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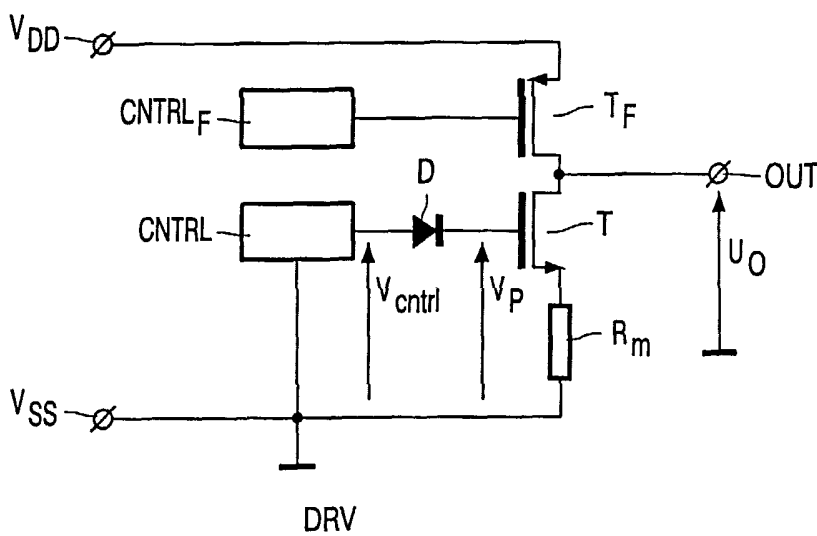
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(54) Title: OUTPUT DRIVER EQUIPPED WITH A SENSING RESISTOR FOR MEASURING THE CURRENT IN THE OUTPUT DRIVER



(57) Abstract: An electronic circuit has an output driver (DRV) for providing a driving signal (U0). The output driver has a transistor (T) with a first main terminal, a second main terminal and a control terminal coupled to receive a control signal (Vcntrl), a power supply terminal (VSS), an output terminal (OUT) for providing the driving signal (U0) that is coupled to the second main terminal, and a sensing resistor (Rm) coupled between the power supply terminal (VSS) and the first main terminal. The output driver (DRV) further has means for temporarily disabling the coupling between the control terminal and the control signal (Vcntrl) during a peak voltage across the sensing resistor (Rm). The means may have a circuit

that has a unidirectional current behavior, such as a diode (D), in series with the control terminal of the transistor (T).

Output driver equipped with a sensing resistor for measuring the current in the output driver

The invention relates to an electronic circuit comprising an output driver for providing a driving signal, which output driver comprises a transistor with a first main electrode, a second main electrode and a control electrode coupled to receive a control signal, a supply terminal, an output terminal to provide the driving signal, which output terminal is coupled to the second electrode, and a sensing resistor which is coupled between the supply terminal and the first main electrode.

Such an electronic circuit is known from the general state of the art, as shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2. Fig. 1 shows an output driver DRV. Said output driver DRV receives a supply voltage between a supply terminal V_{SS} and a further supply terminal V_{DD} , and provides an output voltage U_0 to an output terminal OUT. The output driver DRV comprises an output transistor T and a further output transistor T_F , which are controlled by, respectively, a control circuit CNTRL and a further control circuit CNTRL_F. The output transistor T and the further output transistor T_F are arranged in series between the supply terminal V_{SS} and the further supply terminal V_{DD} . The control circuit CNTRL supplies a binary control signal V_{CNTRL} . The further control circuit CNTRL_F similarly supplies a control signal to the gate of the further transistor T_F which is in phase with the control signal V_{CNTRL} . As a result, the transistors T and T_F are alternately conducting or non-conducting. For certain applications it is desirable to know the current through the output driver DRV. For this purpose, in the general state of the art as shown in Fig. 1, a sensing resistor R_M is arranged in series with the source of the field effect transistor T. If the field effect transistor T carries a current, a voltage is applied across the sensing resistor R_M , which is a measure of the current through the field effect transistor T, which current can be calculated using Ohm's law. The voltage across the resistor R_M has the adverse effect, however, that it causes the gate-source voltage of the field effect transistor T to be reduced. As a result, the maximum driving power of the driver DRV is reduced. In accordance with the general state of the art, this problem is frequently solved by the circuit as shown in Fig. 2. This means that the sensing resistor R_M is arranged in series only with the supply terminal V_{SS} , while the full control voltage V_{CNTRL} is available between the gate and the source of the field effect transistor T. On the assumption that the further supply terminal V_{DD} receives a positive voltage with respect to the supply terminal V_{SS} , the

voltage across the resistor R_M is negative with respect to ground, or with respect to the substrate if an integrated circuit is used. This is undesirable, in particular, when the resistor is used in an integrated circuit because signal processing of the measured voltage becomes much more complicated.

