

(57) **Abrégé(suite)/Abstract(continued):**

breather chamber of a labyrinth structure which continues in a circumferential direction of a rear wheel and extends in an upward and downward direction. An upper end of the breather chamber is communicated with a breather path and is open to the atmospheric air while a lower end of the breather chamber is communicated with a gear chamber through a slit extending in a widthwise direction of the rear wheel.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

To provide a motorcycle wherein only air can be communicated between the inside and the outside of a gear case without increasing the size of the gear case. A gear case includes a gear case body and a gear case cover. The gear case body includes a breather chamber of a labyrinth structure which continues in a circumferential direction of a rear wheel and extends in an upward and downward direction. An upper end of the breather chamber is communicated with a breather path and is open to the atmospheric air while a lower end of the breather chamber is communicated with a gear chamber through a slit extending in a widthwise direction of the rear wheel.

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MOTORCYCLE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

5 This invention relates to a motorcycle wherein a gear case which has a drive shaft driven by a power unit and in which gear wheels for transmitting rotation of the drive shaft to a rear wheel are accommodated is provided sidewardly of the rear wheel and the gear case includes a breather path which opens the inside of a gear chamber to the atmosphere.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Motorcycles include a vehicle of the drive shaft driving type wherein driving force of a power unit is transmitted to a rear wheel (driving wheel) through a drive shaft, and a gear case in which gear wheels for transmitting rotation of the drive shaft to the rear wheel are accommodated is provided sidewardly of the rear wheel.

Some vehicles of this type have oil for lubrication accommodated in the gear case and includes a breather mechanism for keeping the pressure in the gear case to a predetermined pressure (refer to, for example, Patent Japanese Utility Model JP 2-393 published 01-08-1990 or Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 2008-75732 published 04-03-2008).

Incidentally, not only air in the gear case but also lubricating oil in the gear case sometimes enter a path of the breather mechanism, and it is desired to separate this oil and the air from each other so that only the air is communicated between the inside and the outside of the gear case.

However, in the breather mechanism as disclosed in Patent Japanese Utility Model Publication No. Hei 2-393, a chamber which communicates the external

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air with the inside of the gear case is provided in the gear case body, and a communicating path extending obliquely upwardly is formed in a case cover which closes up a rear wheel side opening of the gear case body such that the chamber is communicated with the internal space of the gear case through the communicating path. Therefore, if oil enters the path, then the path along which
5 air passes becomes narrower and the oil is sometimes discharged to the outside together with the air. As a countermeasure, the size of the chamber has been increased, and therefore, it has become necessary to increase the size of the gear case.

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Meanwhile, in the breather mechanism disclosed in Japanese Patent Laid-Open No. 2008-75732, a short breather hole extending in a substantially horizontal direction is formed in an upper portion of the gear case such that it is open to the external air through the breather tube. Therefore, the path along which the air is
15 to pass is narrowed. Also in this instance, the oil is sometimes discharged to the outside together with the air, and in order to increase the size of the path along which air is to pass as a countermeasure, it becomes necessary to increase the size of the gear case.

20 The present invention has been made in view of such circumstances as described above, and it is an object of the present invention to provide a motorcycle wherein only air can be communicated between the inside and the outside of a gear case without increasing the size of the gear case.

25 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to the present invention, a motorcycle wherein a gear case which has a drive shaft driven by a power unit and in which gear wheels for transmitting rotation of the drive shaft to a rear wheel are accommodated is provided
30 sidewardly of the rear wheel and the gear case includes a breather path which opens the inside of a gear chamber to the atmosphere is characterized in that the gear case includes a gear case body and a gear case cover and the gear case body includes a breather chamber of a labyrinth structure which continues in a circumferential direction of the rear wheel and extends in an upward and

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downward direction such that an upper end of the breather chamber is communicated with the breather path while a lower end of the breather chamber is communicated with the gear chamber through a slit extending in a widthwise direction of the rear wheel. According to the present invention, since the
5 breather chamber of the labyrinth structure which continues in the circumferential direction of the rear wheel and extends in the upward and downward direction such that the upper end of the breather chamber is communicated with the breather path while the lower end of the breather chamber is communicated with the gear chamber through the slit extending in
10 the widthwise direction of the rear wheel, circulation of air between the breather chamber and the gear chamber can be made smooth by the slit. Consequently, even if the size of the breather chamber is not increased, air and oil can be separated from each other efficiently by the breather chamber of the labyrinth structure and only the air can be circulated between the inside and the outside of
15 the gear case while the appearance is not damaged either.

In the present invention, since the gear case body of the gear case includes the breather chamber of the labyrinth structure which continues in the circumferential direction of the rear wheel and extends in the upward and
20 downward direction such that the upper end of the breather chamber is communicated with the breather path while the lower end of the breather chamber is communicated with the gear chamber through the slit extending in the widthwise direction of the rear wheel, even if the size of the breather chamber is not increased, only air can be circulated between the inside and the
25 outside of the gear case while the appearance is not damaged either.

In an aspect of the invention, the gear case body may have a through-hole formed therein which communicates an upper end of the breather chamber and the gear chamber with each other in an upward and downward direction.
30 According to this configuration, oil advancing into the upper end of the breather chamber can be returned into the gear chamber through the through-hole.

Since the gear case body has the through-hole formed therein which communicates the upper end of the breather chamber and the gear chamber with

each other in the upward and downward direction, oil advancing into the upper end of the breather chamber can be returned into the gear chamber through the through-hole.

- 5 Further, in another aspect of the invention, the breather path may be communicated with the upper end of the breather chamber on the upper side with respect to the through-hole. According to this configuration, oil immediately before it enters the breather path can be returned into the gear chamber through the through-hole.

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Since the breather path is communicated with the upper end of the breather chamber on the upper side with respect to the through-hole, oil immediately before it enters the breather path can be returned into the gear chamber through the through-hole.

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In a further aspect of the invention, the motorcycle may have a breather tube connecting to the breather chamber through the breather path for opening the breather chamber to the atmosphere, and a lower end of the breather tube may be positioned on the upper side with respect to the center of an axle of the rear wheel. According to this configuration, even when the motorcycle runs on a poorly drained place, it is possible to prevent water from entering the breather tube.

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Since the motorcycle has a breather tube connecting to the breather chamber through the breather path for opening the breather chamber to the atmosphere and the lower end of the breather tube is positioned on the upper side with respect to the center of the axle of the rear wheel, even when the motorcycle runs on a poorly drained place, it is possible to prevent water from entering the breather tube.

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In yet another aspect of the invention, the labyrinth structure of the breather chamber may have a first projection provided continuously to the slit in the breather chamber and a second projection provided on a wall in the breather chamber on the side which opposes to the first projection. According to this

configuration, the first projection makes it difficult for oil from advancing into the breather chamber, and even if oil advances into the breather chamber, it is possible for the second projection to decrease the power of the oil thereby to make it easy to return the oil into the gear chamber.

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Since the labyrinth structure of the breather chamber has the first projection provided continuously to the slit in the breather chamber and the second projection provided on the wall in the breather chamber on the side which opposes to the first projection, the oil can be returned readily into the gear chamber.

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In a further aspect of the invention, the gear case cover may have a communicating path provided therein which is opposed at an opening on one end side thereof to a lower end of the breather chamber, extends from the opening of the one end side thereof toward the inner side in a radial direction in the gear case cover and is opposed at an opening at the other end thereof to the gear chamber. According to this configuration, even if oil from the gear chamber comes up through the communicating path in addition to the slit, the breather chamber of the labyrinth structure can return the oil into the gear chamber before the oil is opened to the atmospheric air.

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Since the gear case cover has the communicating path provided therein which is opposed at the opening on the one end side thereof to the lower end of the breather chamber, extends from the opening of the one end side thereof toward the inner side in a radial direction in the gear case cover and is opposed at the opening at the other end thereof to the gear chamber, even if oil from the gear chamber comes up through the communicating path in addition to the slit, the breather chamber of the labyrinth structure can return the oil into the gear chamber before the oil is opened to the atmospheric air.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Preferred embodiments of the invention are shown in the drawings, wherein:

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FIG. 1 is a side elevational view of a motorcycle according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a sectional view showing a shaft drive apparatus together with
5 peripheral components.

FIG. 3 is a sectional view showing a gear mechanism.

(A) of FIG. 4 is a perspective view of a gear case as viewed from the outer side
10 (left side of the vehicle) and (B) of FIG. 4 is a view of the gear case as viewed from the inner side (right side of the vehicle body (rear wheel side)).

FIG. 5 is a perspective view showing an internal structure of a gear case body.

15 FIG. 6 is a view of the gear base body as viewed from the front side (left side of the vehicle body).

FIG. 7 is a view of the gear base body as viewed from the rear side (right side of the vehicle body).

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FIG. 8 is a sectional view taken along line VIII-VIII of FIG. 6.

(A) of FIG. 9 is a view of a gear case cover as viewed from the front side (right side of the vehicle body), (B) of FIG. 9 is a view of the gear case cover as viewed
25 from the rear side (left side of the vehicle body), and (C) of FIG. 9 is a sectional view taken along IX-IX of (A) of FIG. 9.

FIG. 10 is a view showing a breather path together with peripheral components.

30 FIG. 11 is a view showing a breather tube together with peripheral components.

FIG. 12 is a view showing a breather chamber together with peripheral components with part of the gear case cut away.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

In the following, an embodiment of the present invention is described with reference to the accompanying drawings. It is to be noted that, in the following description, the direction such as the forward, rearward, leftward, rightward, upward, or downward direction is, a direction as viewed from a passenger of the vehicle body, and in the figures, an arrow mark F denotes the forward direction of the vehicle body while another arrow mark L denotes the leftward direction of the vehicle body and a further arrow mark U denotes the upward direction of the vehicle body.

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FIG. 1 is a side elevational view of a motorcycle of the cruiser type according to an embodiment of the present invention.

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This motorcycle 10 includes a vehicle body frame 11, a pair of left and right front forks 13 supported for pivotal motion on a head pipe 12 attached to a front end portion of the vehicle body frame 11, a handle bar 15 for steering operation attached to a top bridge 14 which supports an upper end portion of the front forks 13, a front wheel 16 supported for rotation on the front forks 13, an engine (power unit) 17 supported on the vehicle body frame 11, a rear swing arm (also called rear fork) 21 supported for rocking motion on a pivot 20 at a rear lower portion of the vehicle body frame 11, a rear wheel (driving wheel) 22 supported for rotation at a rear end portion of the rear swing arm 21, and a rear cushion 23 interposed between the rear swing arm 21 and the vehicle body frame 11.

