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(54) **VEHICLE FLIP-OUT RAMP**

(76) Inventors: **Cleatus Lewis**, Modesto, CA (US);
Alan R. Cohn, Lockeford, CA (US);
Donald Morris, San Carlos, CA (US)

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Correspondence Address:
CHRISTENSEN, O'CONNOR, JOHNSON,
KINDNESS, PLLC
1420 FIFTH AVENUE
SUITE 2800
SEATTLE, WA 98101-2347 (US)

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A wheelchair ramp assembly (20) is disclosed. The wheelchair ramp assembly includes a frame attachable to a vehicle having a floor, a platform coupled to a portion of the frame, a ramp having a weight, and a reciprocating mechanism disposed between the ramp and the platform coupled to a portion of the frame, a ramp having a weight, and a reciprocating mechanism disposed between the ramp and the platform for reciprocating the ramp between a deployed position and a stowed position in response to a force. The reciprocating mechanism counterbalancing the weight of the ramp during actuation of the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions to reduce the force required to reciprocate the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions.

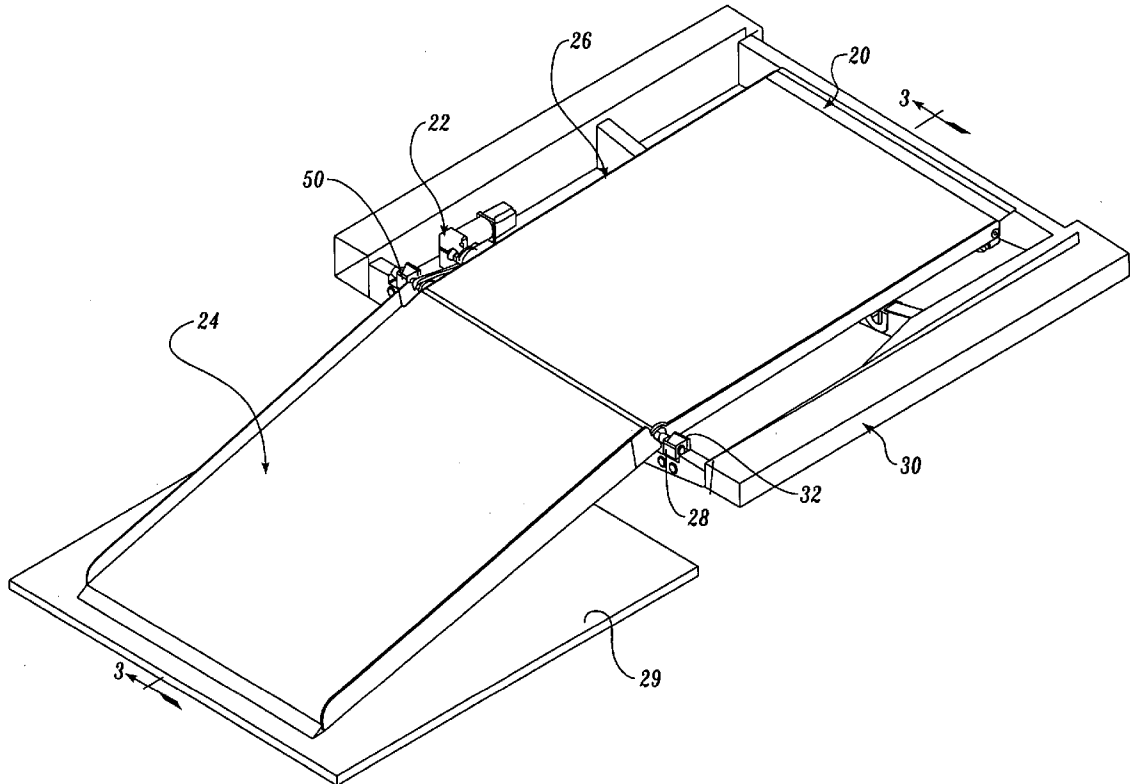
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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 09/747,024, filed on Dec. 20, 2000, now Pat. No. 6,602,041.

(60) Provisional application No. 60/172,779, filed on Dec. 20, 1999. Provisional application No. 60/183,110,



