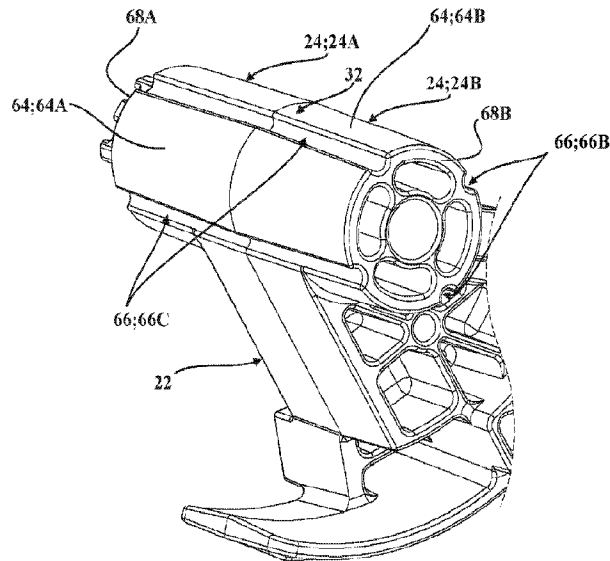




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(72) **Inventeur/Inventor:**
HENRIKSON, JESSE, US
(73) **Propriétaire/Owner:**
KONGSBERG POWER PRODUCTS SYSTEMS I, INC.,
US
(74) **Agent:** ROBIC

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(54) **Title: PEDAL ASSEMBLY WITH DEBRIS FILTERING MECHANISM**



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

A pedal assembly for a vehicle, including a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position, and a pivot shaft is operatively attached to the pedal arm. The pivot shaft defines a pivot axis. A housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle is provided. The housing defines a bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis. A debris filtering mechanism is formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

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(71) Applicant: **KONGSBERG POWER PRODUCTS SYSTEMS I, INC.** [US/US]; 300 S. Cochran Street, Willis, TX 77378 (US).

(72) Inventor: **HENRIKSON, Jesse**; 9550 Lake Conroe Drive, Conroe, TX 77304 (US).

(74) Agents: **HAIDLE, Samuel, J.** et al.; Howard & Howard Attorneys PLLC, 450 West Fourth Street, Royal Oak, MI 48067 (US).

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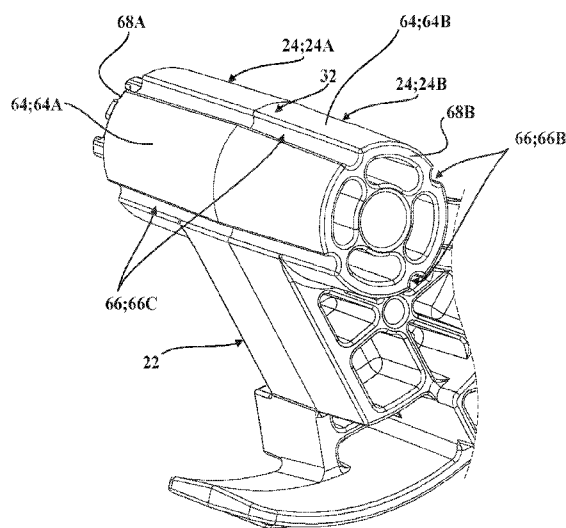


FIG. 8

(57) Abstract: A pedal assembly for a vehicle, including a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position, and a pivot shaft is operatively attached to the pedal arm. The pivot shaft defines a pivot axis. A housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle is provided. The housing defines a bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis. A debris filtering mechanism is formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

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PEDAL ASSEMBLY WITH DEBRIS FILTERING MECHANISM

Field

5 The present invention relates, generally, to pedal assemblies for vehicles and, more specifically, to a pedal assembly with a debris filtering mechanism.

Background

10 Conventional pedal assemblies known in the art are employed to allow a driver to selectively control operation of a vehicle. To that end, pedal assemblies may be realized as an “accelerator pedal” used to control vehicle acceleration and modulate vehicle speed, a “brake pedal” used to control vehicle deceleration and stop the vehicle, or a “clutch pedal” used to modulate translation of rotational torque between an engine and a transmission.

15 It will be appreciated that certain types of vehicles are operated in harsh environments, such as is known in the construction, agriculture, recreational, and/or power sports industries. In these industries, the pedal assembly may occasionally be submerged in or otherwise exposed to a coarse slurry of water and mud/sand, or other contaminants. In such circumstances, the accumulation or
20 presence of contaminants may be detrimental to proper operation of the pedal assembly, and frequently exacerbates wear of certain components of the pedal assembly, resulting in reduced life and inconsistent operation during subsequent use. Moreover, proper removal of contaminants may be cumbersome.

25 In order to overcome these disadvantages, pedal assemblies known in the related art may employ various seals, sealed bearings, and the like, arranged to inhibit passage of contaminants into the pedal assembly itself. However, these types of pedal assemblies tend to be relatively cumbersome and expensive to manufacture, and may be relatively heavy and require a large packaging size. While these conventional pedal assemblies have generally performed well for their
30 intended use, there remains a need in the art for a pedal assembly which can operate consistently and reliably in different environments, and which can be manufactured and assembled in an

efficient and cost-effective manor while, at the same time, affording minimal packaging size and component weight.

Summary

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The present invention overcomes the disadvantages in the prior art in a pedal assembly for a vehicle. The pedal assembly includes a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position. A pivot shaft is operatively attached to the pedal arm. The pivot shaft defines a pivot axis. A housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle is provided. The housing defines a bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis. A debris filtering mechanism is formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

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In this way, the pedal assembly of the present invention provides improved functionality and usability in connection with vehicles and, at the same time, reduces the cost and complexity of manufacturing and assembling pedal assemblies which can operate reliably and predictably in a number of different environments.

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According to a broad aspect, the invention provides a pedal assembly for a vehicle, comprising: a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position; a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis; a housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between the inner surface and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis; and a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having at least one channel arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the inner surface towards the outer surface away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second

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position, wherein the at least one channel is defined in at least one of the bore and the pivot shaft and has a generally U-shaped profile.

According to another broad aspect, the invention provides a pedal assembly for a vehicle,
5 comprising: a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position; a pivot shaft
operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis; a housing having
a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner
surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between the inner surface and
the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of
10 the pedal arm about the pivot axis, wherein the bore of the housing has a first diameter adjacent
to the outer surface and a second diameter adjacent to the inner surface greater than the first
diameter; and a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore,
the debris filtering mechanism having at least one channel arranged in communication between
the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the
15 inner surface towards the outer surface away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the
pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

According to a further broad aspect, the invention provides a pedal assembly for a
vehicle, comprising: a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position; a pivot
20 shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis; a housing
having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an
inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between the inner surface
and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit
rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis; and a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least
25 one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having at least one channel
arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the
housing to direct contaminants from the inner surface towards the outer surface away from the
pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the
second position; wherein the bore of the housing has a first diameter adjacent to the outer surface
30 and a second diameter adjacent to the inner surface greater than the first diameter.

According to another aspect, the invention provides a pedal assembly for a vehicle, comprising: a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position; a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis; a housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between the inner surface and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis; and a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having a plurality of channels radially spaced about the pivot axis and at least one channel arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the inner surface towards the outer surface away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

Brief description of the drawings

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Advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings.

20 Figure 1 is a perspective view of a pedal assembly having a debris filtering mechanism according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 2 is a partially exploded perspective view of the pedal assembly of Figure 1, showing a pedal arm, a pair of housing components, a plug, and a sensor and a kickdown mechanism spaced from the first and second housing components.

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Figure 3 is another partially exploded perspective view of the pedal assembly of Figure 2, showing fasteners and a biasing mechanism interposed between the housing components and pedal arm.

Figure 4 is a perspective view of the pedal assembly of Figure 3, showing the pedal arm, a portion of the biasing mechanism, and fasteners seated in one of the housing components.

5 Figure 5A is a left-side plan view of the components of the pedal assembly depicted in Figure 4, shown with the pedal arm arranged in a first position.

Figure 5B is another left-side plan view of the components of the pedal assembly depicted in Figures 4-5A, shown with the pedal arm arranged in a second pedal position.

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Figure 6 is another perspective view of the pedal assembly of Figures 1-5B, showing the pedal arm, the sensor with an emitter and associated fasteners, and a portion of the biasing mechanism.

15 Figure 7 is a perspective view of a portion of the pedal arm of the pedal assembly of Figures 1-6, showing a debris filtering mechanism formed in a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm, according to one embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 8 another perspective view of a portion of the debris filtering mechanism depicted in
20 Figure 7.

Figure 9A is a top-side plan view of the pedal assembly of Figures 1-8, showing the pedal arm arranged in the first position depicted in Figure 5A.

25 Figure 9B is another top-side plan view of the pedal assembly of Figures 1-8, showing the pedal arm arranged in the second position depicted in Figure 5B.

Figure 10A is a slice sectional view taken along line 10A-10A of Figure 9A.

30 Figure 10B is a slice sectional view taken along line 10B-10B of Figure 9B.

Figure 11 is a perspective view of a housing component having a debris filtering mechanism according to another embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 12 is another perspective view of the housing component of Figure 11.

5

Detailed description of embodiments

Variants, examples and preferred embodiments of the invention are described hereinbelow. Referring now to the drawings, where like numerals indicate like or corresponding parts throughout the several views, a pedal assembly is generally shown at 20 in Figures 1-3. The pedal assembly 20 is adapted for use in a vehicle (not shown, but generally known in the art) and allows a driver to selectively actuate the pedal assembly 20 so as to control the vehicle in operation, as described in greater detail below. To that end, the pedal assembly 20 could be realized as an “accelerator pedal” used to control vehicle acceleration and modulate vehicle speed, a “brake pedal” used to decelerate and stop the vehicle, a “clutch pedal” used to modulate translation of rotational torque between an engine and a transmission, and the like. Moreover, as will be appreciated from the subsequent description below, the pedal assembly 20 could be used to control the vehicle in any suitable way without departing from the scope of the present invention. While the pedal assembly 20 may advantageously be used to control vehicles that are operated in harsh environments, such as is known in the construction, agriculture, recreational, and/or power sports industries, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the vehicle could be of any suitable type or configuration without departing from the scope of the present invention. By way of non-limiting example, the vehicle could be a conventional All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV), a so-called “side-by-side” ATV, a tractor, a farming implement, a golf cart, an automotive vehicle, and the like.

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Referring now to Figures 1-5B, the pedal assembly 20 includes a pedal arm 22, a pivot shaft 24, and a housing 26. The pedal arm 22 is movable between a first pedal position 22A (see Figure 5A) and a second pedal position 22B (see Figure 5B). The pivot shaft 24 is operatively attached to the pedal arm 22 and defines a pivot axis PA. The housing 26 has a mount, generally indicated at 28, which is adapted for attachment to the vehicle (not shown), and the housing 26 defines a bore 30 supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft 24 to permit rotation of the pedal arm 22 about the

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pivot axis PA for movement between the first pedal position 22A and the second pedal position 22B. The pedal assembly 20 also includes a debris filtering mechanism, generally indicated at 32, formed in at least one of the pivot shaft 24 and the bore 30 to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20 and out of the bore 30 as the pedal arm 22 moves between the first position 22A and the second position 22B. The pedal arm 22, the pivot shaft 24, the housing 26, the mount 28, the bore 30, and the debris filtering mechanism 32 will each be described in greater detail below.

