **306** also undergo some compression and tension to absorb impact force Fr. Therefore, outer rim **304** and spokes **306** cooperate to absorb a majority of the impact force Fr.

[0033] Figure 13 shows a side view of thumb wheel **300** of Figure 11 under lateral deformation caused by the lateral component of impact force vector F, labeled Fl. As shown in Figure 13, outer rim **304** has been displaced relative to hub **302**, and has itself deformed laterally under Fl. It should be noted that spoke **306** has deformed laterally to allow outer rim **204** to laterally displace, and the portion showing is actually the spoke-hub joint **318** of spoke **306** which is more resistant to lateral deformation than its main body.

[0034] Any impact force experienced by thumb wheel **300** is therefore at least partially absorbed to minimize the impact force experienced by the solder joints between the electro-mechanical switch and printed circuit board. Hence, the electro-mechanical switch is more likely to remain functional after direct accidental impacts upon the thumb wheel attached to it.

[0035] The embodiments of the shock absorbing thumb wheel shown in Figures 5 to 10 absorb or disperse a significant portion of an impact force applied to their outer rims to limit the amount of force transferred to the solder joints securing the electro-mechanical switch to the printed circuit board. The spokes extending from the hub and connecting to the outer rim of the thumb wheel dampen the impact force applied to the solder joints through its radial and lateral deformation. The spokes are optimized with preset yield points to resist permanent deformation or breakage under the maximum rated impact force. Furthermore, the spokes can themselves deform laterally and radially since there is a minimal amount of material connecting the outer rim to the hub to resist deformation. Hence, additional shock absorption can be realized. Therefore a mobile device employing a shock absorbent thumb wheel according to the embodiments of the present invention is less likely to suffer a solder joint failure between its electro-mechanical switch and printed circuit board under normal accidental impact conditions.

[0036] The embodiments of the shock absorbing thumb wheel shown in the figures have gates, or injection molding artifacts, that indicate the point of injection for the mold. Those of skill in the art will understand that these gates can be located at any location, but are preferably located in the hub area.

[0037] Those of skill in the art will also understand that the shock absorbing thumb wheel of the present invention can be manufactured with different resilient materials, as mentioned earlier, where the selection of the particular material, physical geometry and dimensions of the shock absorbing thumb wheel will determine the maximum desired impact force it can absorb.

[0038] The above-described embodiments of the invention are intended to be examples of the present invention. Alterations, modifications and variations may be effected the particular embodiments by those of skill in the art, without departing from the scope of the invention which is defined solely by the claims appended hereto.

What is Claimed is:

1. A shock absorbing roller thumb wheel for actuating an electro-mechanical switch, comprising:

a hub for attachment to the switch;

a resilient outer rim encircling the hub; and

force dispersion spokes connecting the resilient outer rim to the hub, each force dispersion spoke having a predetermined length and cross-sectional shape for radially and laterally deforming in response to an impact force applied to the resilient outer rim.

2. The roller thumb wheel of claim 1, wherein each force dispersion spoke is substantially S-shaped.

3. The roller thumb wheel of claim 1, wherein four force dispersion spokes are connected between the resilient outer rim and the hub.

4. The roller thumb wheel of claim 1, wherein each force dispersion spoke includes a main body, a spoke-rim joint for connecting the main body to the resilient outer rim, and a spoke-hub joint for connecting the main body to the hub.

5. The roller thumb wheel of claim 4, wherein the spoke-rim joint and the spoke-hub joint are positioned along different radii of the hub.

6. The roller thumb wheel of claim 4, wherein the spoke-rim joint includes a rim shoulder reinforcement for stiffening the spoke-rim joint.

7. The roller thumb wheel of claim 4, wherein the spoke-hub joint includes a hub shoulder reinforcement for stiffening the spoke-hub joint.

8. The roller thumb wheel of claim 4, wherein the main body is arc shaped.

9. The roller thumb wheel of claim 4, wherein the main body extends substantially tangentially from the hub.

10. The roller thumb wheel of claim 9, wherein the main body is curved in shape.

11. The roller thumb wheel of claim 3, further including four additional force dispersion spokes connected between the resilient outer rim and the hub.

12. The roller thumb wheel of claim 11, wherein each pair of force dispersion and additional force dispersion spokes share a common spoke-rim joint.

13. The roller thumb wheel of claim 11, wherein each pair of force dispersion and additional force dispersion spokes share a common spoke-hub joint.

14. The roller thumb wheel of claim 11, wherein each force dispersion spoke and each additional force dispersion spoke have an arc shaped main body connected between a spoke-rim joint and a spoke-hub joint.

15. A mobile device comprising:

an LCD panel for displaying information; and

a shock absorbing roller thumb wheel attached to an electro-mechanical switch for controlling the display information on the LCD panel, the shock absorbing roller thumb wheel comprising

a hub for attachment to the electro-mechanical switch;

a resilient outer rim encircling the hub; and

force dispersion spokes for connecting the resilient outer rim to the hub, each force dispersion spoke having a predetermined length and cross-sectional shape for radially and laterally deforming in response to an impact force applied to the resilient rim.

16. The mobile device of claim 15, wherein four force dispersion spokes are connected between the resilient outer rim and the hub.

17. The mobile device of claim 15, wherein each force dispersion spoke includes a main body, a spoke-rim joint for connecting the main body to the resilient outer rim, and a spoke-hub joint for connecting the main body to the hub.

18. The mobile device of claim 17, wherein the spoke-rim joint and spoke-hub joint are positioned along different radii of the hub.

19. The mobile device of claim 17, wherein the spoke-rim joint includes a rim shoulder reinforcement for stiffening the spoke-rim joint and the spoke-hub joint includes a hub shoulder reinforcement for stiffening the spoke-hub joint.

20. The mobile device of claim 17, wherein the main body is arc shaped.

21. The mobile device of claim 17, wherein the main body extends substantially tangentially from the hub.

22. shock absorbing roller thumb wheel for actuating an electro-mechanical switch, comprising:

a hub for association with the electro-mechanical switch;

an outer rim encircling the hub; and

at least one force dispersion spoke coupled between the hub and the outer rim, said force dispersion spoke having a shape configured to radially and laterally deform in response to an impact force applied to the outer rim.