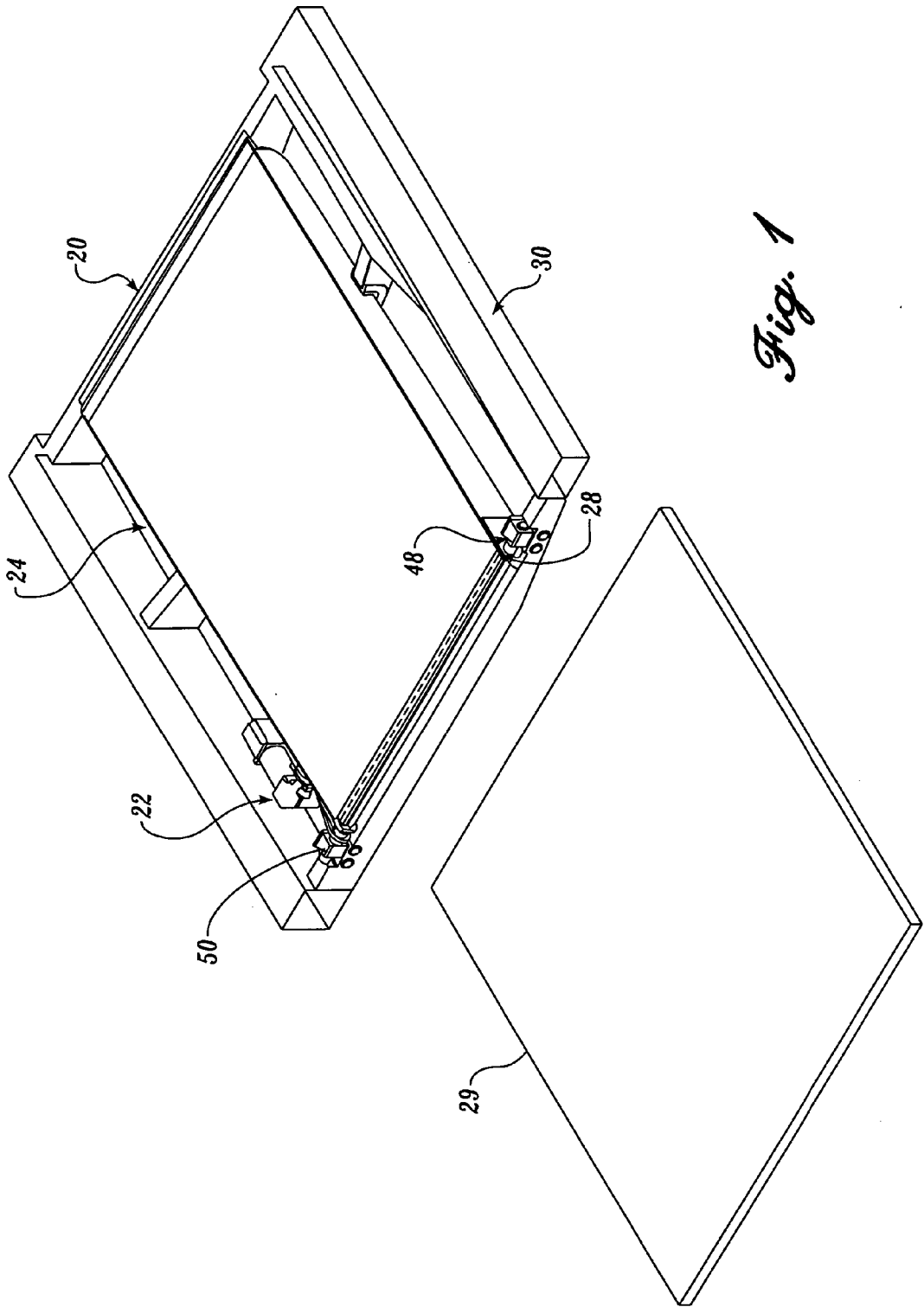


Fig. 1

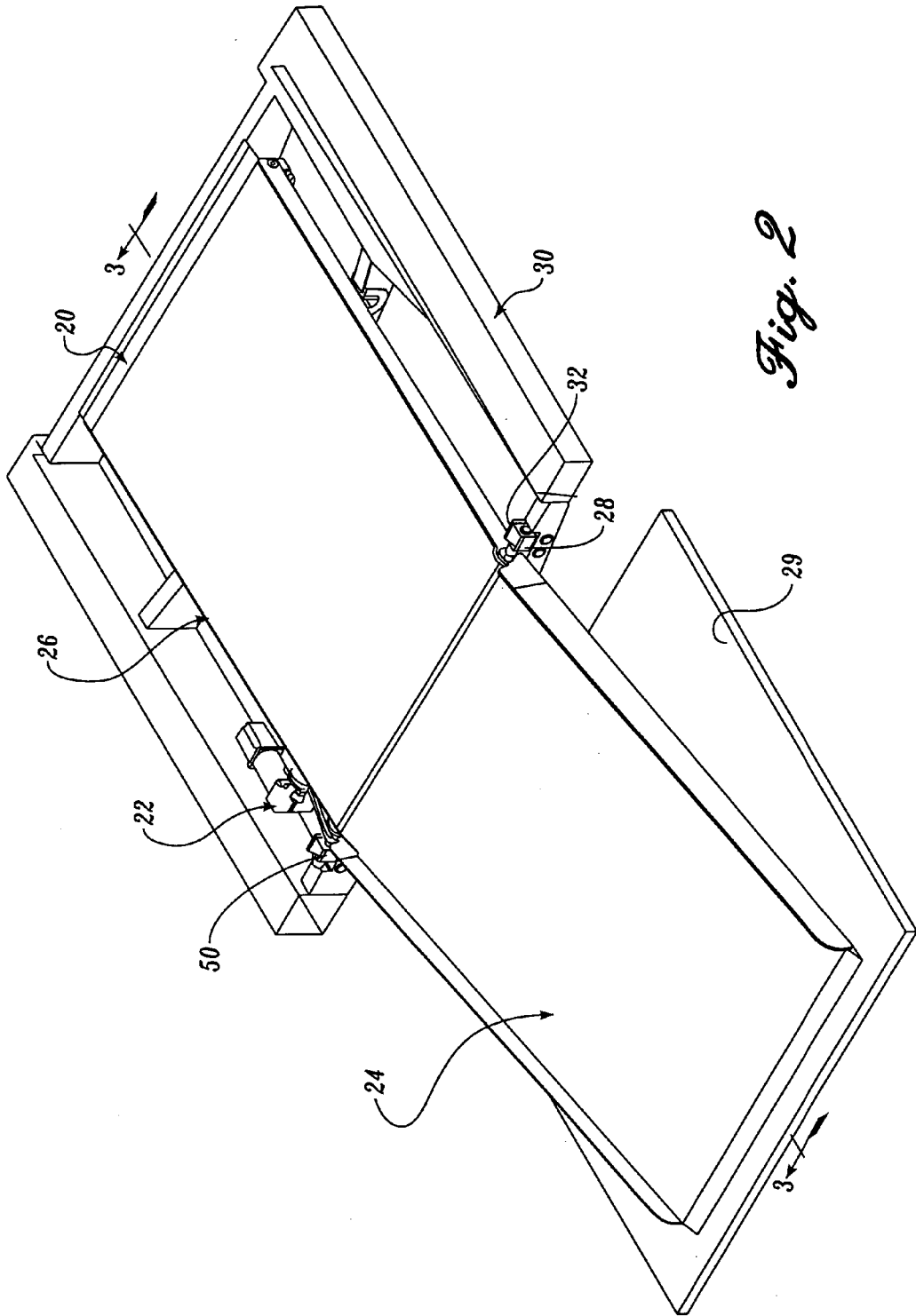


Fig. 2

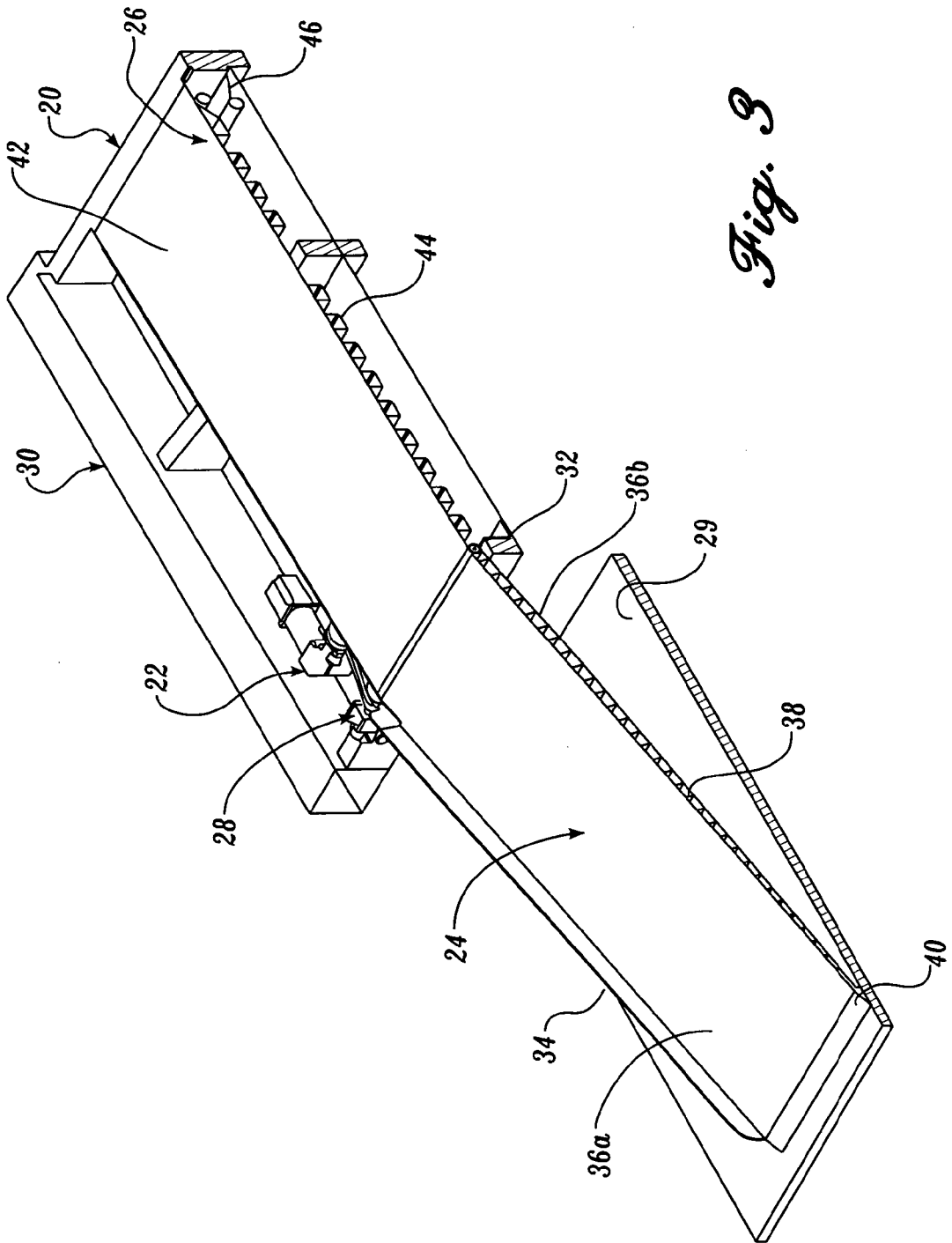


Fig. 3

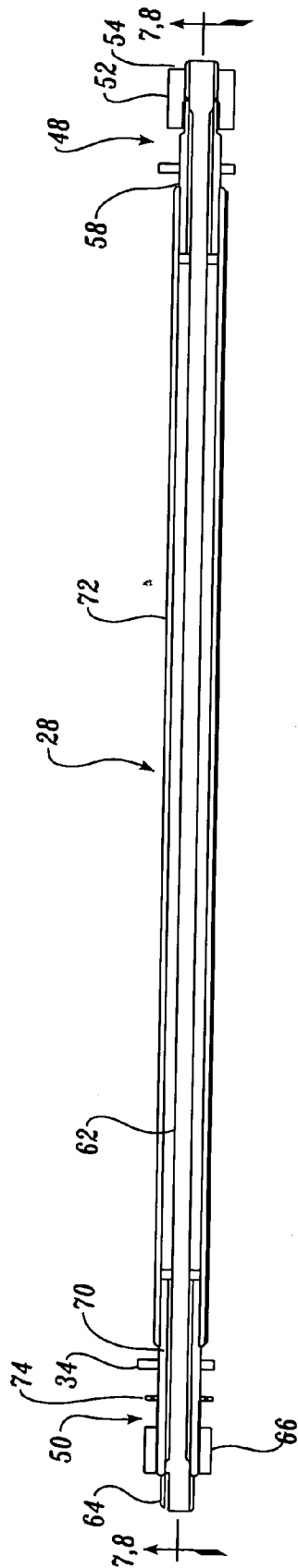


Fig. 4

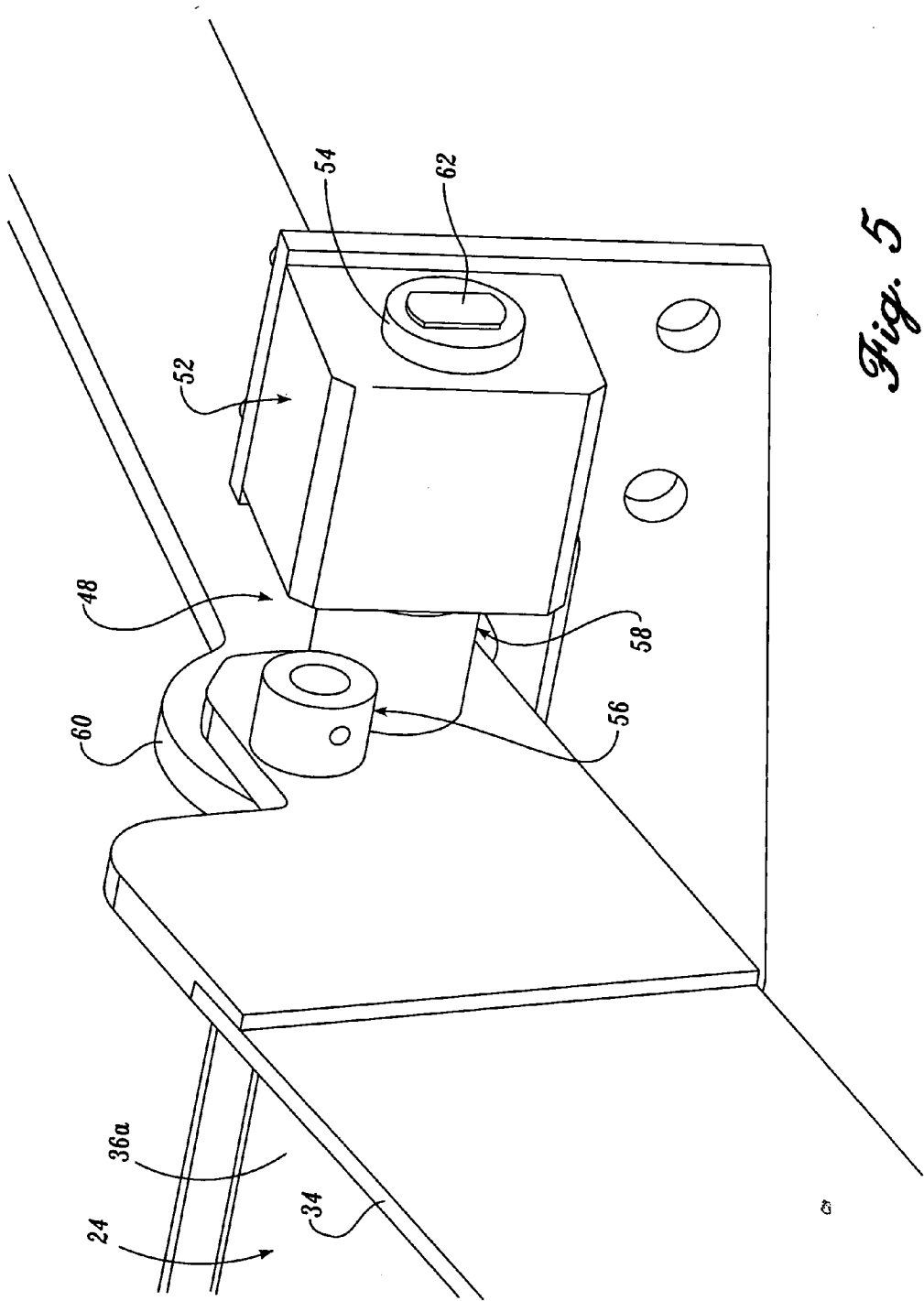


Fig. 5

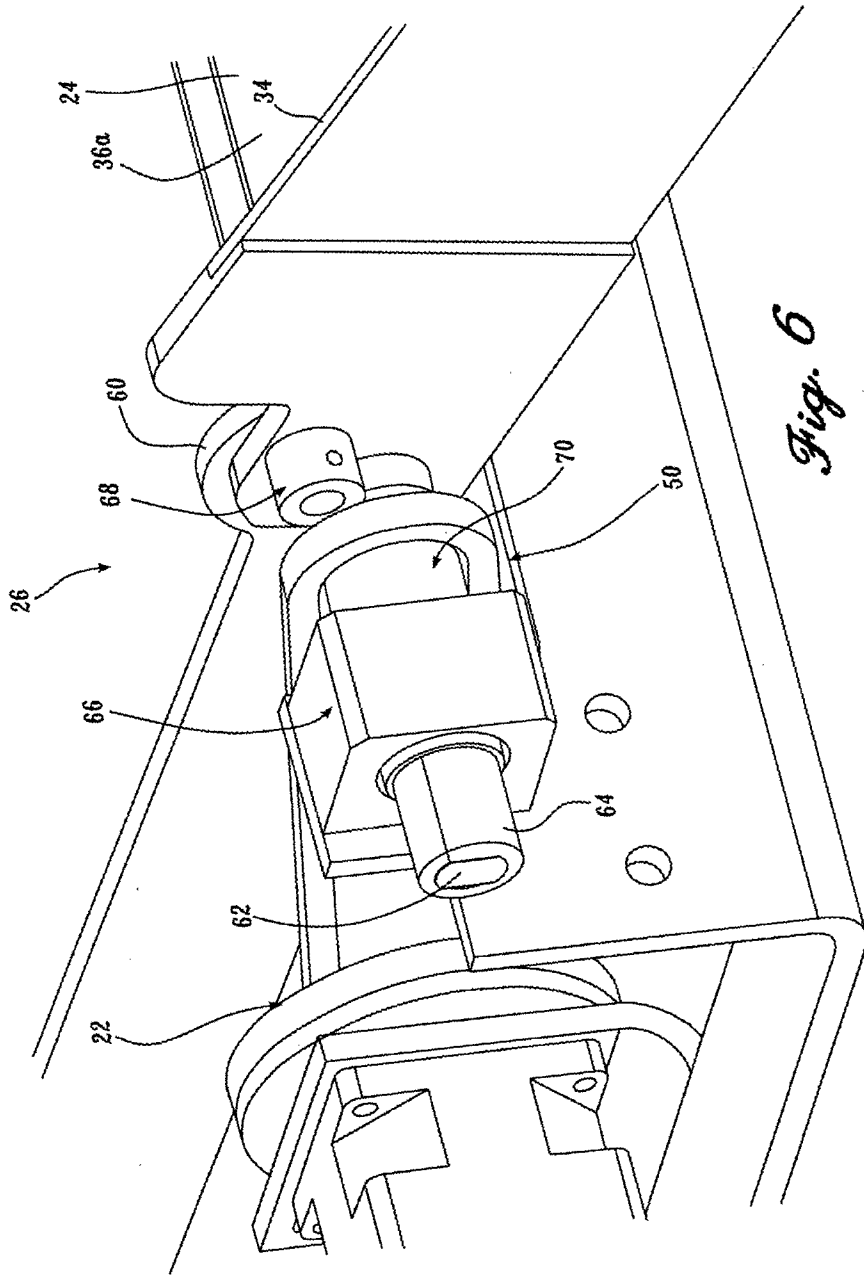


Fig. 6

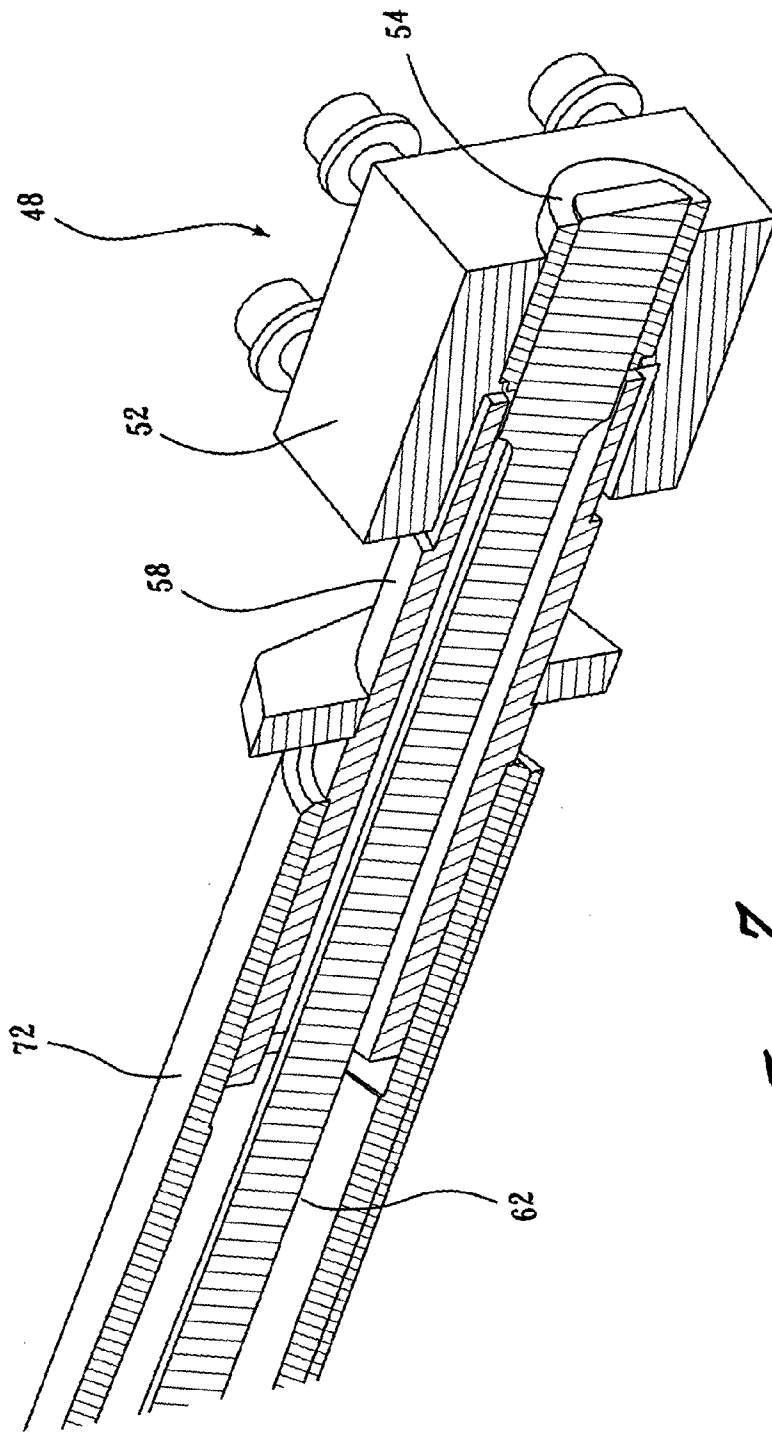


Fig. 7