The pedal arm 22 includes a pad 34 adapted for engagement by the vehicle driver such that force applied to the pad 34 moves the pedal arm 22 between the first position 22A and the second position 22B to effect corresponding operation of the vehicle. By way of non-limiting example, where the pedal assembly 20 is implemented as an “actuator pedal” used to actuate a throttle of an internal-combustion engine (not shown), the first position 22A could correspond to “engine idle” and the second position 22B could correspond to “wide-open throttle”. However, as noted above, the pedal assembly 20 could be used in connection with a number of different applications and, thus, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the first position 22A and/or the second position 22B could correspond to any suitable operating condition of the vehicle without departing from the scope of the present invention.

As best shown in Figure 5, the pedal arm 22, the pivot shaft 24, and the pad 34 are formed as a unitary, one-piece component manufactured such as via an injection molding process, with the pedal arm 22 arranged extending between the pivot shaft 24 and the pad 34. However, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the pedal arm 22 could be formed in any suitable way, from any number of components operatively attached in any suitable way, without departing from the scope of the present invention.

As noted above, the housing 26 is employed to support the pivot shaft 24 and the pedal assembly 20 via the bore 30, and is configured for attachment to a portion of the vehicle (not shown). To this end, as shown in Figures 4, 10A, and 10B, the housing 26 has a body, generally indicated at 35, which defines an inner surface 35A and an outer surface 35B. The mount 28 is formed on the body 35 and, in the representative embodiment illustrated herein, is realized by various structural features which retain or accommodate fasteners 36 used to secure the pedal

assembly 20 to a portion of the vehicle (not shown in detail). Here, one or more mounts 28 are formed integrally with the body 35, and the bore 30 is defined in the body 35. More specifically, the bore 30 is formed between the inner surface 35A and the outer surface 35B. As is described in greater detail below, in one embodiment, the debris filtering mechanism 32 is arranged to direct
5 contaminants from the inner surface 35A towards the outer surface 35B as the pedal arm 22 moves between the first position 22A and the second position 22B.

In the representative embodiment illustrated herein, the housing 26 includes a first housing component 26A having a first bore 30A, and a second housing component 26B having a second
10 bore 30B. Here, the pivot shaft 24 includes a first shaft portion 24A rotatably supported by the first bore 30A, and a second shaft portion 24B rotatably supported by the second bore 30B, to permit rotation of the pivot shaft 24 about the pivot axis PA as the pedal arm 22 moves between the first position 22A and the second position 22B. The first housing component 26A and the second housing component 26B are fixed together using one or more fasteners 36 (see Figures 2 and 3).
15 However, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the housing 26 could include any suitable number of components arranged or attached in any suitable way sufficient to rotatably support the pivot shaft 24 via the bore 30, without departing from the scope of the present invention. The first housing component 26A, the second housing component 26B, and the pedal arm 22 are advantageously shaped and arranged so as to inhibit ingress of contaminants towards the
20 pivot shaft 24. In certain embodiments, the pedal assembly 20 employs a plug 37 to further inhibit ingress of contaminants (see Figures 1 and 2).

Referring now to Figures 1 and 2, as noted above, the pedal assembly 20 is used to facilitate control of the vehicle in operation. To that end, the pedal assembly 20 may include at least one
25 sensor, generally indicated at 38, and a controller, shown schematically at 40 in Figure 1, arranged in communication with the at least one sensor 38. In the representative embodiment illustrated herein, the pedal assembly 20 employs a rotational position sensor 38.

The rotational position sensor 38 is mounted to the housing 26, such as via fasteners 36, and
30 is adapted to determine the angular position of the pivot shaft 24 about the pivot axis PA. To that end, in one embodiment, the rotational position sensor 38 employs an emitter 42 (see Figure 6), and

the pivot shaft 24 includes at least one coupling, generally indicated at 44 (see Figure 2), which is shaped to engage and rotate concurrently with the emitter 42 as the pedal arm 22 moves between the first position 22A and the second position 22B. Thus, the rotational position sensor 38 is configured to determine the angular position of the emitter 42 as the pedal arm 22 moves with respect to the housing 26. In the representative embodiment illustrated in Figure 6, a shield and a pair of emitters realized as magnets are shown and are adapted for attachment to the coupling 44 on the pivot shaft 24 for concurrent rotation about the pivot axis PA, such as via cold staking (not shown). In the representative embodiment illustrated herein, the pivot shaft 24 includes a single coupling 44 configured to receive the emitter 42, and the sensor 38 is operatively attached to the first housing component 26A. However, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the pivot shaft 24 could be implemented with more than one coupling 44 such that the emitter 42 and sensor 38 could be arranged differently, such as to facilitate mounting the sensor 38 to the second housing component 26B (not shown). Similarly, it will be appreciated that the sensor 38 could be arranged, clocked, or otherwise oriented in different ways depending on application requirements.

In one embodiment, the pedal assembly 20 includes a kickdown mechanism, generally indicated at 46. The kickdown mechanism 46 is mounted to the housing 26, such as via fasteners 36, and is adapted to provide the vehicle driver with feedback as the pedal arm 22 approaches the second position 22B. To this end, the pedal arm 22 is provided with an engagement surface 48 (see Figure 4) arranged to abut the kickdown mechanism 46 to translate force from the kickdown mechanism 46 to the pedal arm 22 when approaching the second position 22B. It will be appreciated that the kickdown mechanism 46 could be configured in a number of different ways without departing from the scope of the present invention.

Similarly, it will be appreciated that the sensor 38 could be of any suitable type or configuration without departing from the scope of the present invention. The sensor 38 and controller 40 are disposed in electrical communication, such as by one or more wires 50, and cooperate to control the vehicle in response to changes in the position of the pedal arm 22. Here, as the driver of the vehicle actuates the pedal arm 22, the rotational position sensor 38 communicates the angular position of the pedal arm 22 to the controller 40 which, in turn, subsequently controls

the vehicle in response, as noted above. By way of non-limiting example, where the pedal assembly 20 is implemented as an “accelerator pedal,” the controller 40 could actuate an electronic throttle valve used to control an internal combustion engine used to propel the vehicle (not shown, but generally known in the art). Those having ordinary skill in the art will recognize this as a so-called “drive-by-wire” accelerator and throttle arrangement commonly utilized by conventional internal-combustion propelled vehicles of the type described above. Similarly, where the pedal assembly 20 is implemented as a “clutch pedal,” the controller 40 could limit or otherwise control engine operation in response to signals from the sensor 38 indicating disengagement between the engine and the transmission. It will be appreciated the pedal assembly 20 could control the vehicle in other ways, with or without the use of the sensor 38, controller 40, and/or kickdown mechanism 46, without departing from the scope of the present invention. By way of non-limiting example, while the representative embodiment of the pedal assembly 20 illustrated herein is realized as an electronic pedal assembly 20 with the sensor 38 disposed in communication with the controller 40, the pedal assembly 20 could be realized as a mechanical pedal assembly, such as with a coupling arranged in force-translating relationship with a cable, linkage, and the like, arranged to effect control of the vehicle (not shown).

As is best shown in Figures 3, 4, and 6, the pedal assembly 20 employs a biasing mechanism, generally indicated at 52, interposed between the pedal arm 22 and the housing 26. The biasing mechanism 52 is configured so as to urge the pedal arm 22 towards the first position 22A in absence of force applied to the pedal arm 22, such as via the pad 34. The biasing mechanism 52 includes a biasing element 54, such as one or more arcuate compression springs, and a bias plate 56 supporting the biasing element 54 interposed between the housing components 26A, 26B and the pedal arm 22 (see Figures 3 and 6). Here, the bias plate 56 is formed as a separate component from the housing 26 and is supported between or otherwise captured by at least one of the housing components 26A, 26B. The bias plate 56 has at least one bias projection 58, and the pedal arm 22 has at least one arm projection 60, both of which are shaped to retain the biasing element 54 in operation. However, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the pedal arm 22 could be biased in other ways without departing from the scope of the present invention.

As noted above, the pivot shaft 24 rotates about the pivot axis PA and engages the bore 30 of the housing 26. Here, as shown in Figures 3, 7, and 8, the bore 30 of the housing 26 defines a bore contact surface 62 (see Figure 3), and the pivot shaft 24 defines a shaft contact surface 64 (see Figures 7 and 8). More specifically, and according to the representative embodiment illustrated herein, the first bearing bore 30A of the first housing component 26A defines a first bore contact surface 62A, the second bearing bore 30B of the second housing component 26B defines a second bore contact surface 62B, the first shaft portion 24A defines a first shaft contact surface 64A, and the second shaft portion 24B defines a second shaft contact surface 64B. However, as will be appreciated from the subsequent description below, the pedal assembly 20 could employ a pivot shaft 24 which is rotatably supported by single bore 30 between which the debris filtering mechanism 32 is interposed to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20, without departing from the scope of the present invention.

The respective contact surfaces 62, 64 engage each other in operation as the pivot shaft 24 rotates about the pivot axis PA. Because the pivot shaft 24 directly engages the bore 22 of the housing 24, the housing 26 and pivot shaft 24 may advantageously be manufactured from materials that facilitate smooth rotatable engagement with each other. In one embodiment, the housing 26 is manufactured from acetal and the pivot shaft 24 is manufactured from glass-filled nylon. This configuration strikes a substantial balance between low manufacturing costs and strength while, at the same time, ensuring low-friction engagement of the respective contact surfaces 62, 64 in operation. In one embodiment, as shown best in Figures 10 and 11, the pivot shaft 24 and the bore 30 each have corresponding frustoconical configurations. More specifically, the first shaft portion 24A and the first bore 30A each have corresponding frustoconical configurations, and the second shaft portion 24B and the second shaft 30B each have corresponding frustoconical configurations. To this end, as is illustrated in Figure 10A, in one embodiment, the bore 30 of the housing 26 has a first diameter D1 adjacent to the outer surface 35B of the body 35, and the bore 30 has a second diameter D2 adjacent to the inner surface 35A of the body 35 which is greater than the first diameter D1. As will be appreciated from the subsequent description of the debris filtering mechanism 32 below, this configuration helps urge contaminants away from the inner surface 35A of the body 35 of the housing 26 and towards the outer surface 35B as the pivot shaft 24 rotates about the pivot axis PA.