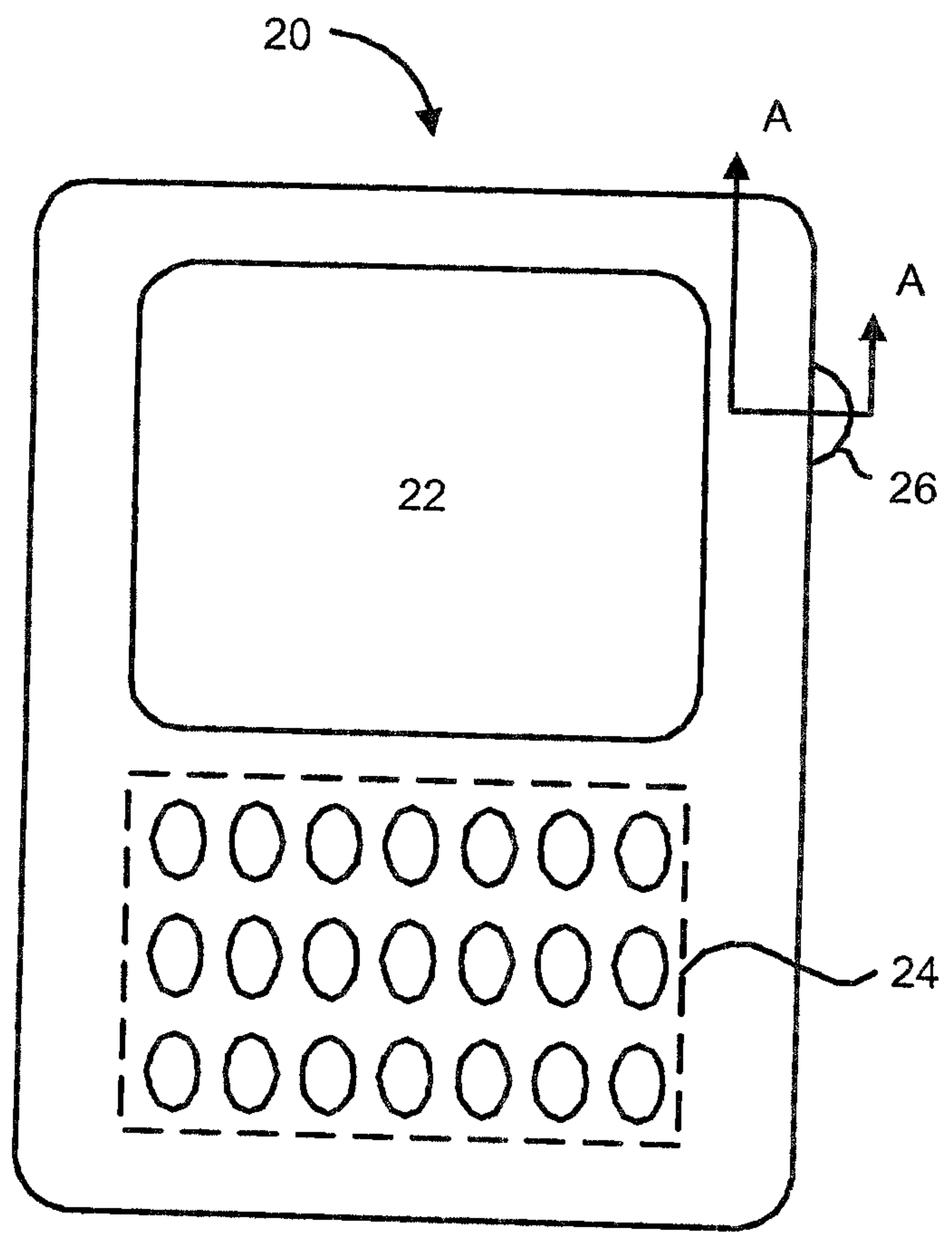


Figure 1

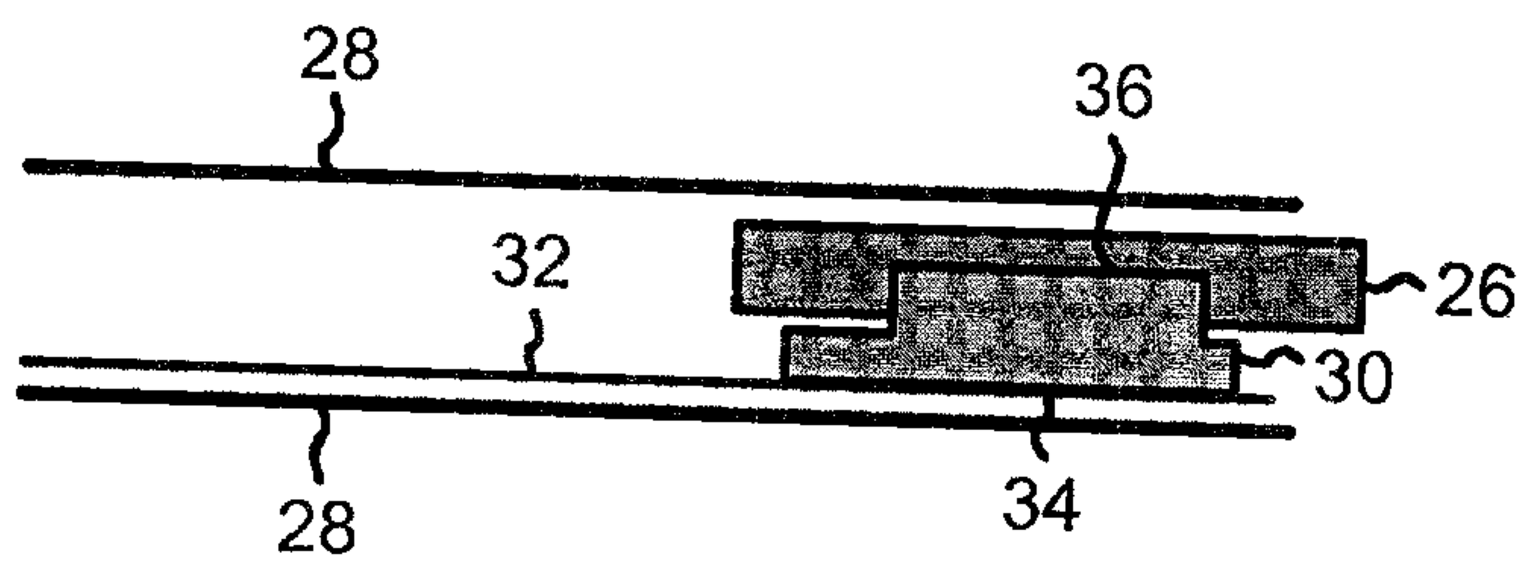


Figure 2