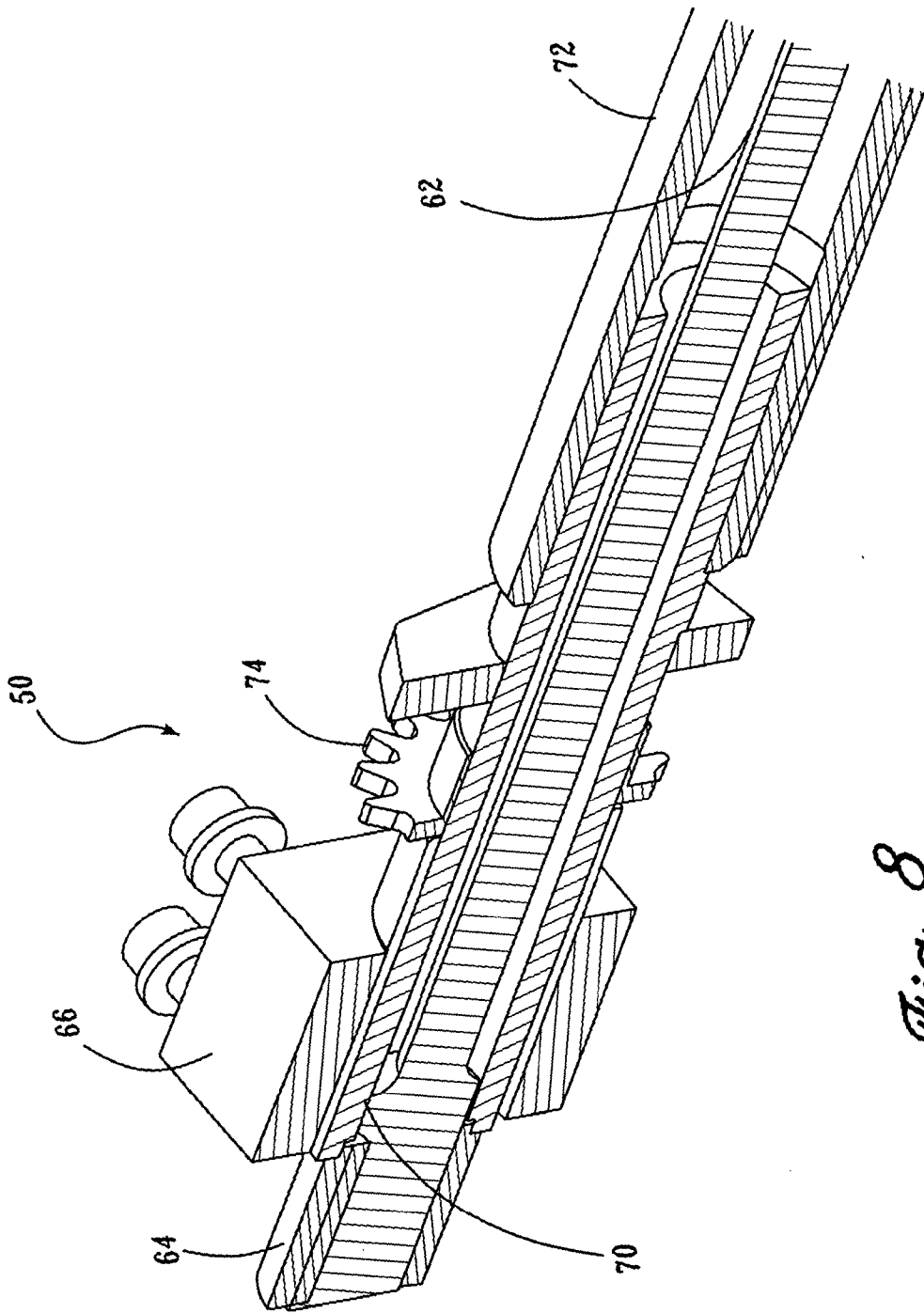


Fig. 8

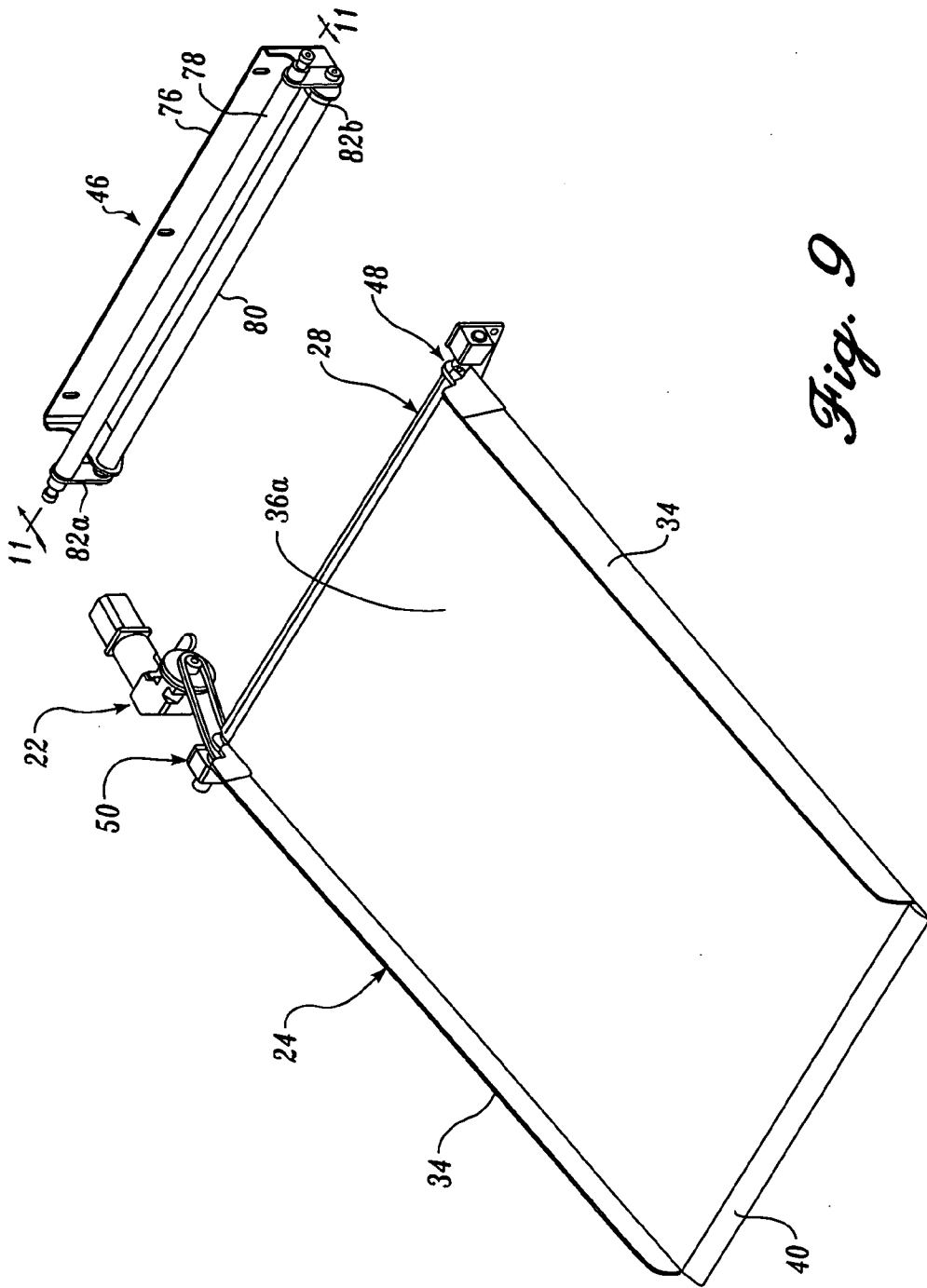


Fig. 9

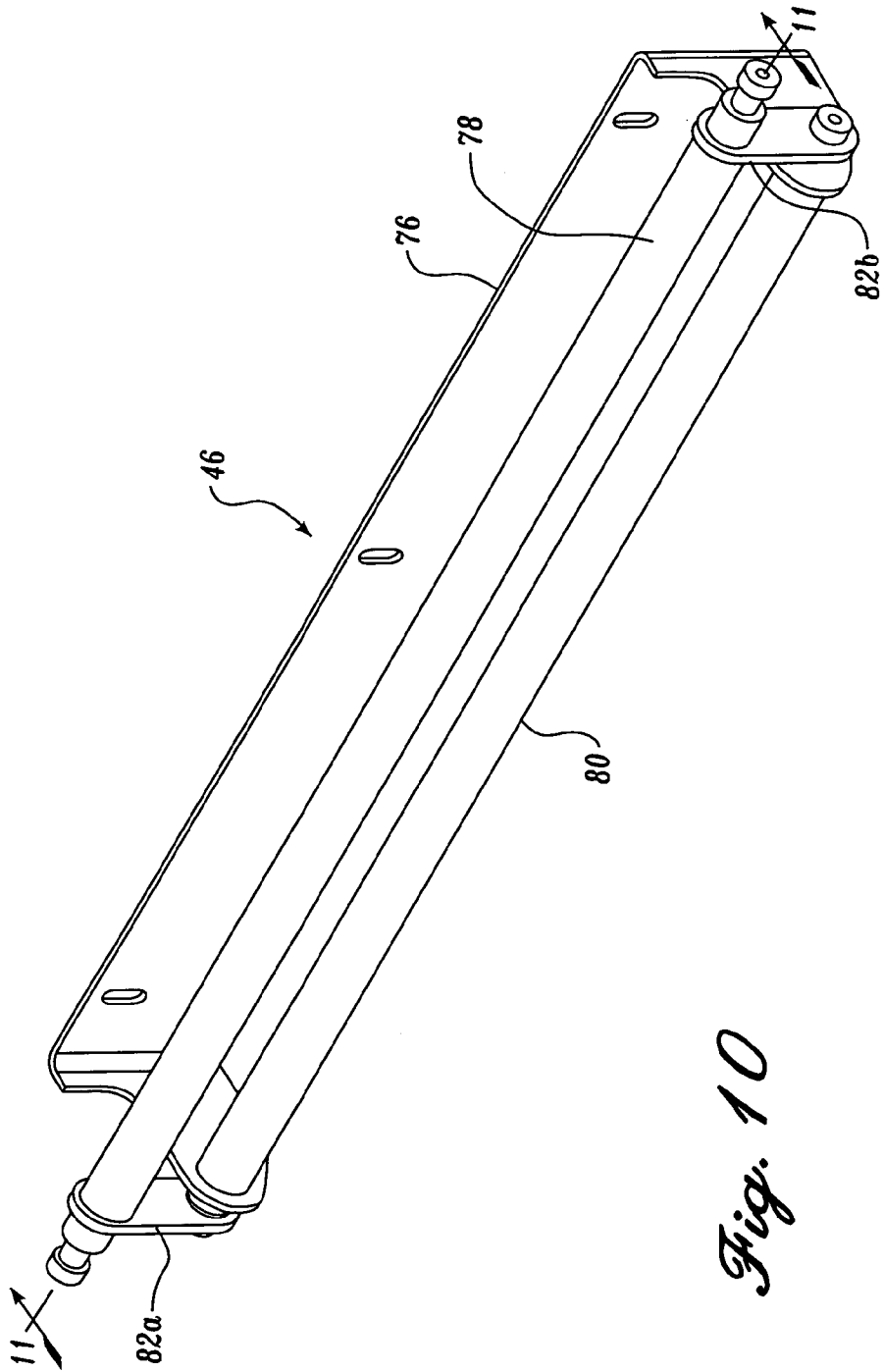


Fig. 10

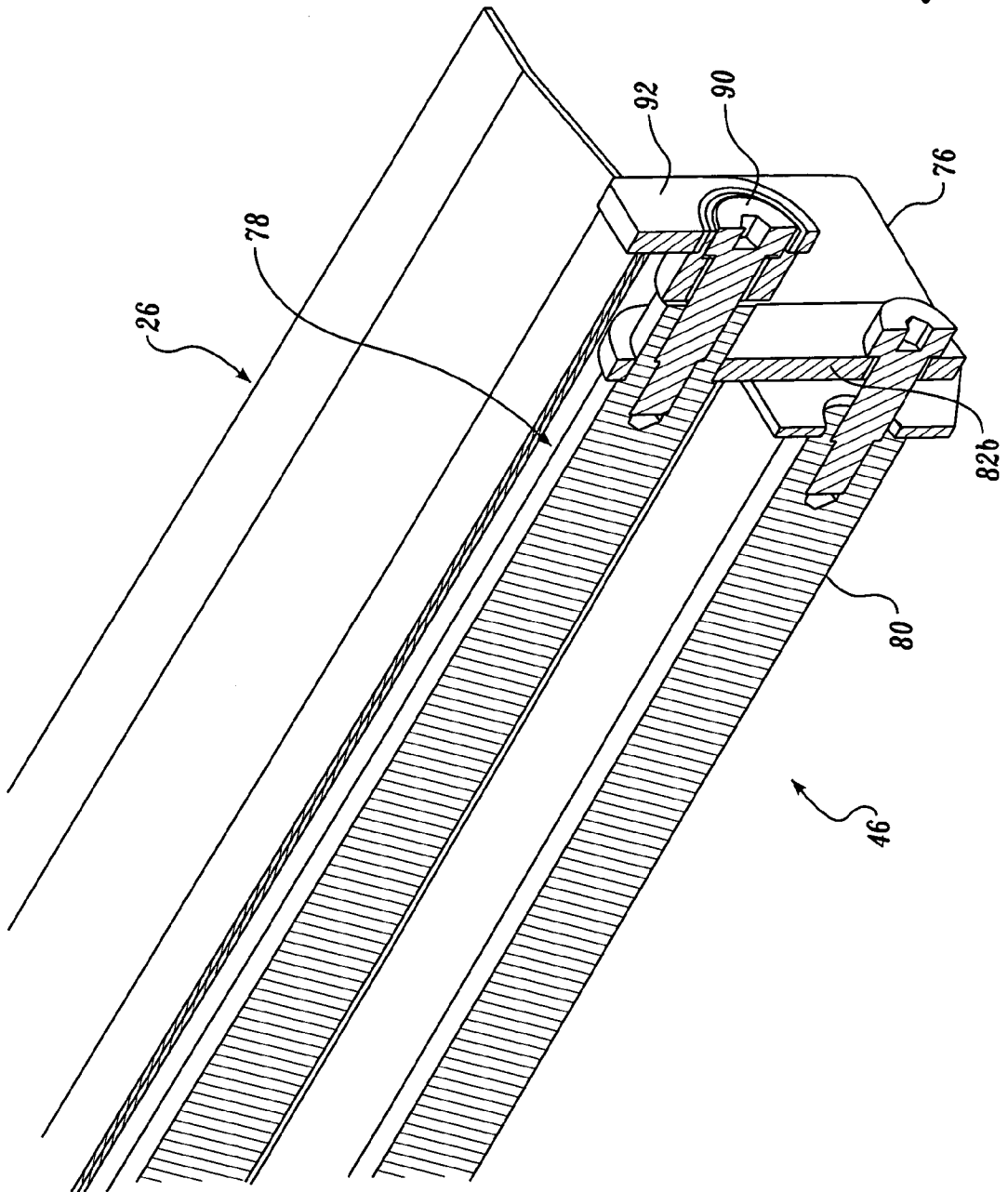


Fig. 11

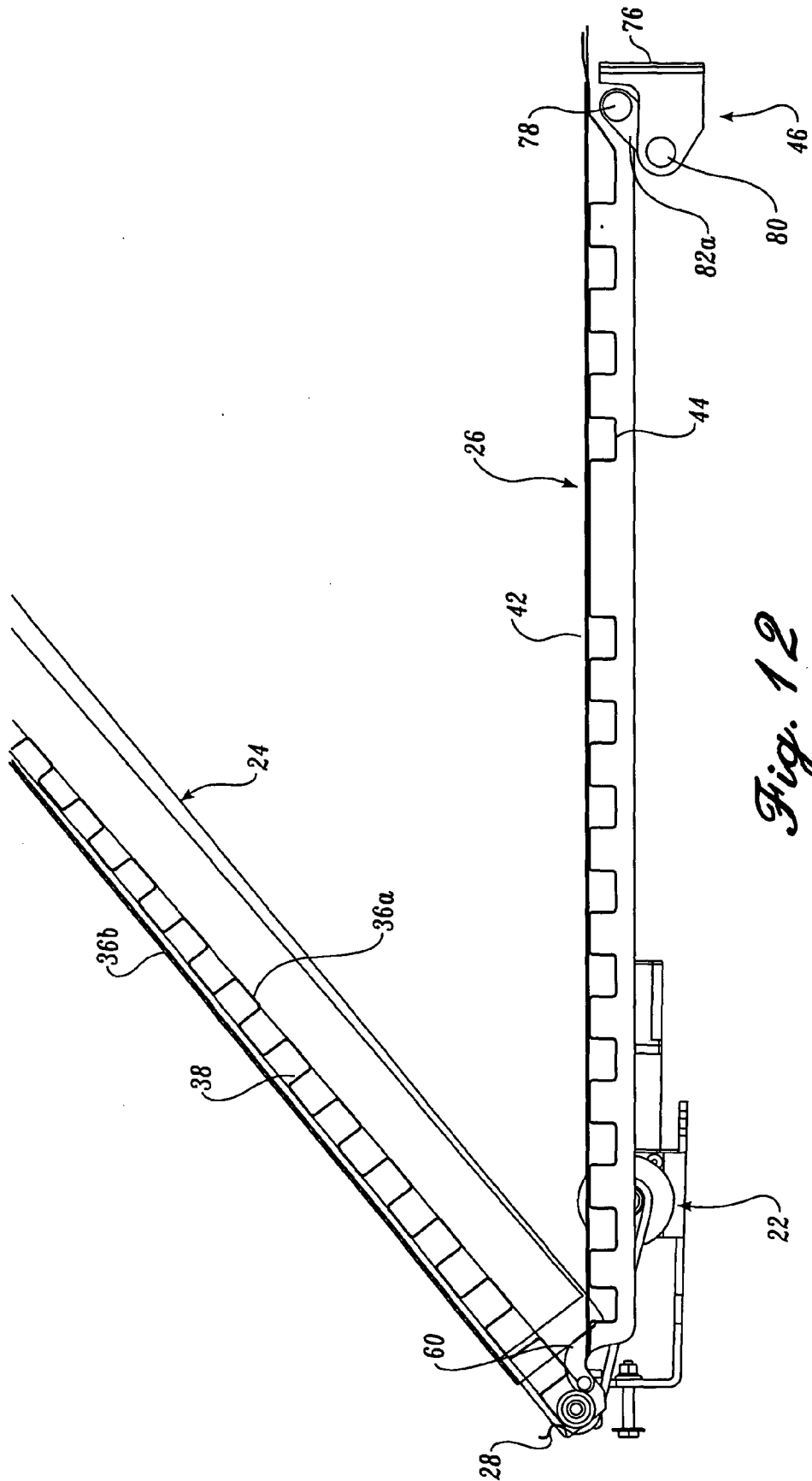


Fig. 12

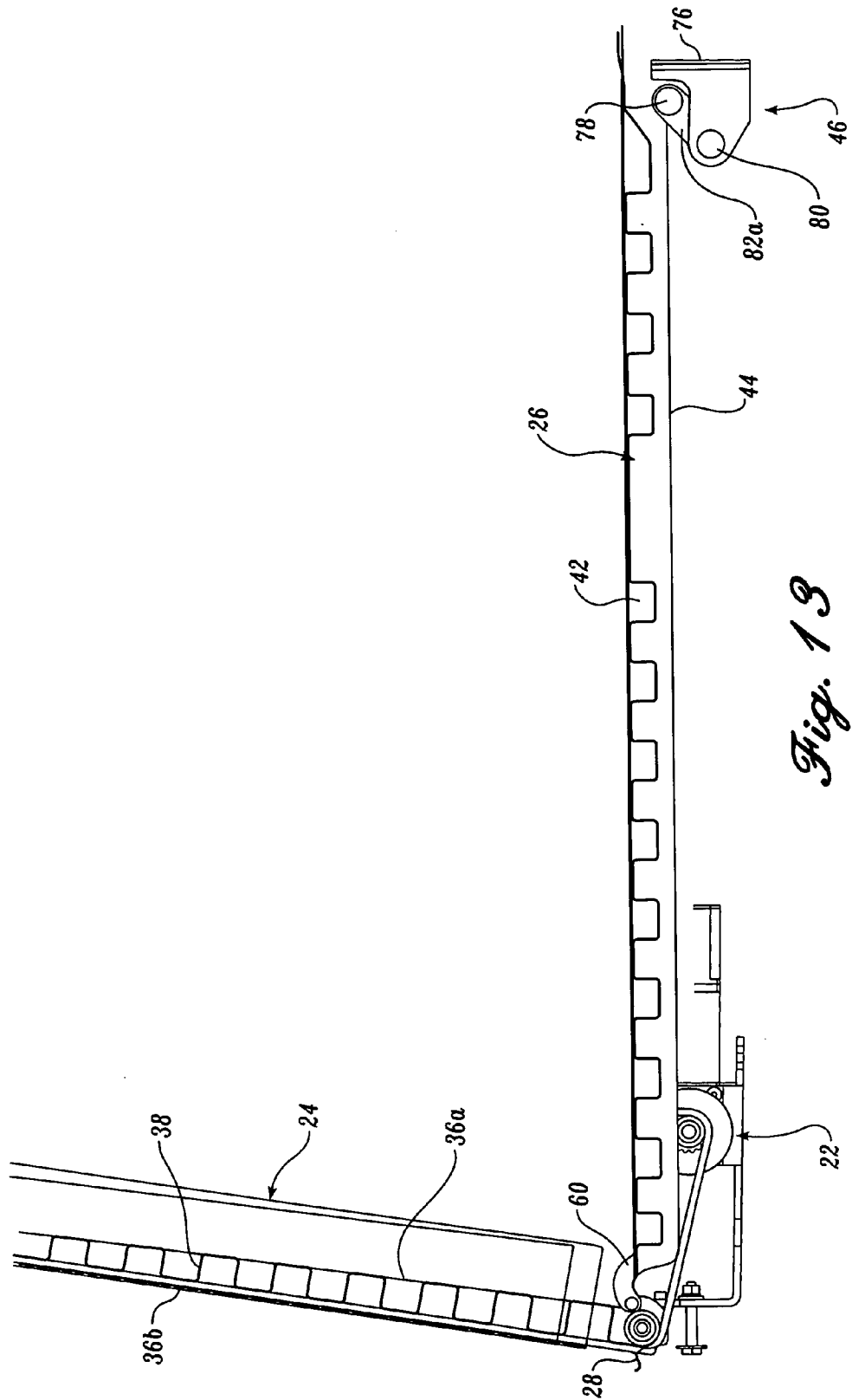


Fig. 13

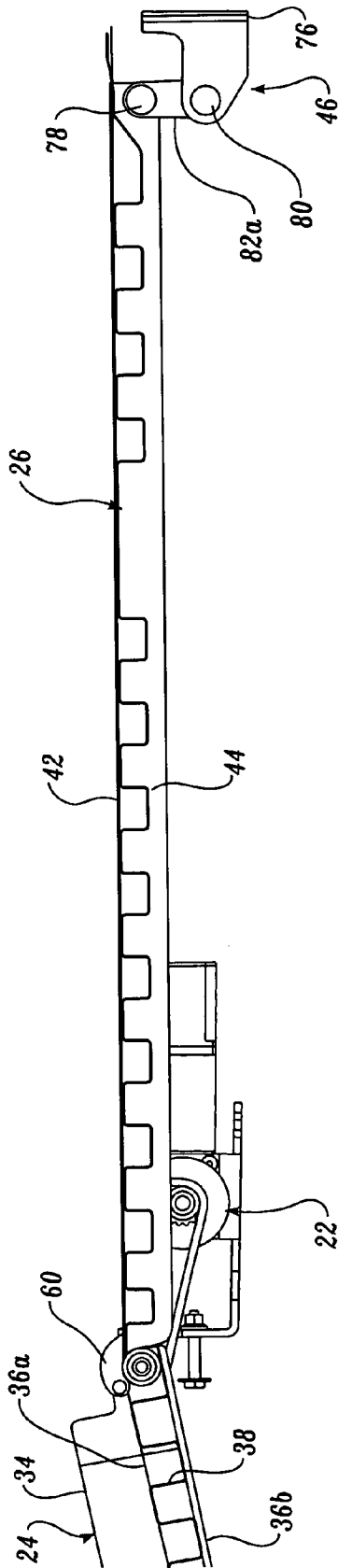
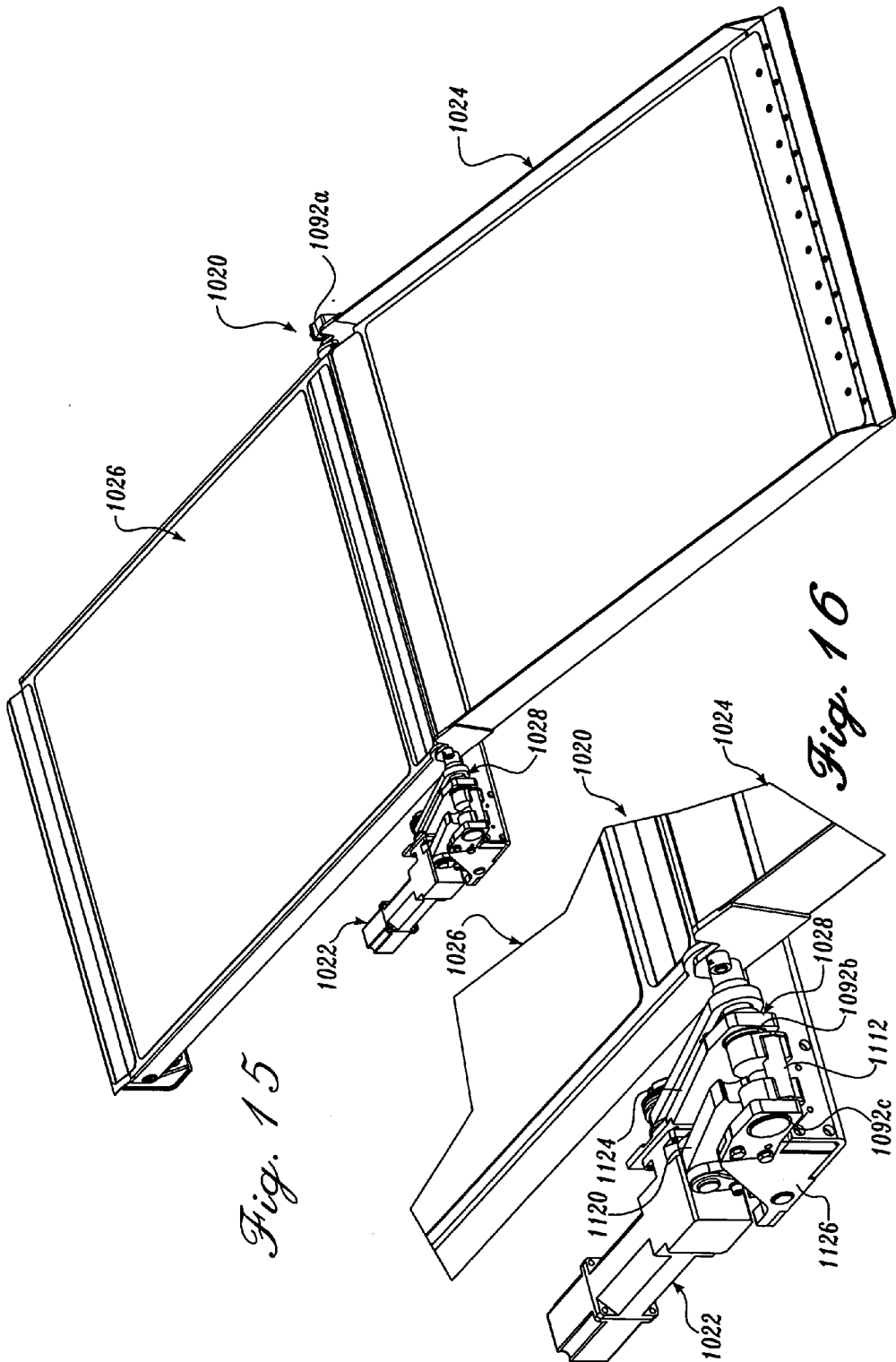