It will be appreciated that proper movement of the pedal arm 22 between the first position 22A and the second position 22B in response to rotation of the pivot shaft 24 about the pivot axis PA ensures proper operation of the vehicle. Thus, smooth rotation of the pivot shaft 24 about the bearing bore 30 needs to be maintained in operation. To this end, the debris filtering mechanism 32 is employed to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20 in use, as noted above. As described in greater detail below, the debris filtering mechanism 32 directs contaminants away from the pivot shaft 24 and the bore 30 that might otherwise cause extreme wear to the bore contact surface 62 and/or the shaft contact surface 64. It will be appreciated that contaminants can be introduced into contact surfaces 62, 64 of the pedal assembly 20 in operation, in particular where the vehicle is used in harsh environments. By way of non-limiting example, where the vehicle is an off-road vehicle, the pedal assembly 20 may occasionally be submerged in or otherwise exposed to a coarse slurry of water and mud/sand. As will be appreciated from the subsequent description below, the debris filtering mechanism 32 of the pedal assembly 20 of the present invention is configured to direct these contaminants away from the bore 30 and the pivot shaft 24 to minimize wear to the contact surfaces 62, 64 in operation.

As noted above, the debris filtering mechanism 32 may be formed in at least one of the pivot shaft 24 and the bore 30. As shown in Figures 7, 8, and 10B, in one embodiment, the debris filtering mechanism 32 comprises at least one channel, generally indicated at 66, defined in at least one of the bore 30 and the pivot shaft 24. As is best illustrated in Figure 10B, the at least one channel 66 is arranged in communication between the inner surface 35A and the outer surface 35B of the body 35. Here, the channel 66 has a generally U-shaped profile and is both shaped and arranged so as to accommodate contaminants and to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20.

In the representative embodiment illustrated in Figures 1-10B, the debris filtering mechanism 32 is realized as a plurality of channels 66 formed in the pivot shaft 24 and radially spaced about the pivot axis PA. As is shown best in Figures 7 and 8, the pivot shaft 24 extends between opposing first and second shaft ends 68A, 68B, and employs a total of six channels 66 formed therein. Specifically, two channels 66A extend from the first shaft end 68A to the second

shaft end 68B and are formed in communication across both the first shaft portion 24A and the second shaft portion 24B, two channels 66B extend from the first shaft end 68A towards the second shaft end 68B and are formed in the first shaft portion 24A but terminate before the second shaft portion 24B, and two channels 66C extend from the second shaft end 68B towards the first shaft end 68A and are formed in the second shaft portion 24B but terminate before the first shaft portion 24A. Put differently, each shaft contact surface 64 defines four channels 66 in total, two of which are common between the first shaft contact surface 64A and the second shaft contact surface 64B. Thus, in one embodiment, the debris filtering mechanism 32 includes at least one channel 66 formed in each of the shaft portions 24A, 24B. Similarly, in one embodiment, at least one of the channels 66 extends between the first bore 30A and the second bore 30B. In one embodiment, at least one of the channels 66 extends across both of the shaft portions 24A, 24B. In one embodiment, at least one of the channels 66 is discontinuous along the pivot shaft 24.

The channels 66 extend linearly with the pivot axis PA, are sized equally, and are radially spaced from each other about the pivot axis PA. In one embodiment, the channels 66 are equidistantly spaced from each other about the pivot axis PA. However, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the debris filtering mechanism 32 could include any suitable number of channels 66 spaced, arranged, or sized in any suitable way sufficient to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20, without departing from the scope of the present invention.

As noted above, the debris filtering mechanism 32 of the pedal assembly 20 depicted in Figures 1-10B is formed in the pivot shaft 24. However, as noted above, the debris filtering mechanism 32 could also be formed in the bore 30 of the housing 26. To this end, Figures 11 and 12 depict another embodiment of the debris filtering mechanism formed in the housing. In these Figures and in description that follows, the structure and components of this embodiment that are the same as or that otherwise correspond to the structure and components of the previously-described embodiment are provided with the same reference numerals increased by 200.

Referring now to Figures 11 and 12, a housing 226 is shown. Here, the housing 226 includes a body 235 defining an inner surface 235A and an outer surface 235B, a mount 228 adapted for attachment to a portion of the vehicle, and a bore 230 to rotatably support a pivot shaft

(not shown in Figures 11 and 12). The bore 230 has a frustoconical configuration defined between the inner surface 235A and the outer surface 235B. A debris filtering mechanism 232 is formed in the bore 230 and extends from the inner surface 235A to the outer surface 235B. Here, the debris filtering mechanism 232 is defined by a plurality of radially-spaced channels 266, each having a generally U-shaped profile. In this embodiment, a total of eight channels 266 are provided, each of which are shaped and arranged so as to accommodate contaminants and to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 220 in response to movement of the pivot shaft between the positions, as noted above in connection with the previously-described embodiment.

Those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the debris filtering mechanism 32, 232 could be of any suitable configuration, and could employ any suitable number of channels 66, 266 of any suitable arrangement or configuration formed in the pivot shaft 24 and/or in the bore 30, 230, sufficient to direct contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20, 220 as the pivot shaft 24 rotates about the pivot axis PA and the pedal arm 22 moves between the first position 22A and the second position 22B.

In this way, the debris filtering mechanism 32, 232 of the pedal assembly 20, 220 of the present invention affords significant advantages in connection with vehicles which may be exposed to contaminants during use, such as off-road vehicles where the pedal assembly 20, 220 may occasionally be submerged in or otherwise exposed to a coarse slurry of water and mud/sand. Specifically, the debris filtering mechanism 32, 232 directs such contaminants away from the pedal assembly 20, 220 as the pivot shaft 24 rotates about the pivot axis PA in response to movement of the pedal arm 22 between the first position 22A and the second position 22B. Thus, contaminants which would otherwise accumulate within the pedal assembly 20 and could lead to inconsistent operation of and excessive wear to the various components of the pedal assembly 20, are directed away from the pedal assembly 20 via the debris filtering mechanism 32, 232. Moreover, those having ordinary skill in the art will appreciate that the debris filtering mechanism 32, 232 allows the pedal assembly 20, 220 to be used in harsh environments without necessitating the use of expensive components, such as sealed bearings. In light of the foregoing, it will be appreciated that the pedal assembly 20, 220 of the present invention provides improved functionality and usability in connection with vehicles and, at the same time, reduces the cost and complexity of

manufacturing and assembling pedal assemblies which can operate reliably and predictably in a number of different environments.

5 The invention has been described in an illustrative manner, and it is to be understood that the terminology which has been used is intended to be in the nature of words of description rather than of limitation. It is now apparent to those skilled in the art that many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is, therefore, to be understood that the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described.

CLAIMS

1. A pedal assembly for a vehicle, comprising:
a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position;
5 a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis;
a housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between the inner surface and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot
10 shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis; and
a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having at least one channel arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the inner surface towards the outer surface away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the
15 pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position, wherein the at least one channel is defined in at least one of the bore and the pivot shaft and has a generally U-shaped profile.
2. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 1, wherein the debris filtering mechanism
20 comprises a plurality of channels defined in the pivot shaft.
3. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 1 or 2, wherein the debris filtering mechanism comprises a plurality of channels defined in the bore of the housing.
- 25 4. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 1 to 3, wherein the bore of the housing has a first diameter adjacent to the outer surface and a second diameter adjacent to the inner surface greater than the first diameter.
5. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the bore of the
30 housing and the pivot shaft each have a frustoconical configuration.

6. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 1, wherein the debris filtering mechanism includes a plurality of channels radially spaced about the pivot axis.
7. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 6, wherein each of the channels are formed obliquely relative to the pivot axis.
8. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 1, wherein the bore of the housing defines a bore contact surface and wherein the pivot shaft defines a shaft contact surface shaped to rotatably engage the bore contact surface as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.
9. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 8, wherein the at least one channel is defined in, and recessed below, at least one of the bore contact surface and the shaft surface.
10. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 1, wherein the housing is further defined as a first housing component and the bore is further defined as a first bore, and wherein the pedal assembly further comprises a second housing component defining a second bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis.
11. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 10, wherein the pivot shaft includes a first shaft portion associated with the first bore of the first housing component and a second shaft portion associated with the second bore of the second housing component.
12. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 11, wherein the first shaft portion and the second shaft portion each have a frustoconical configuration.
13. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 11, wherein the at least one channel is formed in each of the first shaft portion and the second shaft portion.

14. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 13, wherein the at least one channel includes a plurality of channels with at least one channel extending entirely across the first and second shaft portions.
- 5 15. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 14, wherein at least one channel of the plurality of channels is discontinuous across the pivot shaft.
16. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 1 to 15, further including a biasing element interposed in force-translating relationship between the pedal arm and the housing with
10 the biasing element configured to urge the pedal arm to the first position.
17. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 1 to 16, further including a rotational position sensor operatively attached to the housing and disposed in rotational communication with the pivot shaft.
- 15 18. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 17, wherein the rotational position sensor includes at least one emitter adapted for attachment to the pivot shaft to communicate with the rotational position sensor.
- 20 19. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 1, wherein the pivot shaft extends between opposing first and second shaft ends and wherein the at least one channel is formed in the pivot shaft and extends along the pivot shaft from the first shaft end to the second shaft end.
20. A pedal assembly for a vehicle, comprising:
25 a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position;
a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis;
a housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between
30 the inner surface and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis, wherein the bore of the housing has

a first diameter adjacent to the outer surface and a second diameter adjacent to the inner surface greater than the first diameter; and

5 a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having at least one channel arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the inner surface towards the outer surface away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

10 21. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 20, wherein the debris filtering mechanism comprises at least one channel defined in at least one of the bore and the pivot shaft.

22. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 21, wherein the at least one channel has a generally U-shaped profile.

15 23. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 20 to 22, wherein the debris filtering mechanism comprises a plurality of channels defined in the pivot shaft.

24. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claim 20 to 23, wherein the debris filtering mechanism comprises a plurality of channels defined in the bore of the housing.

20 25. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 20 to 24, wherein the bore of the housing and the pivot shaft each have a frustoconical configuration.

25 26. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 20 to 25, wherein the bore of the housing defines a bore contact surface and wherein the pivot shaft defines a shaft contact surface shaped to rotatably engage the bore contact surface as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

30 27. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 20 to 26, further including a biasing element interposed in force-translating relationship between the pedal arm and the housing with the biasing element configured to urge the pedal arm to the first position.

28. The pedal assembly as set forth in any one of claims 20 to 27, further including a rotational position sensor operatively attached to the housing and disposed in rotational communication with the pivot shaft.

5

29. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 28, wherein the rotational position sensor includes at least one emitter adapted for attachment to the pivot shaft to communicate with the rotational position sensor.

10 30. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 20, wherein the pivot shaft extends between opposing first and second shaft ends and wherein the at least one channel is formed in the pivot shaft and extends along the pivot shaft from the first shaft end to the second shaft end.

31. A pedal assembly for a vehicle, comprising:
15 a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position;
a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis;

a housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between
20 the inner surface and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis; and

a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having at least one channel arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the
25 inner surface towards the outer surface away from the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position;

wherein the bore of the housing has a first diameter adjacent to the outer surface and a second diameter adjacent to the inner surface greater than the first diameter.