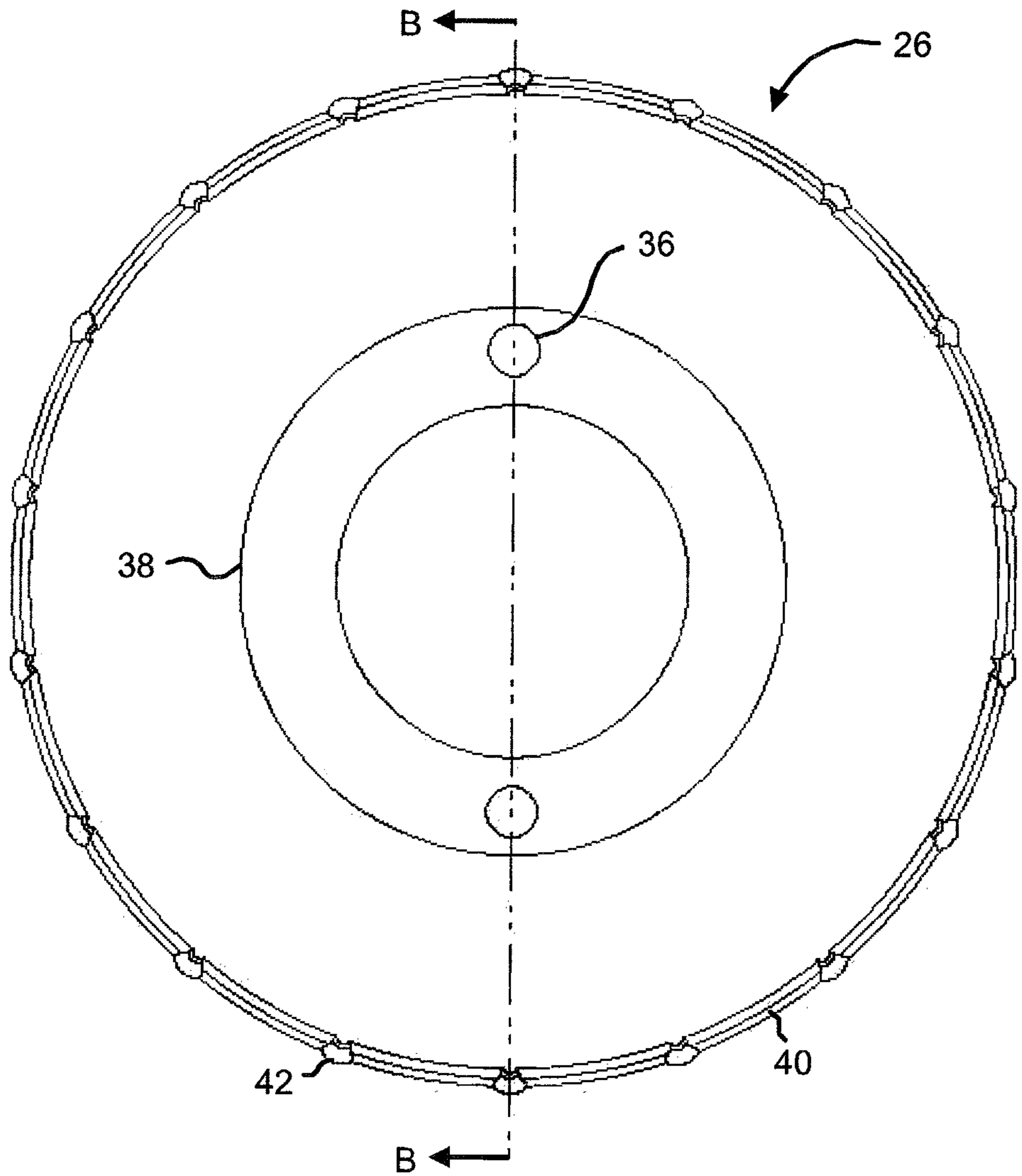


Figure 3 (Prior Art)

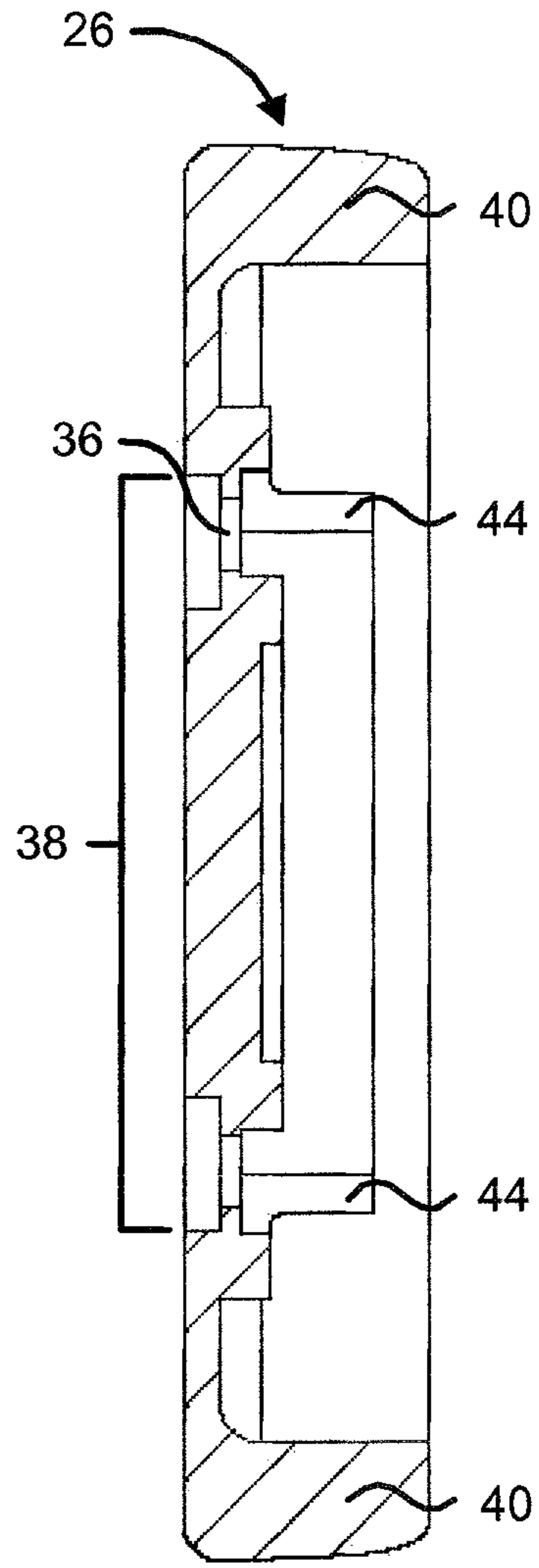


Figure 4 (Prior Art)