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Therefore, it is an object of the invention to provide an electronic circuit with a driver, which is provided with a sensing resistor for measuring the current through the driver, wherein the available control voltage of the output transistor is reduced hardly, if at all, by
10 the voltage across the sensing resistor, and wherein signal processing of the measured voltage is possible in a simple manner.

To achieve this object, the output driver further comprises means for rendering
15 ineffective said coupling between the control electrode and the control signal during a peak voltage across the sensing resistor. Most of the time substantially no current flows through the transistor. Only for a comparatively short period of time, i.e. when the driving signal changes from a high logic value to a low logic value, a current of significant value flows through the transistor, thereby causing a peak voltage across the sensing resistor. During this
20 peak voltage, the control electrode, or the gate if a field effect transistor is used, is decoupled from the control circuit that controls this control electrode most of the time. The ever-present intrinsic capacitance between gate and source of the transistor makes sure that the voltage difference between gate and source of the transistor remains substantially constant during this peak voltage across the sensing resistor. The potential on the gate of the transistor
25 consequently exhibits a peak that corresponds to the peak voltage across the sensing resistor.

In an embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver in accordance with the invention said means comprises a unipolar circuit that is arranged in
30 series with the control electrode of the transistor. This unipolar circuit makes sure that the coupling between the gate of the transistor and the control circuit is automatically interrupted as soon as the potential on the gate of the transistor approximates the maximum potential that can be supplied by the control circuit as a result of the peak voltage across the sensing resistor which also affects the gate of the transistor via its gate-source capacitance.

In an embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver in accordance with the invention the unipolar circuit comprises a diode. Said diode is a very
5 simple implementation for the unipolar circuit.

In an embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver in accordance with the invention the output driver further comprises current means which are
10 coupled between a further supply terminal and the control electrode of the transistor. The current means can be used to compensate for the possible slow leaking away of the gate-source voltage of the transistor during the time that the gate of the transistor is decoupled from the control circuit. The value of the current to be supplied by the current means is very small. Consequently, a significant increase in power dissipation of the output driver does not
15 take place. As the value for this small current may easily be chosen to be slightly too high, the potential on the gate of the transistor can become impermissibly high. This can be precluded by providing the output driver with limiting means for limiting the potential on the control electrode of the transistor. Said limiting means can be equipped, for example, with a zener diode that is coupled between the gate of the transistor and the supply terminal, or
20 between the gate and the source of the transistor.

These and other aspects of the invention are apparent from and will be elucidated with reference to the embodiments described hereinafter.

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In the drawings:

Fig. 1 shows a known electronic circuit comprising an output driver equipped with a sensing resistor for measuring the current through the output driver;

30 Fig. 2 shows an alternative, known electronic circuit comprising an output driver equipped with a sensing resistor for measuring the current through the output driver;

Fig. 3 shows a first embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver equipped with a sensing resistor for measuring the current through the output driver in accordance with the invention;

Fig. 4 shows a second embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver equipped with a sensing resistor for measuring the current through the output driver in accordance with the invention; and

5 Fig. 5 shows a third embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver equipped with a sensing resistor for measuring the current through the output driver in accordance with the invention.

In these Figures, like reference numerals refer to like parts or elements.