30 32. A pedal assembly for a vehicle, comprising:
a pedal arm moveable between a first position and a second position;

a pivot shaft operatively attached to the pedal arm with the pivot shaft defining a pivot axis;

a housing having a mount adapted for attachment to the vehicle, the housing having a body defining an inner surface and an outer surface, the housing defining a bore formed between the inner surface and the outer surface with the bore supporting at least a portion of the pivot shaft to permit
5 rotation of the pedal arm about the pivot axis; and

a debris filtering mechanism formed in at least one of the pivot shaft and the bore, the debris filtering mechanism having a plurality of channels radially spaced about the pivot axis and at least one channel arranged in communication between the inner surface and the outer surface of the body of the housing to direct contaminants from the inner surface towards the outer surface away from
10 the pedal assembly and out of the bore as the pedal arm moves between the first position and the second position.

33. The pedal assembly as set forth in claim 32, wherein each of the channels are formed obliquely relative to the pivot axis.

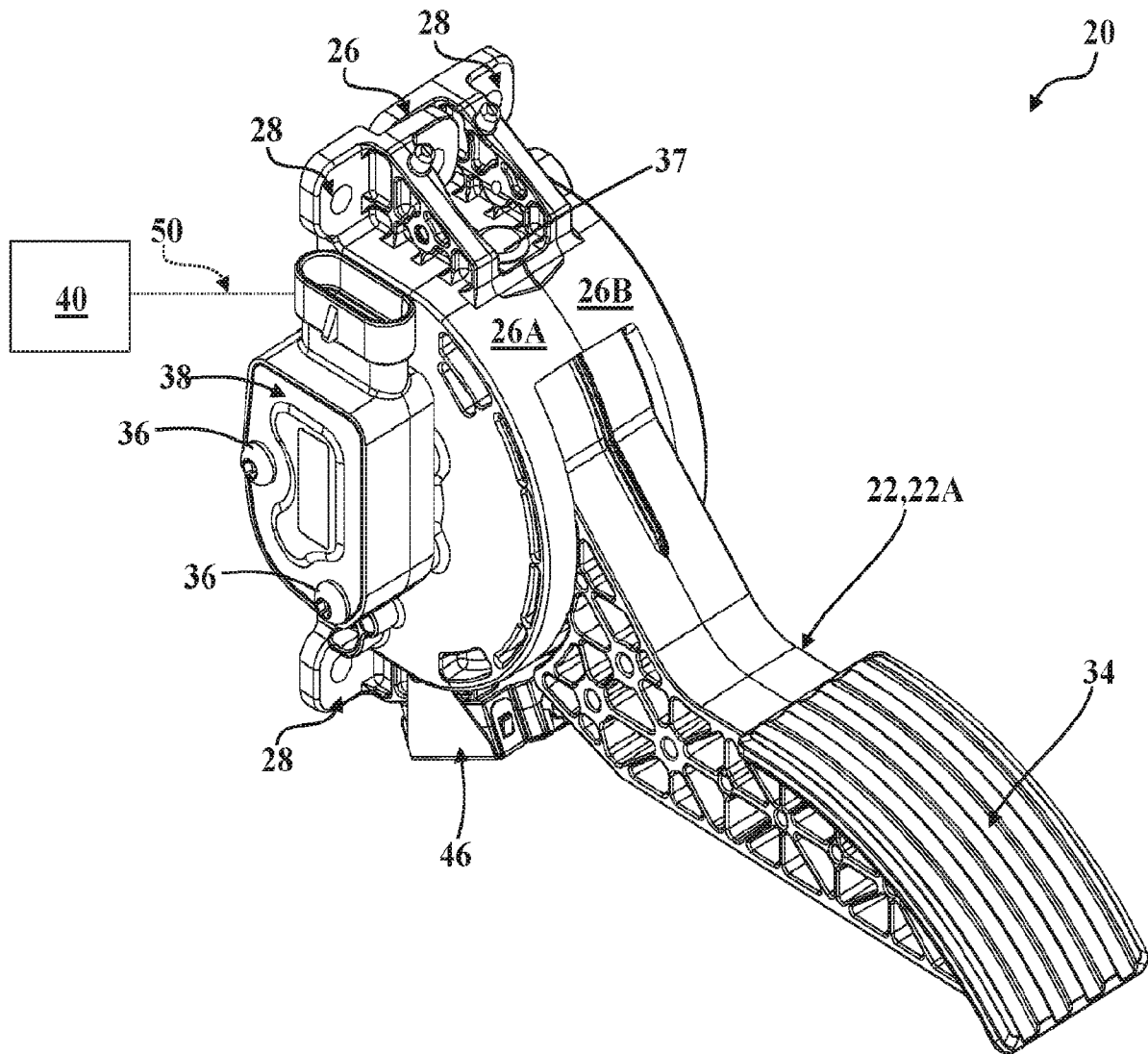


FIG. 1
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

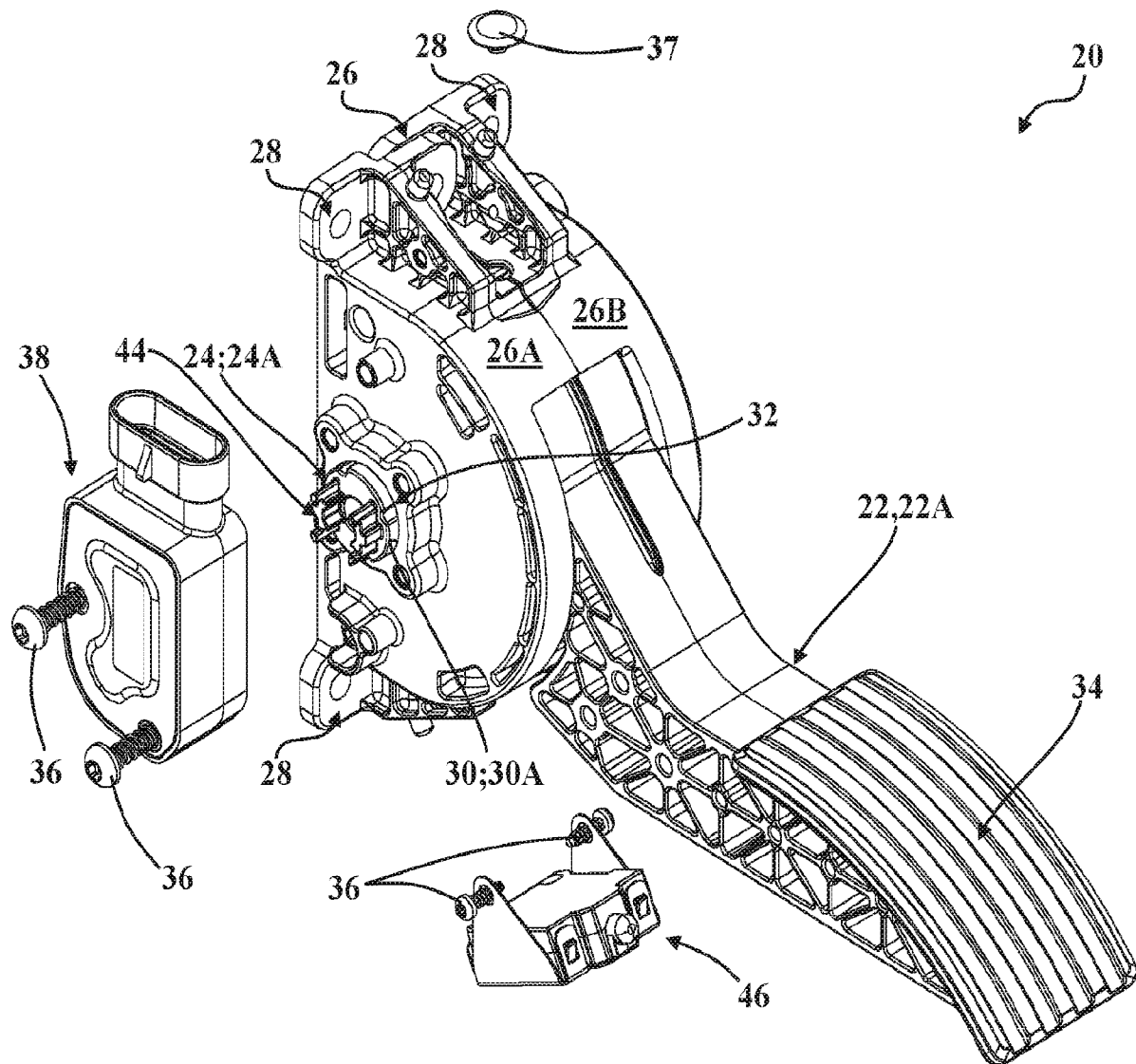


FIG. 2
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

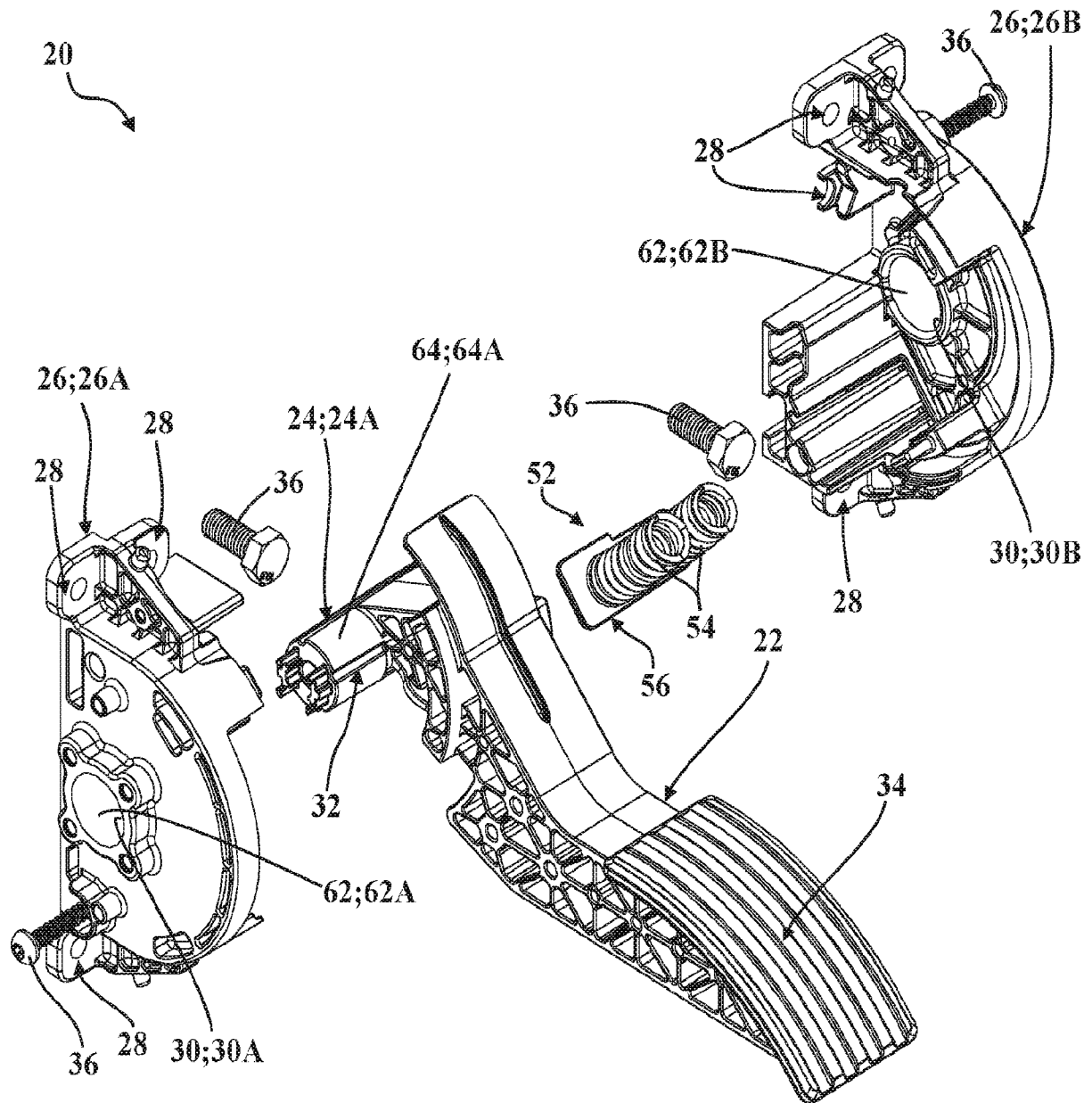


FIG. 3
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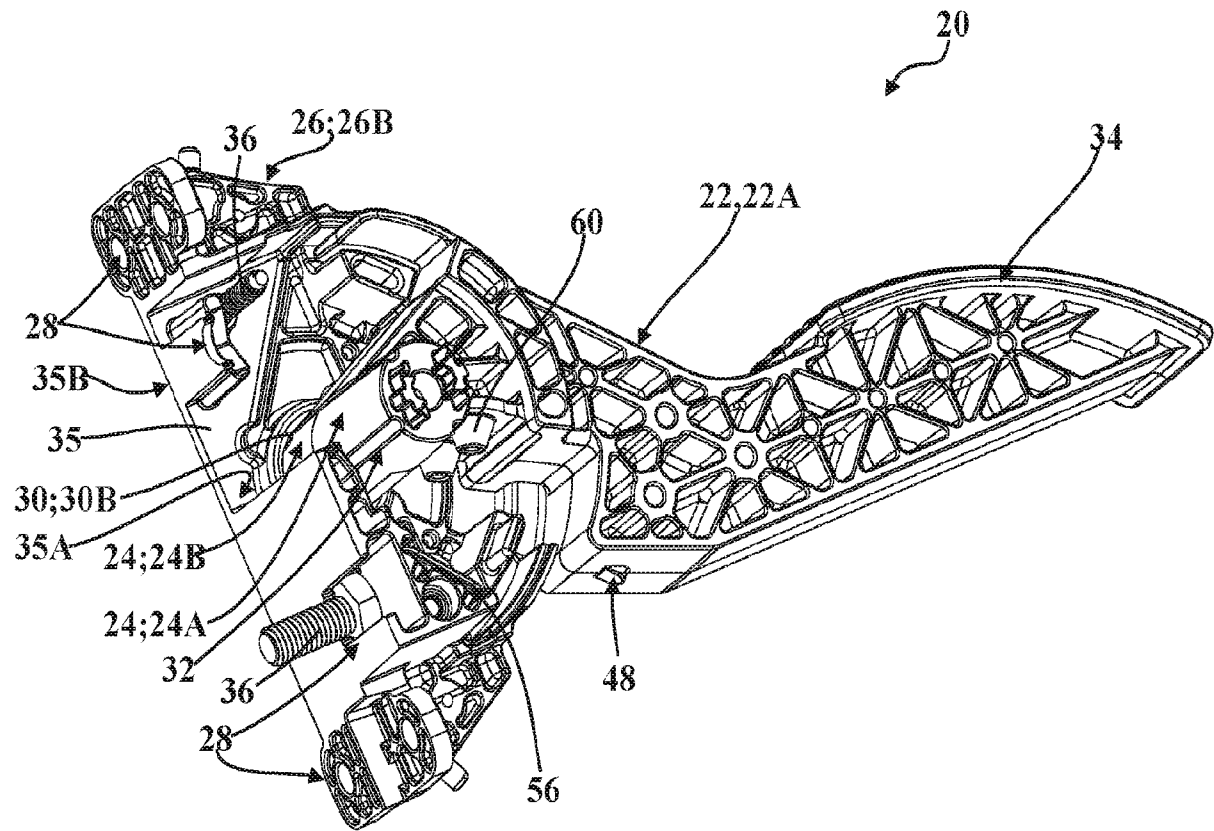


FIG. 4
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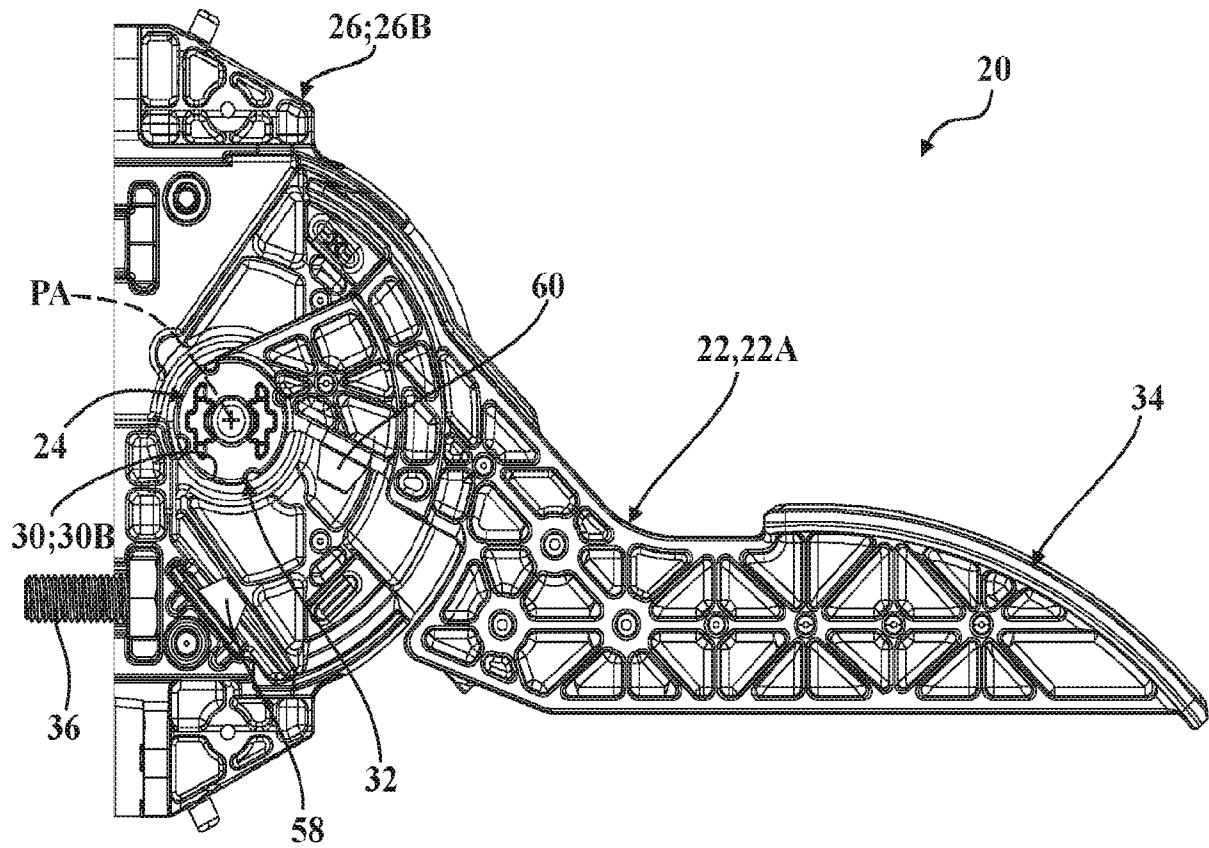


FIG. 5A
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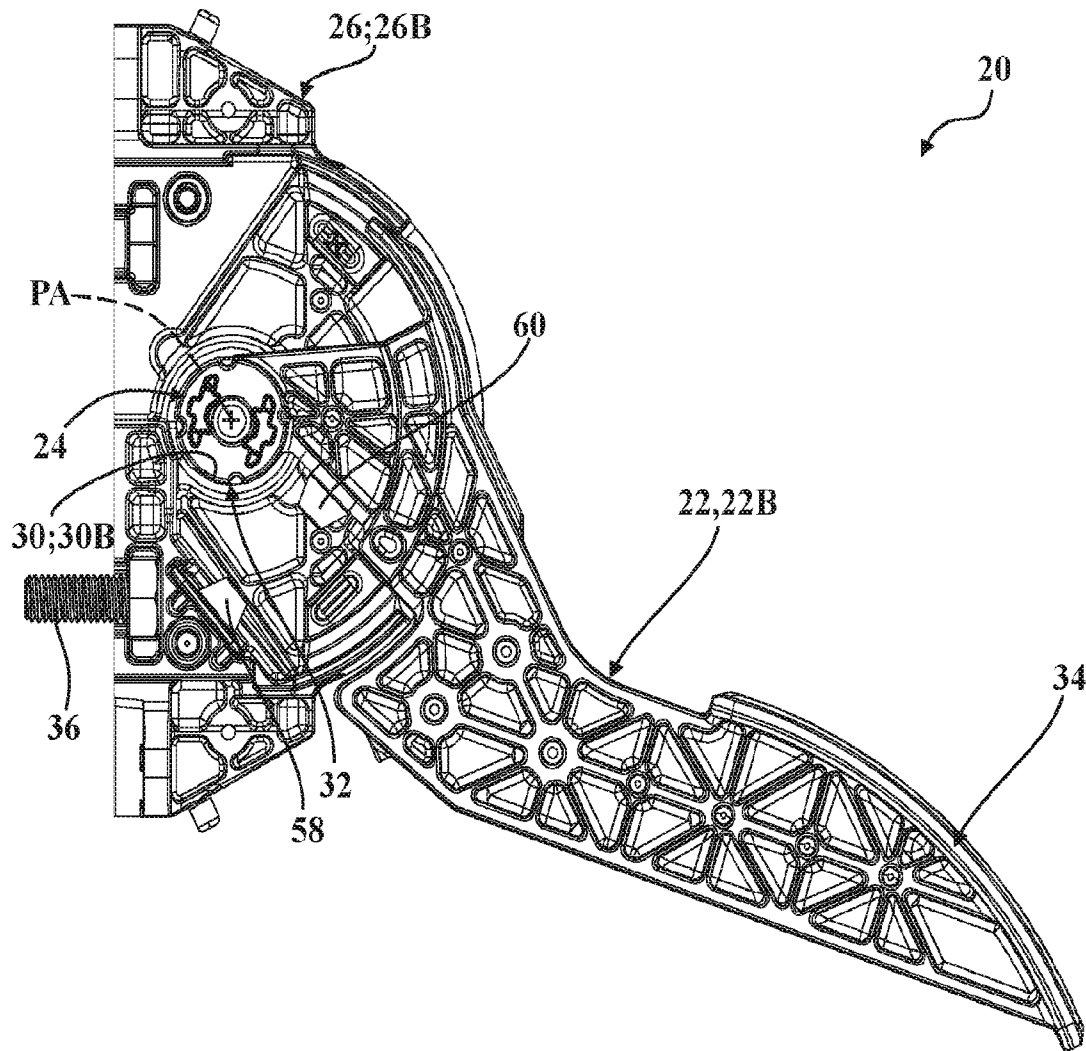