Fig. 14



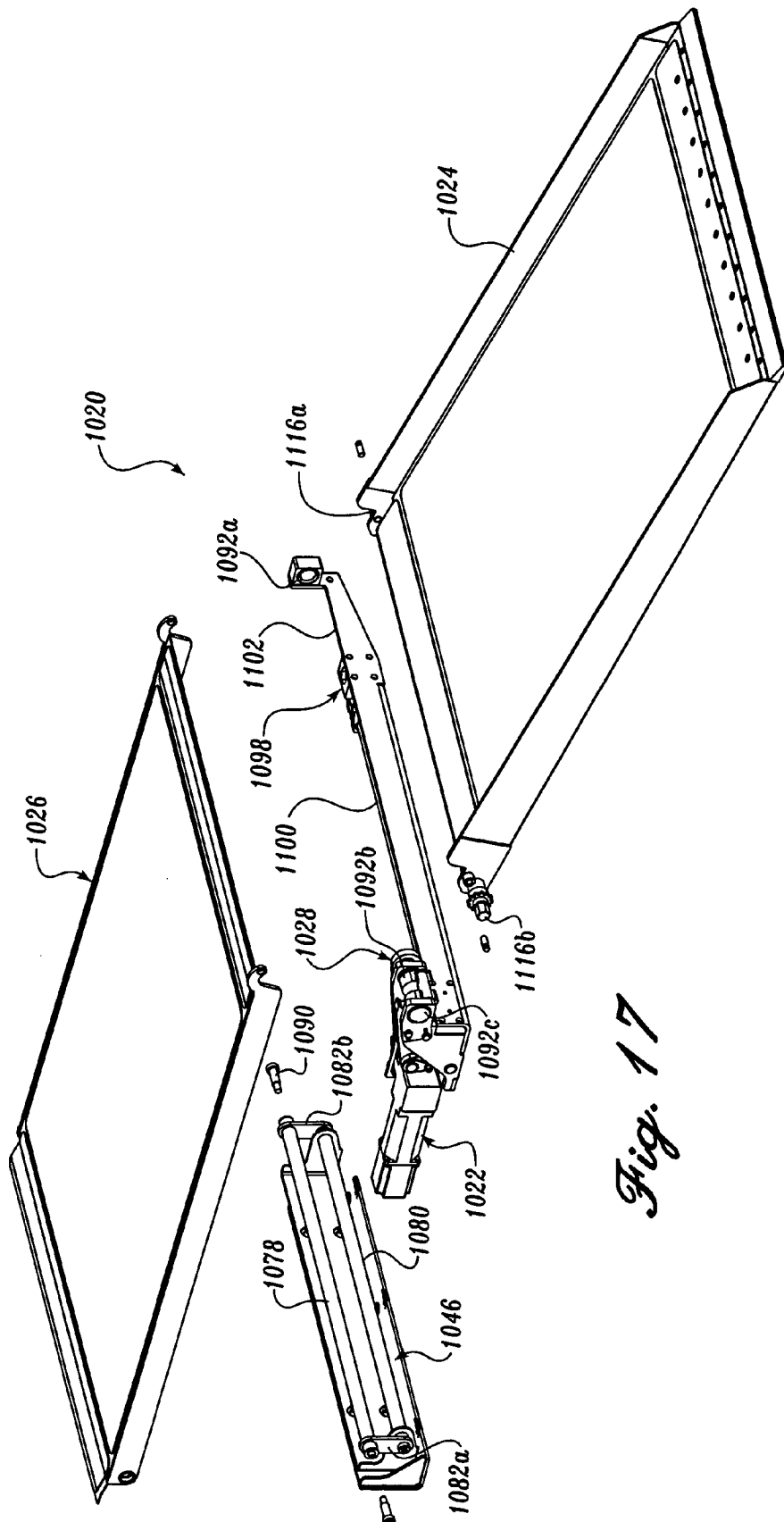


Fig. 17

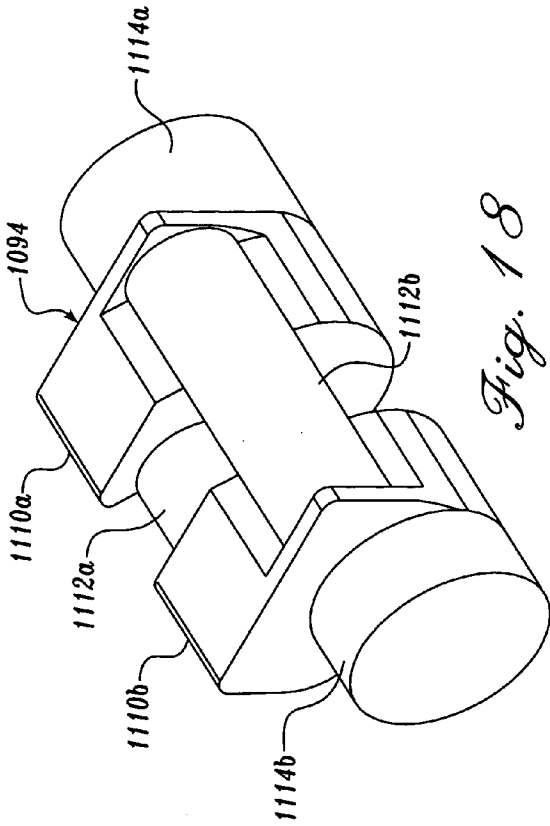


Fig. 18

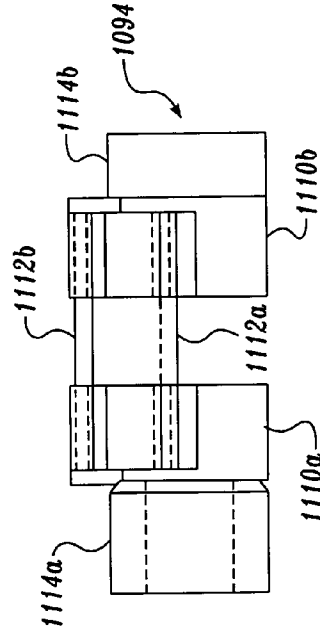


Fig. 21

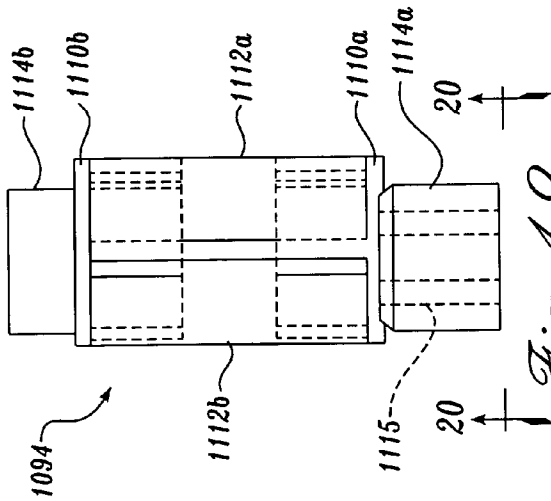


Fig. 19

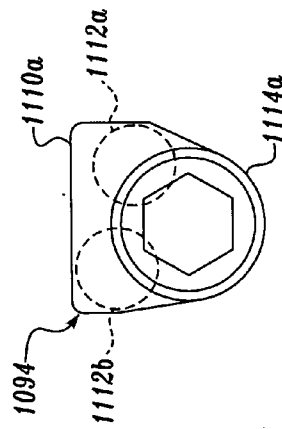


Fig. 20

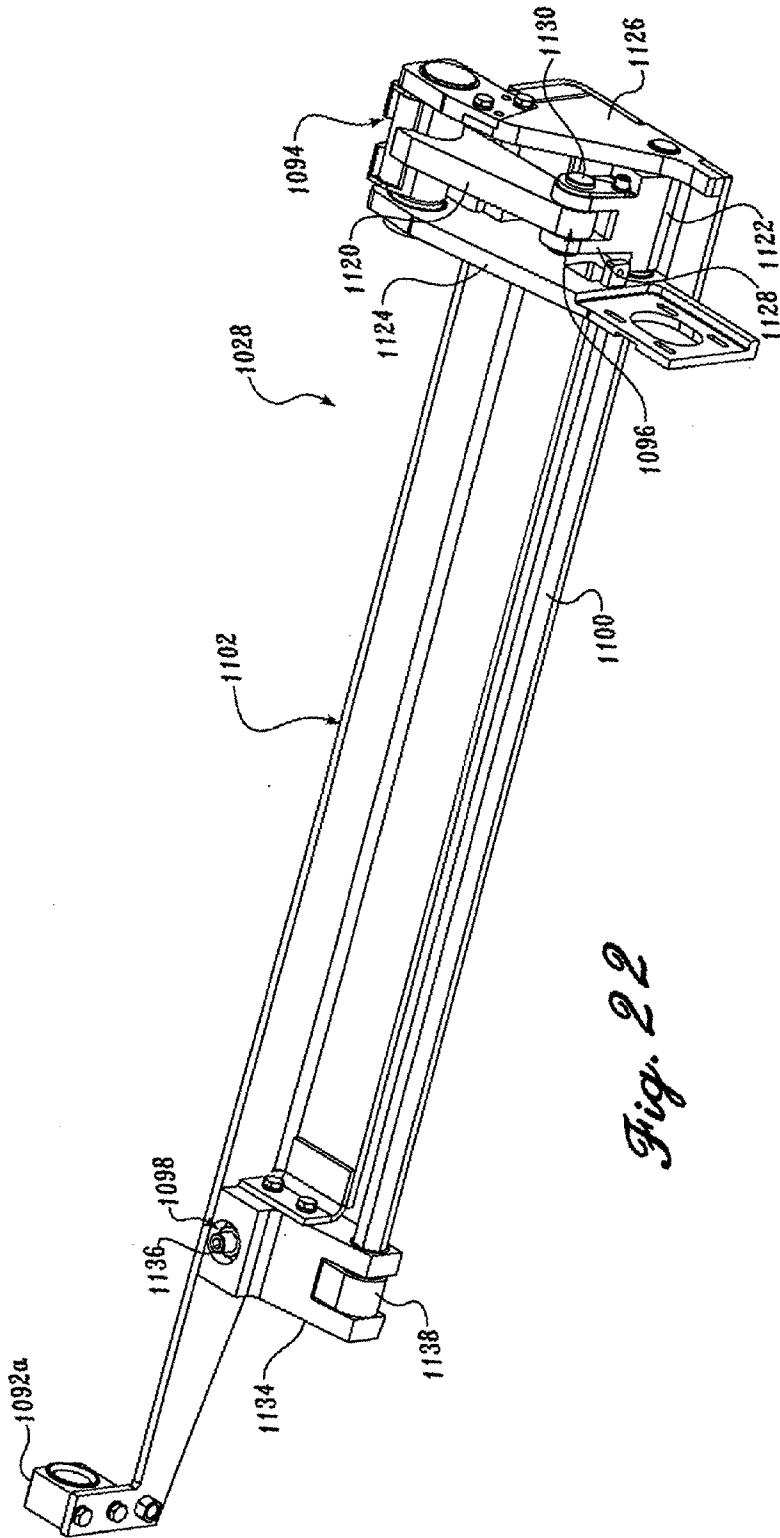


Fig. 22

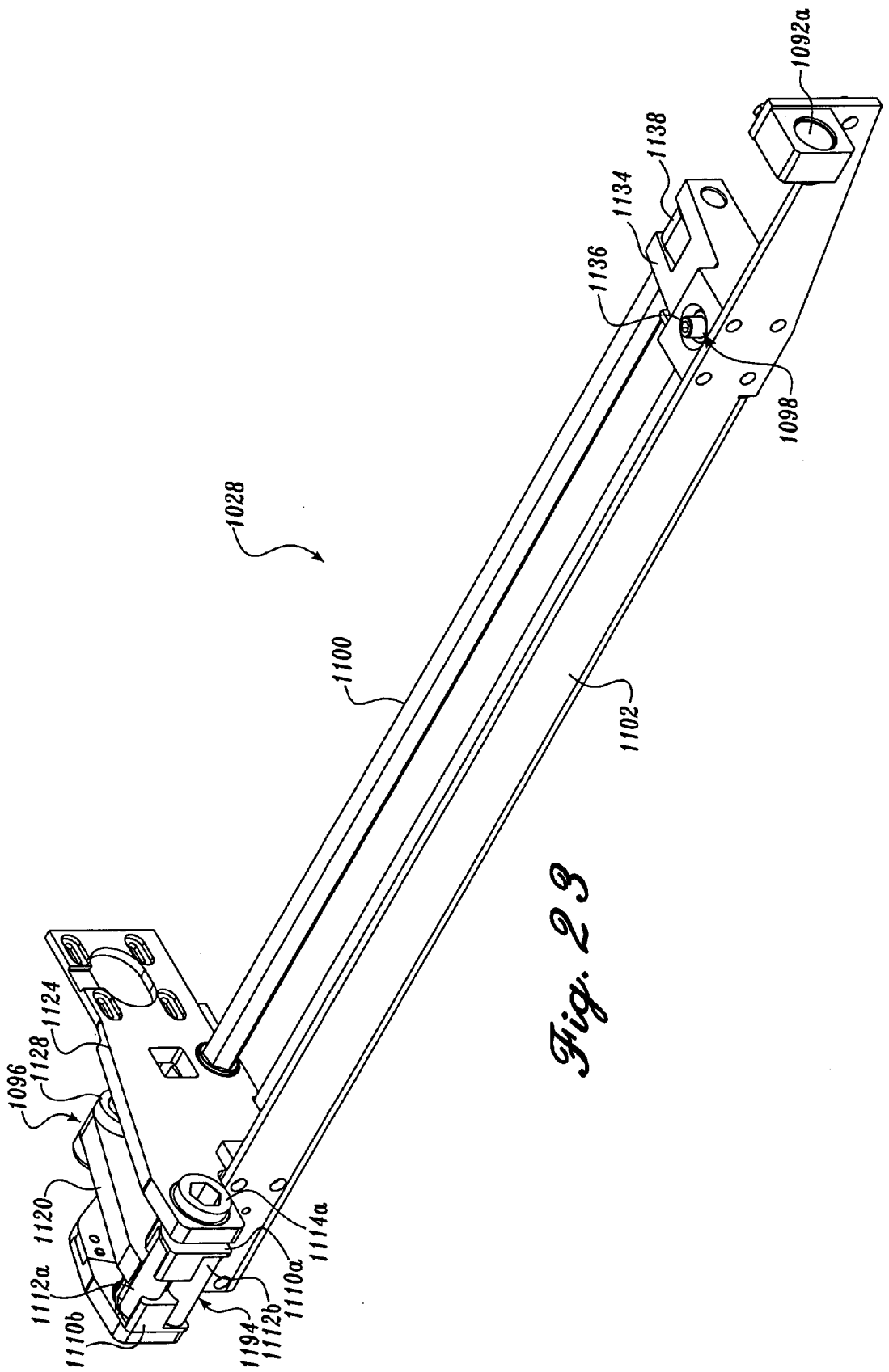


Fig. 23

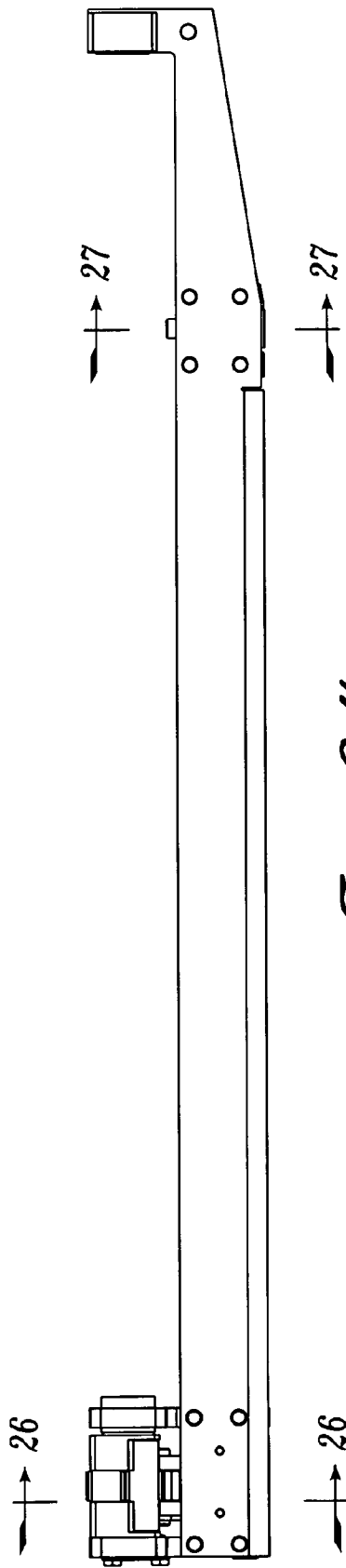


Fig. 24

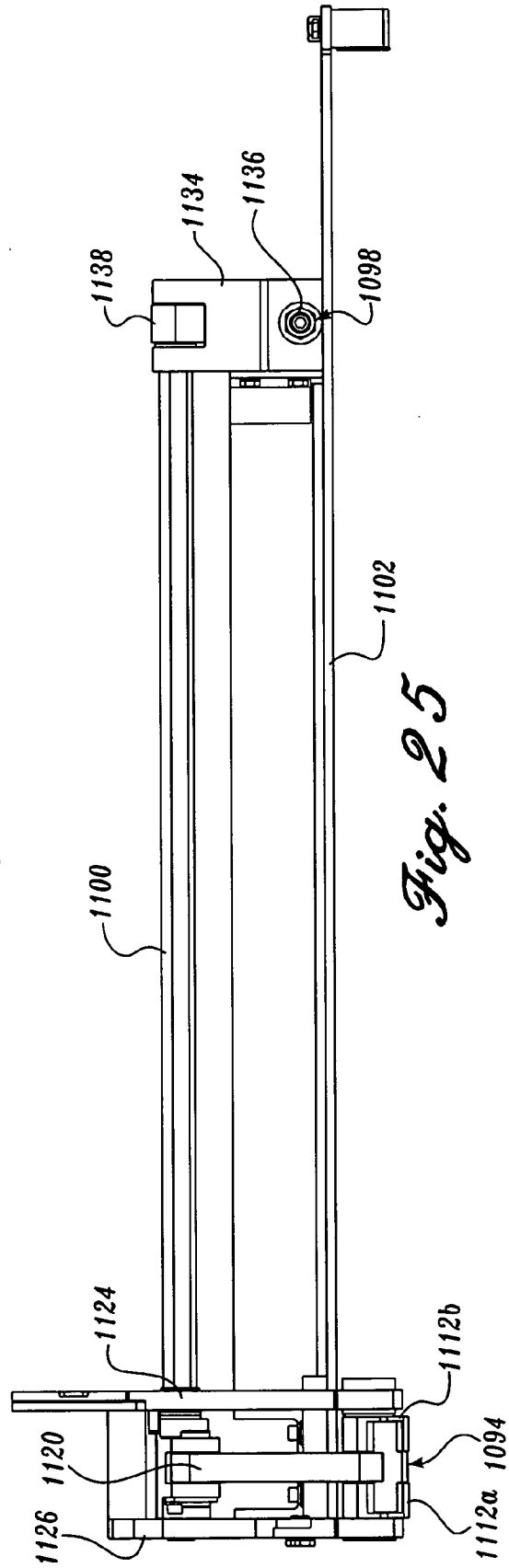


Fig. 25

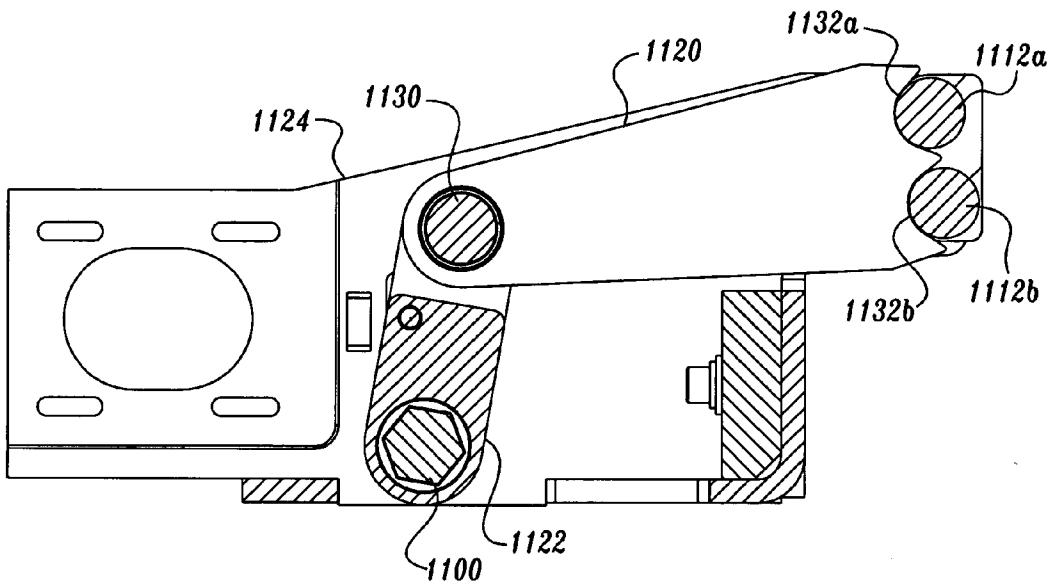


