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DESCRIPTION

AREA OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The invention relates to the problem of protecting microphone openings. Microphones are very sensitive elements, and they need to be protected from detrimental influence from water and other substances like dust and dirt, which may all cause deterioration of a microphone. Further it is a big problem with microphones that air moving at velocities above a certain level about the microphone entrance will cause a very annoying sound in the microphone, known as wind noise.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] A number of different windscreen covers have been tried in time but none works satisfactory, and wind noise is still a major disturbance for people who wear hearing aids. Mesh screens have been used, but even if they may dampen wind-noise they have a strong tendency to clog as dirt is inevitably caught and squeezed into the mesh. Also mesh screens will not keep water out of the microphone opening. Phonak have developed a windscreen presented in EP 0847227 made of sintered polymer, foamed ceramic, sintered glass or sintered metal. The developed cover is hydrophobic and-or oleo phobic. This prior art cover is with small open pores, where to a "Teflon" (RTM) coating is applied. This cover suffers from the problem that it is not fully sound transparent and also it is rather expensive. Other prior art, e.g. WO 00/41432 discloses a disposable-type hearing aid comprising an enclosure having a microphone assembly contained therein, where the enclosure also has multiple inlet holes. Furthermore, the disclosure describes a felt which protects the microphone from foreign objects. Furthermore, EP 1397023 discloses a miniature microphone such as those used in hearing aids, which miniature microphone is provided with a sound inlet plate that mates with the microphone.

[0003] None of the prior art techniques seem to provide a microphone cover which both protects the microphone against pollution from the surroundings and diminishes the problems relating to wind-noise in a satisfactory way while at the same time allows free passage for sound from the surroundings to the microphone element.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] According to the invention an audio device is provided comprising a microphone and a sound canal allowing sound to pass from the surroundings to the microphone wherein further a signal path from the microphone to a receiver is provided and powered by a current source, such that sounds received at the microphone may be enhanced and presented at the ear level

of the user and wherein a protection screen is provided at the sound canal, whereby the screen comprises a first surface which faces the surroundings and a second surface which faces the sound canal whereby the screen has a slit formed opening between the first surface and the second surface whereby the transition between the first surface and the slit formed opening is smooth and gradual, and whereby a sharp edge forms the transition between the second surface and the slit formed opening.

[0005] By way of the slit formed opening and the gradual transition from the first even surface and the opening, it is ensured that air moving about over the protection screen will not find any sharp edges and less turbulence will be generated, whereby the wind noise will remain at a minimum level. The sharp edges provided between the second surface and the slit formed opening will ensure that water will have a tendency to form droplets on the first even surface, and such droplets may easily be wiped off or simply left to dry. Thus the protection screen will protect the microphone against wind noise and against water. The slit-formed entrance allows a large opening area without allowing large elements of pollution to enter into the delicate microphones, whereby good sound transparency combined with good protection against pollution is ensured. Further, the gradual transition from the first even surface to the slit, will allow the protection screen to be wiped off and cleaned without dirt elements being squeezed into the opening. Any audio device comprising a sound pick-up element and a sound producing element at the ear may benefit from the invention. Hearing aids, cochlear implants and headsets are obvious examples. In hearing aids and headsets the receiver is a miniature loudspeaker, and in cochlear implants the receiver is an electrode device presenting the sound signal a number of electrical potential differences along an electrode.

[0006] In an embodiment of the audio device, two slit formed openings are provided in the surface of the protection screen, with an intermediate plate element between the two slit formed openings and also an opening to a canal leading to a microphone is provided below the intermediate plate element, such that a sound passage is provided from the surroundings, through the slit formed openings, and into the canal leading to the microphone. This gives a further protection of the microphone, because the intermediate plate will prevent direct access from the surroundings and into the microphone canal. Further the provision of two slit formed openings will aid to secure the audio device against clogged microphone openings, as the audio device will function fine, even if one of the slit formed openings should be clogged as long as the other remains free.