FIG. 5B
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

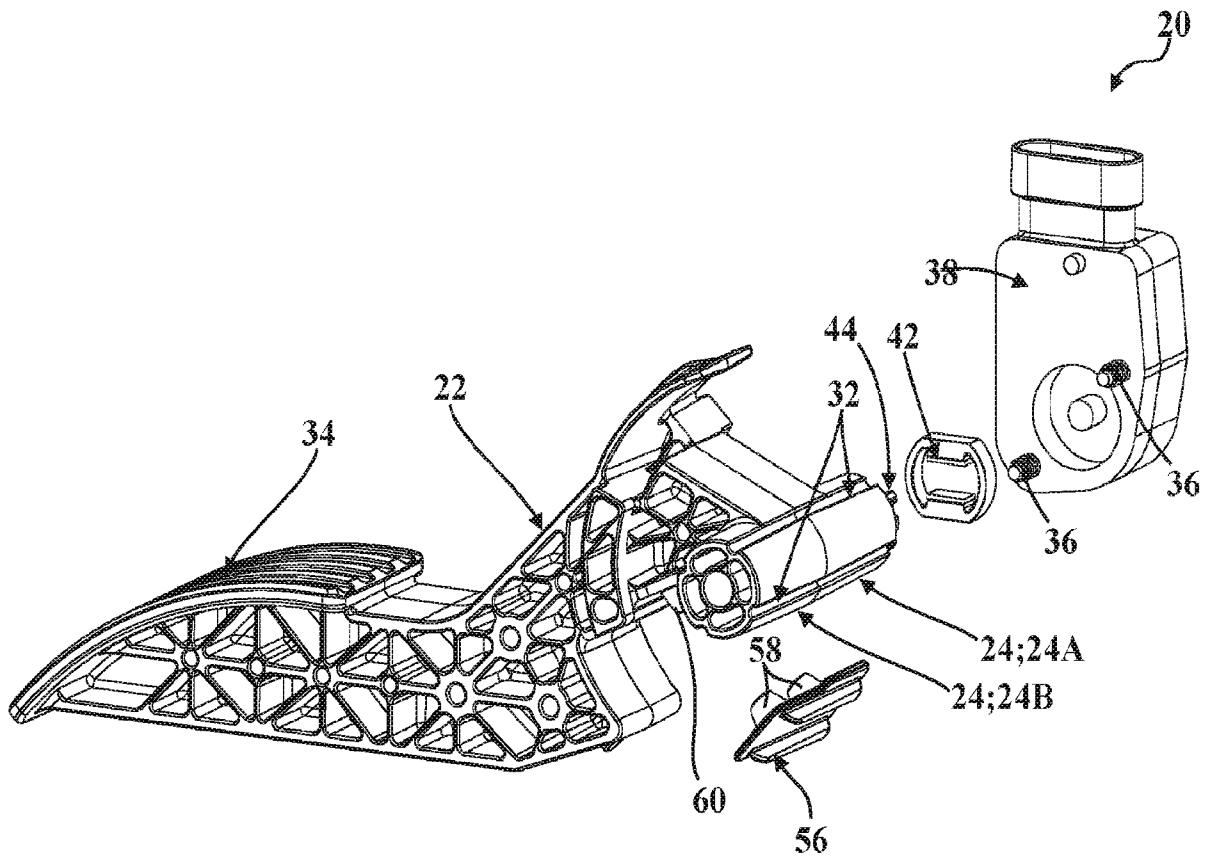
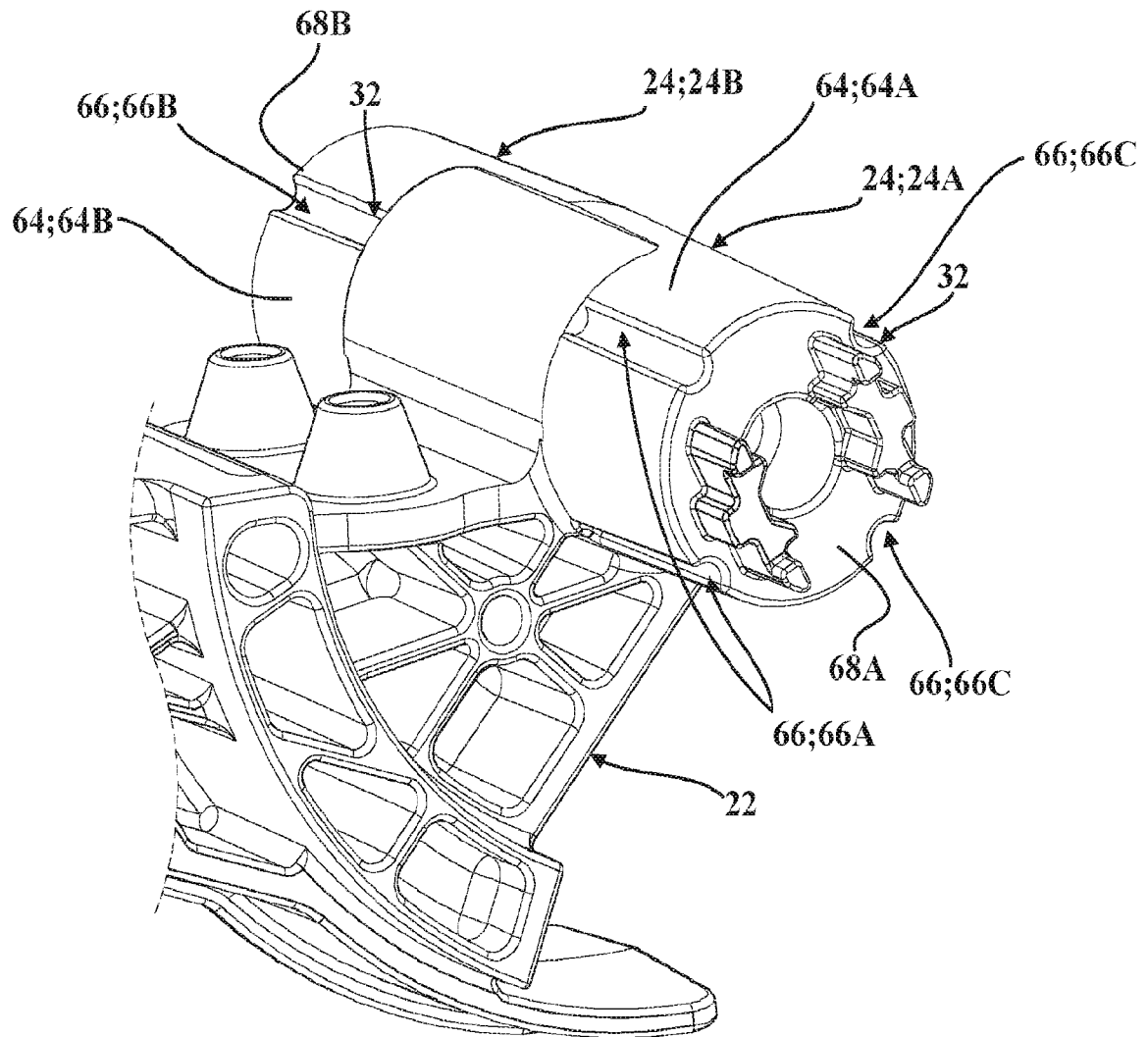