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The vehicle body frame 11 includes a main frame 25 extending in a rearwardly descending relationship from the head pipe 12, a pair of left and right seat rails 26 extending rearwardly from a rear end portion of the main frame 25, a pair of left and right down frames 27 extending downwardly from the head pipe 12 and curved in such a manner as to extend substantially horizontally rearwards, and a pair of left and right rear frames 28 (also referred to as pivot plates) connecting rear ends of the pair of left and right down frames 27 and rear ends of the seat rails 26 to each other. A fuel tank 31 is supported at a front portion of the main frame 25, and a seat 32 (driver's seat 32A and passenger's seat 32B) is supported

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rearwardly of the fuel tank 31. A rear fender 33 for covering the upper side of the rear wheel 22 is supported at a rear downward position of the seat 32.

It is to be noted that, in FIG. 1, reference numeral 29 denotes a gusset member for reinforcing the vehicle body frame 11, reference numeral 35 denotes a headlamp, reference numeral 36 denotes a winker, and reference numeral 37 denotes a tail lamp.

The engine 17 is supported in a space surrounded by the main frame 25, down frames 27 and rear frames 28, and is a V-type two-cylinder engine which includes a crankcase 41 and two cylinder sections 42F and 42R extending upwardly at a predetermined angle of nip at forward and backward positions of the vehicle body from the crankcase 41. It is to be noted that, in FIG. 1, an air cleaner or a fuel supplying system which forms an engine intake system, an exhaust pipe or an exhaust muffler which forms an engine exhaust system or the like is not shown.

In the present motorcycle 10, a shaft-drive type power transmission mechanism (hereinafter referred to as shaft drive apparatus) 50 is adopted as a power transmission mechanism for transmitting power of the engine 17 to the rear wheel 22.

FIG. 2 is a sectional view showing the shaft drive apparatus 50 together with peripheral components such as the rear swing arm 21.

The rear swing arm 21 is formed from a connection of a pipe portion 21A supported between the pair of left and right rear frames 28 and a hollow member 21B formed from left and right extensions 22L and 22R integrally therewith and extending rearwardly from the pipe portion 21A.

The shaft drive apparatus 50 has a drive shaft 51 extending in the forward and backward direction through the inside of the extension 22L of the rear swing arm 21 and is an apparatus which transmits power of the engine 17 to the rear wheel 22 through the drive shaft 51. The configuration of the shaft drive apparatus 50

is roughly divided into the drive shaft 51 connected at a front end portion 51A thereof to an output power shaft 53 of the engine 17 through a universal joint 55 and a gear mechanism 60 for transmitting rotation of the drive shaft 51 to the rear wheel 22.

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FIG. 3 is a sectional view showing the gear mechanism 60. As shown in FIG. 3, the gear mechanism 60 includes, as principal components thereof, a final gear wheel (referred to also as final driven gear wheel) 61 in the form of a bevel gear wheel which meshes with a drive gear wheel 57 connected to the rear end portion 51B (refer to FIG. 2) of the drive shaft 51 through a joint 56 to convert the transmission direction of the driving force, and a gear case 63 for accommodating the final gear wheel 61.

The final gear wheel 61 is pressed in a sleeve 65. The sleeve 65 is supported for rotation by bearings 67 and 68 disposed in the gear case 63 in a spaced relationship from each other in the axis direction (leftward and rightward direction of the vehicle body) of the sleeve 65. A damper holder 70 is attached to the sleeve 65 as shown in FIG. 2 such that it rotates integrally with the sleeve 65, and a damper member 73 and a driven flange 74 are attached to the damper holder 70 through a bolt 71, and the driven flange 74 is connected to a hub 22A of the rear wheel 22.

Further, as shown in FIG. 3, an axle collar 77 is supported for rotation on the inner circumference side of the sleeve 65 through a bearing (needle bearing) 75, and a rear wheel axle 78 is fitted in the inside of the axle collar 77. A bearing 79 is disposed also at a vehicle body outer side end portion (left end portion) of the gear case 63, and the rear wheel axle 78 is fitted in the bearing 79. It is to be noted that, for the bearings other than the bearing (needle bearing) 75, a ball bearing is adopted.

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A buffer apparatus is provided between the final gear wheel 61 and the rear wheel 22. In the present embodiment, the buffer apparatus is a damper member 73 (refer to FIG. 2). This damper member 73 is interposed between the final gear wheel 61 and the hub 22A of the rear wheel 22 to moderate the variation when a

great variation occurs with transmission torque between the final gear wheel 61 and the rear wheel 22.

Consequently, the rotation of the output power shaft of the engine 17 rotates the drive shaft 51, and the rotation of the drive shaft 51 rotates the final gear wheel 61 through the drive gear wheel 57. Further, the rotation of the final gear wheel 61 is transmitted to the rear wheel 22 through the damper member 73 which serves as the buffer apparatus, to drive the rear wheel 22 to rotate.

As shown in FIG. 3, the drive gear wheel 57 connected to the rear side of the drive shaft 51 is accommodated for rotation through the bearing 58 in the front portion space of the gear case 63. In particular, the final gear wheel 61 and the drive gear wheel 57 are accommodated in the gear chamber 63A in the gear case 63.

Further, the gear chamber 63A of the gear case 63 is formed in an oil-enclosing structure by a plurality of seal members 81. In particular, an oil seal 82 for closing up the gap between the joint 56 and the case 63 (actually a holding member 59 of the bearing 58) on the case outer side (front side) with respect to the bearing 58 is provided at the front portion of the gear case 63, and another oil seal 83 for closing up the gap between the sleeve 65 and the gear case 63 on the case outer side (right side) with respect to the bearing 68 is provided at the rear wheel side end portion (right end portion) of the gear case 63. On the opposite side to the gear case 63, a further oil seal 84 for closing up the gap between the sleeve 65 and the gear case 63 on the case outer side (left side) with respect to the bearing 67 is provided. Further, a dust seal 85 is disposed on the case outer side (left side) of the bearing 79 disposed on the vehicle body left side with respect to the oil seal 84.

Further, a dust guard plate 86 in the form of a ring member is attached to the inner side (rear wheel 22 side) of the gear case 63, and a countermeasure against dust inwardly of the gear case 63 is provided by the dust guard plate 86. Consequently, the entire gear case 63 is formed in an oil enclosing structure and besides in a dust preventing structure.

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It is to be noted that, as shown in FIG. 2, a pair of left and right bearings 87 and 88 are provided on the inner periphery of the hub 22A of the rear wheel 22, and the rear wheel axle 78 is supported through the bearings 87 and 88. Further, a
5 seal member 89 and a disk brake plate 90 are attached to the opposite side of the hub 22A to the gear case 63. It is to be noted that reference numeral 91 in the figure represents a disk brake unit in the form of a caliper, and 92 a nut for fixing to the rear swing arm 21 of the rear wheel axle 78.

10 Now, the gear case 63 is described.

As shown in FIG. 1, the gear case 63 is supported on the rear wheel axle 78 and includes a rotation blocking mechanism formed from a torque rod 38 which extends in the forward and backward direction below the rear swing arm 21 and
15 connects the gear case 63 and the rear swing arm 21 to each other.

(A) and (B) of FIG. 4 show perspective views of the gear case 63 as viewed from the outer side (vehicle left side) and the inner side (vehicle body right side (rear wheel side)), respectively.
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The gear case 63 is composed of a gear case body 100 of a substantially cup shape and a gear case cover 130 substantially in the form of a disk for closing up a rear wheel side opening of the gear case body 100, and is formed in a leftwardly and rightwardly divided shape wherein the gear case body 100 functions as an outer
25 side cover and the gear case cover 130 functions as an inner side cover.

The gear case body 100 and the gear case cover 130 are connected to each other by a plurality of (eight in the example shown) bolts (fastening members) 101 tightened in a spaced relationship from each other in a circumferential direction
30 from the gear case cover 130 side and the gear chamber 63A is formed in the inside of the gear case 63. Further, the gear case 63 includes a tubular portion 102 communicating with the gear chamber 63A in the inside of the gear case 63 and projecting in the forward direction, and the drive shaft 51 is fitted in the tubular portion 102 as shown in FIG. 2 and is connected to the drive gear wheel

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57 in the gear chamber 63A through the joint 56 disposed in the tubular portion 102.

5 The gear case 63 further includes a torque rod connecting portion 104 projecting in a forwardly downward direction of the gear case 63 and having the torque rod 38 connected thereto, a pair of left and right central openings 105 and 131 through which the rear wheel axle 78 passes, and an oil pouring hole 107 positioned at a rear lower portion of the vehicle body with respect to the central openings 105 and 131. Oil for the lubrication is poured into the gear chamber 10 63A from the oil pouring hole 107 so that it is reserved into the inside of the gear chamber 63A. It is to be noted that the oil pouring hole 107 is normally closed up with a cap 108 (refer to FIG. 3).

FIGS. 5 to 8 show the gear case body, and (A), (B) and (C) of FIG. 9 show the gear 15 case cover 130. More particularly, FIG. 5 is a perspective view showing an internal structure of the gear case body 100, FIG. 6 is a view of the gear case body 100 as viewed from the front side (left side of the vehicle body), FIG. 7 is a view of the gear case body 100 as viewed from the rear side (right side of the vehicle body), and FIG. 8 is a sectional view taken along line VIII-VIII of FIG. 6. Further, 20 (A) of FIG. 9 is a view of the gear case cover 130 as viewed from the front side (right side of the vehicle body), (B) of FIG. 9 is a view of the gear case cover 130 as viewed from the rear side (left side of the vehicle body), and (C) of FIG. 9 is a sectional view taken along line IX-IX of (A) of FIG. 9. It is to be noted that, in the figures mentioned, while the forward direction, leftward direction and upward 25 direction of the vehicle body are represented by arrow marks F, L and U, respectively, the directions somewhat vary in response to rocking motion of the rear swing arm 21.

30 The gear case body 100 is formed as a unitary member by casting and is formed substantially in a cup shape having the center on the axial line (hereinafter referred to as rear wheel axis) L1 of the rear wheel axle 78. This gear case body 100 includes a part supporting portion 109 for supporting bearings 69 and 79, the oil seal 84 and so forth disposed between the gear case body 100 and the rear wheel axle 78, and a mating portion 110 of a comparatively great thickness

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provided on the outer periphery side of the part supporting portion 109 and continuing annularly along an outer edge of the gear case body 100.

The gear case cover 130 mates with the gear case body 100 from the inner side.