10 Fig. 3 shows a first embodiment of an electronic circuit including an output driver DRV comprising a supply terminal V_{SS} , a further supply terminal V_{DD} , an output field effect transistor T , a further output field effect transistor T_F , a control circuit CNTRL, a further control circuit CNTRL_F, a diode D , a sensing resistor R_M , and an output terminal OUT for supplying a driving signal U_0 . The control circuit CNTRL supplies a control signal
15 V_{CNTRL} which can be supplied via the diode D to the gate of the transistor T . The further control circuit CNTRL_F directly supplies a control signal to the further transistor T_F . The sensing resistor R_M is coupled between the source of the transistor T and the supply terminal V_{SS} that is also connected to ground. Like the drain of transistor T_F , the drain of transistor T is coupled to the output terminal OUT. The source of the further transistor T_F is connected to
20 the further supply terminal V_{DD} . Next, a description will be given of the operation of the circuit. On the assumption that no significant DC load is coupled to the output terminal OUT, the transistors T and T_F will not carry current if the driving signal U_0 has a high logic value or a low logic value for a good length of time. The transistor T only carries current in the transition phase from the high to the low logic value of the driving signal U_0 . As a result, the
25 control signal V_{CNTRL} would diminish in the known circuit in accordance with Fig. 1. This does not occur however in the circuit shown in Fig. 3. This can be attributed to the fact that at that instant the diode D is turned off. At said instant, the voltage V_P between the gate of the transistor T and the supply terminal V_{SS} is decoupled from the control voltage V_{CNTRL} . As a result, the potential on the gate will follow the potential on the source of the transistor T , so
30 that the gate-source voltage of the transistor T remains substantially constant. This has the advantage that the maximum output current that can be drawn from the output terminal OUT in the transistor T is not limited.

Fig. 4 shows a second embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver DRV. The control circuit CNTRL is equipped with a conventional inverter

comprising an N-type field effect transistor and a P-type field effect transistor, with the diode D of Fig. 3 being arranged, in this case, in series with the drain of said P-type field effect transistor. The terminal 1 receives the input signal, and terminal 2 receives a supply voltage. The operation of the circuit is similar to that of the circuit shown in Fig. 3. Most of the time, i.e. when there is no peak voltage across the sensing resistor R_M , the voltage between the gate and the source is determined by V_{CNTRL} , which is fully imposed by the control circuit CNTRL. During a peak voltage across the sensing resistor R_M , the diode D is reverse biased, as a result of which the signal between the gate and the source is not dictated by the control circuit CNTRL but by the transistor T itself. In this period, the voltage V_P thus corresponds to the voltage V_P as indicated in Fig. 3.

Fig. 5 shows a third embodiment of an electronic circuit comprising an output driver DRV. During the peak voltage across the sensing resistor R_M , the gate-source voltage of the field effect transistor T remains relatively constant as a result of the gate-source capacitance. However, the voltage decreases gradually as a result of leakage. This can be compensated for by using current means which, in Fig. 5, are implemented using the current source J that is coupled to the gate of the field effect transistor T. The current value supplied by the current source J must be very small. If the current value is too large, the potential on the gate of the field effect transistor T may become impermissibly high. To preclude this, a zener diode may be coupled between the gate and the supply terminal V_{SS} , or a zener diode may be coupled between the gate and the source of the field effect transistor T. The latter solution is preferred as it leads to a direct limitation of the gate-source voltage.

25

The electronic circuit in accordance with the invention can be applied in an integrated circuit or implemented in a discrete manner. Although field effect transistors are applied in all embodiments, it is alternatively possible to substitute, for example, the output transistor T with a bipolar transistor. In that case, the current value to be supplied by the current source J must be much higher in general. It is also possible to substitute all P-type transistors with N-type transistors, provided also all N-type transistors are replaced by P-type transistors, the diode's polarity is reversed, and the supply voltage polarity is reversed.

30

CLAIMS:

1. An electronic circuit comprising an output driver for providing a driving signal, which output driver comprises a transistor with a first main electrode, a second main electrode and a control electrode coupled to receive a control signal, a supply terminal, an output terminal to provide the driving signal, which output terminal is coupled to the second electrode, and a sensing resistor which is coupled between the supply terminal and the first main electrode, the output driver (DRV) further comprising means for rendering ineffective said coupling between the control electrode and the control signal (V_{CTRL}) during a peak voltage across the sensing resistor (R_M).
5
- 10 2. An electronic circuit as claimed in claim 1, wherein said means comprises a unipolar circuit that is arranged in series with the control electrode of the transistor (T).
3. An electronic circuit as claimed in claim 2, wherein the unipolar circuit comprises a diode (D).
15
4. An electronic circuit as claimed in claim 1, wherein the output driver (DRV) further comprises current means (J) which are coupled between a further supply terminal (V_{DD}) and the control electrode of the transistor (T).
- 20 5. An electronic circuit as claimed in claim 1, wherein the output driver (DRV) additionally comprises limiting means for limiting the voltage on the control electrode of the transistor (T).
6. An electronic circuit as claimed in claim 1, wherein the output driver (DRV) additionally comprises limiting means for limiting the voltage between the control electrode and the first main electrode of the transistor (T).
25
7. An electronic circuit as claimed in claim 5, wherein the limiting means comprise a zener diode (Z).