Fig. 26

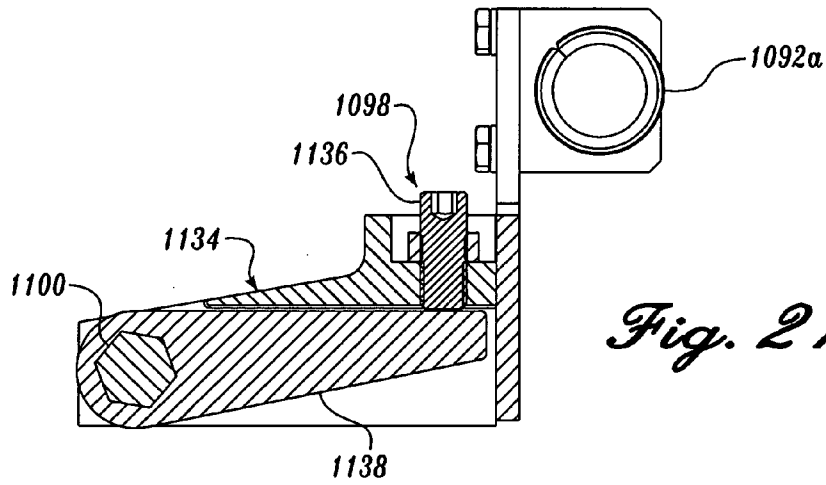


Fig. 27

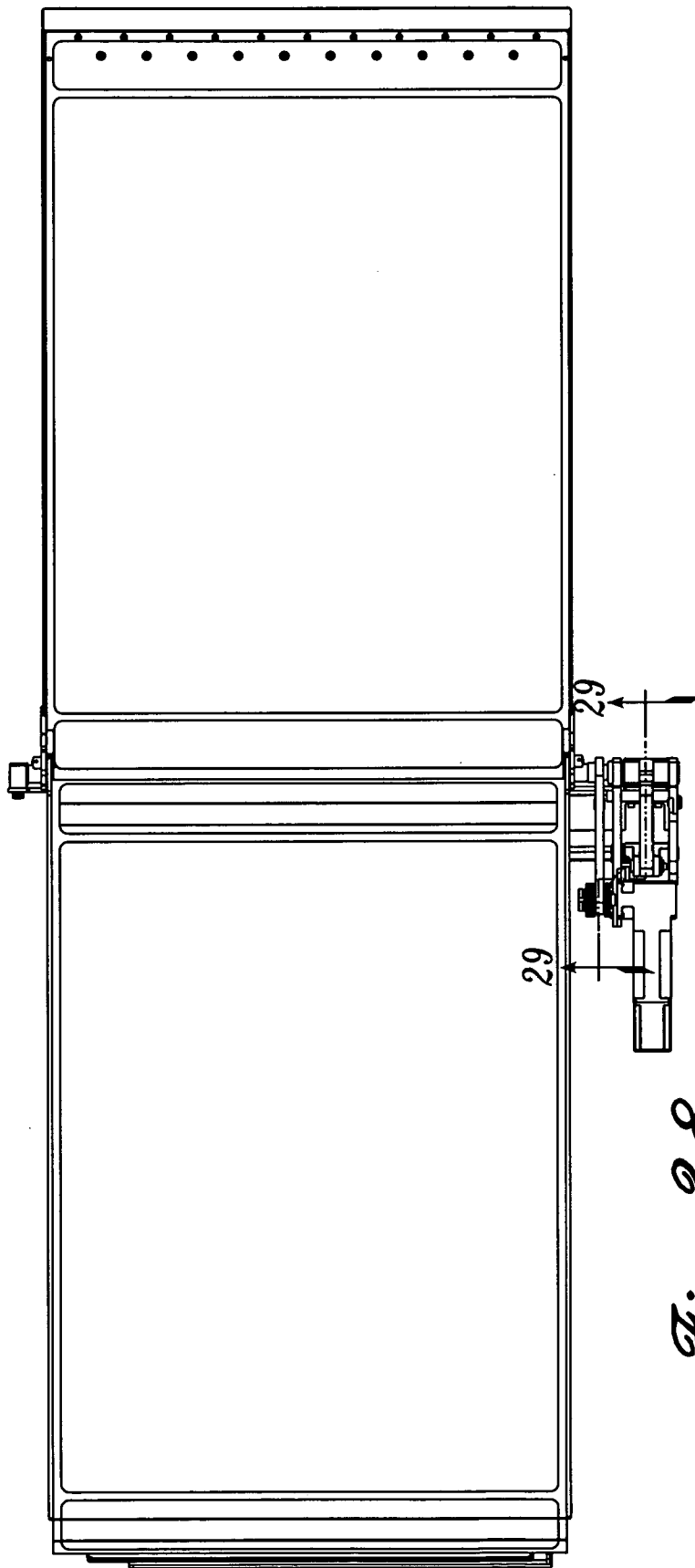


Fig. 28

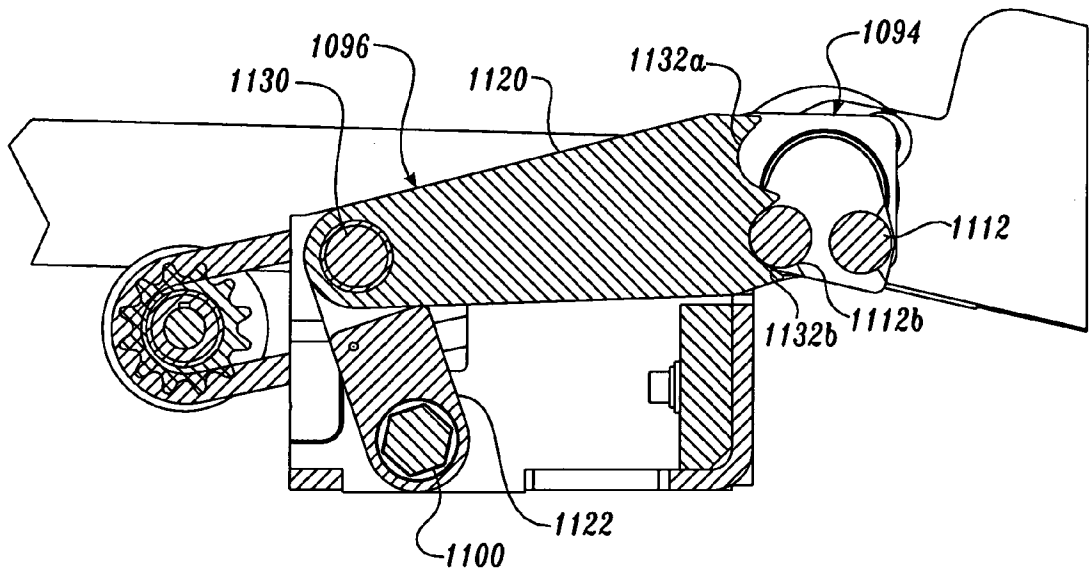


Fig. 29

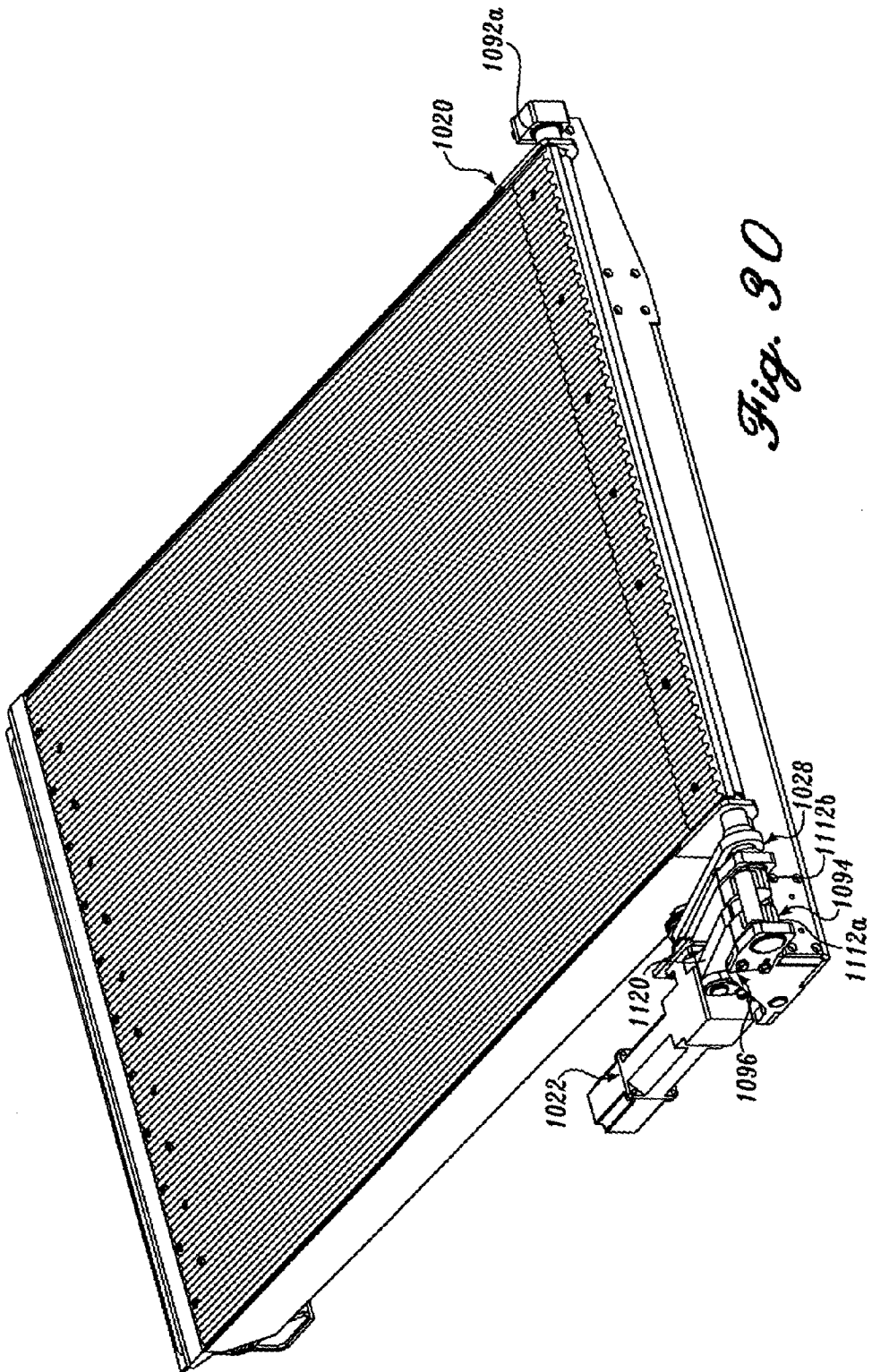


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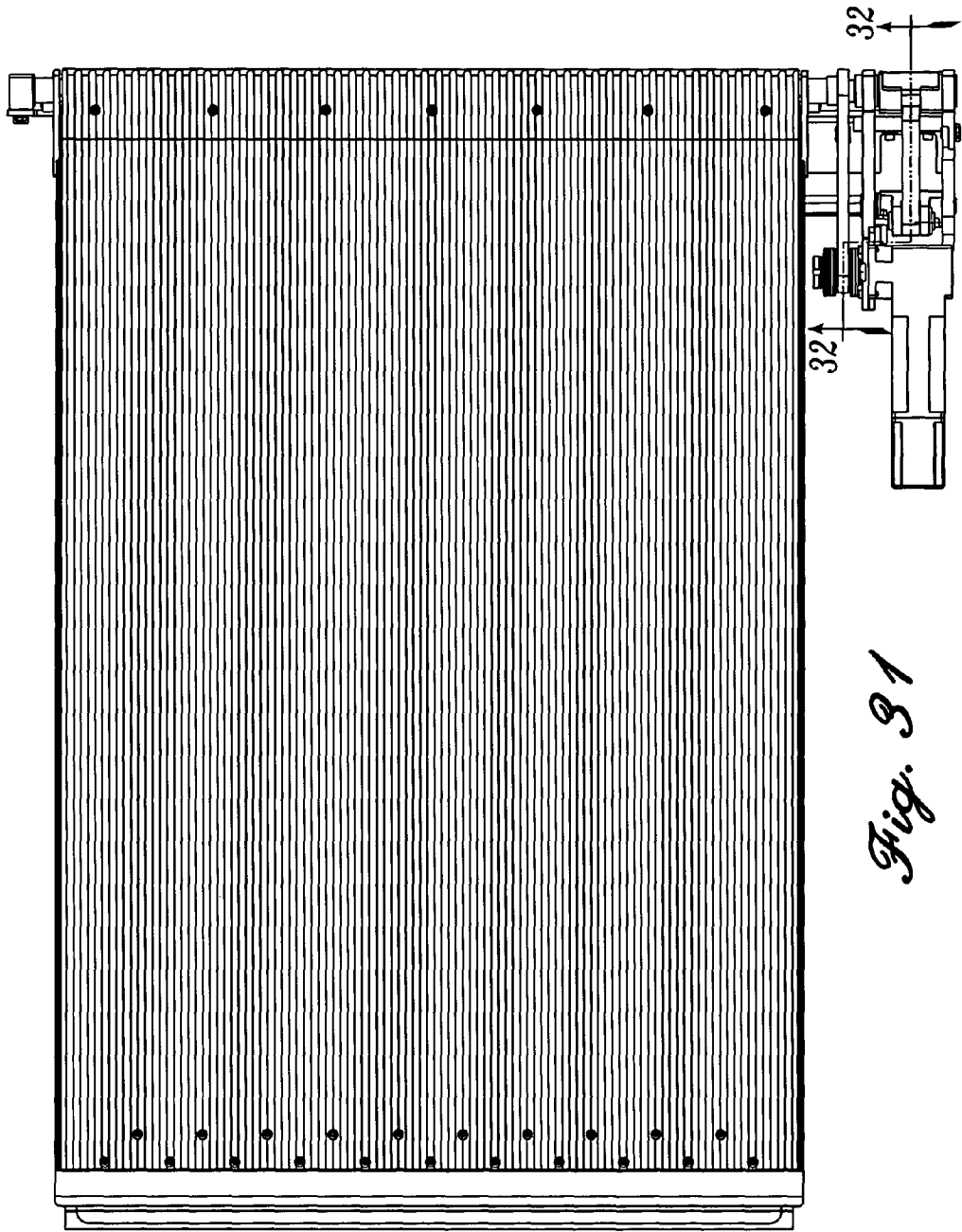


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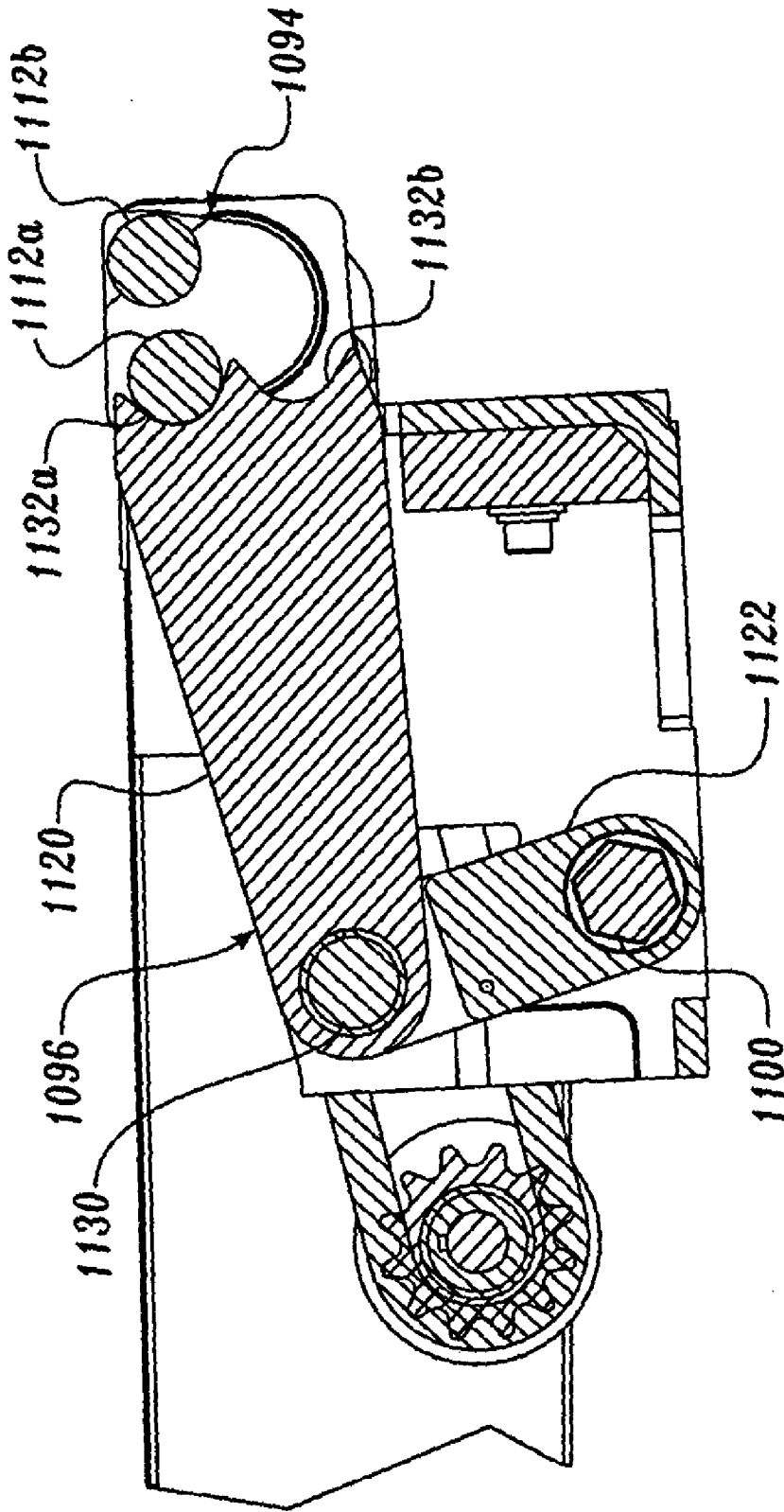


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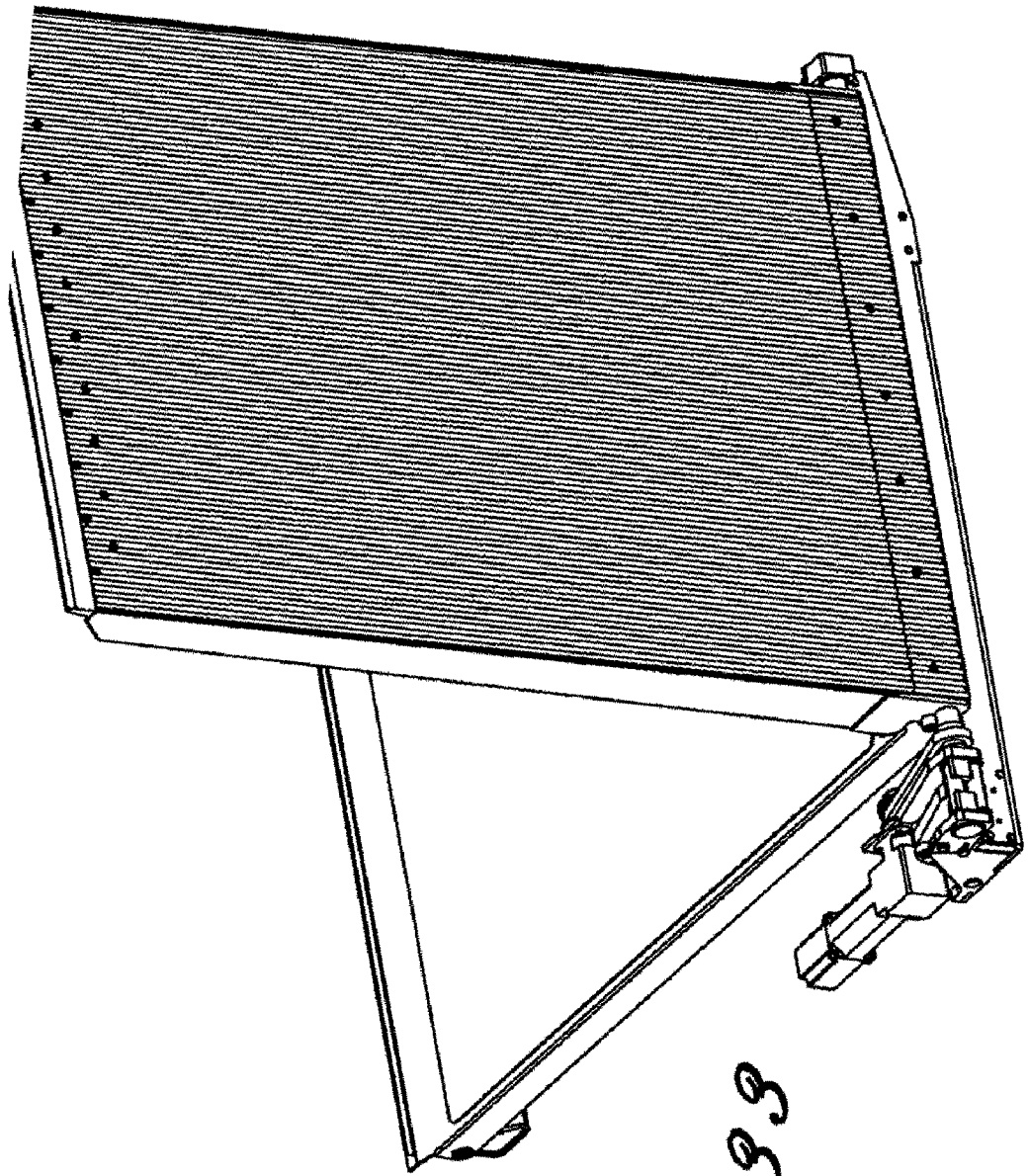