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As shown in FIG. 7, a plurality of (eight in the example shown) bolt fastening holes 111 are formed in an equidistantly spaced relationship (at intervals of 45 degrees) in the mating portion 110. By tightening the plural bolts 101 into the bolt fastening holes 111 in a state wherein the gear case cover 130 is mated with the mating portion 110. The gear chamber 63A described hereinabove is formed in the inner side of an inner circumference side wall face 110A of the mating portion 110.

Further, grooves 112 are formed between the plural bolt fastening holes 111 in the mating portion 110 such that they extend successively in a circumferential direction along the mating portion 110. The grooves 112 are formed as elongated grooves which are open only on the gear case cover 130 side thereof and do not extend through the mating portion 110 and have a depth by which they extend substantially fully in the widthwise direction of the gear case body 100 and function as so-called lightening holes for achieving reduction in weight of the gear case body 100.

In the present embodiment, that one (denoted by a reference character 112A) of the grooves 112 which is positioned in an obliquely upward direction of the vehicle body with respect to the rear wheel axis L1 serves also as a breather chamber, and the inside of the gear chamber 63A is open to the atmosphere outside the gear case 63 through the groove 112A which serves as the breather chamber to form a breather mechanism 200 for holding the pressure in the gear case 63 at a predetermined pressure.

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The groove 112A which forms the breather chamber is a groove extending continuously along a circumferential direction from an obliquely rearward position of the vehicle body with respect to the rear wheel axis L1 (groove between the bolt fastening hole 111A provided at a position of an angle θ_1 (22.5

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degrees) with reference to a substantially horizontal plane L2 which passes the axial line L and the bolt fastening hole 111B provided at a position of another angle θ_2 (77.5 degrees)), in other words, has a shape of an elongated groove continuously extending in a forwardly ascending relationship at an obliquely rearward position of the vehicle body with respect to the rear wheel axis L1.

Since the groove 112A at an obliquely rearward position of the vehicle body with respect to the rear wheel axis L1 is used as the breather chamber (hereinafter referred to as breather chamber 201) in this manner, the breather chamber 201 can be provided at a position higher than that of the oil surface of oil reserved in the gear case 63. Further, since this groove 112A extends continuously in a forwardly ascending relationship at an obliquely rearward position of the vehicle body, the breather chamber 201 can be formed so as to include a path which extends upwardly along the direction of rotation of the final gear wheel 61.

As shown (A) to (C) of FIG. 9, the gear case cover 130 is formed in a substantially disk shape, and also the gear case cover 130 is formed as a unitary member by casting similarly to the gear case body 100. The gear case cover 130 includes part supporting portions 133 for supporting the bearing 68, oil seal 83 and so forth disposed between the gear case cover 130 and the rear wheel axle 78, and a mating portion 135 of a comparatively great thickness provided on the outer periphery side of the part supporting portions 133 and continuing annularly along an outer edge of the gear case cover 130.

In the mating portion 135, bolt fitting holes 137 in which the plural bolts 101 for connecting the gear case body 100 are fitted are formed in an equidistantly spaced relationship from each other such that the mating portion 135 and the gear case body 100 are connected to each other by bolts in a state wherein the mating portion 110 of the gear case body 100 is mated with the mating portion 135.

Also in the mating portion 135, grooves 139 which function as so-called lightening holes for reducing the weight of the gear case cover 130 are formed between the plural bolt fitting holes 137. In particular, the grooves 139 are

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formed as elongated grooves which extend continuously in a circumferential direction along the mating portion 135 of the gear case cover 130 and are open only on the gear case body 100 side but do not extend through the mating portion 135 and formed as deep grooves of a depth with which they extend in the widthwise direction of the gear case cover 130 as shown in (B) of FIG. 9.

Further, the grooves 139 of the gear case cover 130 include a groove (denoted by reference character 139A) which opposes to the groove 112A which serves also as the breather chamber of the gear case body 100, and also this groove 139A is communicated, when the gear case body 100 is connected, with the groove 112A such that it functions as part of the breather chamber 201.

In particular, the breather chamber 201 is formed from the groove 139A of the gear case cover 130 and the groove 112A of the gear case body 100, and thereby, a great dimension can be assured for the width (dimension in the leftward and rightward direction of the vehicle body) of the breather chamber 201 making use of the full width of the gear case cover 130. A great dimension can be assured also for the chamber height and the chamber length (dimension along the circumferential direction of the rear wheel axis L1) of the breather chamber 201. Accordingly, the breather chamber 201 of a great volume can be assured without increasing the size of the gear case 63, and the appearance of the gear case 63 is not damaged.

Now, the breather mechanism 200 is described in detail.

This breather chamber 201 is communicated at a lower end thereof with the gear chamber 63A through a horizontally elongated slit 210 (refer to FIGS. 5 and 7) formed by cutting away the mating portion 110 of the gear case body 100 and is open at an upper end thereof to the atmosphere through a breather path 220 (refer to FIG. 9) provided in the gear case cover 130.

More particularly, as shown in FIGS. 5 and 7, the mating portion 110 of the gear case body 100 has an inner circumference side portion (hereinafter referred to as partition wall 110B) which functions as a partition wall for partitioning the

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- breather chamber 201 into the groove 112A and the gear chamber 63A. A portion of the partition wall 110B which corresponds to a lower end of the groove 112 is cut away fully in the widthwise direction to form the horizontally elongated slit 210. In particular, since the slit 210 is formed in the full width of the groove 112 which substantially forms the entire breather chamber 201, the breather chamber 201 and the gear chamber 63A can be communicated with each other through a large opening, and communication of air between the breather chamber 201 and the gear chamber 63A can be smoothed.
- Further, as shown in FIG. 9, in the gear case cover 130, the breather path 220 for passing air in the vehicle widthwise direction therethrough is provided at an upper end portion of the groove 112A which forms the breather chamber 201. Here, FIG. 10 is a sectional view showing this breather path 220 together with peripheral components. As shown in this figure, the breather path 220 has a breather hole 221 provided at an upper portion of the gear case cover 130, a first pipe member 223 communicated with the breather chamber 201 side of the breather hole 221 and extending in the vehicle widthwise direction in the space at an upper end of the breather chamber 201, and a second pipe member 225 fitted on the opposite side of the breather hole 221 to the breather chamber 201 and extending in an inner-side obliquely downward (rear wheel side obliquely downward) direction. A breather tube 227 is connected to this second pipe member 225.
- FIG. 11 is a view showing the breather tube 227 together with peripheral components. As shown in this figure, the breather tube 227 is connected by inserting one end thereof into the second pipe member 225 from the outer side (rear wheel side) of the gear case cover 130 and is disposed in a downwardly directed state.
- Since this breather tube 227 is formed by using a short tube of approximately several centimeters, the lower end thereof is positioned upwardly with respect to the rear wheel axis L1, and the lower end of this breather tube 227 is inserted into a ring-shaped tube insertion portion 86A formed integrally on the dust guard plate 86 attached to the gear case cover 130. Therefore, the breather tube 227 can

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be attached along the gear case cover 130, and protrusion thereof to the rear wheel 22 side can be suppressed.

5 In this manner, in the present embodiment, since the breather chamber 201 is communicated at the lower end thereof with the gear chamber 63A through the slit 210 extending in the widthwise direction of the rear wheel 22 and is open at the upper end thereof to the atmosphere through the breather path 220, if the internal pressure of the gear chamber 63A becomes high, then a flow of air from the lower end to the upper end of the breather chamber 201 is generated in the
10 breather chamber 201.

Further, the air path of the breather chamber 201 from the lower end toward the upper end is formed in a labyrinth structure which is a path in the form of a labyrinth. In particular, the breather chamber 201 includes a first projection 230
15 provided integrally with the partition wall 110B in a connecting relationship with an equal width with an upper edge of the slit 210 and projecting toward the outer circumference side of the rear wheel axis L1, and a second projection 235 projecting from a wall (outer periphery side portion of the mating portion 110) 110C in the breather chamber 201 on the opposing side to the first projection 230
20 to the rear wheel axis L1 side (inner periphery side) in the breather chamber 201. Therefore, the path from the lower end to the upper end of the breather chamber 201 is bent by the projections 230 and 235 thereby to form a labyrinth-like path.

FIG. 12 is a view showing the breather chamber 201 together with peripheral
25 components with part of the gear case 63 cut away. As shown in this figure, a through-hole 240 is provided in the partition wall 110B on the inner circumference side of the breather chamber 201 such that it extends upwardly and downwardly between the breather chamber 201 and the gear chamber 63A on the upper end side of the breather chamber 201. More particularly, the
30 through-hole 240 is provided at a position rather lower than and in the proximity of an opening of the first pipe member 223 which forms one end side of the breather path 220 and functions as an oil returning hole for returning oil in this breather chamber 201 into the gear chamber 63A.

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Further, a communicating path 245 is provided in the gear case cover 130 such that it is opposed at an opening 245A on one end side thereof sidewardly of the first projection 230 positioned at a lower end of the breather chamber 201, extends to the inner side in a diametrical direction in the gear case cover 130 from the opening 245A on this one end side and is opposed at an opening 245B (refer to (B) and (C) of FIG. 9) at the other end thereof to the gear chamber 63A. As shown in (B) of FIG. 9, the opening 245B on the inner circumference side of the communicating path 245 is communicated with a part supporting portion 133 of the gear case cover 130, and more particularly is connected to an outer peripheral angular portion of the bearing 68 (refer to FIG. 2) disposed between the gear case cover 130 and the rear wheel axle 78. In other words, the gear chamber 63A and the breather chamber 201 are communicated with each other not only by the path through the slit 210 but also by the communicating path 245 which passes the gear case cover 130.

15

Now, operation of the breather mechanism 200 is described.

When the final gear wheel 61 in the gear case 63 is driven from the engine 17 through the drive shaft 51 and the pressure in the gear case 63 becomes a little higher than the atmospheric pressure, then air in the gear case 63 enters the breather chamber 201 through the slit 210. In this instance, since a flow of air moving in the direction of rotation of the final gear wheel 61 and in a centrifugal direction is generated in the gear case 63 by the rotation of the final gear wheel 61, the air smoothly enters the breather chamber 201 through the horizontally elongated slit 210 formed in the outer periphery of the final gear wheel 61. Further, since not only the air but oil for lubrication exist in the gear case 63, also the oil during lubrication sometimes enters the breather chamber 201 together with the air.