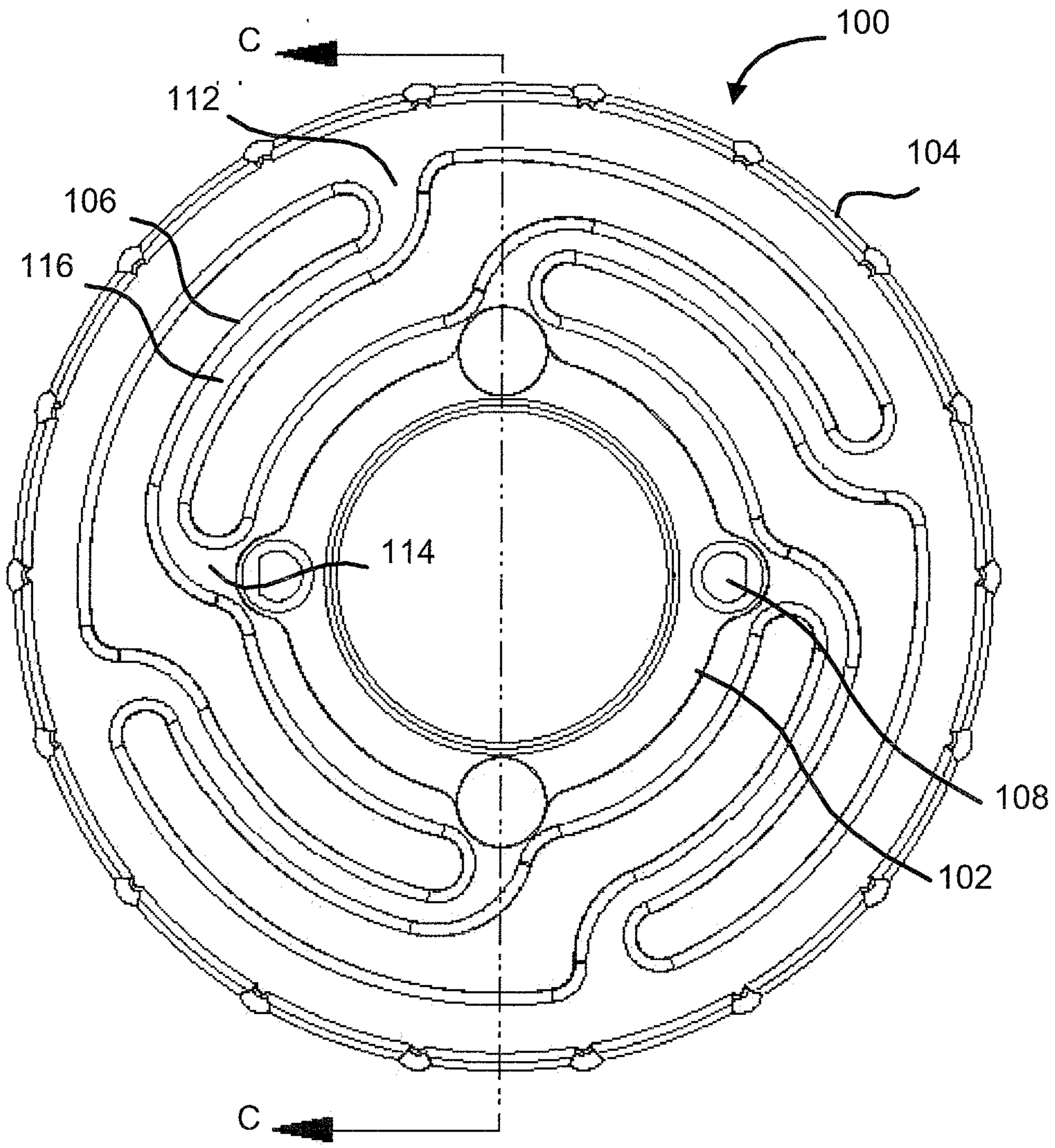
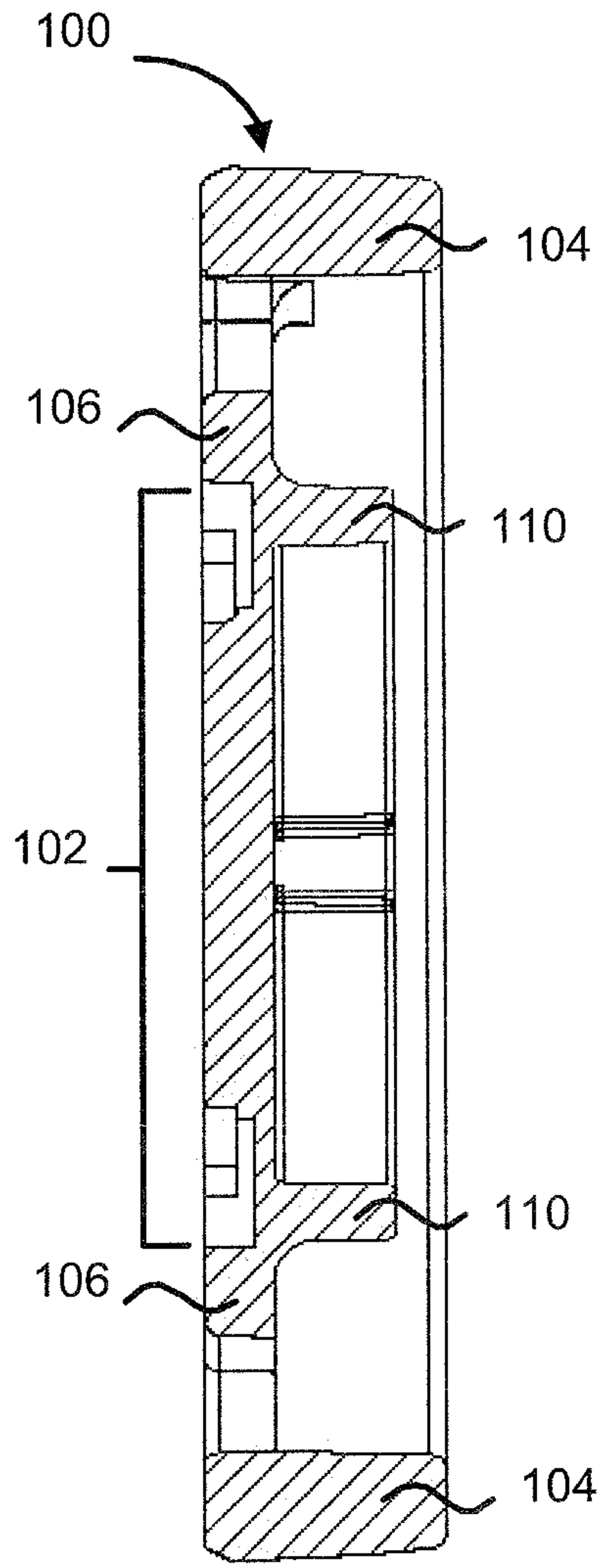