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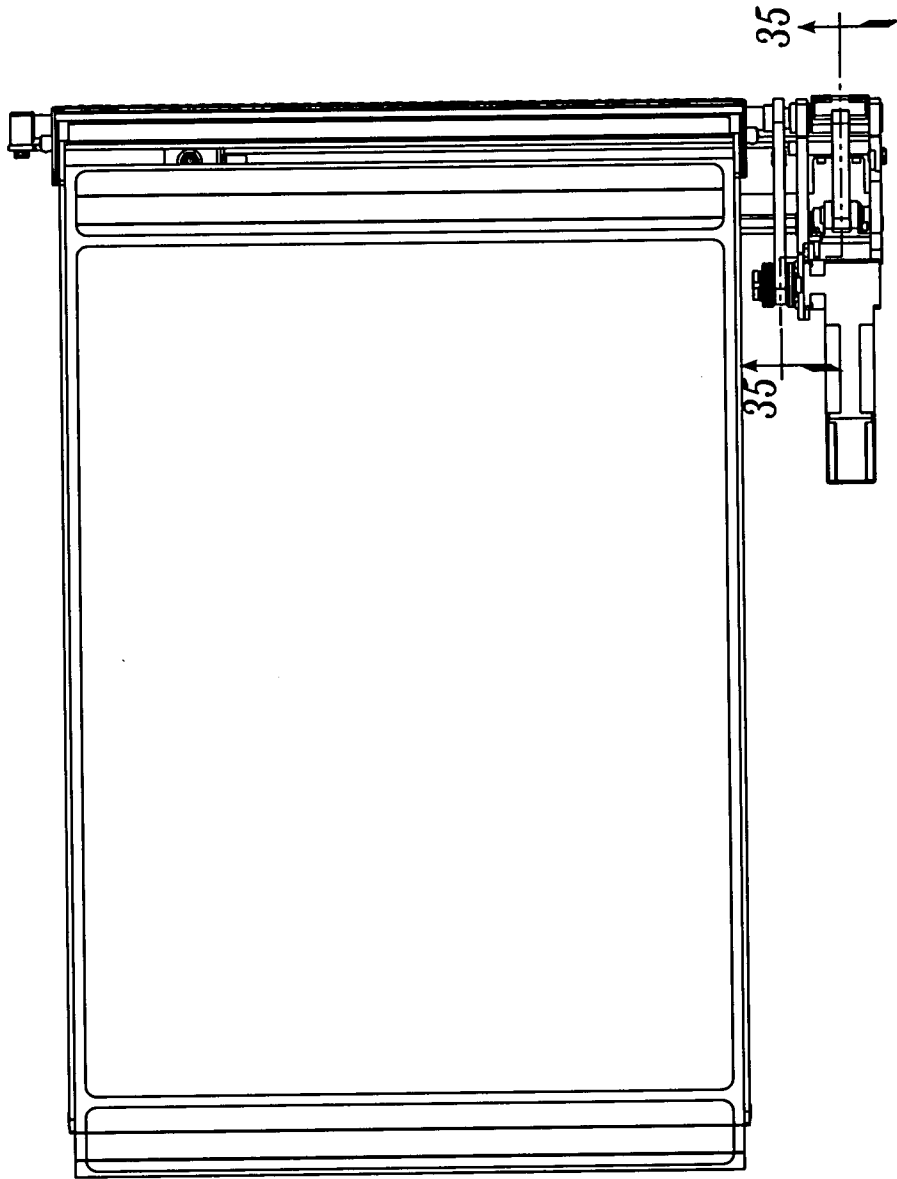


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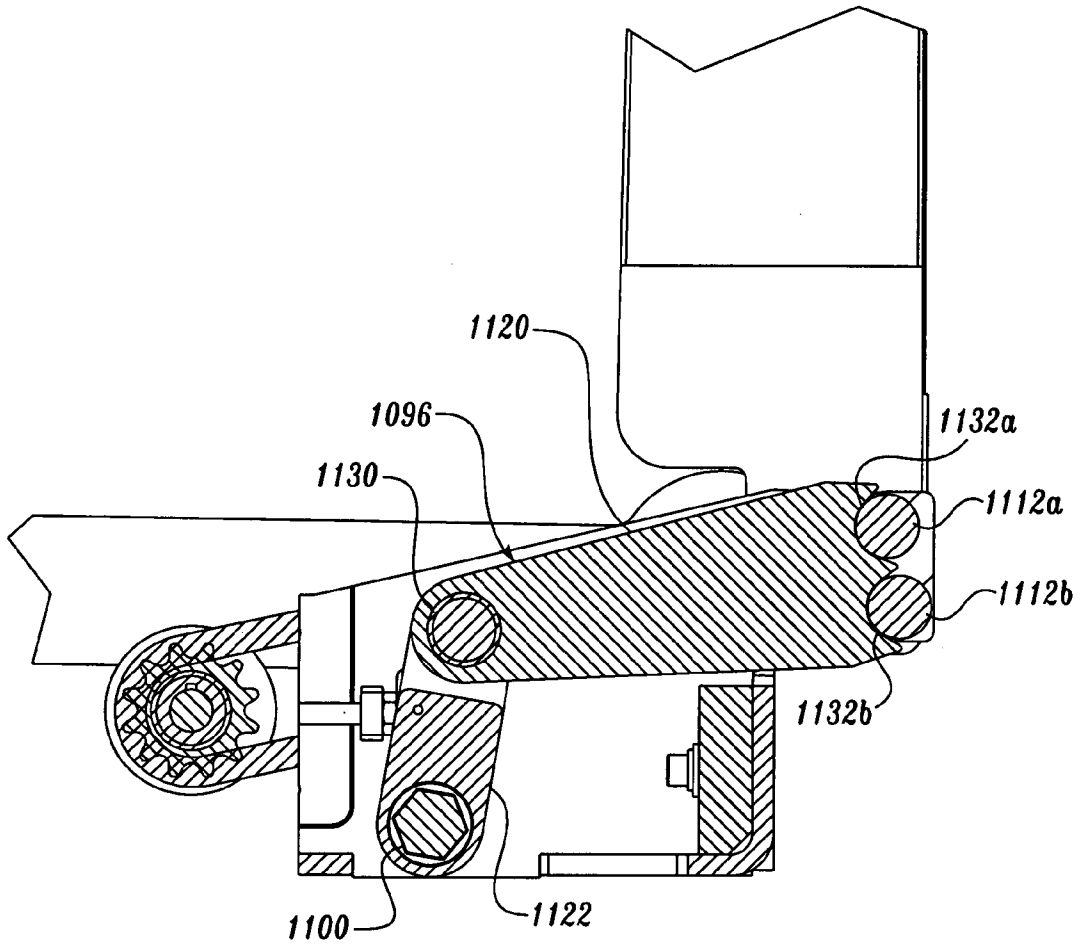
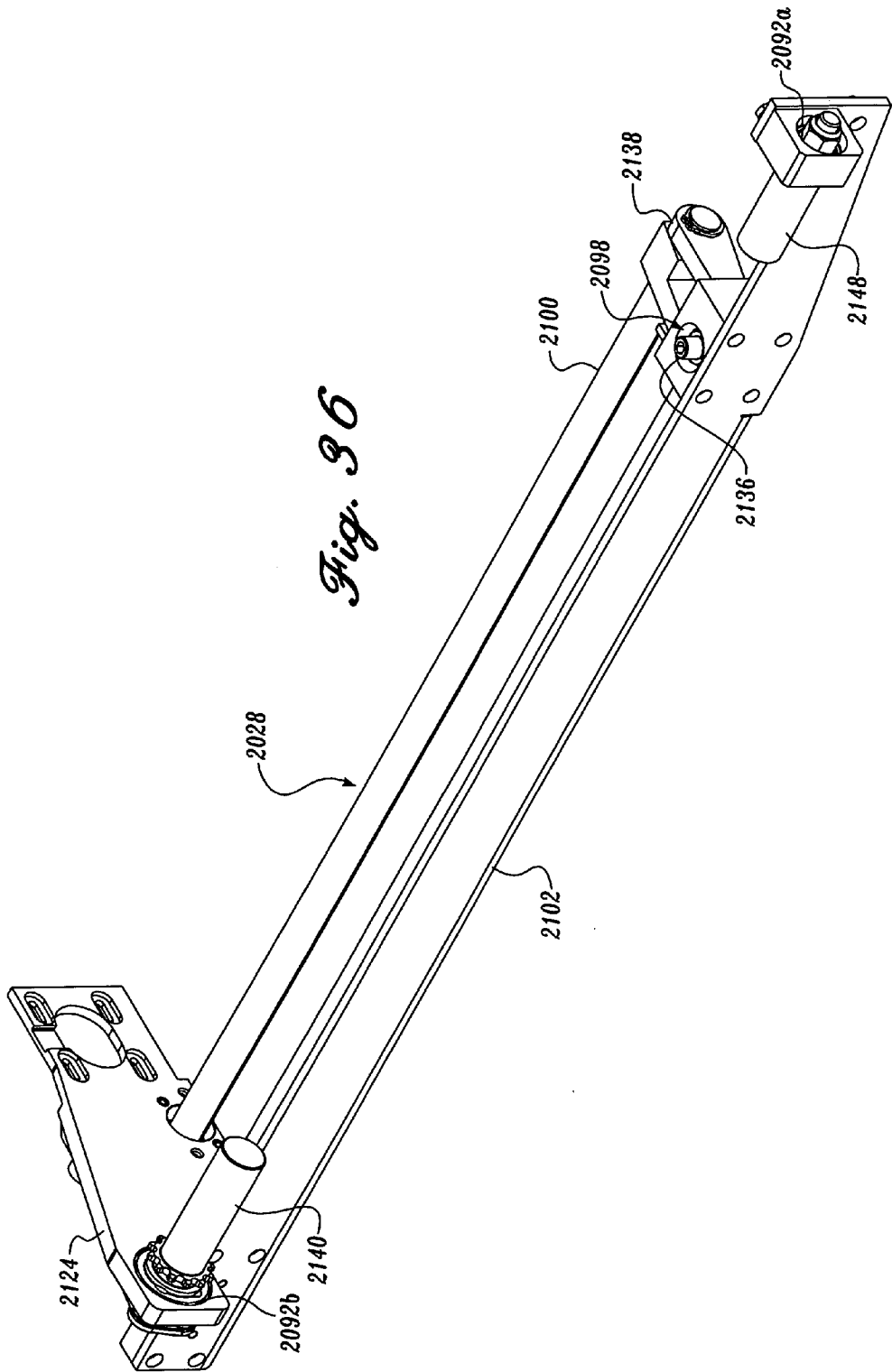