[0007] In an embodiment of the invention, two or more canals leading to a microphone or microphones are provided in the area below the intermediate plate element. This allows a directional audio device to be made. The slit formed openings will here allow sounds from all directions to reach the microphone entrances equally well, and this is most important in ensuring good directional characteristic of microphone systems with more openings. Further, the two slit formed openings secure the system against malfunction due to clogging of the sound entrances.

[0008] In an embodiment of the invention, the two slit formed openings extends side by side,

and the distance between the slit formed openings is such that the below opening, which leads to a microphone canal, is covered by the intermediate plate element. This construction is particularly well suited to keep debris and moisture out of the canals leading to the microphones, as the intermediate plate element will provide a roofing over the microphone openings which serves to keep water and dust out of the microphone canals.

[0009] In a further embodiment a space beneath the slit formed openings is provided along the whole length of the openings, such that sound may pass through the slit at any point and reach the microphones. This will enhance the sound transparency of the protection screen further.

[0010] The invention also comprises a protection screen for an audio device where the screen has a first surface which faces the surroundings and an opposed second surface which faces an audio device, wherein the first surface is substantially smooth, and wherein a slit formed opening is provided in the screen between the first surface and the second surfaces and wherein the transition between the first surface and the slit formed opening is smooth and gradual, and whereby the transition between the second surface and the slit formed opening is sharp and edge-like. Such a protection screen will be advantageous in that it may provide good protection against both wind noise, and at the same time will prevent moisture and other pollution elements to enter into delicate electronic devices placed below the protection screen.

[0011] In an embodiment the protection screen has a slit formed opening with a lengthwise extension allowing two microphone openings in a directional microphone system to be placed along the length of the slit-formed opening. Sound may in such a system enter the slit formed opening at any point and reach either opening of the directional system. This will provide improved directional characteristics of the system.

[0012] Preferably the protection screen has two slit formed openings provided side by side and spaced around 3mm apart, such that an intermediate plate part is formed between the slit formed openings. An intermediate part of this width is suited to cover microphone openings of a directional system, and having the microphone openings placed below the intermediate part, will allow sound to reach the microphones even if one of the slit formed openings should clog.

[0013] It is further preferred that the slit formed openings have a width in the range of 0.1 to 0.5mm. This will prevent both moisture and dust from entering into the area beneath the screen and at the same time allows sufficient sound transparency of the protection screen. In a preferred embodiment the width is around 0.2mm.

[0014] In an embodiment the sharp edge-like transition between the second surface and the slitformed opening is provided as an edge with a maximum radius of curvature of 0.05mm. This radius of curvature will prevent droplets of moisture formed at the first surface of the screen to seep from the first to the second surface. This is important as thereby water may be kept out of an audio device equipped with the screen.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**[0015]**

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a part of an audio device with cover plate,

Fig. 2 is a lengthwise sectional view of an audio device according to the invention,

Fig. 3 is a side view,

Fig. 4 is a perspective view of the detachable cover seen from below,

Fig. 5 is an exploded view of the main parts of the audio device.

DESCRIPTION OF A PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0016] In the exploded view of fig. 5 the various parts of the audio device are shown. A generally triangular shell part 20 forms the basis of the device. A chassis 14 is shaped to fit into the shell 20 from a first side and a battery frame 21 fits into a second side of the shell part. The three parts: shell 20, chassis 14 and battery frame 21 are shaped to enclose the electronic parts of the audio device, namely microphones 1, 11 seen in figs. 1, 2 and 3 and a print (not shown) with an audio processing device and a battery. Further a socket 22 is provided for outputting an electric audio signal. A plug 23 fits the socket and leads inside a tube 24 are provided for powering an audio speaker 25. In use the audio device is placed behind a users ear, and the speaker 25 is placed inside the ear canal of the user to allow the user to hear enhanced versions of the sound received at the microphones 1, 11. A windscreen 3 is further mountable on the chassis 14 to protect the sound entrances 2, 12.