30 In the present configuration, since the breather path on the upstream side with respect to the slit 210 is formed in a labyrinth structure wherein it is curved by a great amount along the first projection 230 provided continuously to the slit 210 and is then curved by a great amount by the second projection 235, the oil having a higher specific gravity than the air is more likely to be returned to the gear

chamber 63A when it comes to the first projection 230. Further, even if some oil passes by the first projection 230 and flows to the upstream side, the power of the oil is further weakened by the labyrinth structure formed from the first projection 230 and the second projection 235 and besides the oil is guided to the
5 partition wall 110B of the inner circumference side of the breather chamber 201 provided by the second projection 235, the movement of the oil to the upstream side is suppressed.

10 In this instance, the oil on the partition wall 110B flows downwardly along the inclined face of the partition wall 110B by action of the gravity, and part of the oil drops from the through-hole 240 and returns to the gear chamber 63A. Then, the oil flowing down to the first projection 230 rides over the first projection 230 and returns to the gear chamber 63A, while the remaining part of the oil flows
15 sidewardly along the first projection 230 and enters the communicating path 245, whereafter it is returned to the gear chamber 63A through the communicating path 245. Since the oil passing through the communicating path 245 returns to the gear chamber 63A through the bearing 68 on the inner circumference side of the gear case cover 130, the bearing 68 can be lubricated efficiently with this oil.

20 Meanwhile, since the air is lower in specific gravity than the oil, the flow thereof is not disturbed so much as the oil and the air flows upwardly and is discharged to the outside through the breather path 220 and the breather tube 227. Consequently, the pressure in the gear chamber 63A is adjusted substantially to the atmospheric pressure.

25 Incidentally, the oil in the gear chamber 63A may possibly enter the breather chamber 201 through the communicating path 245. Since the power of the flow of the oil entering the breather chamber 201 through the communicating path 245 is reduced by the second projection 235, it drops from the through-hole 240 and
30 returns to the gear chamber 63A similarly as described above, or rides over the first projection 230 and directly flows down into the gear chamber 63A. Further, the communicating path 245 functions not only as the oil path described above but also as an air path. In particular, the air in the gear chamber 63A is branched into that on the vehicle right side and that on the vehicle left side by the final

gear wheel 61, and if the air pressure on the right side rises, then the air enters the breather chamber 201 through the communicating path 245 and flows to the left side of the gear chamber 63A. Consequently, the left and right air pressures in the gear chamber 63A can be kept equal to each other.

5

In this manner, in the present configuration, since the path for oil and air which connects the gear chamber 63A and the breather chamber 201 to each other is formed from two paths including the path which passes the slit 210 and the path which passes the communicating path 245, the two paths can be changed over in response to the pressure state in the gear chamber 63A between a state wherein both of the paths guide oil and air so as to flow from the gear chamber 63A to the breather chamber 201 (where internal air is discharged to the external air) or from the breather chamber 201 to the gear chamber 63A (where external air is introduced into the gear chamber 63A) and another state wherein one of the two paths guides oil and air so as to flow from the gear chamber 63A to the breather chamber 201 while the other one of the two paths guides oil and air so as to flow from the breather chamber 201 to the gear chamber 63A thereby to form a so-called circulating route.

20 In particular, where the difference between the air pressure in the gear chamber 63A and the atmospheric pressure is large, the gear chamber 63A and the external space are communicated with each other through the two paths and a wide breather path can be assured and the pressure in the gear chamber 63A can be balanced quickly with the atmospheric pressure.

25

On the other hand, where the difference between the air pressure in the gear chamber 63A and the atmospheric pressure is small, an oil circulating path can be formed wherein the flowing direction in one of the paths and the flowing direction in the other one of the paths become the opposite directions to each other such that oil from the one path is separated from air in the breather chamber 201 and then returns to the gear chamber 63A through the other path. In this instance, since the flow of the oil does not disturb the flow of the air, the air path can be assured sufficiently to balance the inside of the gear chamber 63A quickly with the atmospheric pressure.

30

As described above, in the present embodiment, since the gear case body 100 of the gear case 63 includes the breather chamber 201 of a labyrinth structure which continues in a circumferential direction of the rear wheel 22 and extends
5 upwardly and downwardly and the breather chamber 201 is communicated at an upper end thereof with the breather path 220 and open to the atmospheric air and communicated at a lower end thereof to the gear chamber 63A through the slit 210 which extends in a widthwise direction of the rear wheel 22, communication of air between the breather chamber 201 and the gear chamber
10 63A can be carried out smoothly through the slit 210. Besides, since the breather chamber 201 has a labyrinth structure, even if oil enters the breather chamber 201, the oil entering the breather chamber 201 together with air can be separated and flowed downwardly along the inclined face of the breather chamber 201. Consequently, the oil can be returned into the gear case 63 without being opened
15 to the atmospheric air.

Accordingly, even if the size of the breather chamber 201 is not increased, air and oil can be separated from each other efficiently and only the air can be communicated between the inside and the outside of the gear case 63 while the
20 appearance is not damaged.

Further, since the through-hole 240 which extends upwardly and downwardly between the upper end of the breather chamber 201 and the gear chamber 63A is provided in the gear case body 100, oil entering the upper end of the breather
25 chamber 201 can be returned into the gear chamber 63A through the through-hole 240.

Further, since the breather path 220 is communicated with the upper end of the breather chamber 201 on the upper wide with respect to the through-hole 240, oil
30 immediately before entering the breather path 220 can be returned into the gear chamber 63A through the through-hole 240.

Further, since the lower end of the breather tube 227 connected to the breather path 220 is positioned upwardly with respect to the center of the axle (rear wheel

axis L1), even when the vehicle runs on a poorly drained place, it is possible to prevent water from entering the breather tube 227.

Further, since the labyrinth structure of the breather chamber 201 includes the
5 first projection 230 provided in the breather chamber 201 in a continuous
relationship to the slit 210 and the second projection 235 provided on the wall
100C on the side opposing to the first projection 230 in the breather chamber 201,
it is made difficult by the first projection 230 for oil to advance into the breather
chamber 201, and even if oil rides over the first projection 230 and advances into
10 the breather chamber 201, the power of the oil can be lowered by the first
projection 230 so that the oil is returned into the gear chamber 63A. Therefore, in
comparison with an alternative case wherein the breather chamber 201 is not
formed so as to have a labyrinth structure, a sufficient oil separating effect can be
assured with a small volume.

15

Further, since the communicating path 245 which is opposed at the opening
245A on one end side thereof to the lower end of the breather chamber 201,
extends to the inner side in a diametrical direction in the gear case cover 130
from the opening 245A on the one end side and is opposed at the opening 245B
20 on the other end thereof to the gear chamber 63A is provided in the gear case
cover 130, even if oil in the gear chamber 63A comes up through the
communicating path 245 in addition to the slit 210, it can be returned into the
gear chamber 63A by the breather chamber 201 of the labyrinth structure before
it is open to the atmosphere.

25

In this instance, since the path which connects the gear chamber 63A and the
breather chamber 201 to each other increases to two paths including the path
which passes the slit 210 and the path which passes the communicating path 245,
a route along which oil entering from one of the paths into the breather chamber
30 201 is returned to the gear chamber 63A through the other path can be formed.
Consequently, the oil can be returned readily while the volume of the breather
path is assured sufficiently. Besides, with the present configuration, since the
communicating path 245 is communicated with the gear chamber 63A through
the bearing 68 provided on the gear case cover 130, the bearing 68 can be

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lubricated efficiently with the oil which returns to the gear chamber 63A through the communicating path 245.

5 While the present invention has been described in connection with one embodiment thereof, the present invention is not limited to this but allows various design alterations. For example, while, in the embodiment described, one through-hole 240 is provided, the number of such through-holes 240 is not limited to one but a plurality of through-holes 240 may be provided and also the position of the through-hole 240 may be altered suitably. Further, the labyrinth
10 structure of the breather chamber 201 is not limited to the configuration which has the first projection 230 and the second projection 235 described hereinabove, but another labyrinth structure such as a labyrinth structure which includes one such protrusion or three or more protrusions may be applied.

15 Further, while, in the embodiment described above, the present invention is applied to a gear case breather structure of the motorcycle 10 shown in FIG. 1, the present invention can be applied widely also to other vehicles.

20 Although various preferred embodiments of the present invention have been described herein in detail, it will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, that variations may be made thereto without departing from the spirit of the invention or the scope of the appended claims.

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**THE EMBODIMENTS OF THE INVENTION IN WHICH AN EXCLUSIVE
PROPERTY OR PRIVILEGE IS CLAIMED ARE DEFINED AS FOLLOWS:**

1. A motorcycle wherein a gear case which has a drive shaft driven by
5 a power unit and in which gear wheels for transmitting rotation of said drive
shaft to a rear wheel are accommodated is provided sidewardly of said rear
wheel and said gear case includes a breather path which opens the inside of a
gear chamber to the atmosphere, characterized in that said gear case includes
a gear case body and a gear case cover and the gear case body includes a
10 breather chamber of a labyrinth structure which continues in a
circumferential direction of said rear wheel and extends in an upward and
downward direction such that an upper end of said breather chamber is
communicated with said breather path while a lower end of said breather
chamber is communicated with said gear chamber through a slit extending in
15 a widthwise direction of said rear wheel.
2. The motorcycle according to claim 1, characterized in that said gear
case body has a through-hole formed therein which communicates an upper
end of said breather chamber and said gear chamber with each other in an
20 upward and downward direction.
3. The motorcycle according to claim 2, characterized in that said
breather path is connected to said breather chamber at a position above said
through-hole.
25
4. The motorcycle according to claim 2 or 3, characterized in that said
motorcycle has a breather tube connecting to said breather chamber through
said breather path for opening said breather chamber to the atmosphere, and
a lower end of said breather tube is positioned on the upper side with respect
30 to the center of an axle of said rear wheel.
5. The motorcycle according to any one of claims 1 to 4, characterized in
that the labyrinth structure of said breather chamber has a first projection

provided continuously to said slit in said breather chamber and a second projection provided on a wall in said breather chamber on the side which opposes to said first projection.

- 5 6. The motorcycle according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein said gear cover includes an outside surface and an inside surface, said inside surface including a communicating path open at one end to a lower end of said breather chamber with an opposite end of said communicating path open to said gear chamber.