Fig. 35



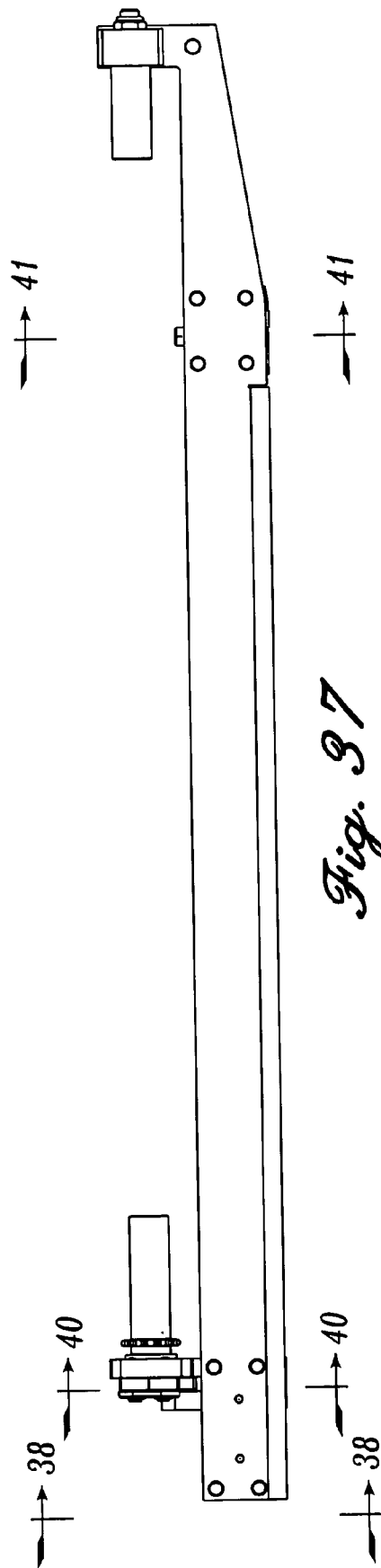


Fig. 37

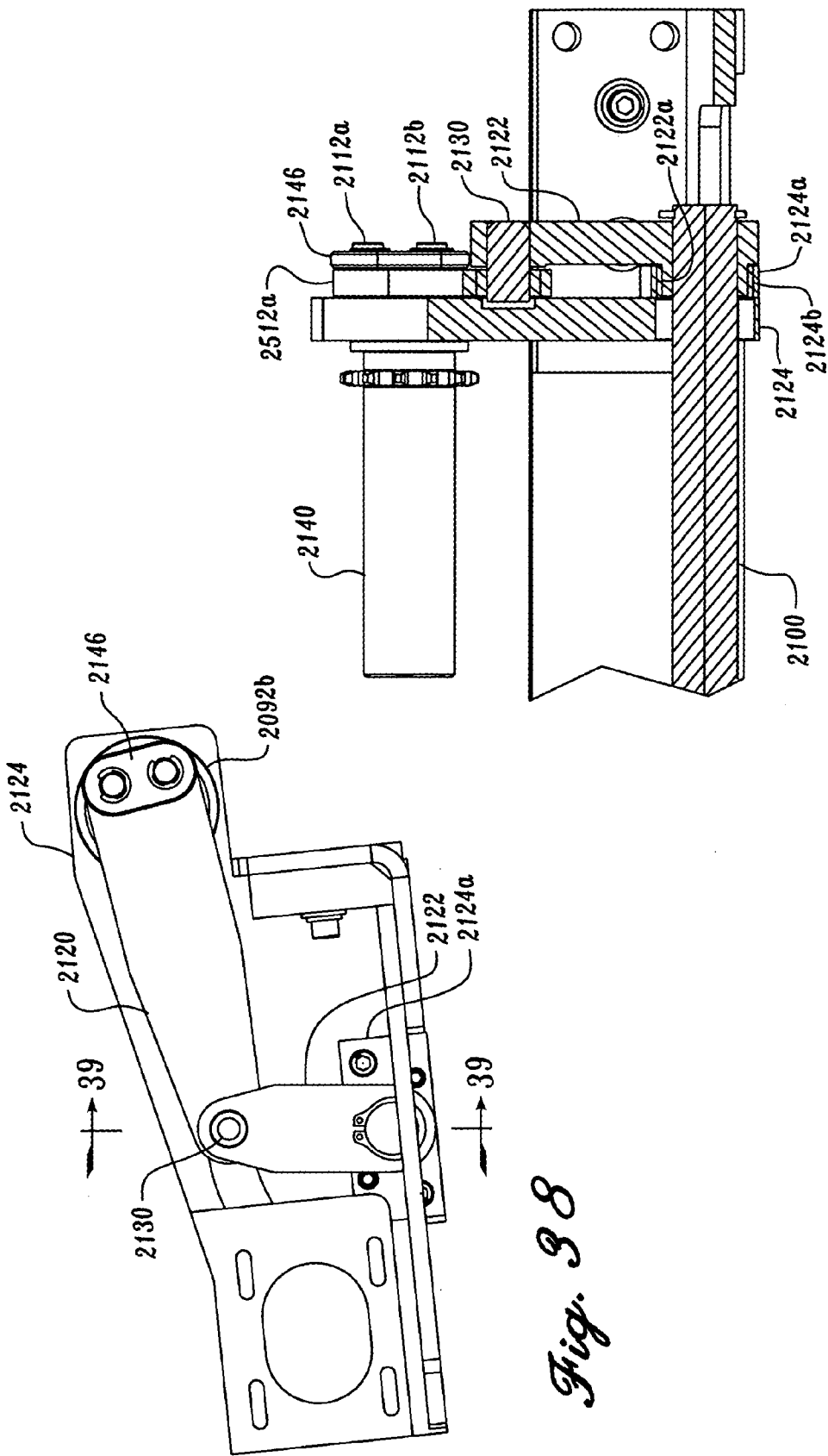


Fig. 38

Fig. 39

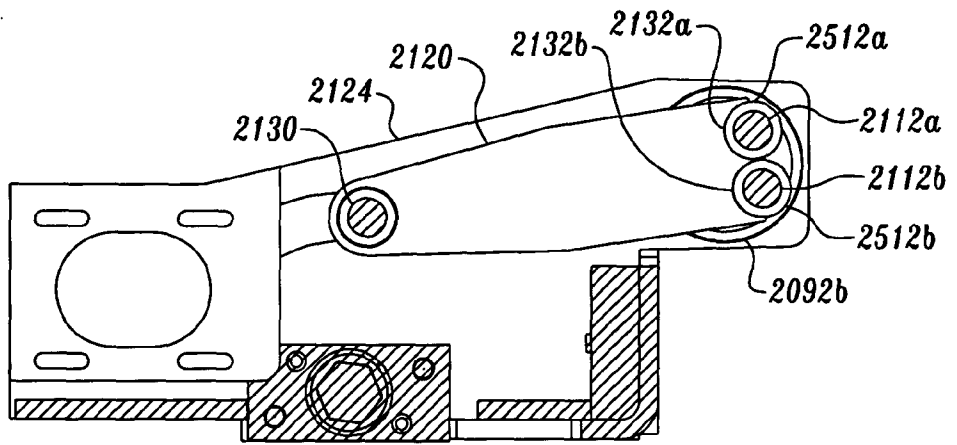


Fig. 40

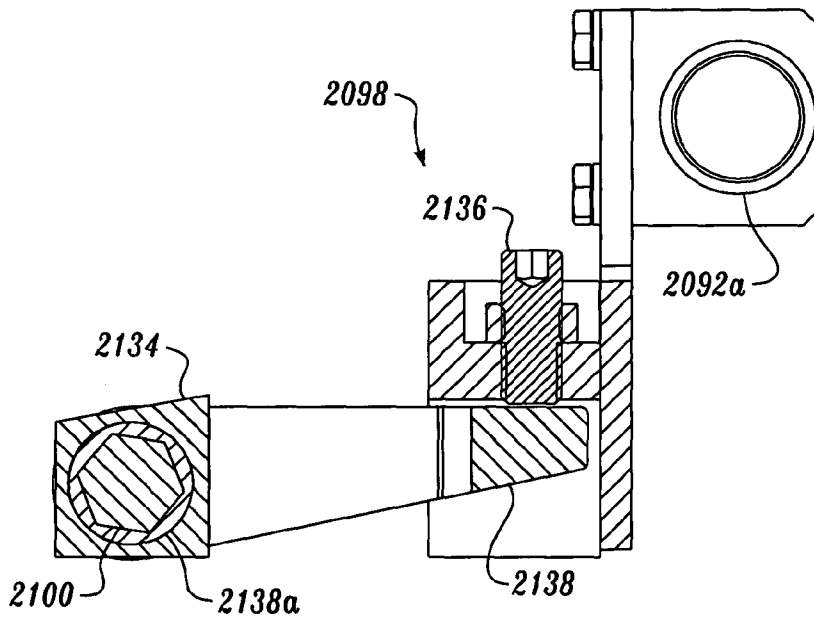


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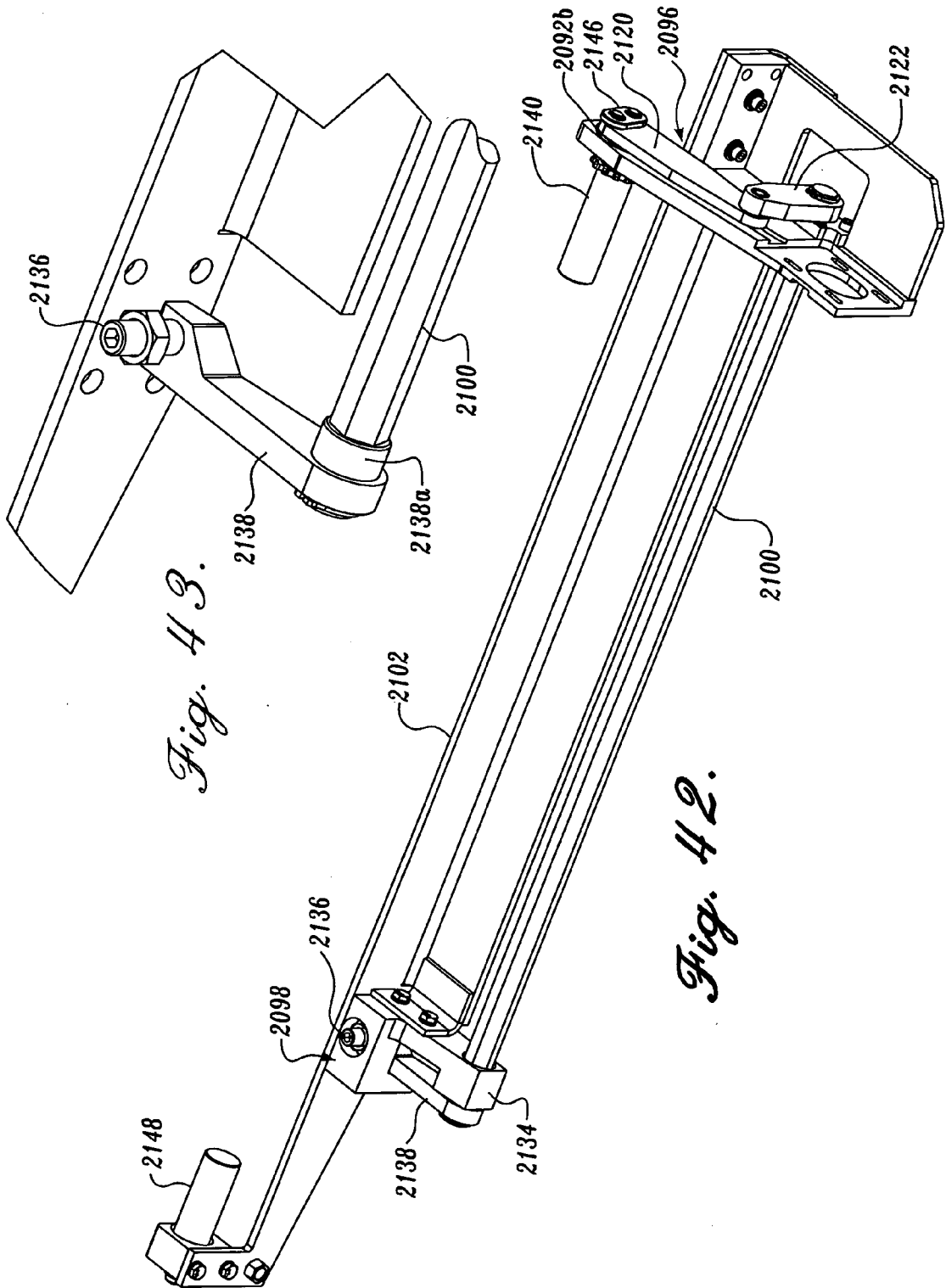
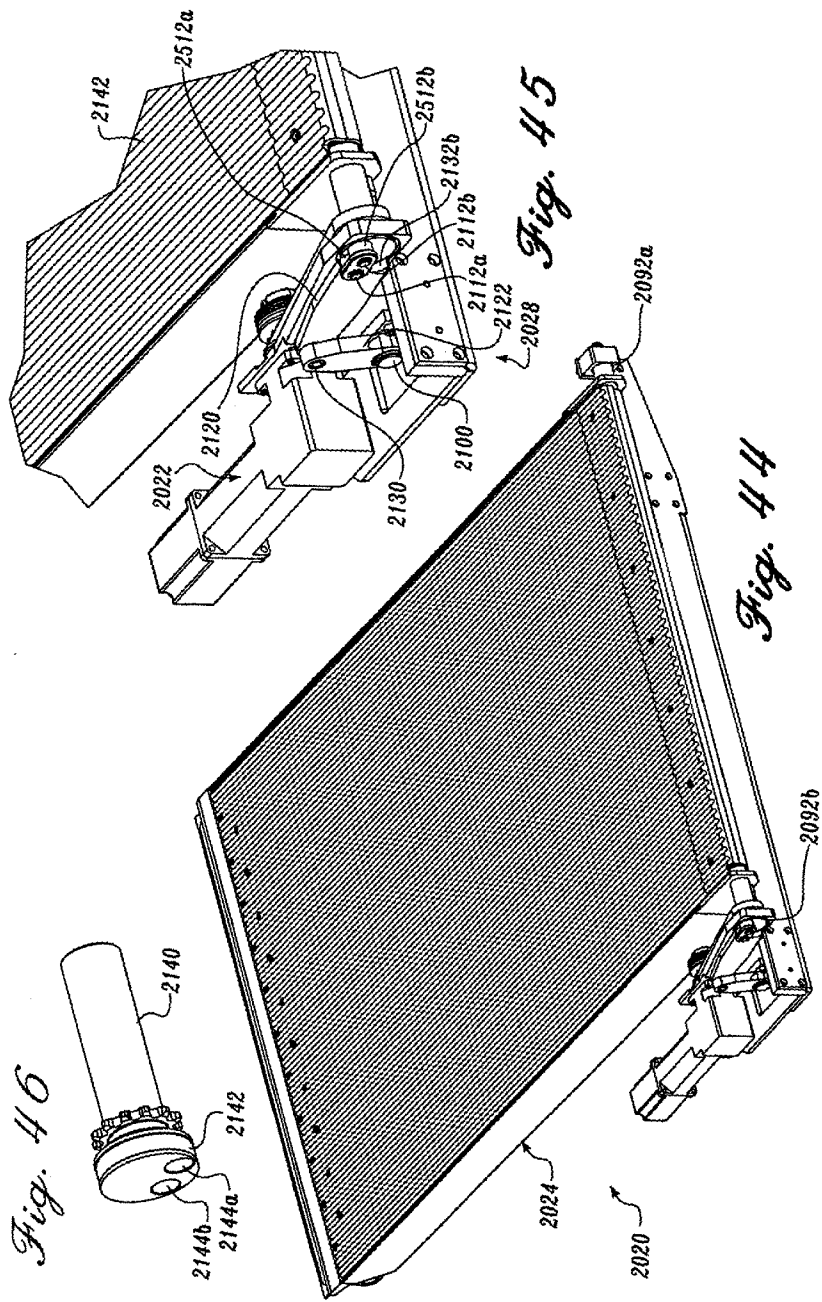


Fig. 43.

Fig. 42.



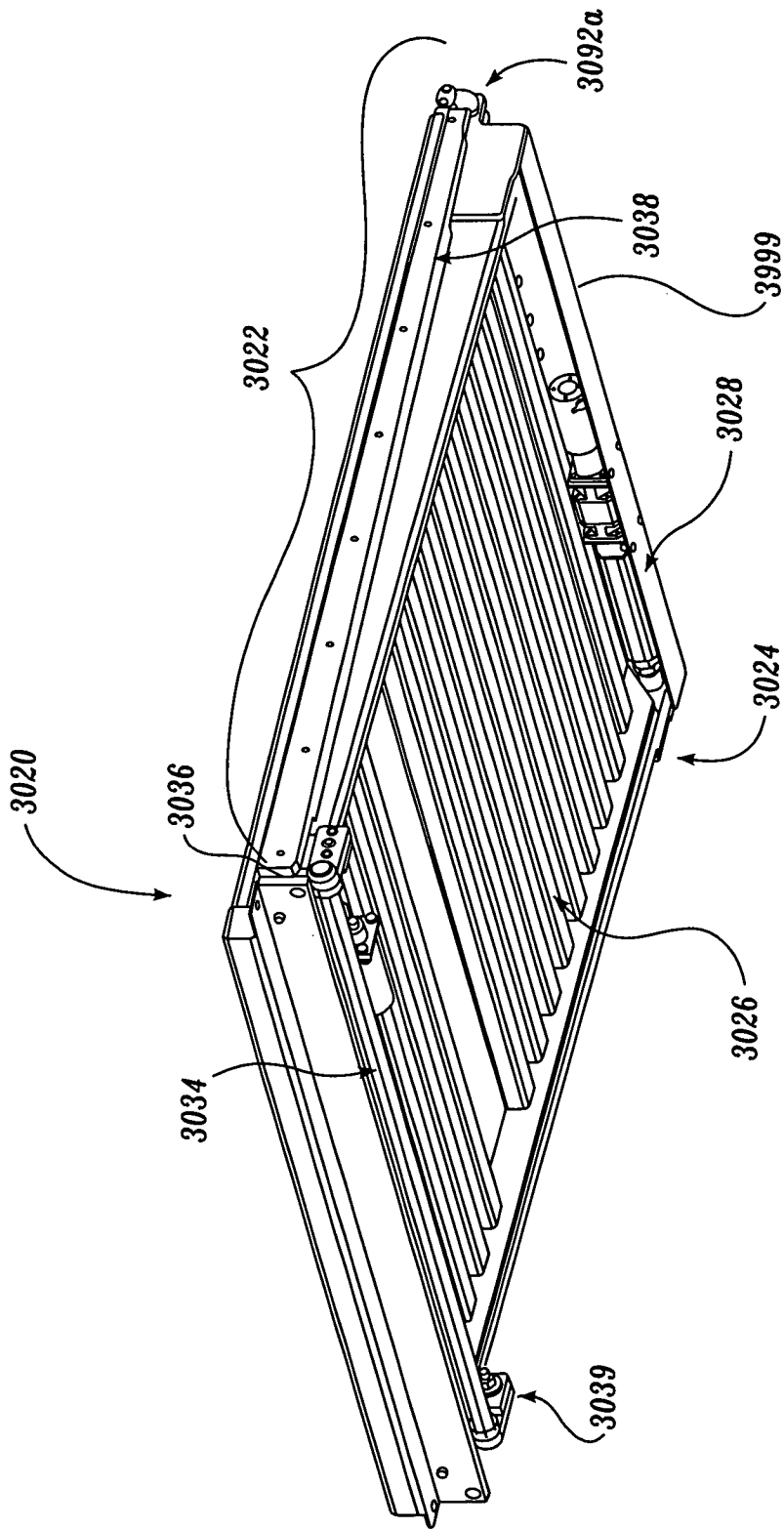
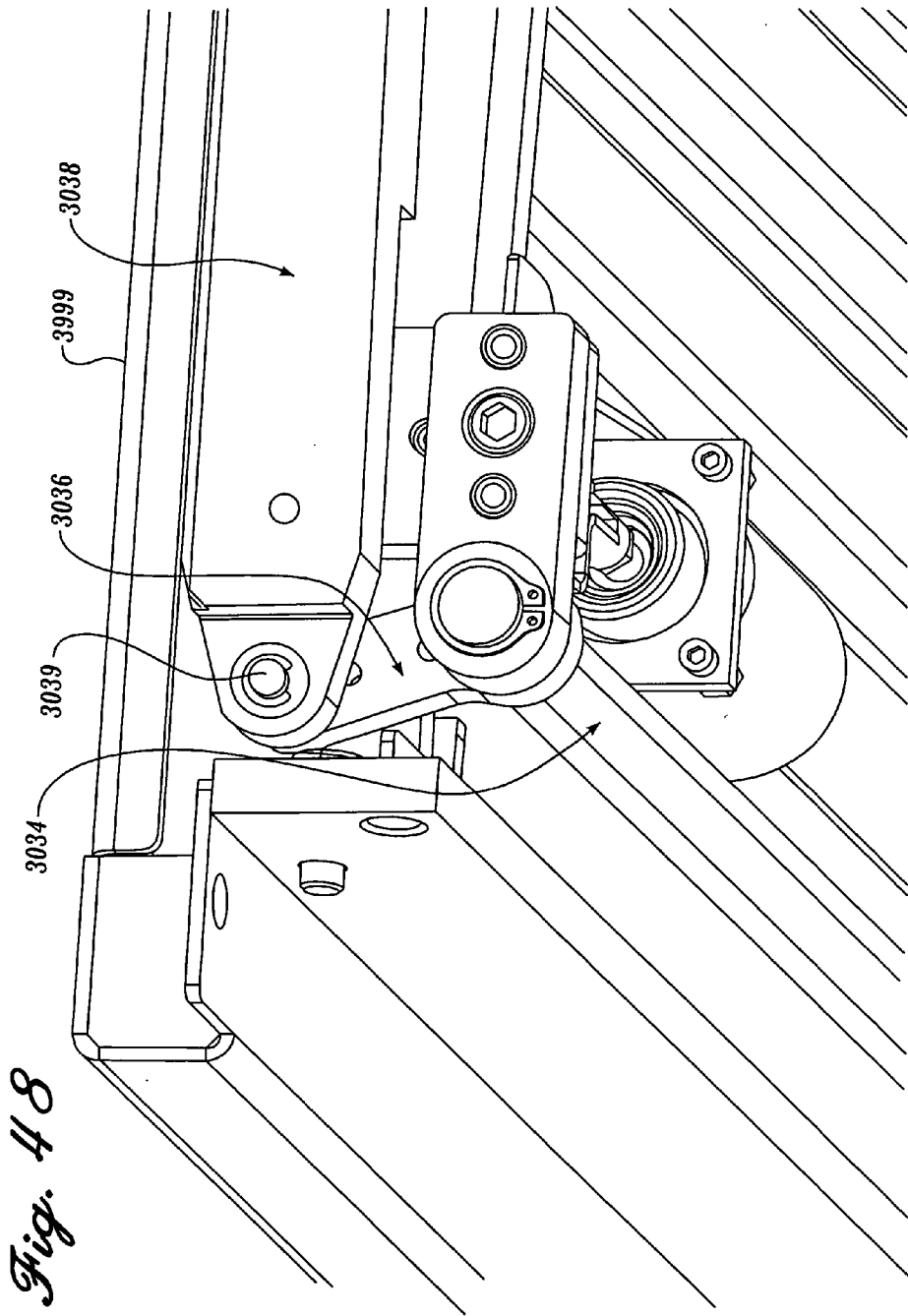
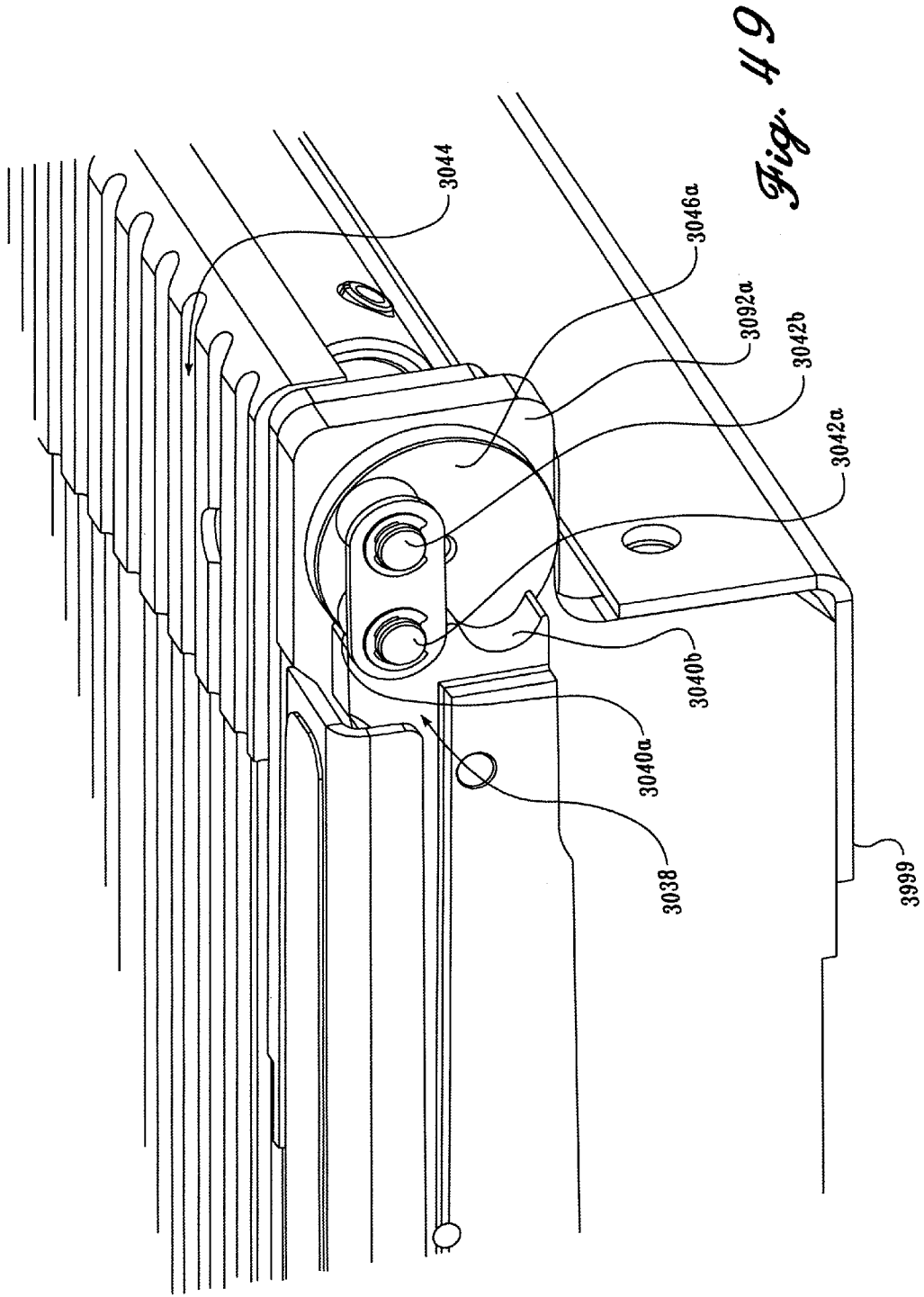
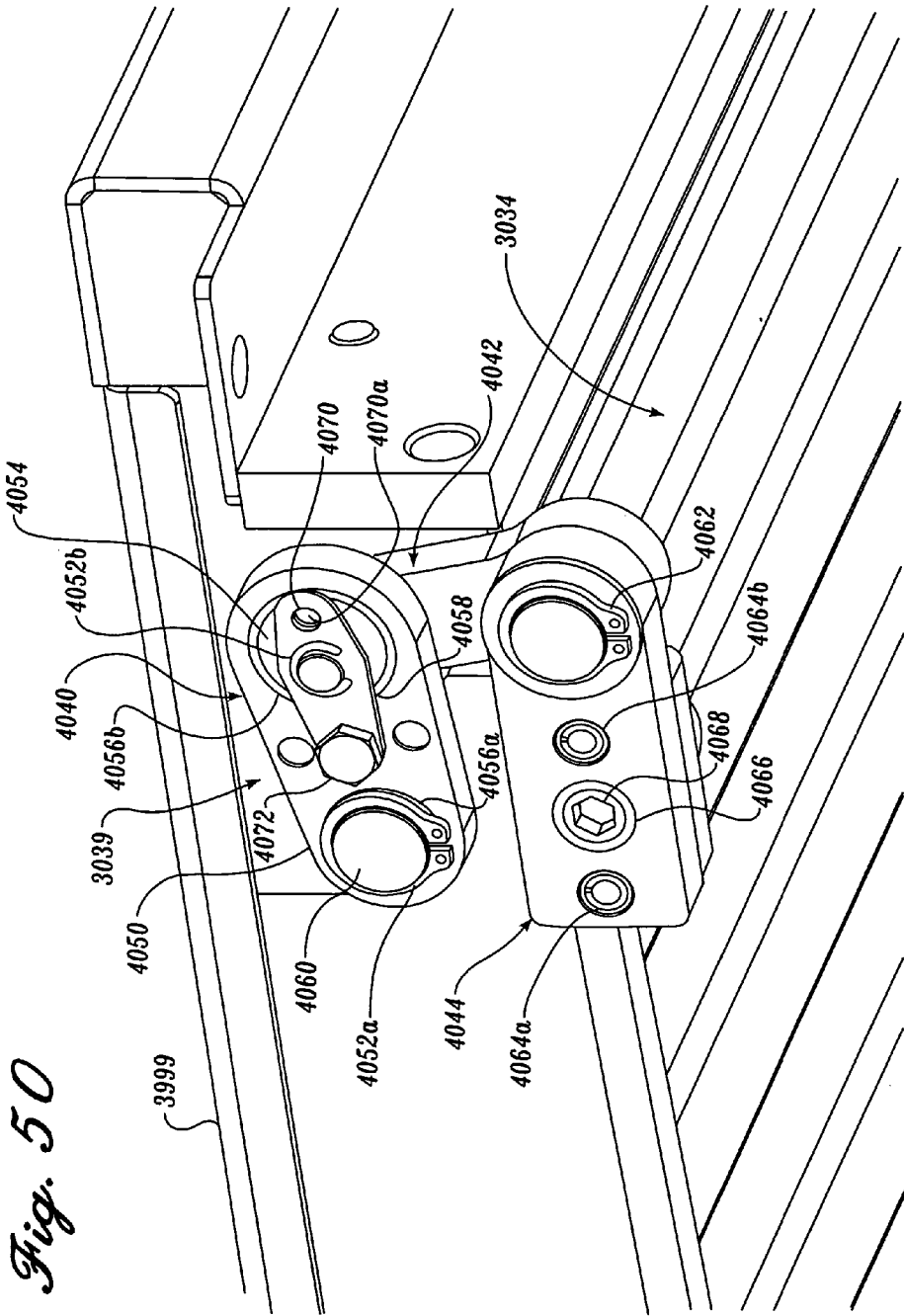
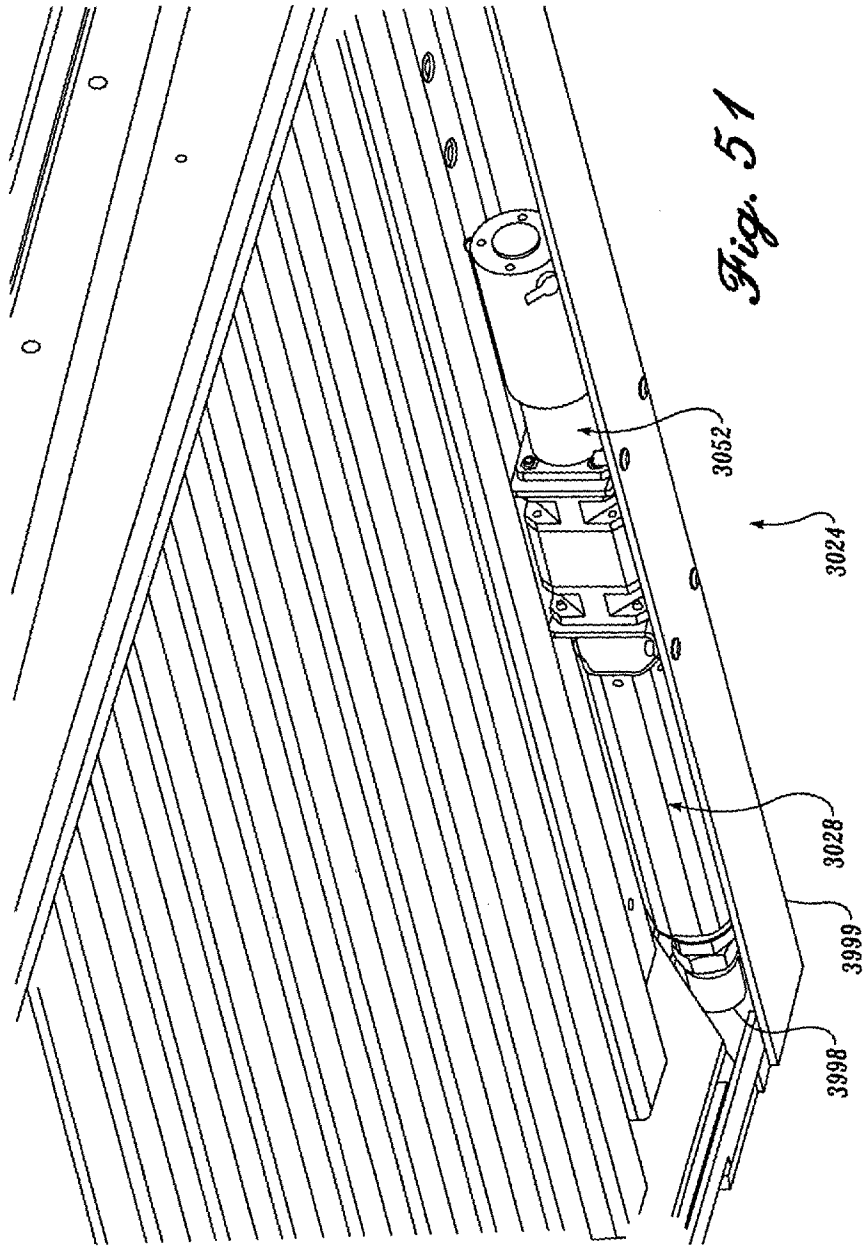