[0017] In fig. 2 an embodiment of the invention is shown in section along a length axis of the audio device. In fig. 1 a sectional view along line A-A perpendicular to the view in fig. 2 and 3 is shown. As seen the protection screen 3 is provided over sound entrances 2, 12 and protects the entrances from direct impact of wind and other environmental influences. The screen 3 has two slitformed openings 6 extending along the length of the screen 3 as best seen in fig. 1 and 4. The screen 3 has a first surface 4 facing the environment and a second surface 5 facing the inside of the audio device with microphones 1, 11. The surface 4 is made even and smooth so that it will be easy to clean and so that no wind noise will result from air passing over the surface 4. Below the screen 3 the sound entrances 2, 12 lead through respective canals in the chassis 14 to the microphones 1, 11. The slit formed openings 6 in the screen 3 are provided above furrows 15 in the chassis 14 and from the furrows 15 access is allowed to the sound entrances 2, 12 for the respective microphones 1, 11. The furrows 15 and the slit formed openings 6 together allow sound to reach the microphones 1, 11 from any point above the

surface 4.

[0018] As seen in fig. 1 the microphones 1,11 are placed in the centreline of the audio device 10 and the furrows 15 and slit formed openings 6 extends at each their side of the centreline. Thus the sound entrances 2,12 are covered by an intermediate part 13 of the screen 3. Apertures 19 between the screen 3 and the chassis 14 are provided and are best seen in fig. 1. The apertures 19 connects the furrows 15 at both sides with the sound entrances 2,12. Each sound entrance 2, 12 thus receive sound from both slit formed openings 6 along the paths indicated by arrows 26 in fig. 1. The audio device will still function even if one of the slit formed openings 6 becomes clogged.

[0019] Resonance chambers 18 are provided in connection with each sound entrance 2,12, between the screen 3 and the chassis 14. As seen in fig. 2 the chambers 18 are blind holes, and they will aid to dampen certain frequencies in the ultrasound range, and this will make the audio device less sensitive to the detrimental influences of ultrasound used in room sensors and automatic door openers.

[0020] As seen in fig. 1 the transition between the first surface 4 and the opening 6 is made with a smooth and rounded shoulder 7, whereas the transition between the second surface 5 and the opening 6 is made with a sharp edge 8. This ensures both that water is less likely to enter the slitformed openings 6, and that the openings are easily cleaned by simply running a soft cloth along the length axis of the device. Tests have shown that water will form pearls or droplets on the shoulder 7 rather than enter the openings 6. This is due to the sharp edge 8 between the slit 6 and the second surface 5 and the rounded shape of the shoulder 7 in combination with the surface tension of water. A perfectly sharp edge between the surface 5 and the opening 6 is difficult to realize, and a rounded edge less than 0.05 mm is sufficiently sharp. Tests have further shown that the width of the slit formed openings 6 should preferably be between 0.1 and 0.3 mm and in a preferred embodiment the slit is 0.2 mm. This measure is taken at the narrow-most part of the slit. Further it is important that the angle between the surface 5 and the side-walls of the slits 6 is less than 90 degrees in order that the overall profile of the slit-formed openings 6 becomes v-shaped. This aids to avoid clogging and allows easy cleaning of the wind screen.

[0021] Wind noise is known to be a serious problem to especially hearing aid wearers, but through the shape of the screen 3 and the openings 6 and the arrangement of the microphones, it is ensured that wind noise is minimized, and at the same time the screen 3 provides a good protection against other environmental influences like moisture and dust. As seen in fig. 4 the screen has protrusions 17 allowing the screen to be mounted by click connections onto the chassis 14 of the audio device 10.

REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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Patent documents cited in the description

- EP0847227A [0002]
- WO0041432A [0002]
- EP1397023A [0002]

EP 1 763 280
P-2005-016DK

Audioanordning, der omfatter en mikrofon

Patentkrav

1. Audioanordning, der omfatter to mikrofoner (1, 11) og lydkanaler, der tillader lyd at passere fra omgivelserne til mikrofonerne, hvor en yderligere signalvej fra mikrofonerne til en højttaler (25) er tilvejebragt og drevet af en strømkilde, således at lyde, der er modtaget ved mikrofonerne, kan forstærkes og præsenteres på øreniveauet af en bruger, hvorved audioanordningen omfatter en skal (20), der er indrettet til at blive anbragt bag øret af brugeren, og en ramme (14), der er formet til at passe ind i skallen, hvor højttaleren (25) er indrettet til at blive anbragt inden i øregangen af brugeren, og hvor en beskyttelsesskærm (3) er tilvejebragt, hvorved beskyttelsesskærmen omfatter en første overflade (4), der vender mod omgivelserne, og en modstående anden overflade (5), der vender mod indersiden af audioanordningen, kendetegnet ved, at beskyttelsesskærmen har to spalteformede åbninger (6) mellem den første overflade og den anden overflade, hvorved overgangen mellem den første overflade og de spalteformede åbninger er glat og gradvis, og hvorved en skarp kant danner overgangen mellem den anden overflade og de spalteformede åbninger, hvor de spalteformede åbninger strækker sig langs længden af beskyttelsesskærmen, og under beskyttelsesskærmen leder to lydindgange (2, 12) gennem respektive kanaler i rammen til de to mikrofoner (1, 11), og et rum nedenunder de spalteformede åbninger er tilvejebragt langs hele længden af åbningerne, således at lyd kan passere gennem spalten på ethvert tidspunkt og nå mikrofonerne.
2. Audioanordning ifølge krav 1, hvor et mellemliggende pladeelement er tilvejebragt mellem de to spalteformede åbninger, og hvorved kanalerne, der leder til mikrofonerne, er tilvejebragt under det mellemliggende pladeelement, således at en lydvej er tilvejebragt fra omgivelserne gennem de spalteformede åbninger og ind i kanalerne, der leder til mikrofonerne.
3. Audioanordning ifølge krav 2, hvor de to spalteformede åbninger strækker sig side om side, og hvor afstanden mellem de spalteformede åbninger er således, at kanalerne, der leder til mikrofonerne, er dækket af det mellemliggende pladeelement.
4. Beskyttelsesskærm til en audioanordning ifølge krav 1, hvor beskyttelsesskærmen har en første overflade, der vender mod omgivelserne,

5 og en modstående anden overflade, der vender mod indersiden af audioanordningen, hvor den første overflade i det væsentlige er glat, og hvor to spalteformede åbninger er tilvejebragt i beskyttelsesskærmen mellem den første overflade og den anden overflade, og hvor overgangen mellem den første overflade og de spalteformede åbninger er glat og gradvis, og hvorved overgangen mellem den anden overflade og de spalteformede åbninger er skarp og kantlignende.

10 5. Beskyttelsesskærm ifølge krav 4, hvorved de spalteformede åbninger har en forlængelse i længderetningen, der tillader to mikrofonåbninger i et retningsfølsomt mikrofonsystem at blive placeret langs længden af de spalteformede åbninger.

15 6. Beskyttelsesskærm ifølge krav 4, hvor de to spalteformede åbninger er tilvejebragt side om side og anbragt med ca. 3 mm fra hinanden, således at en mellemliggende pladedel er dannet mellem de spalteformede åbninger.

20 7. Beskyttelsesskærm ifølge krav 4, hvor de spalteformede åbninger har en bredde i området fra 0,1 mm til 0,5 mm.

8. Beskyttelsesskærm ifølge krav 4, hvor den skarpe kantlignende overgang mellem den anden overflade og de spalteformede åbninger er tilvejebragt som en skarp kant med en maksimal krumningsradius på 0,05 mm.