FIG. 1

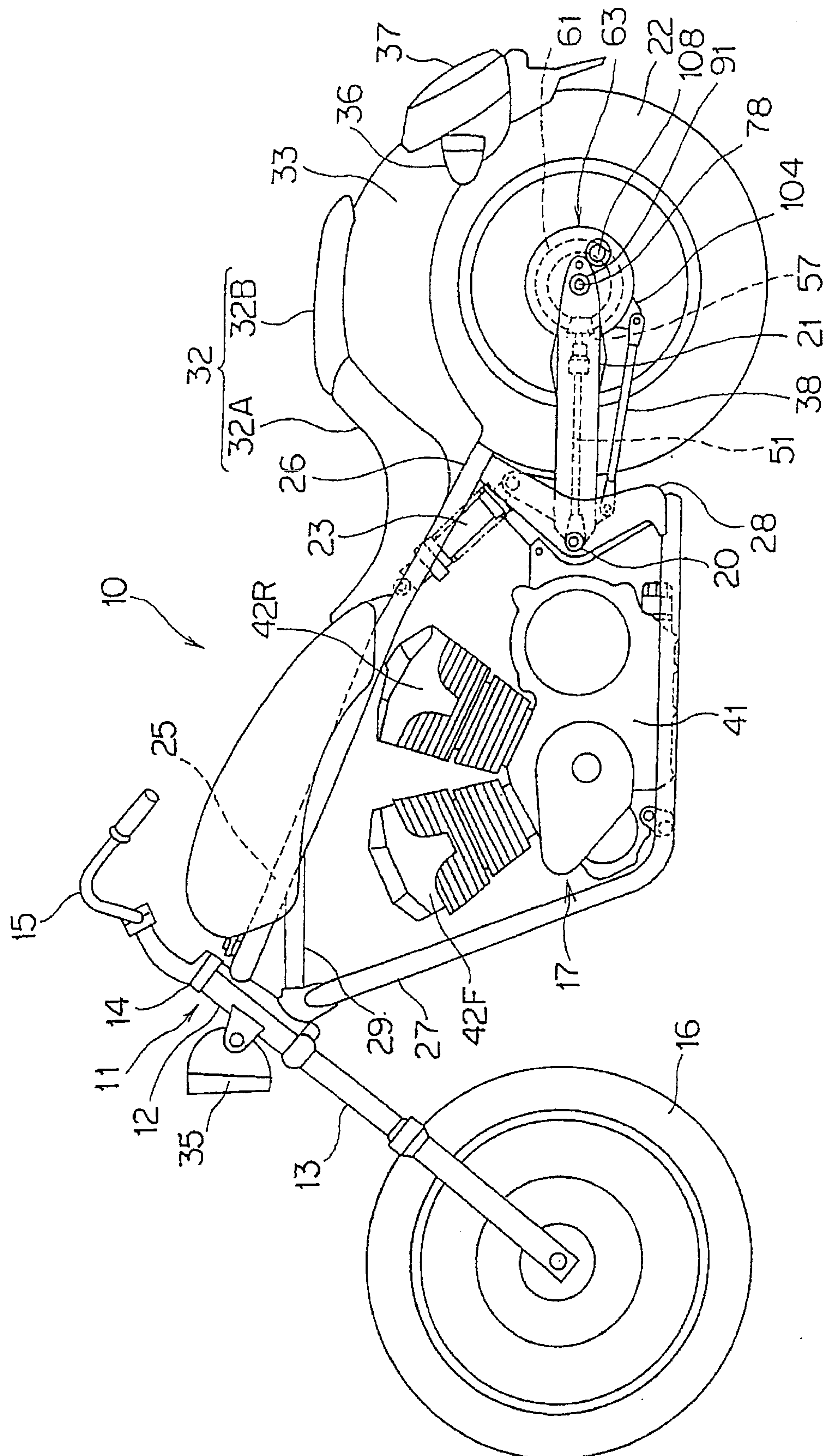


FIG. 2

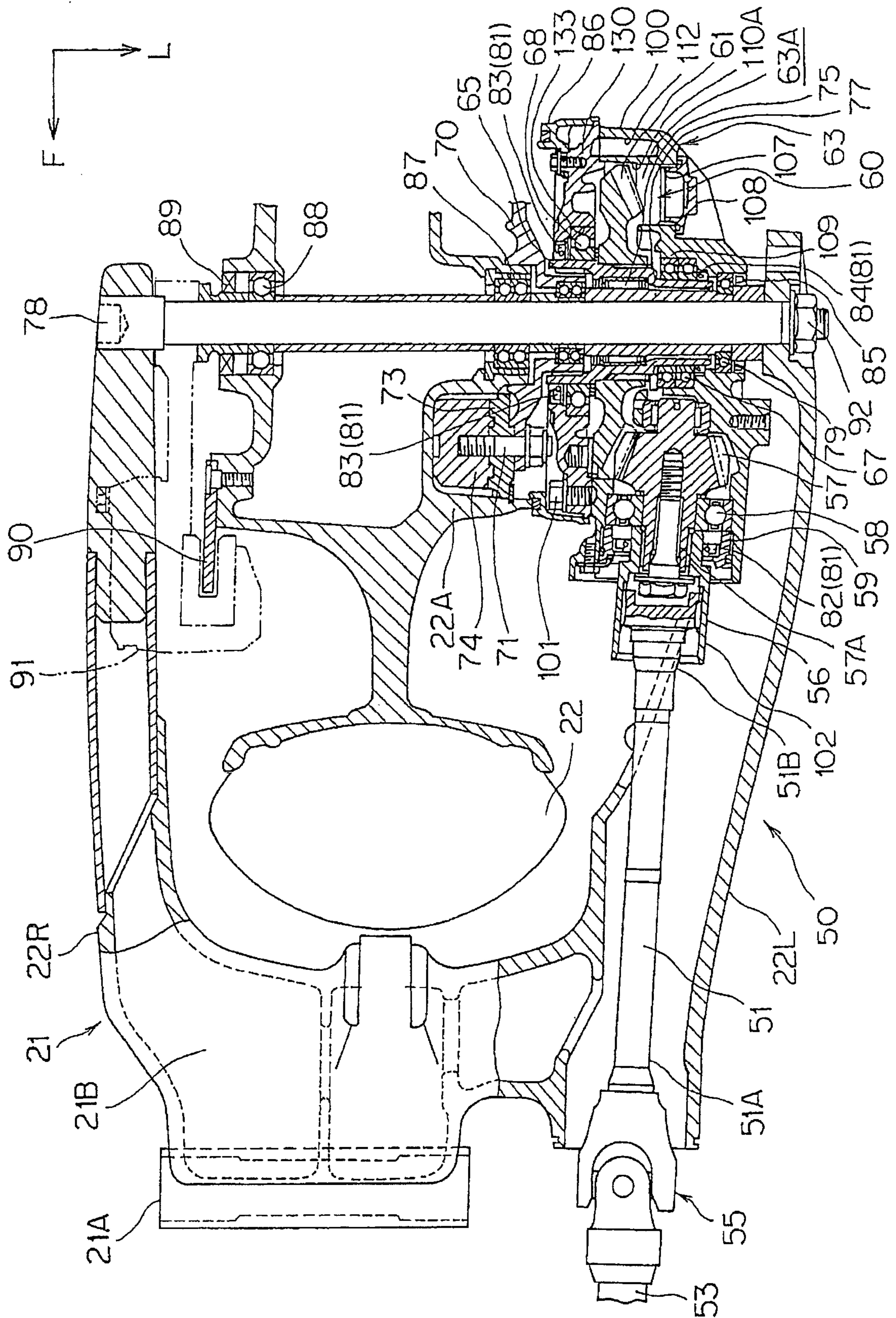


FIG. 3

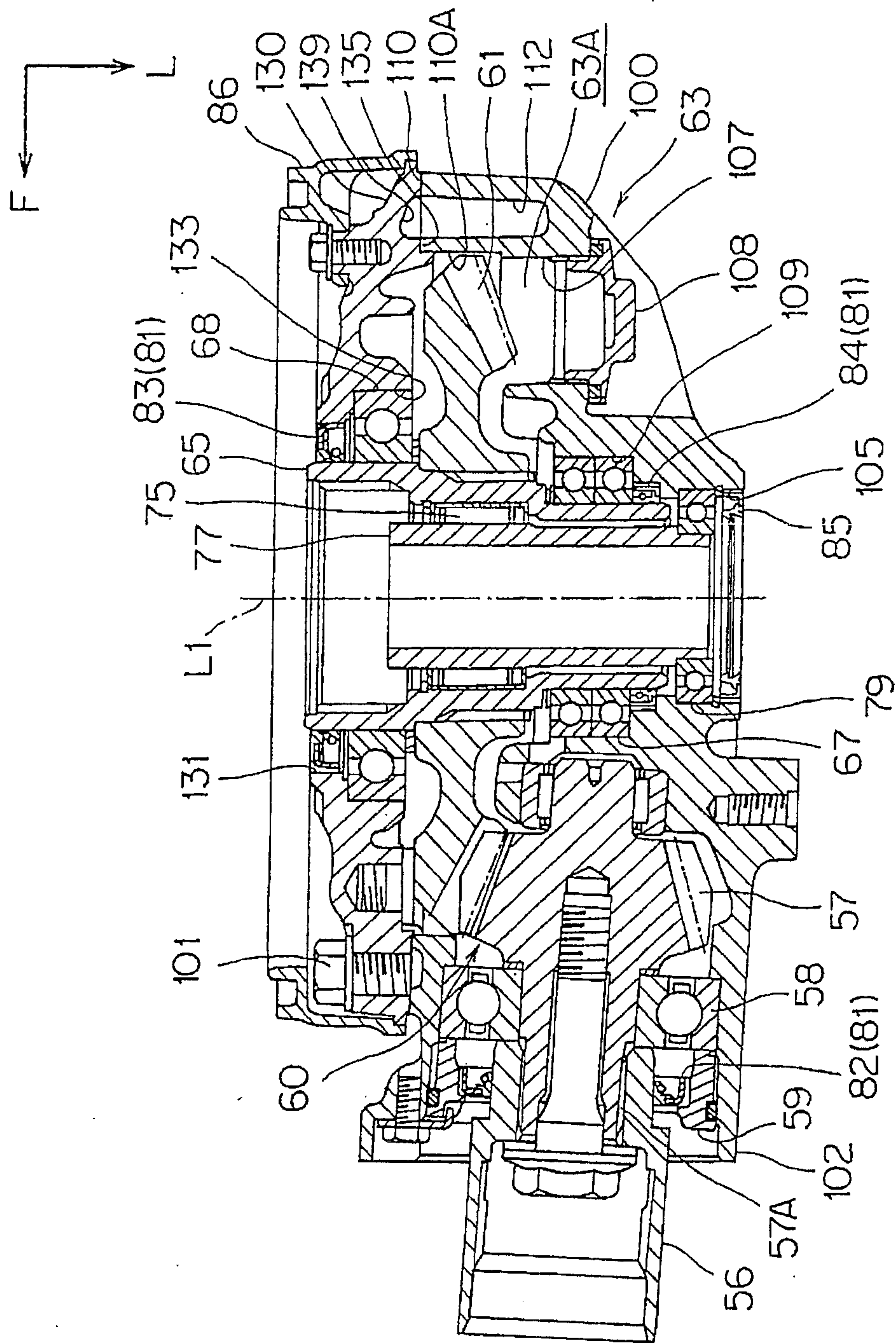