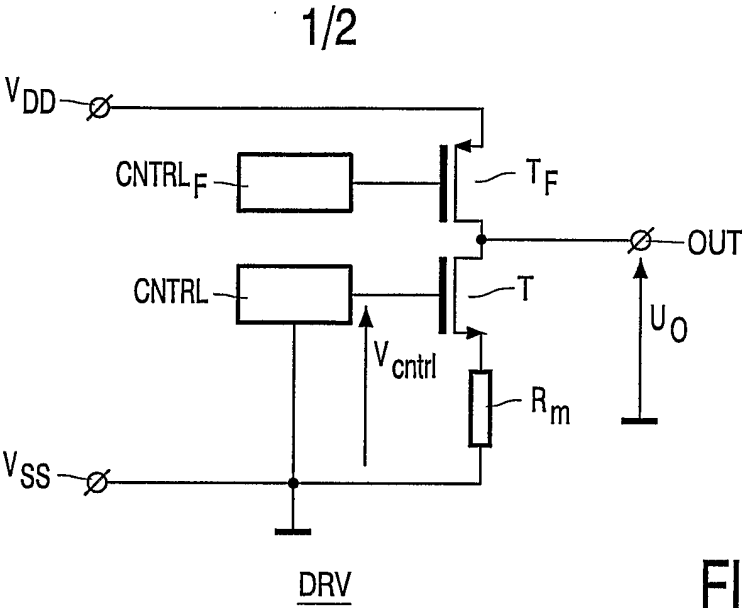


FIG. 1

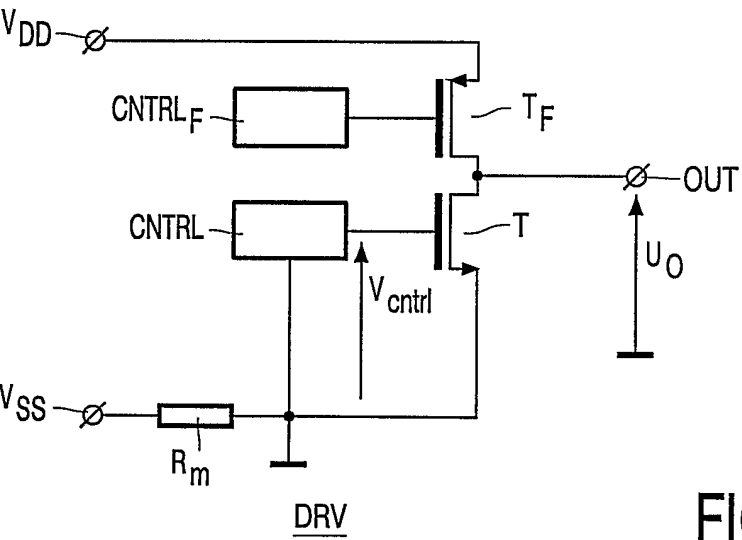


FIG. 2

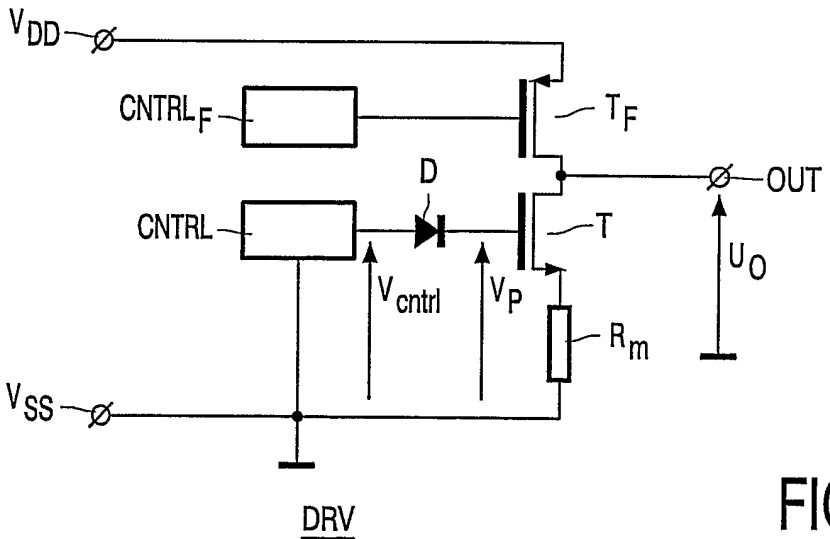