25

DRAWINGS

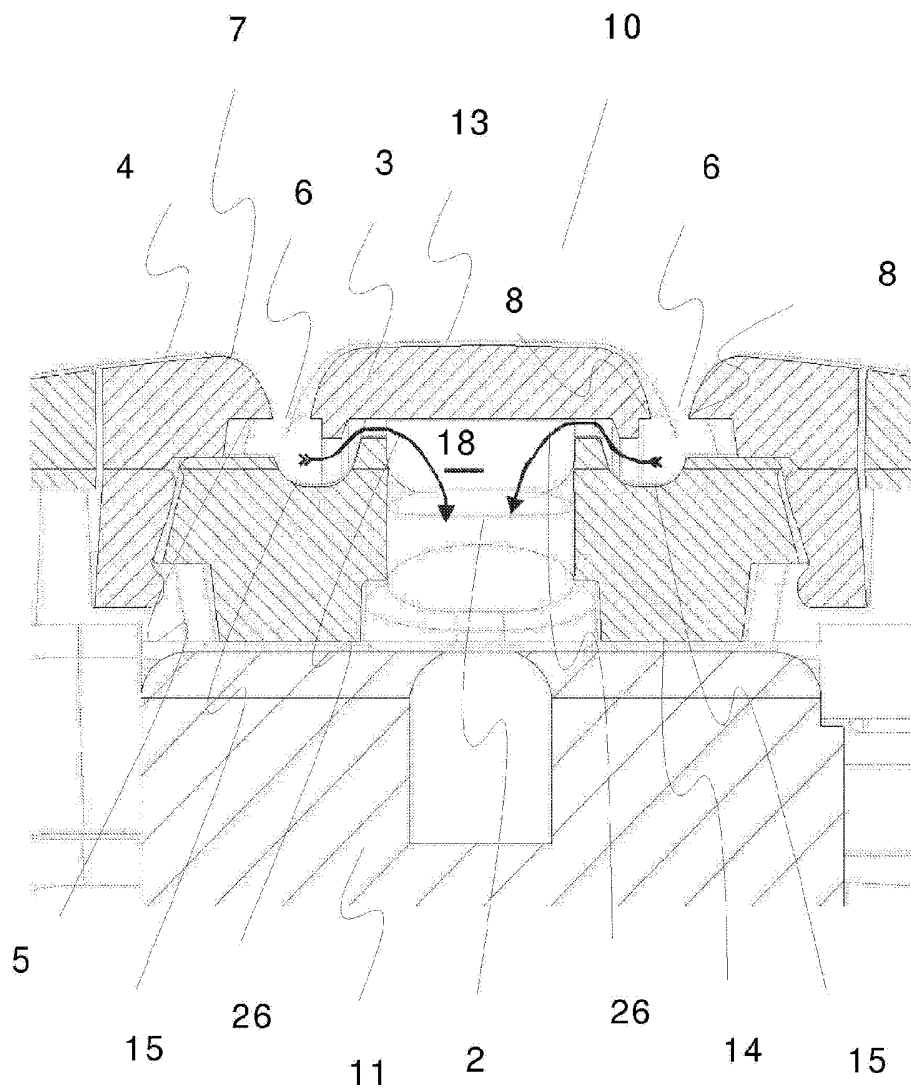


Fig. 1

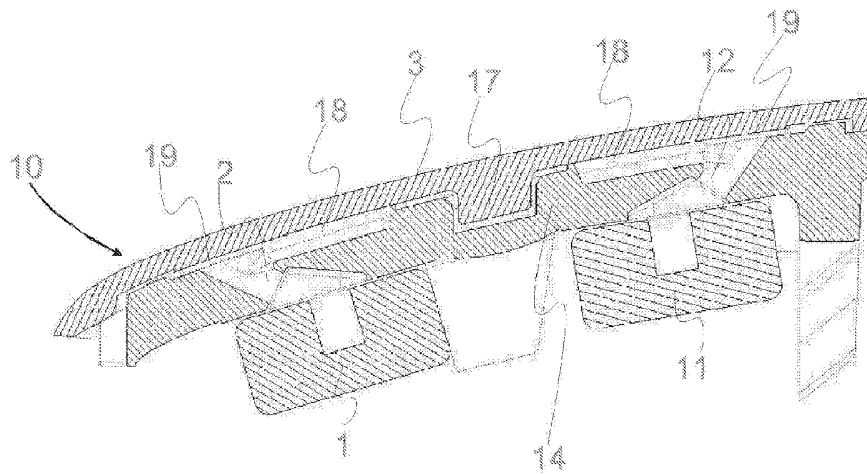