Figure 5



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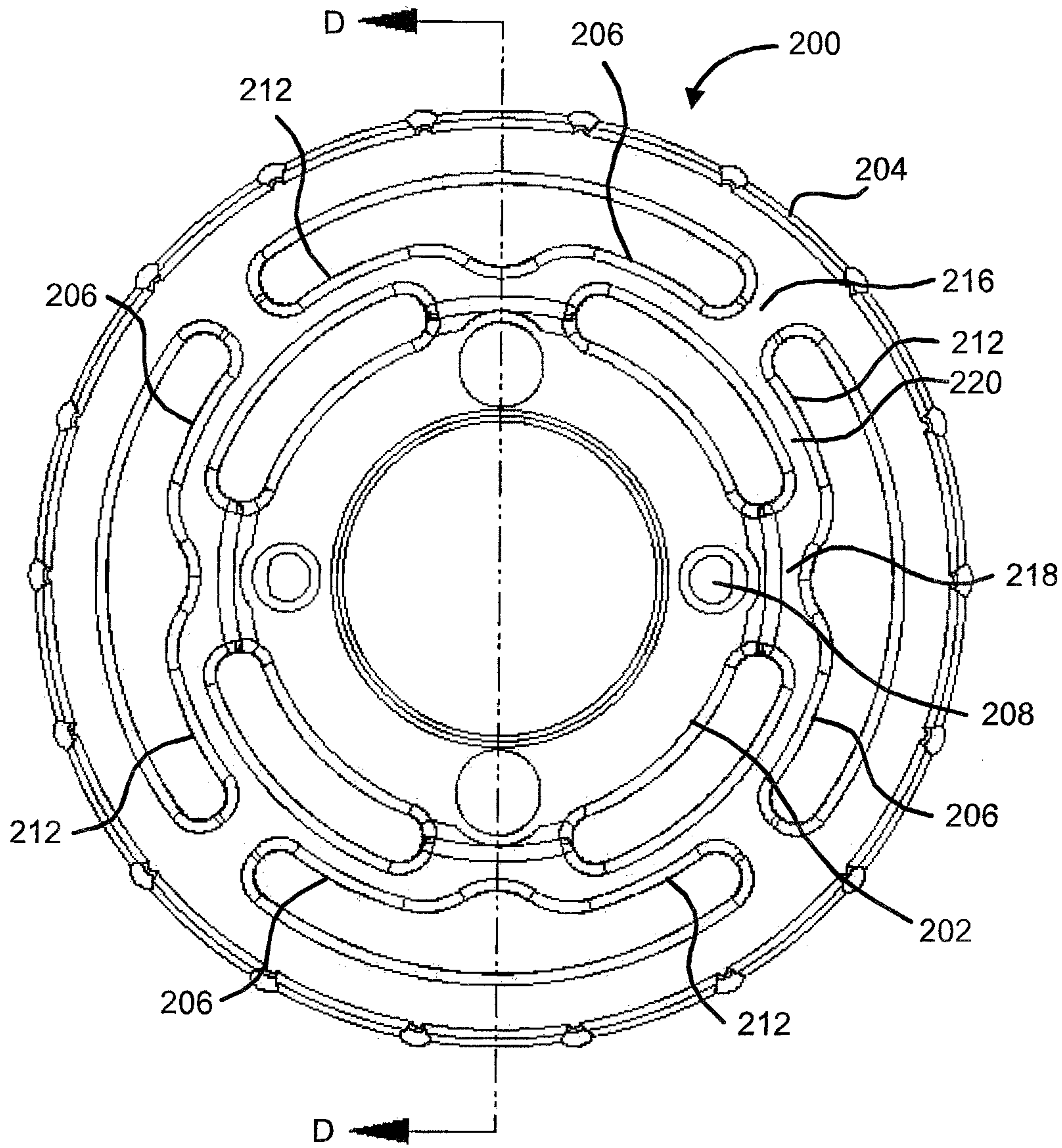

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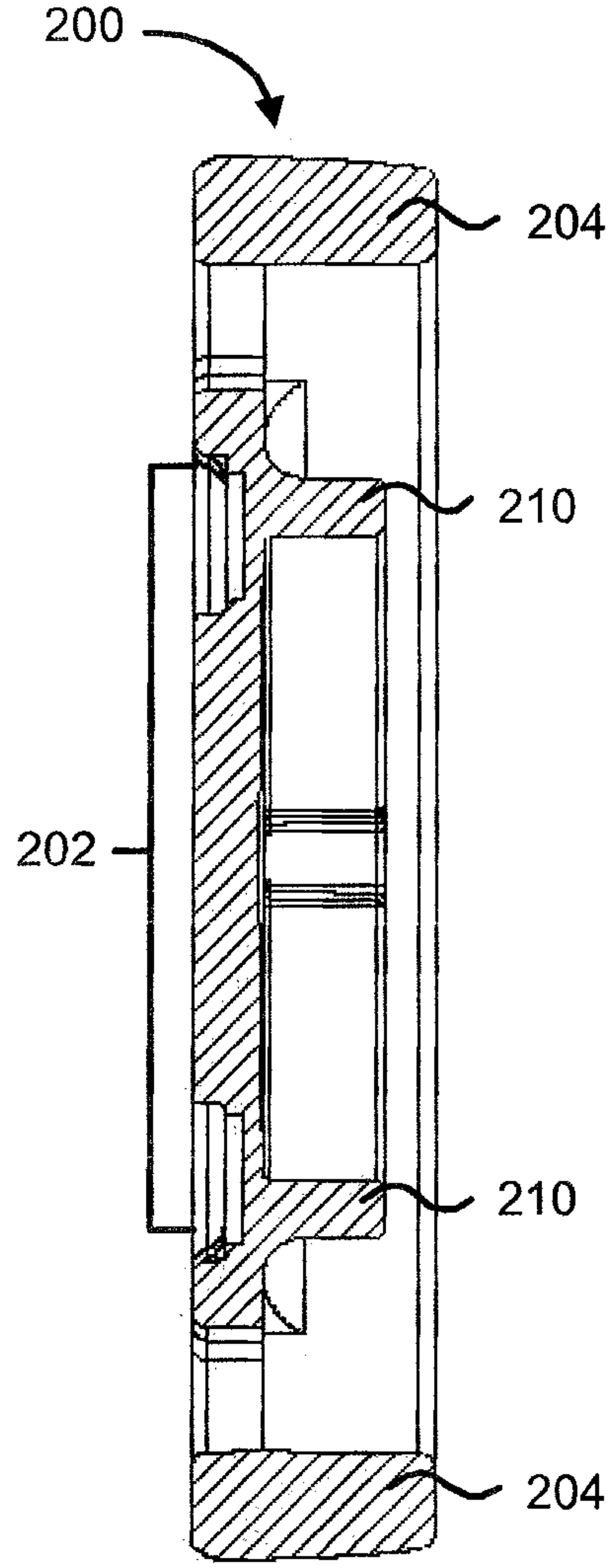