FIG. 3

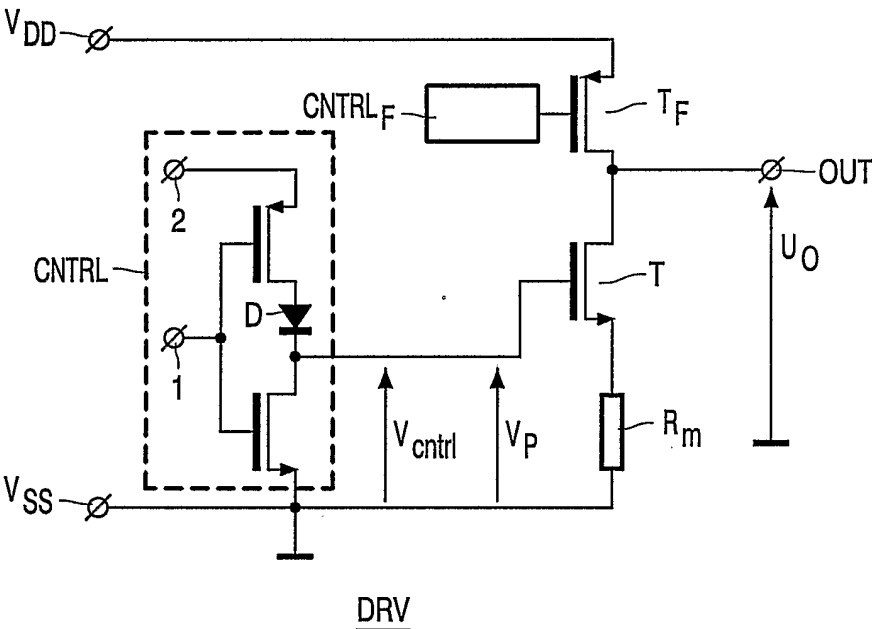


FIG. 4

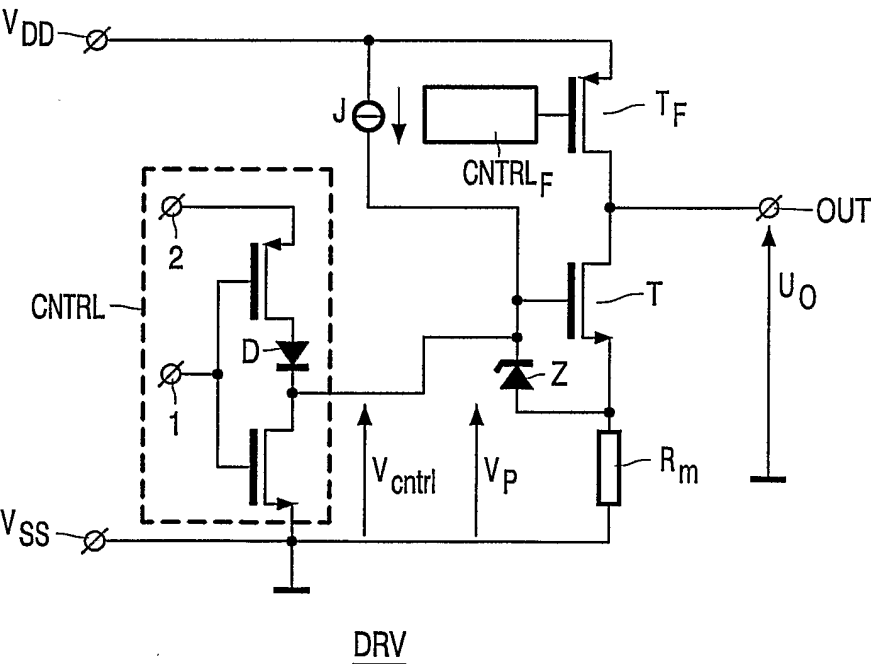


FIG. 5