FIG. 4

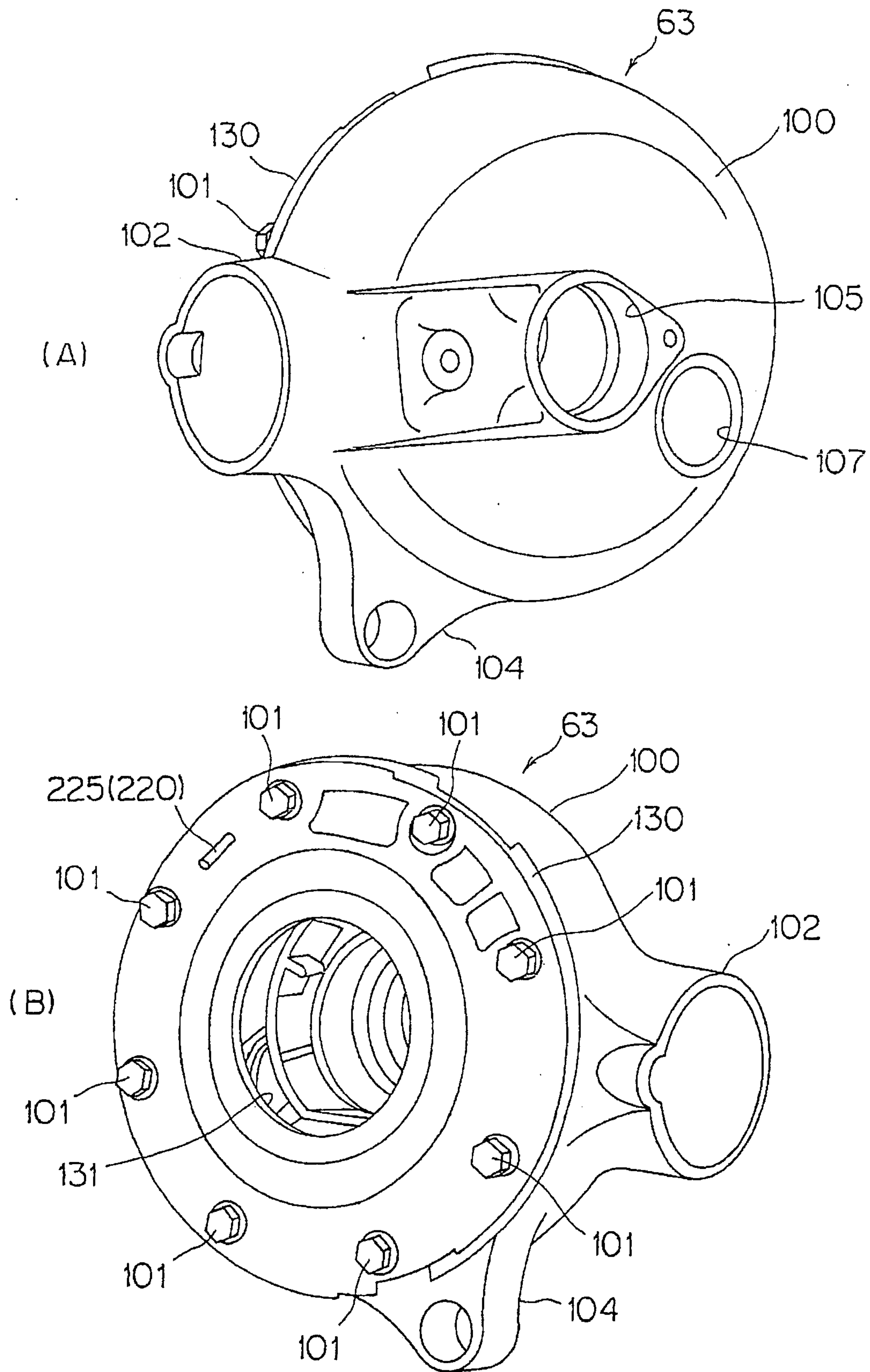


FIG. 5

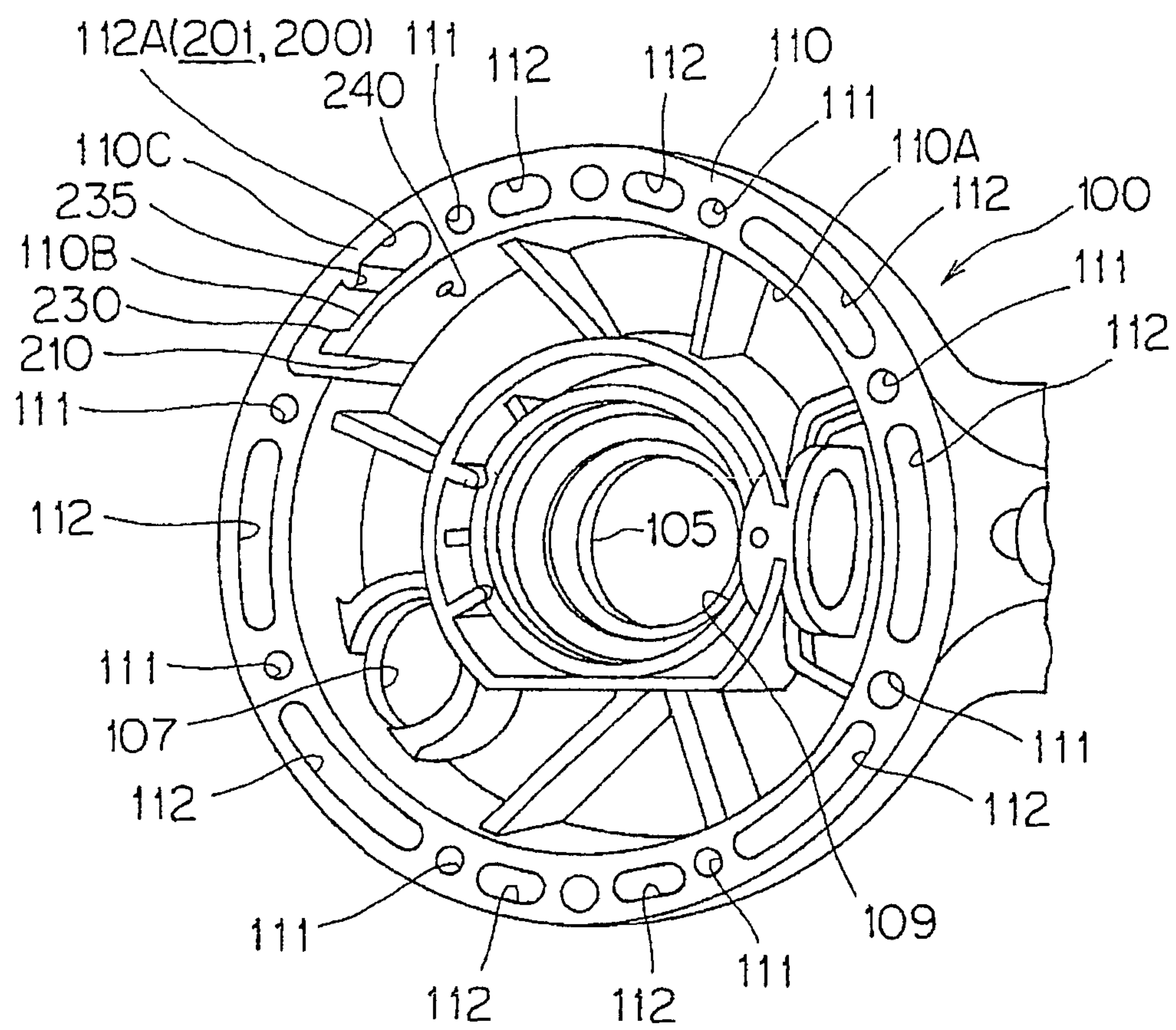


FIG. 6

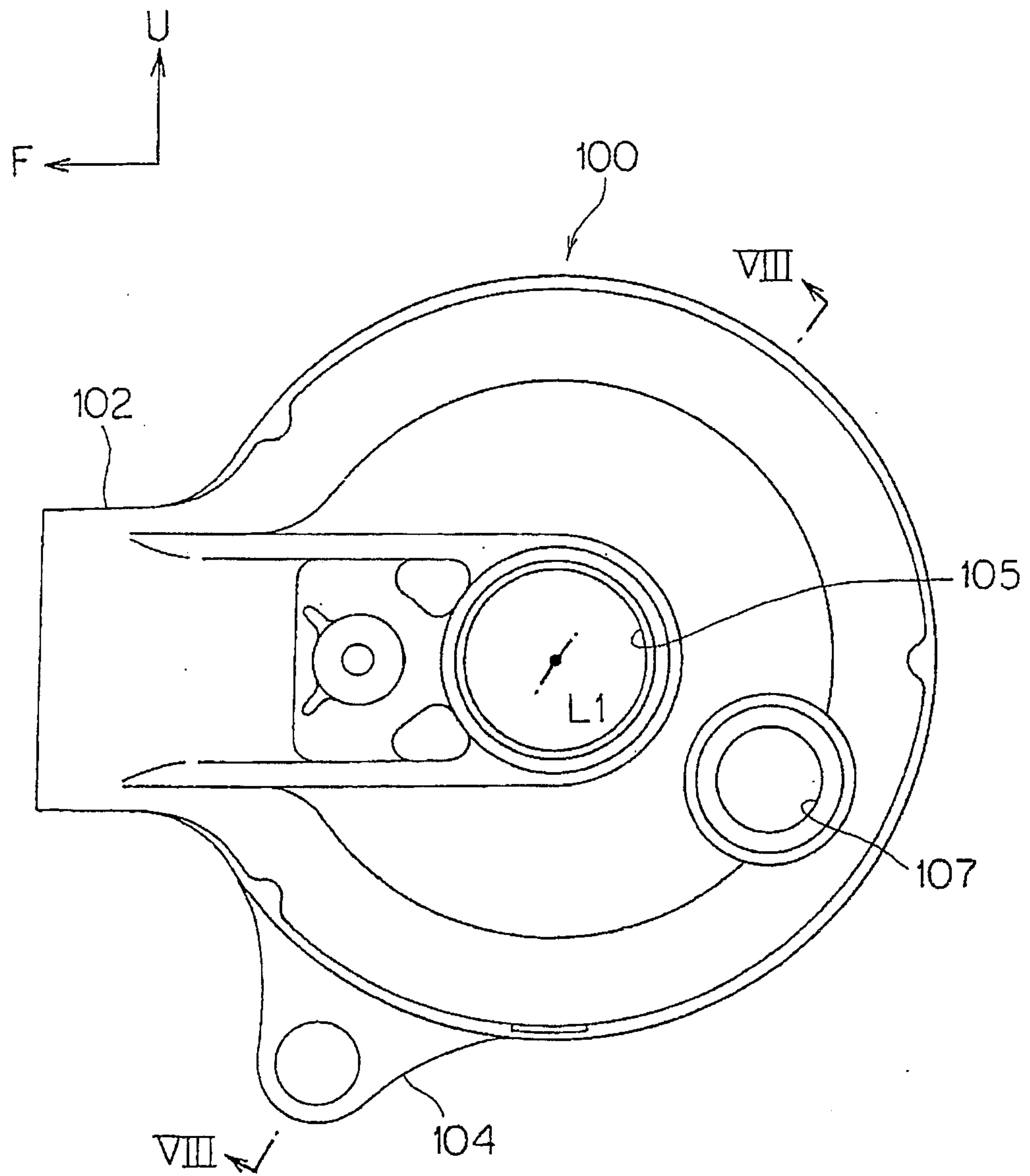