FIG. 6
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

**FIG. 7**

SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

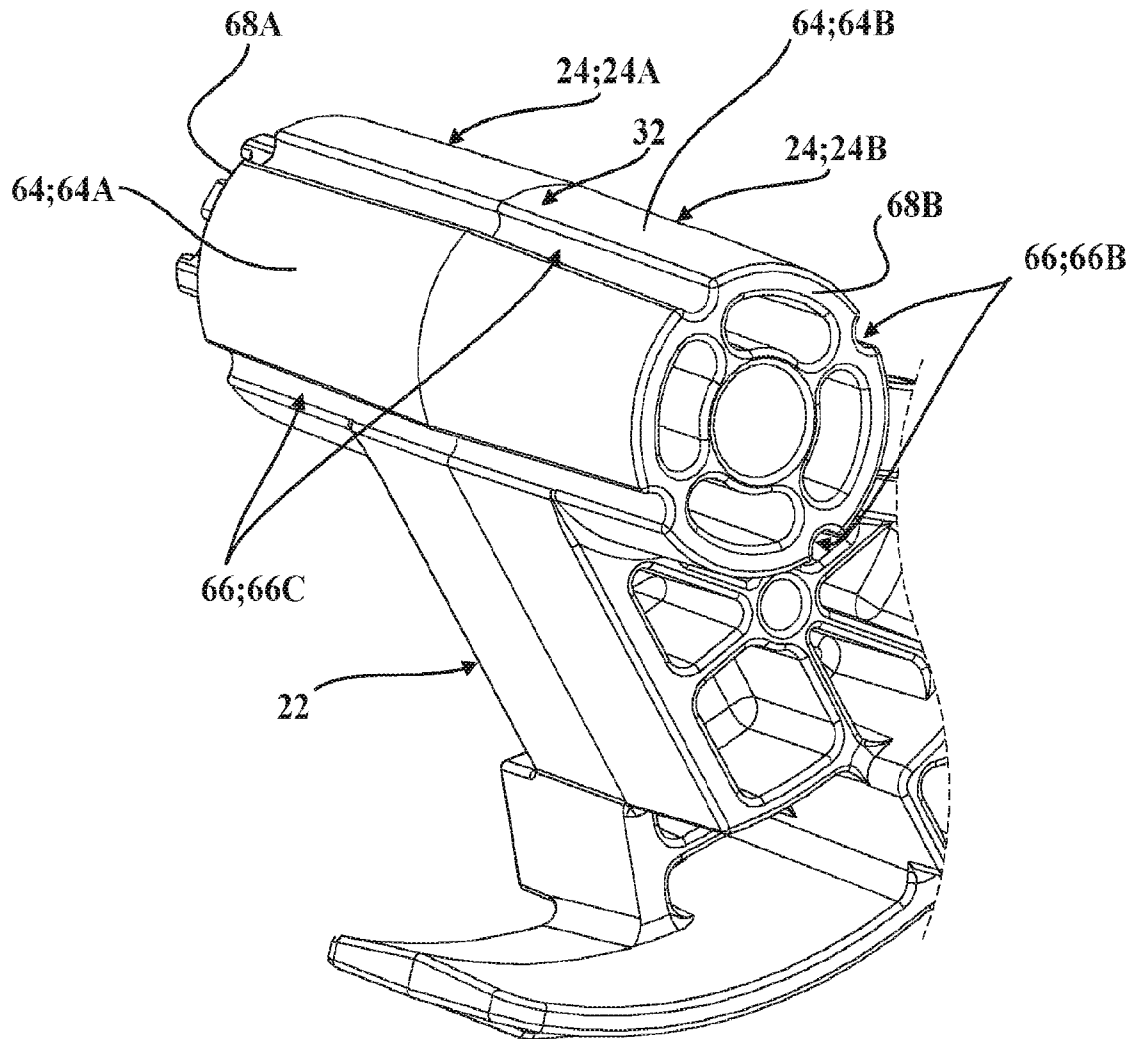


FIG. 8
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

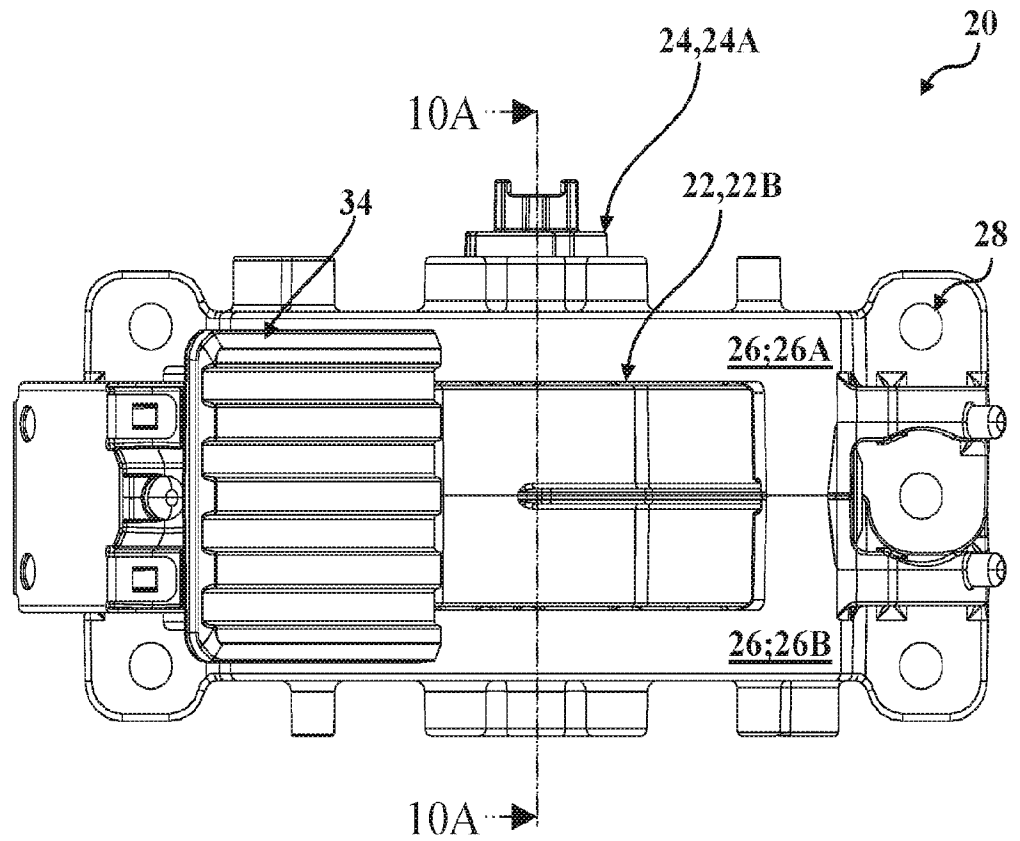


FIG. 9A
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

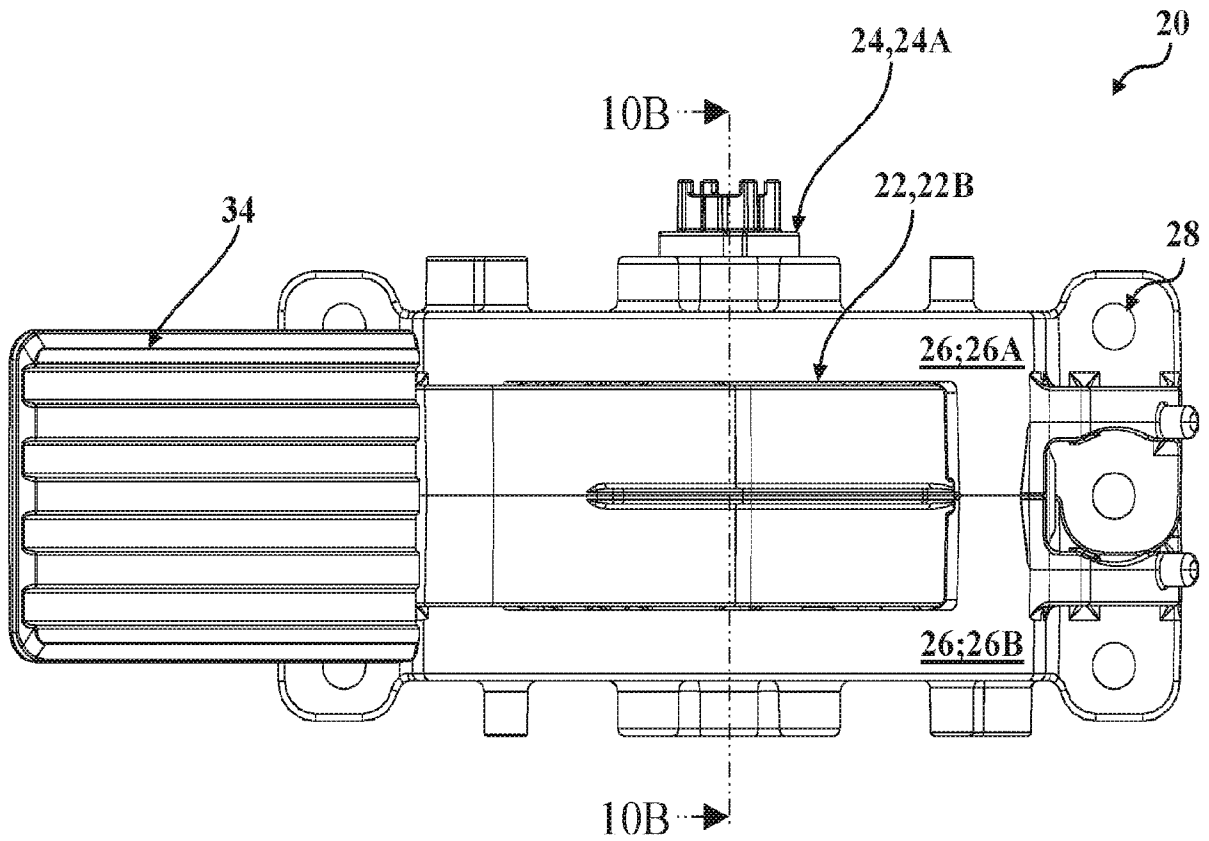


FIG. 9B
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