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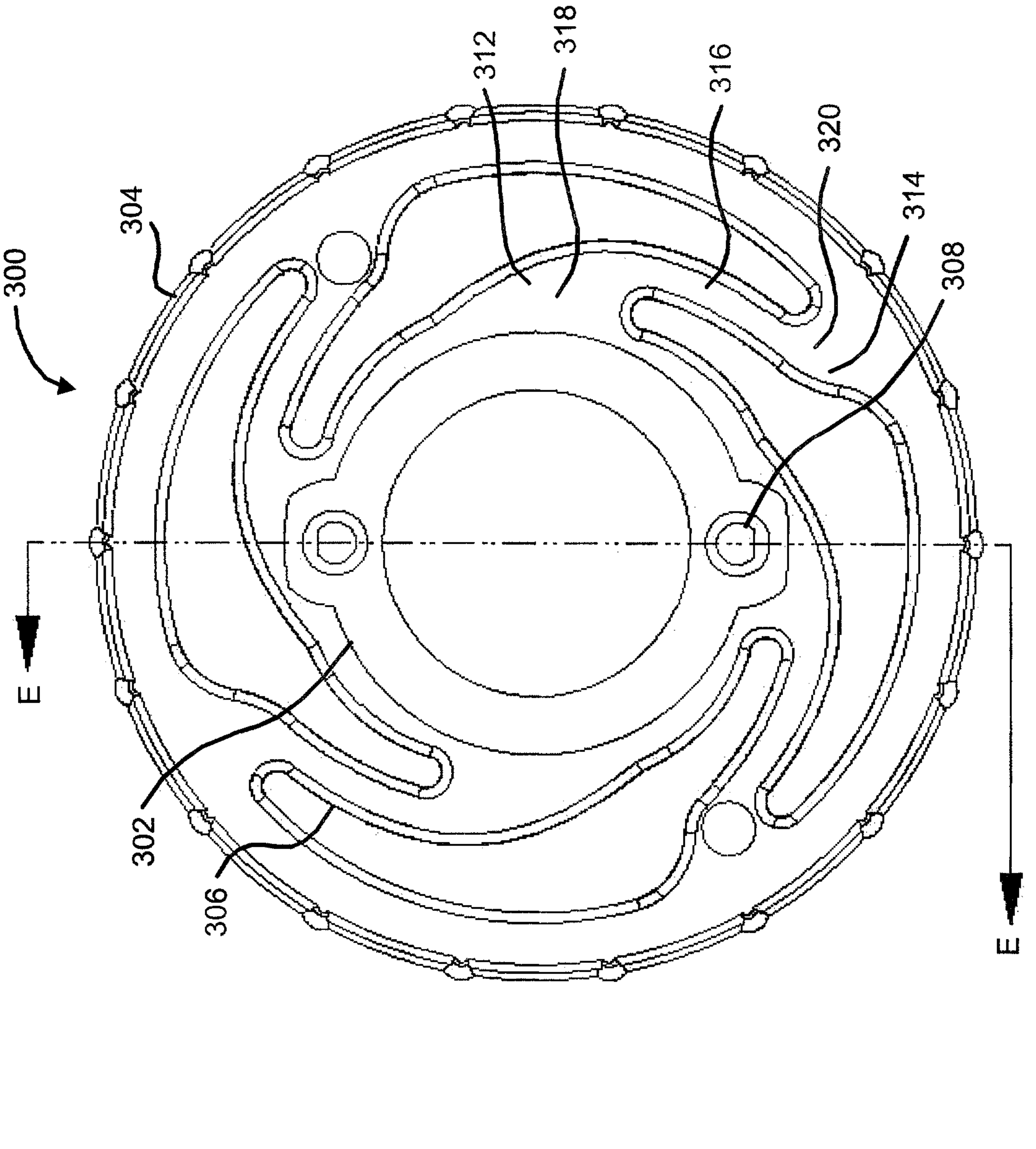