Fig. 2

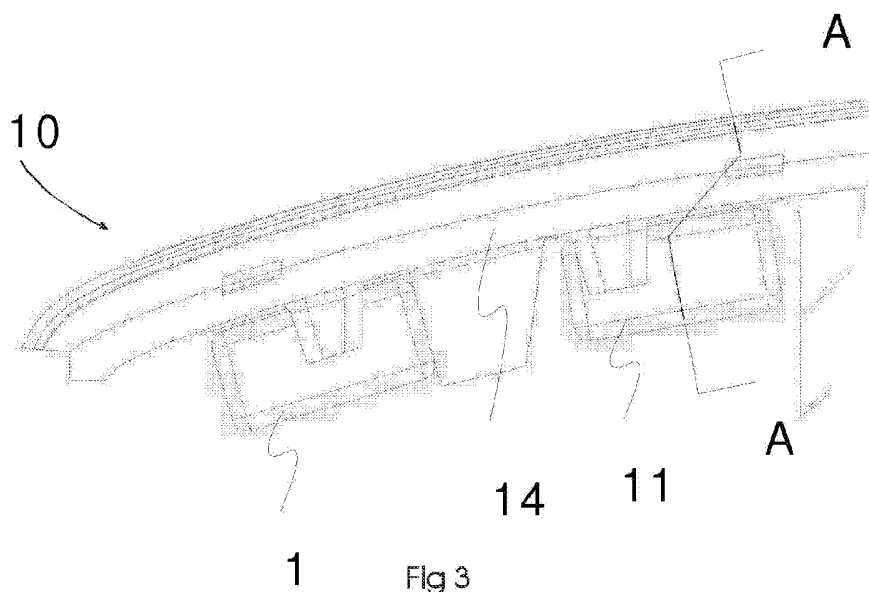


Fig 3