FIG. 7

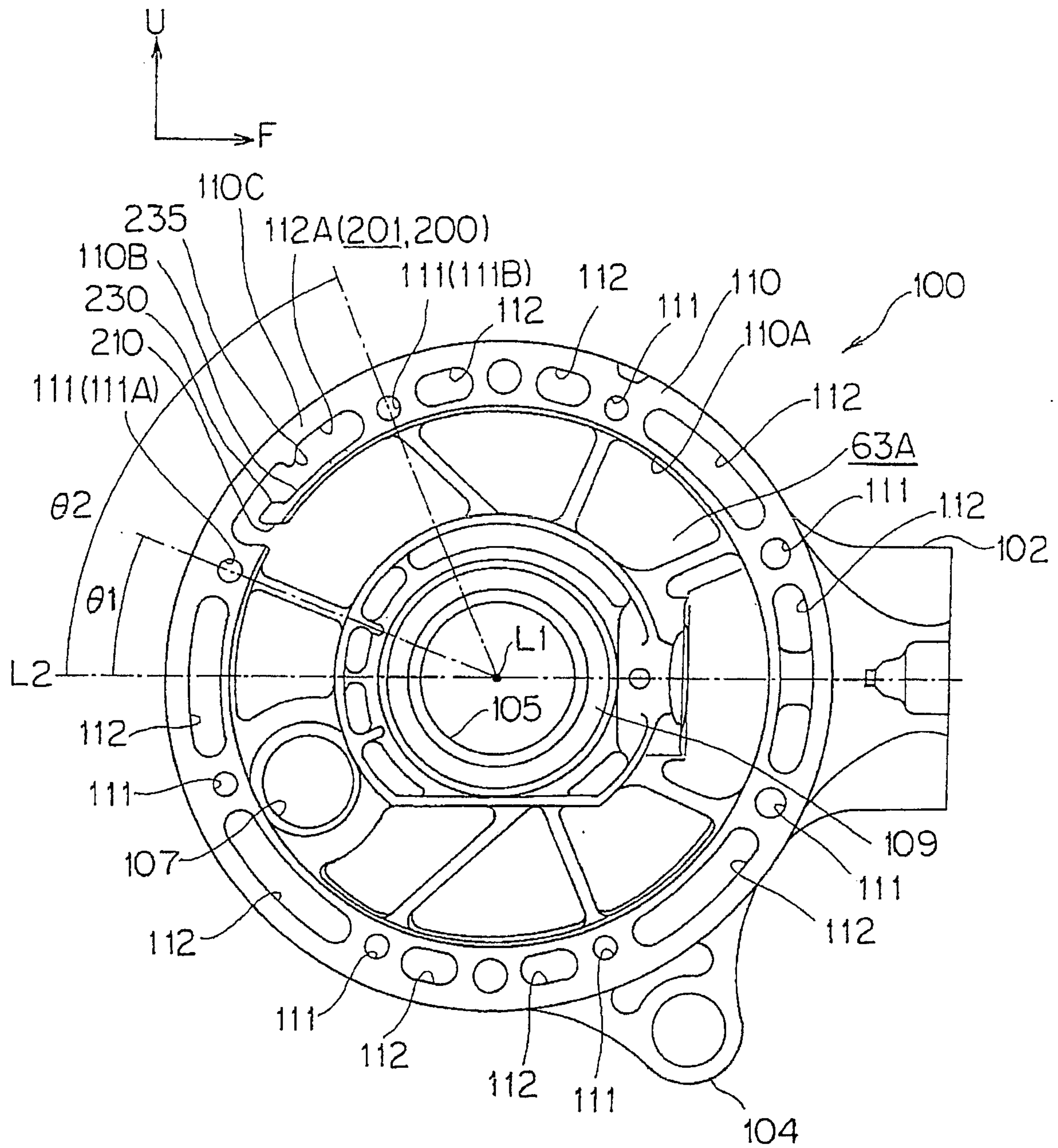


FIG. 8

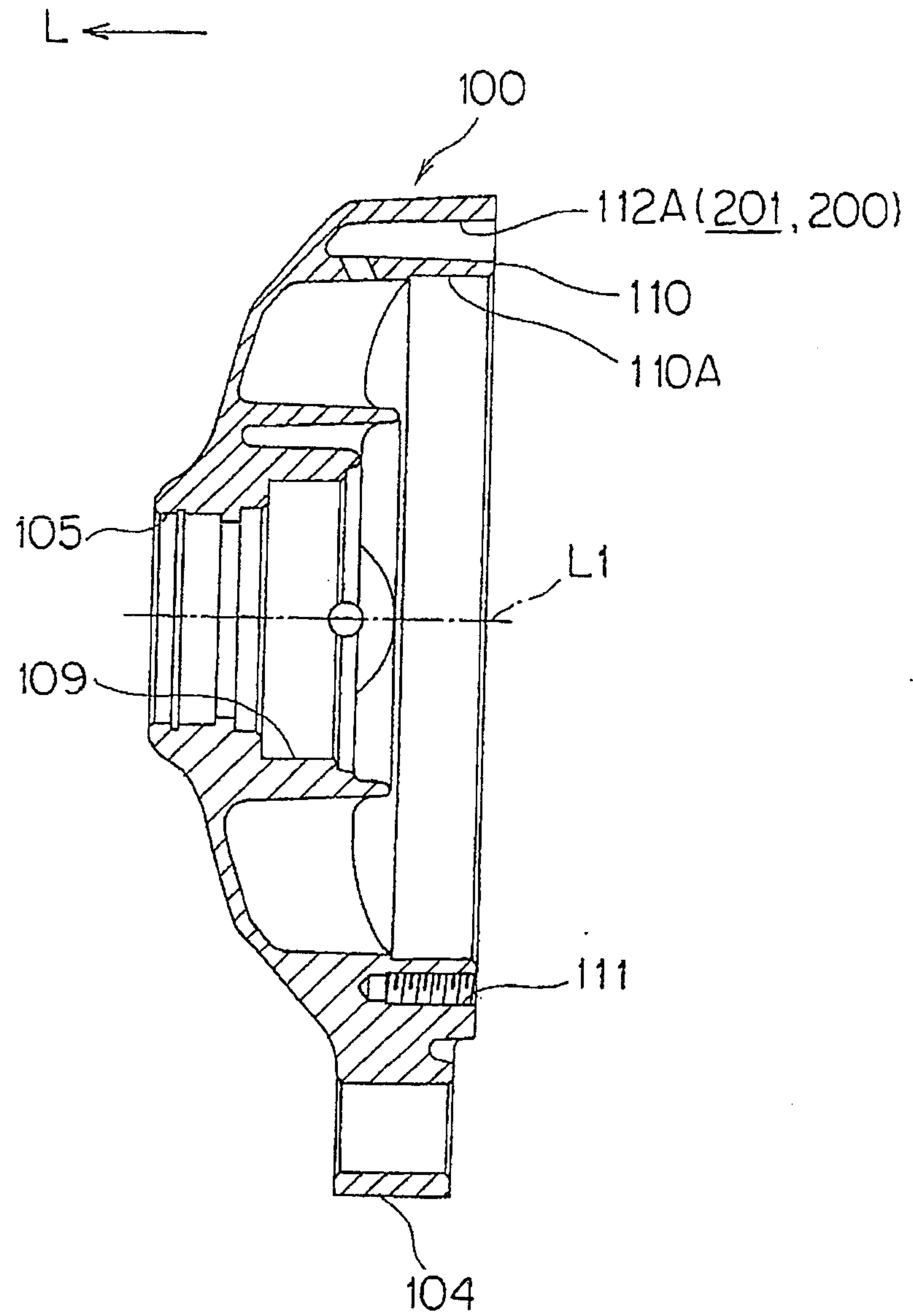


FIG. 9