Figure 9

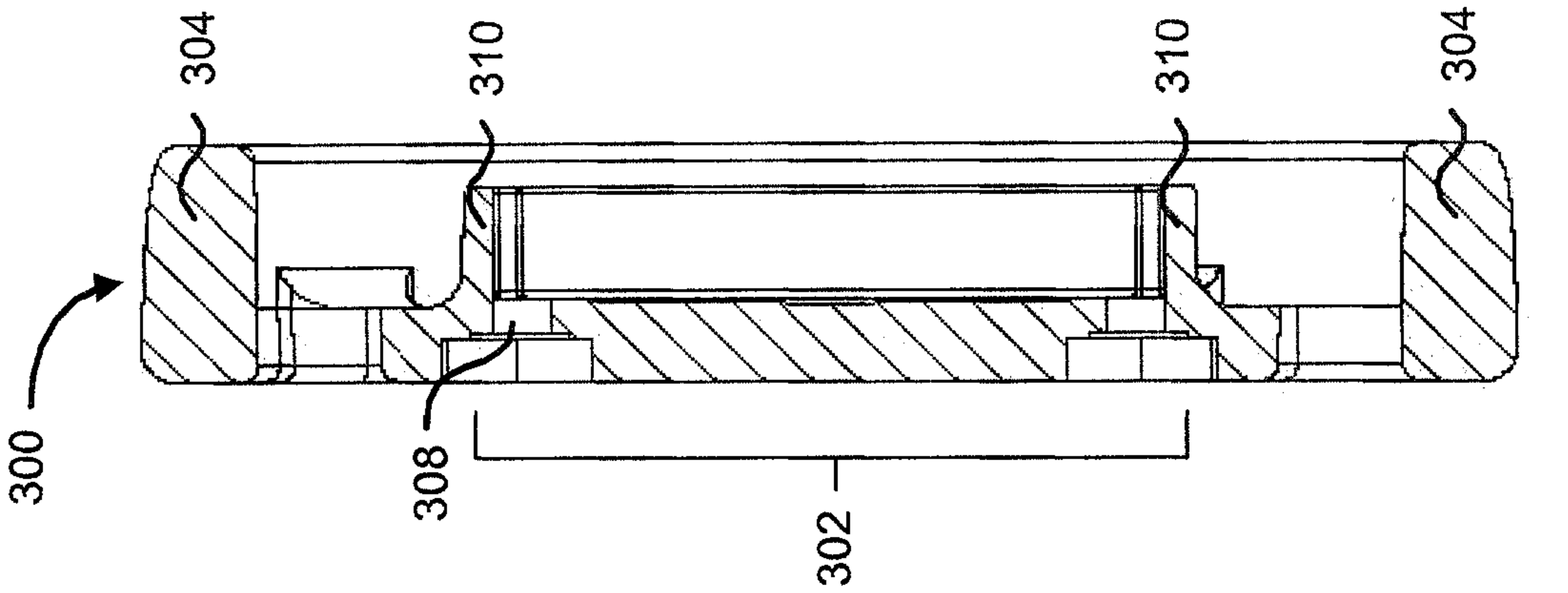


Figure 10

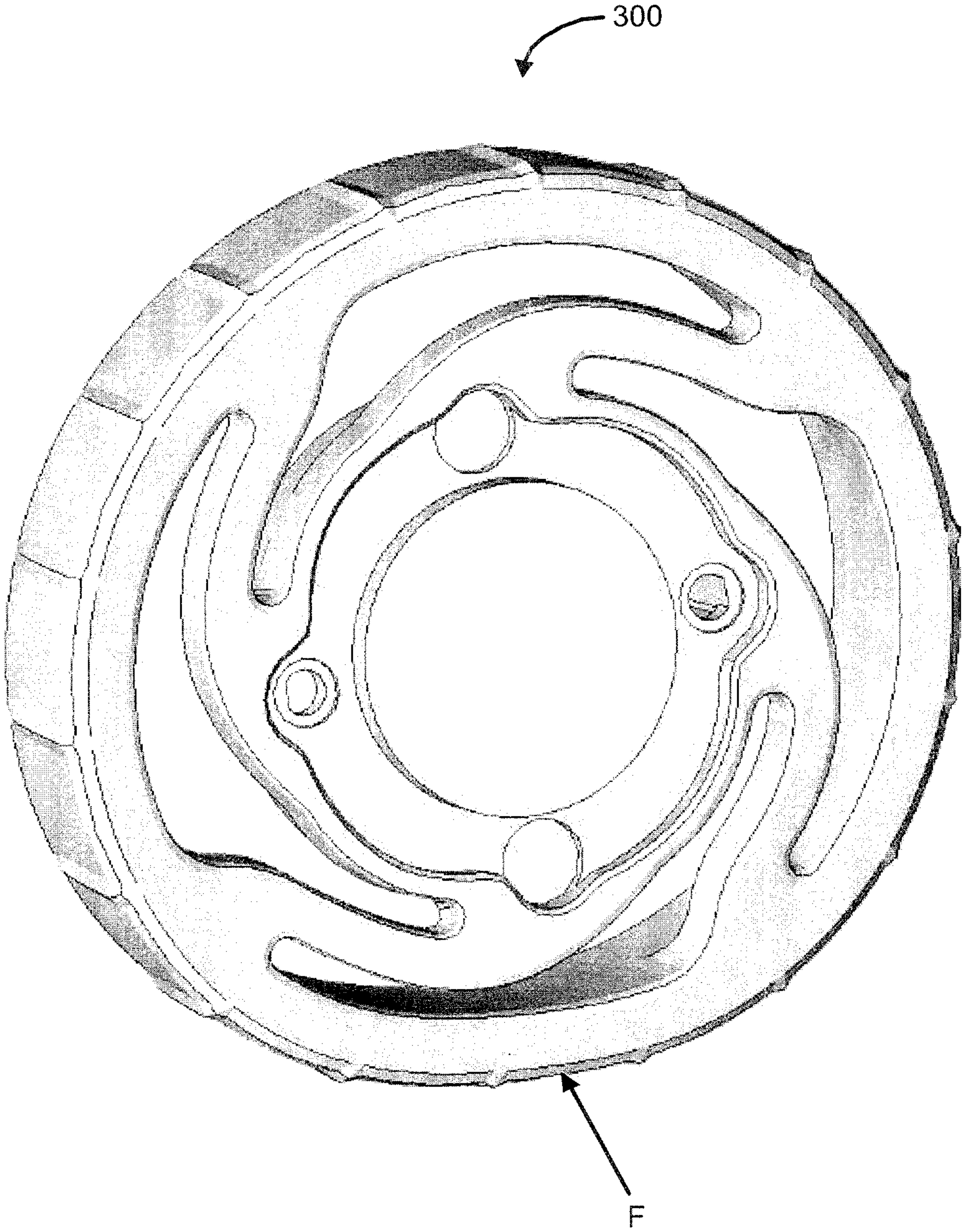


Figure 11

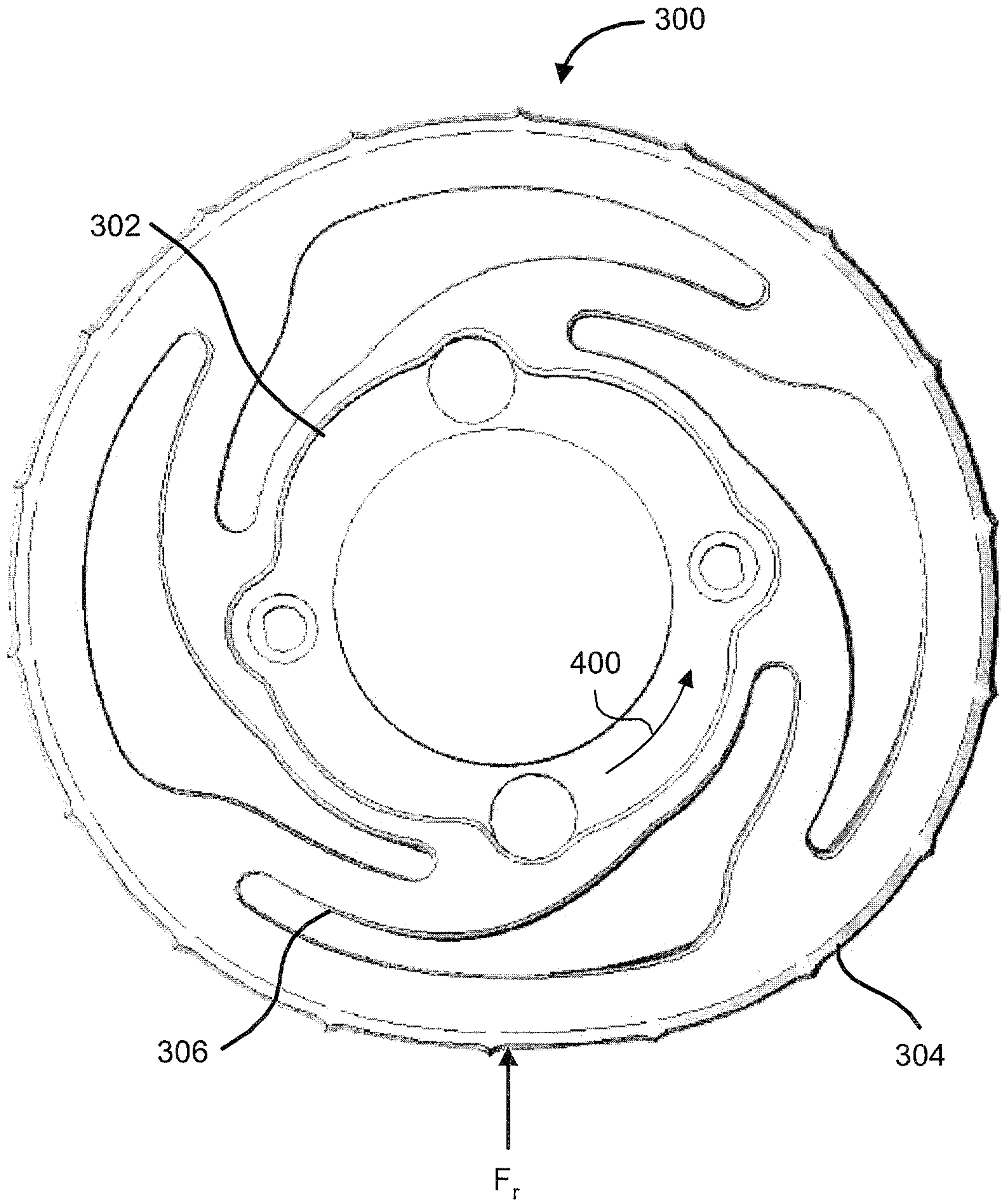