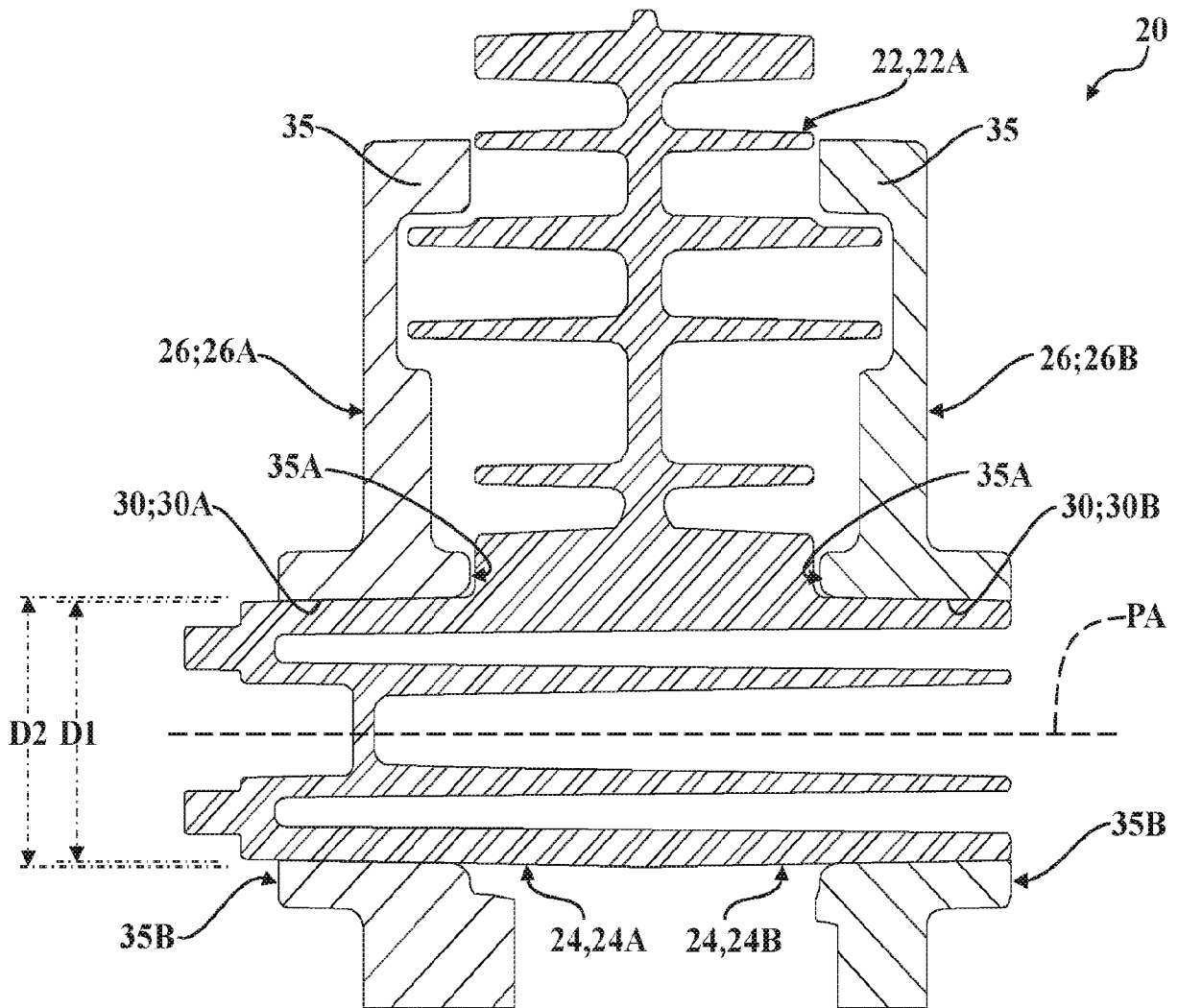


FIG. 10A
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

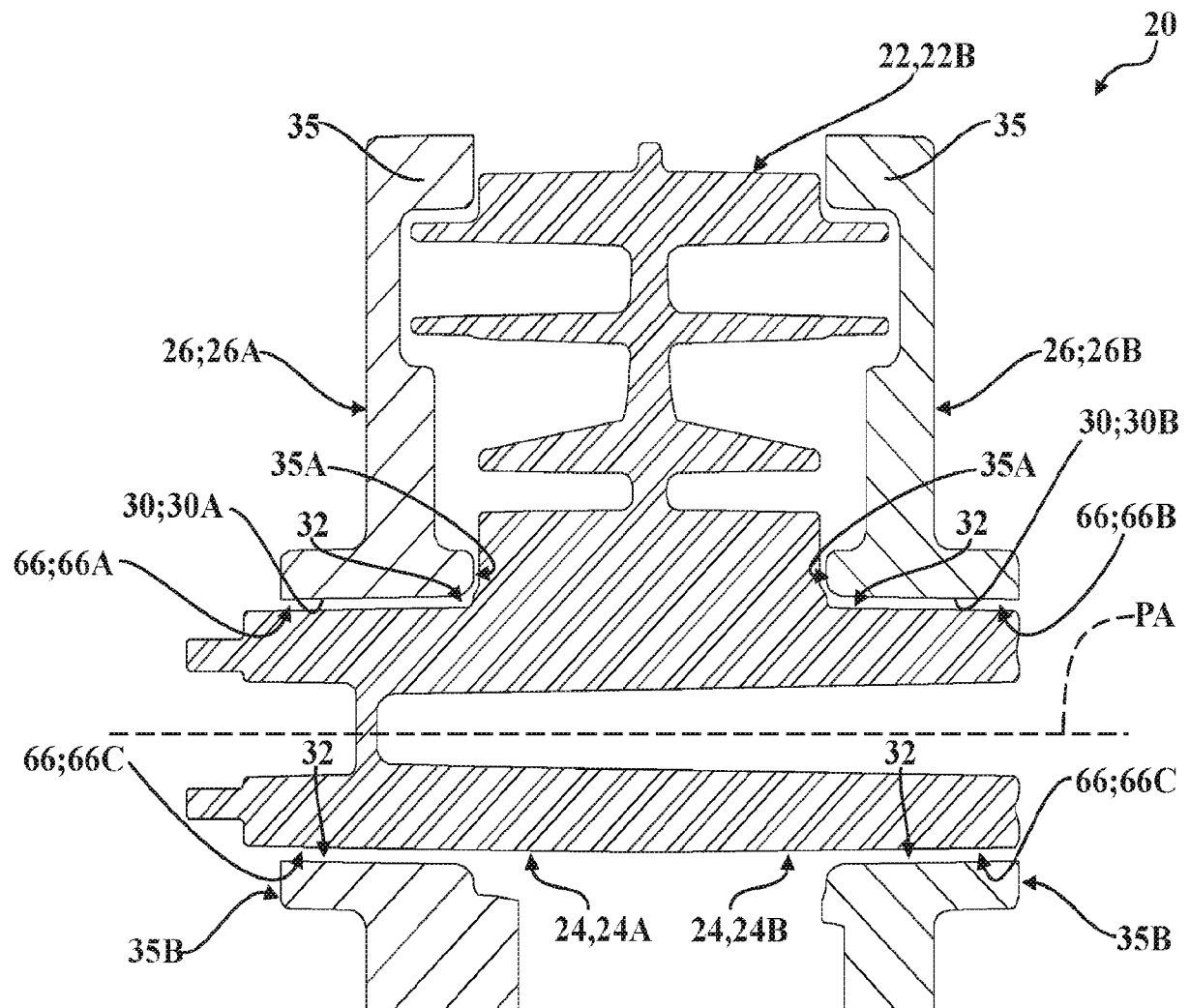
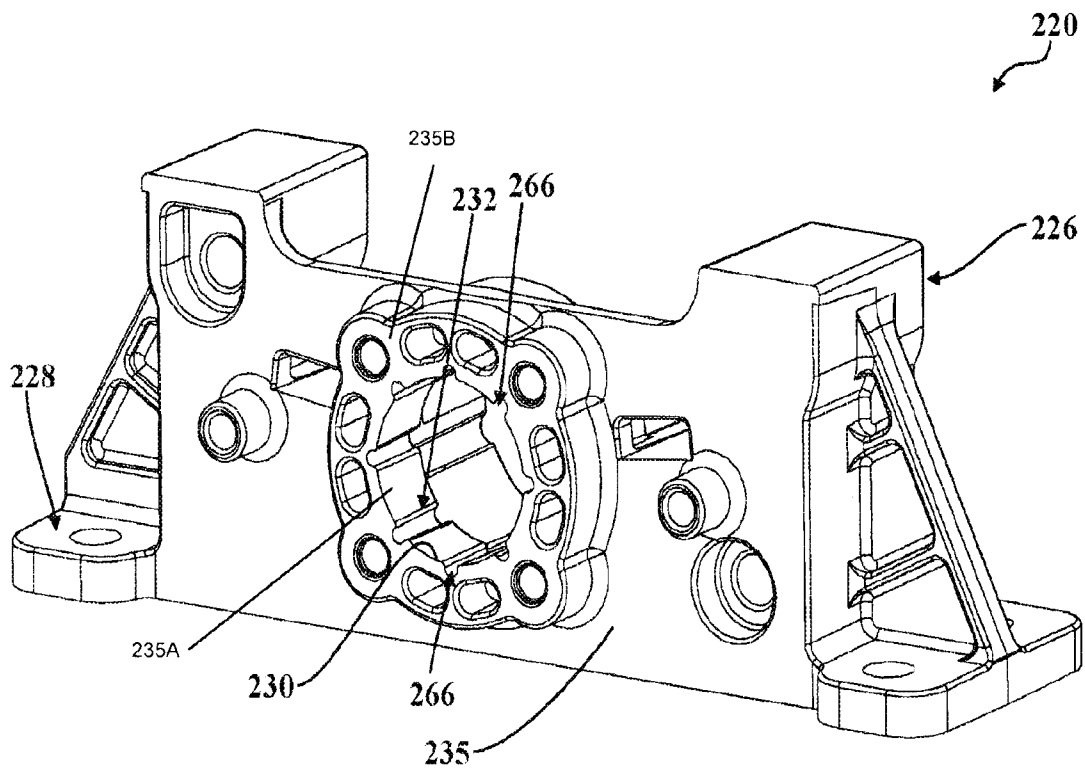


FIG. 10B
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

**FIG. 11**

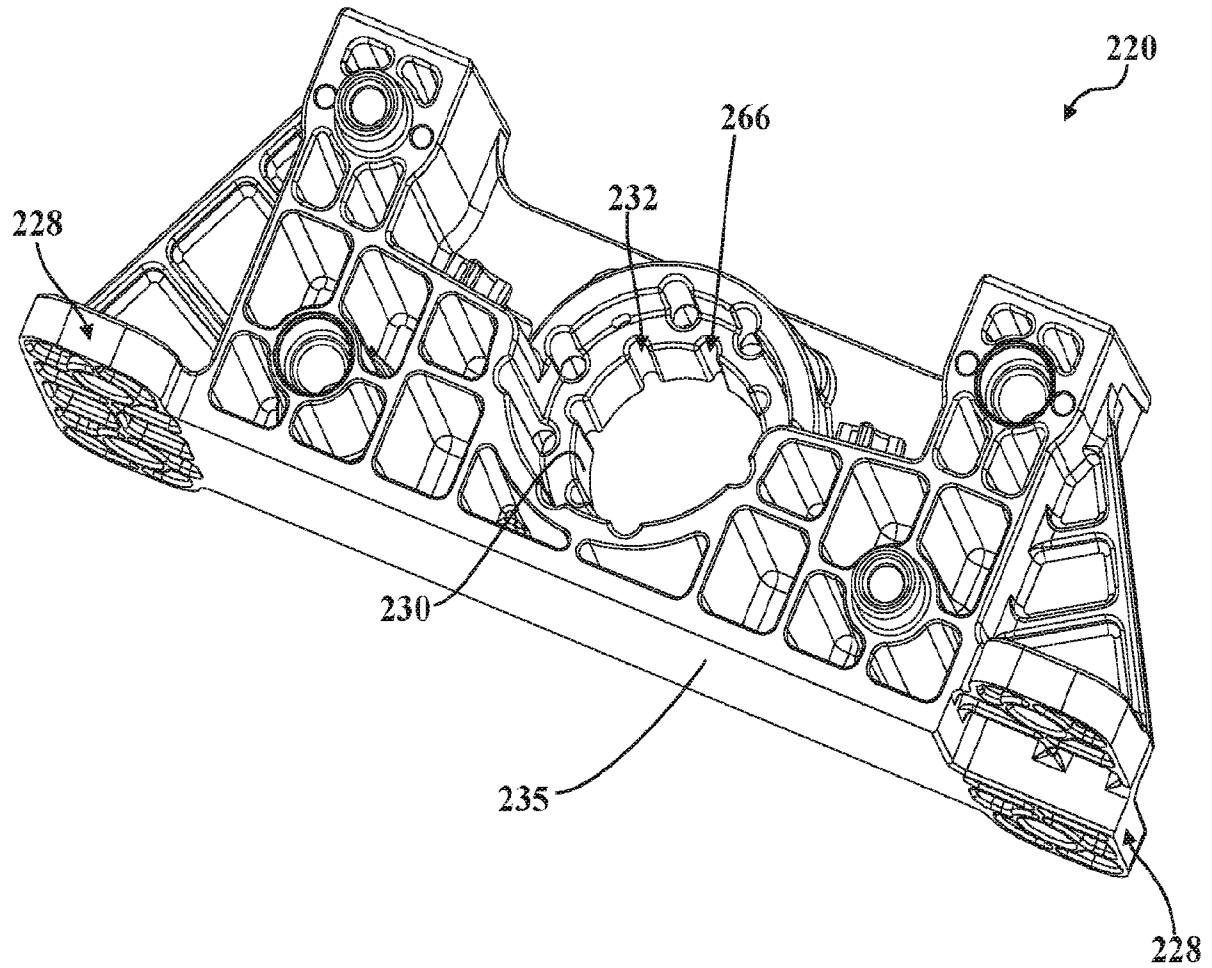


FIG. 12
SUBSTITUTE SHEET (RULE 26)

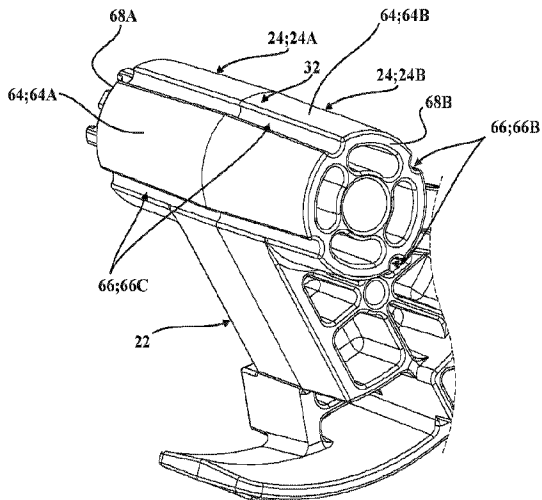


FIG. 8