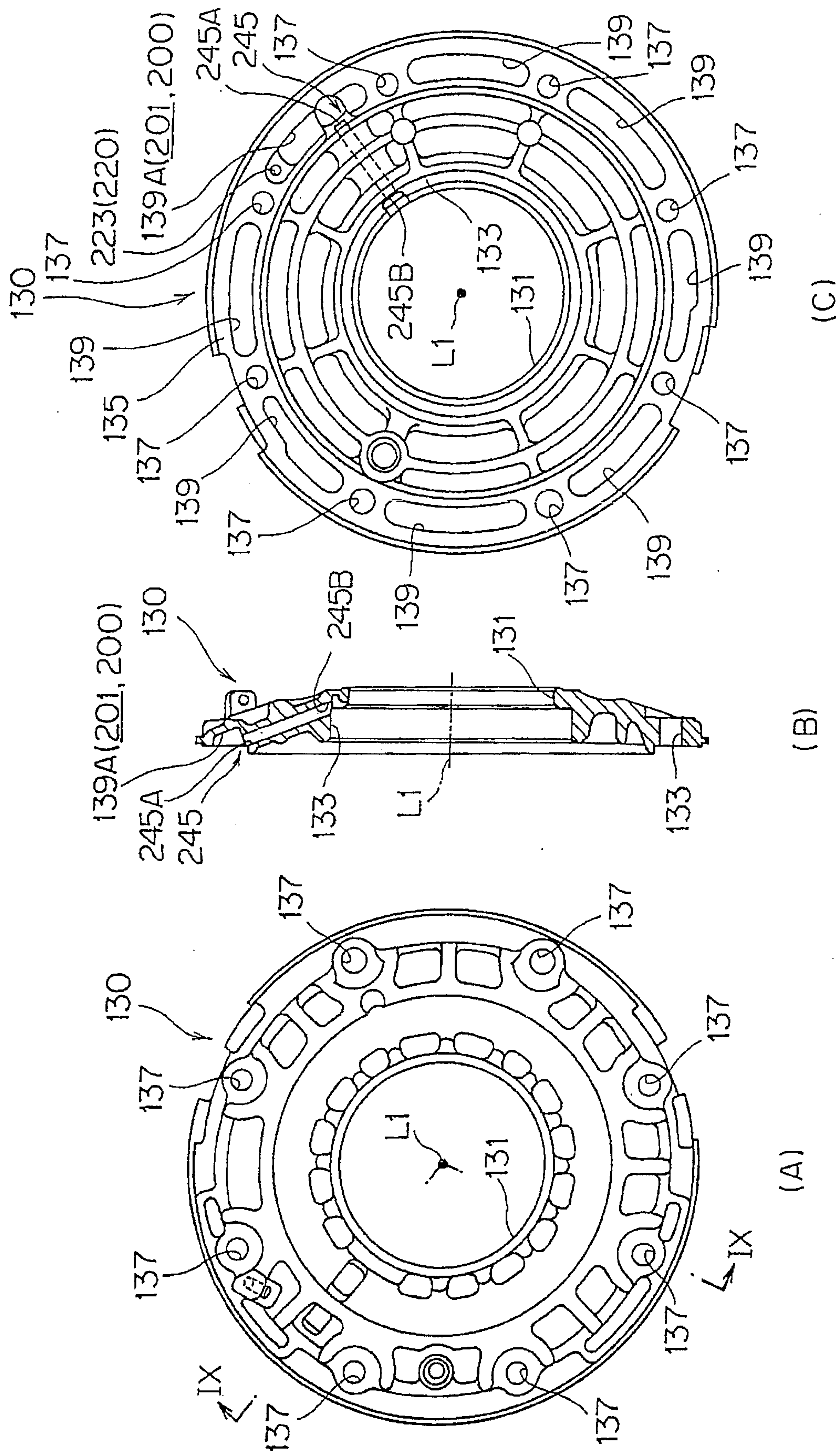


FIG. 10

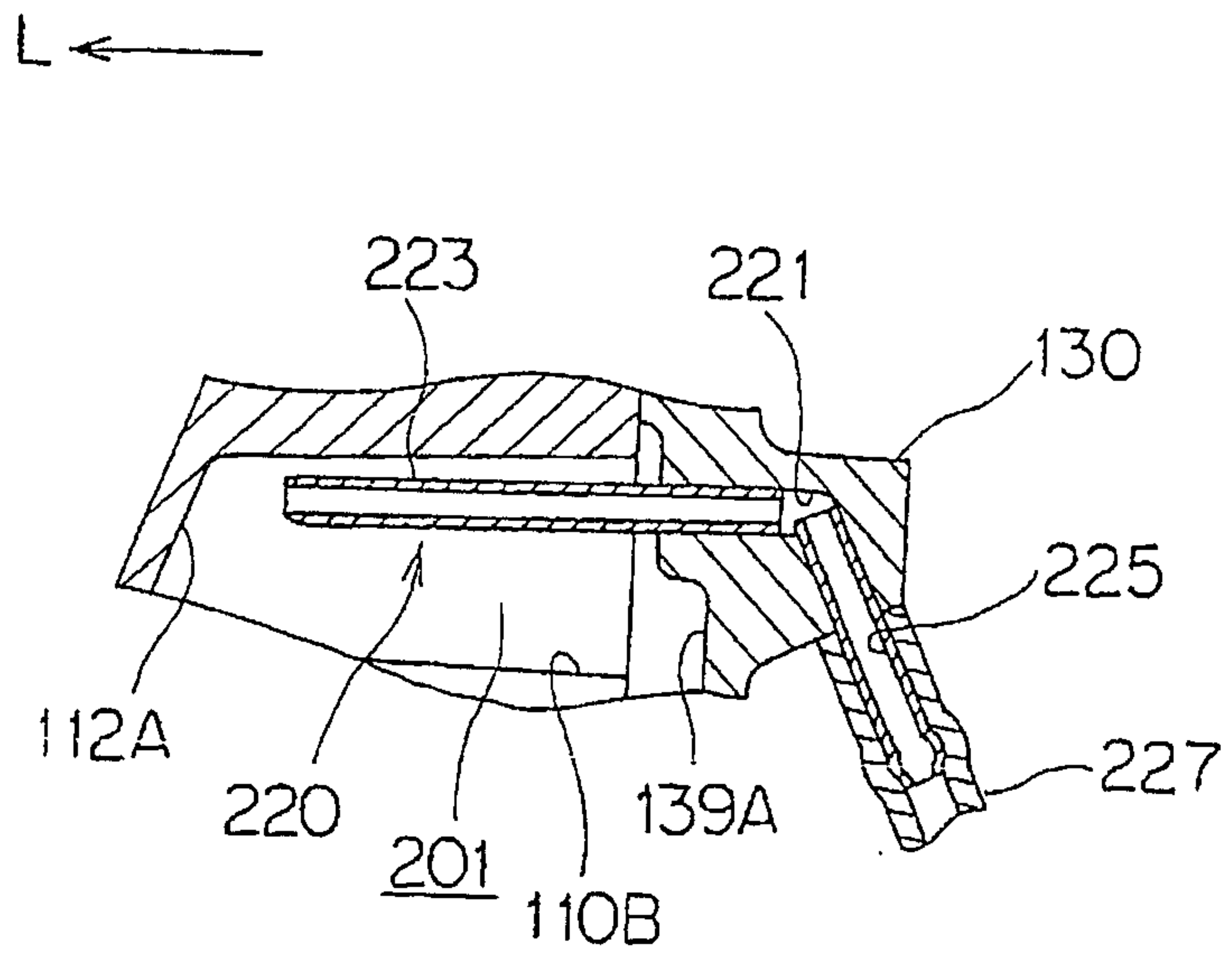


FIG. 11

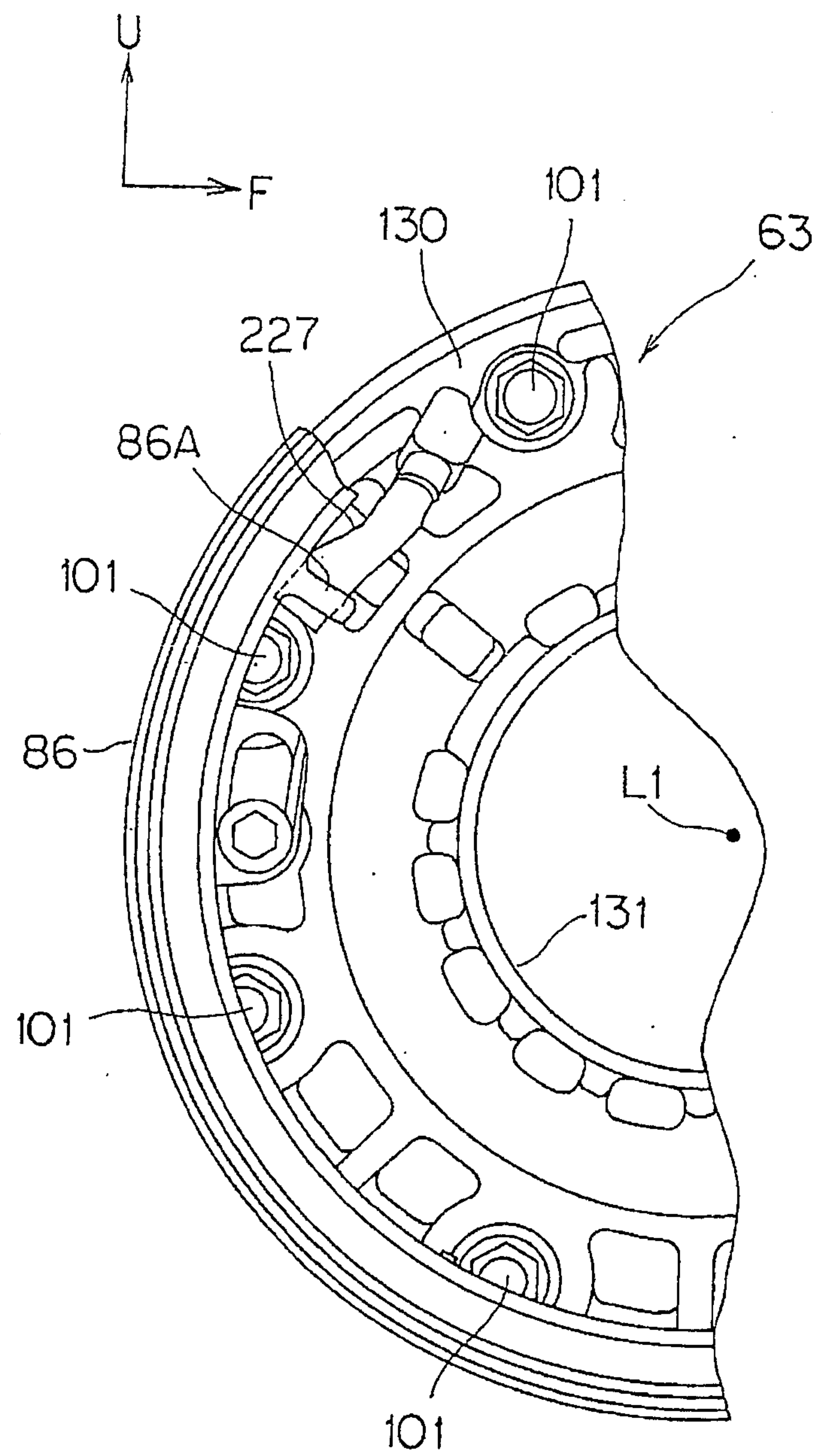


FIG. 12