Figure 12

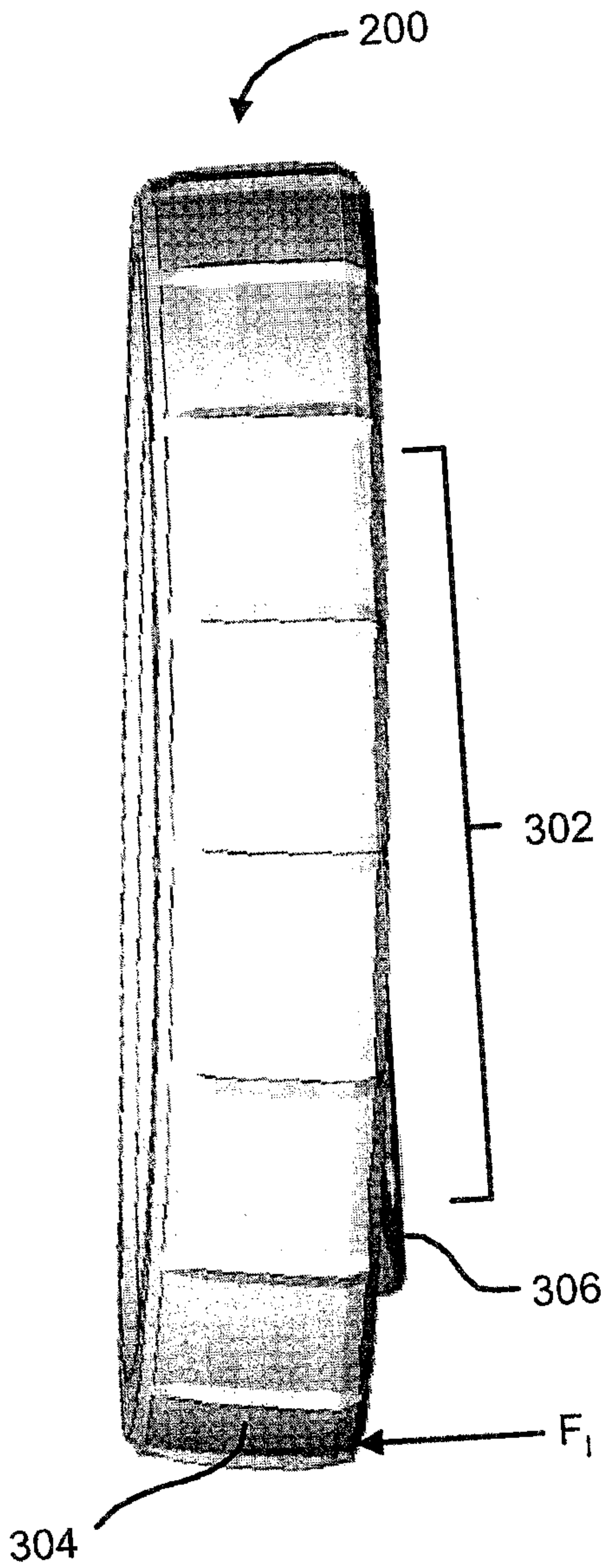
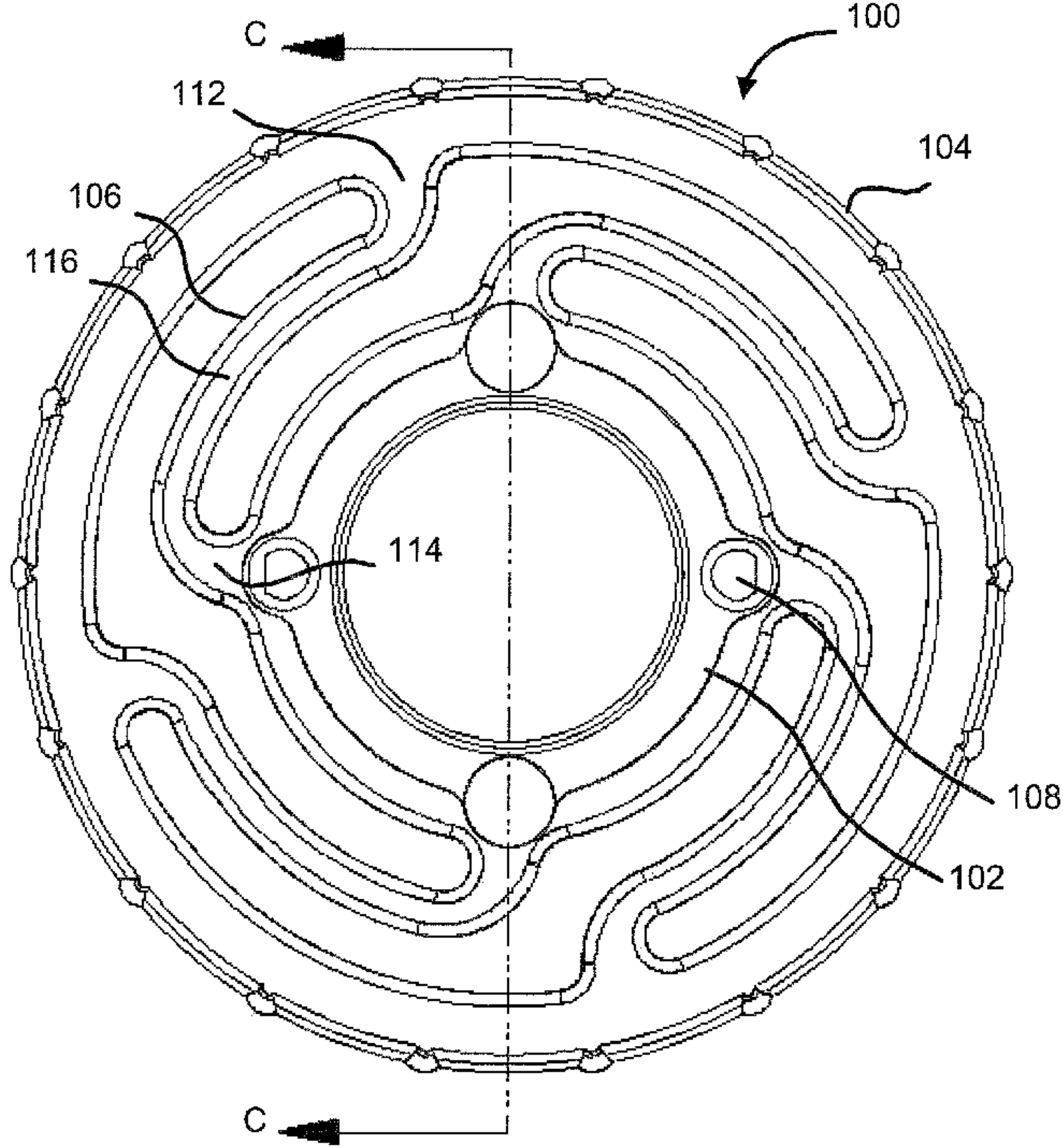


Figure 13



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