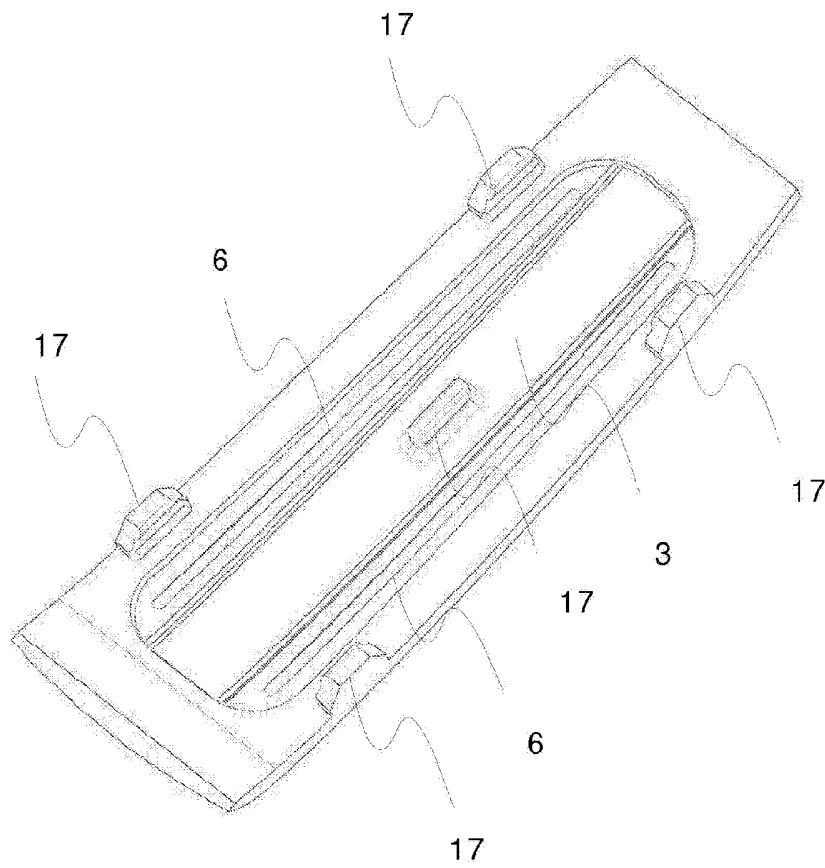


Fig. 4

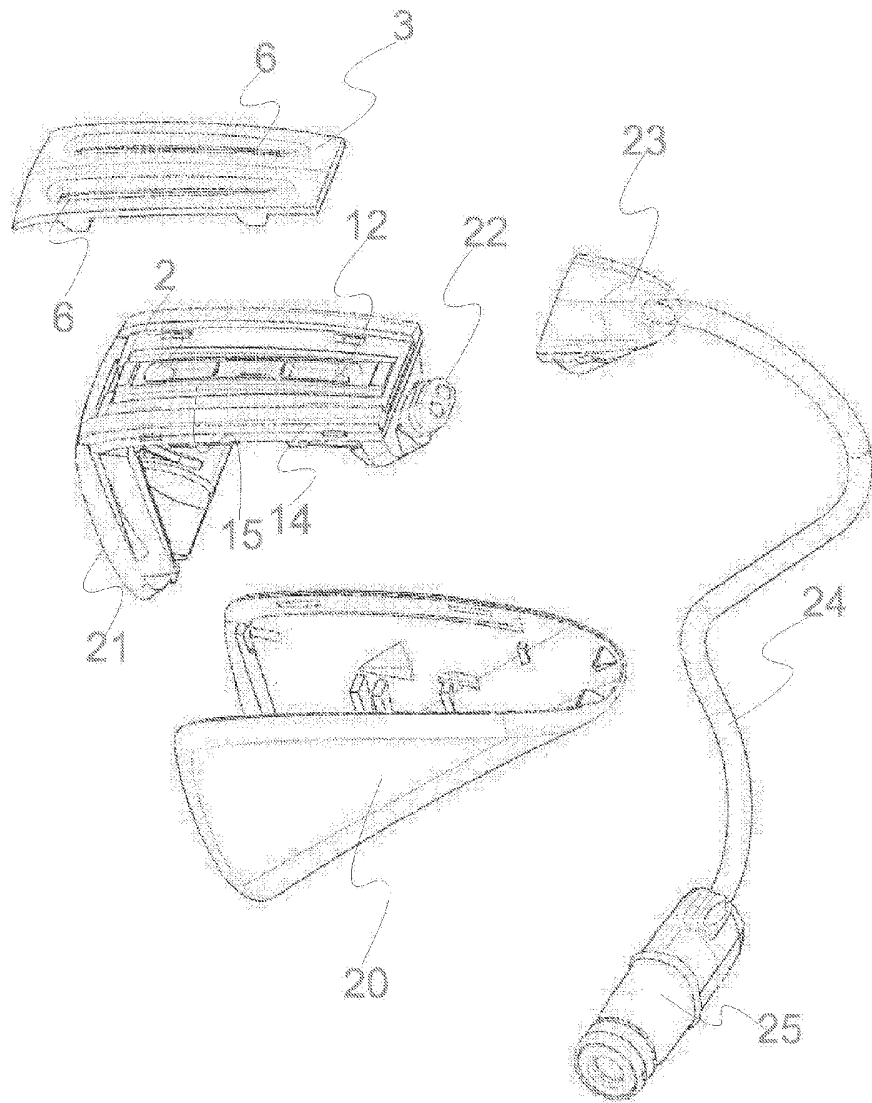


Fig. 5