Fig. 47









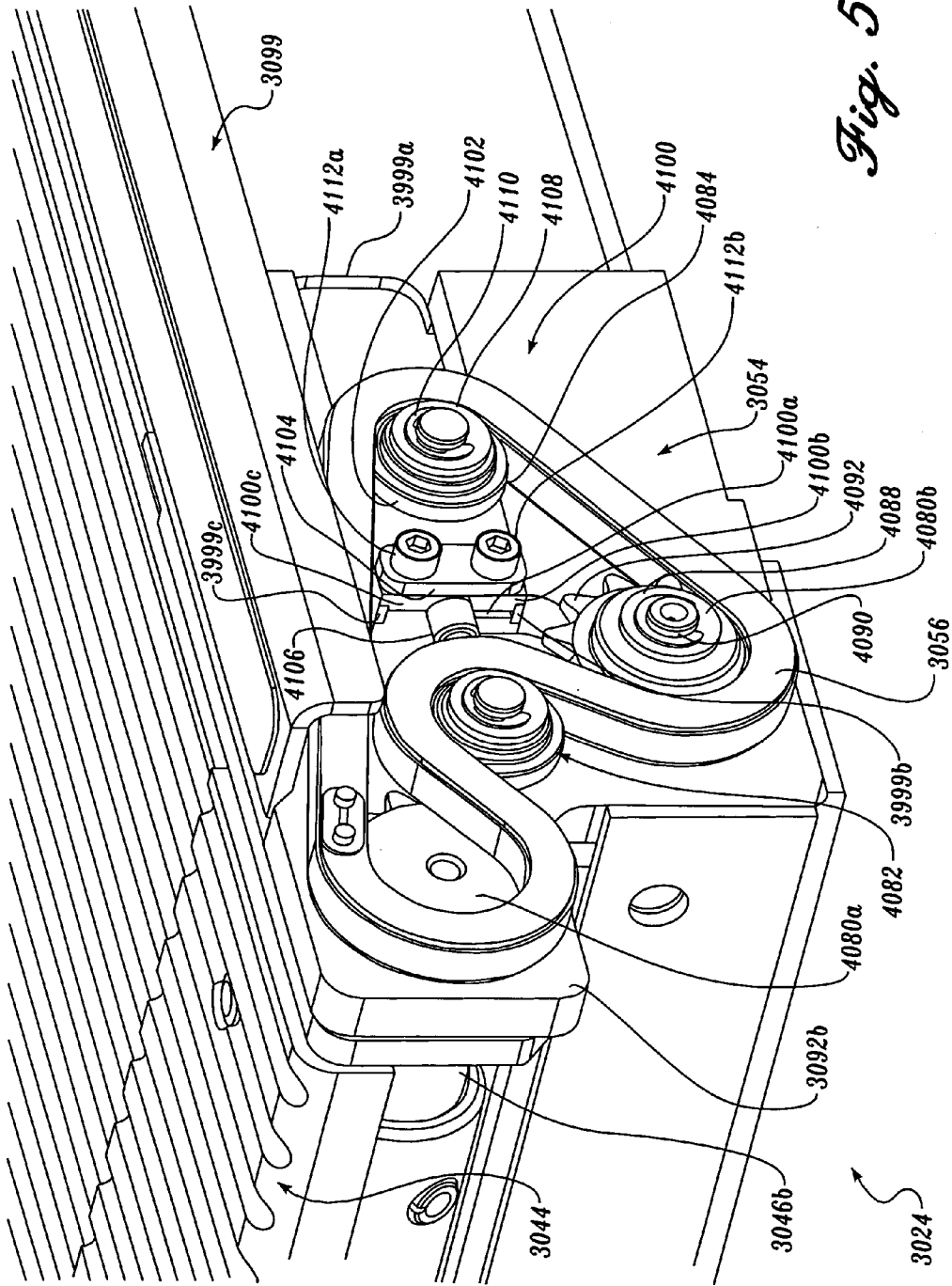


Fig. 52

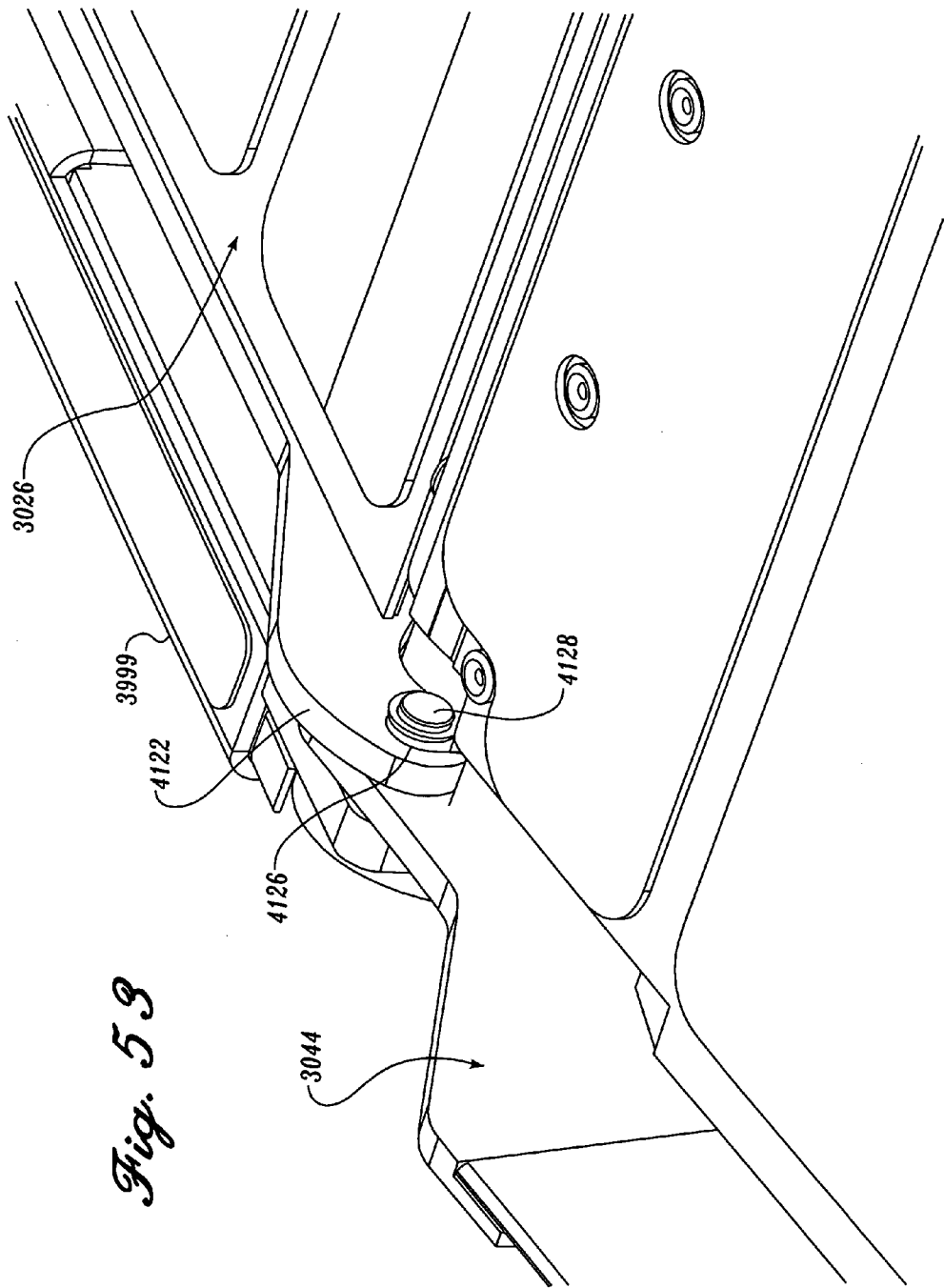


Fig. 53

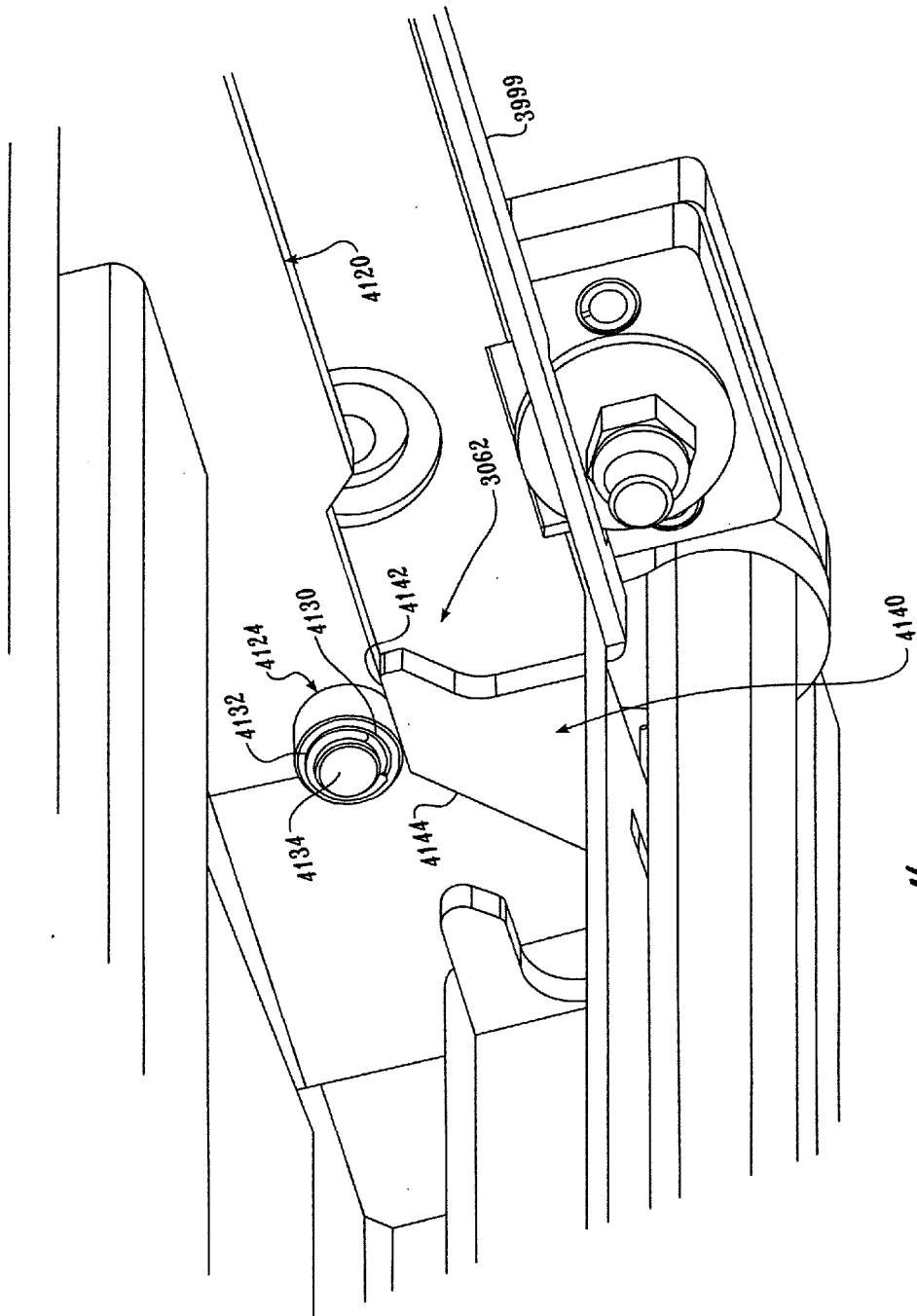


Fig. 54

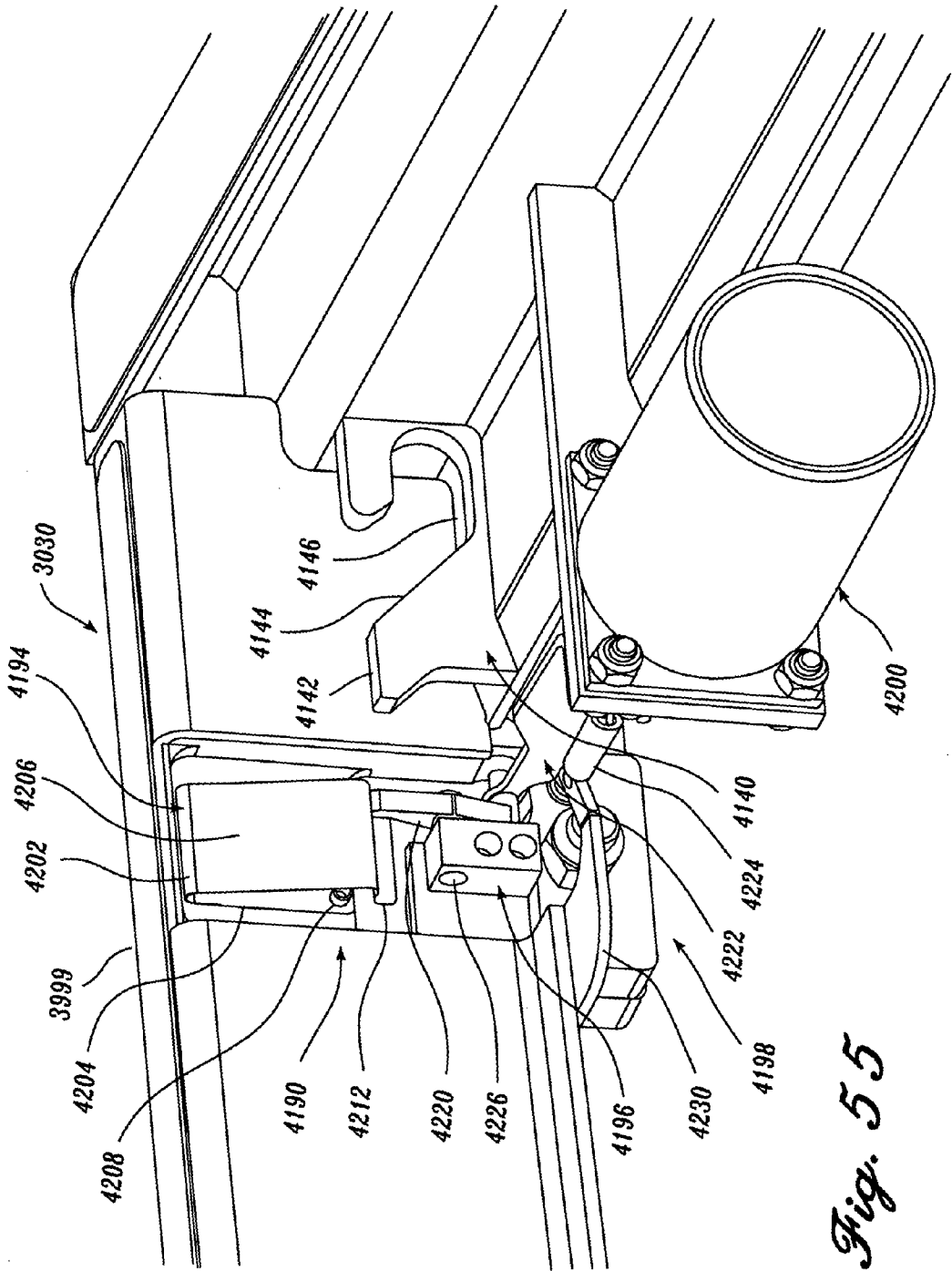


Fig. 55

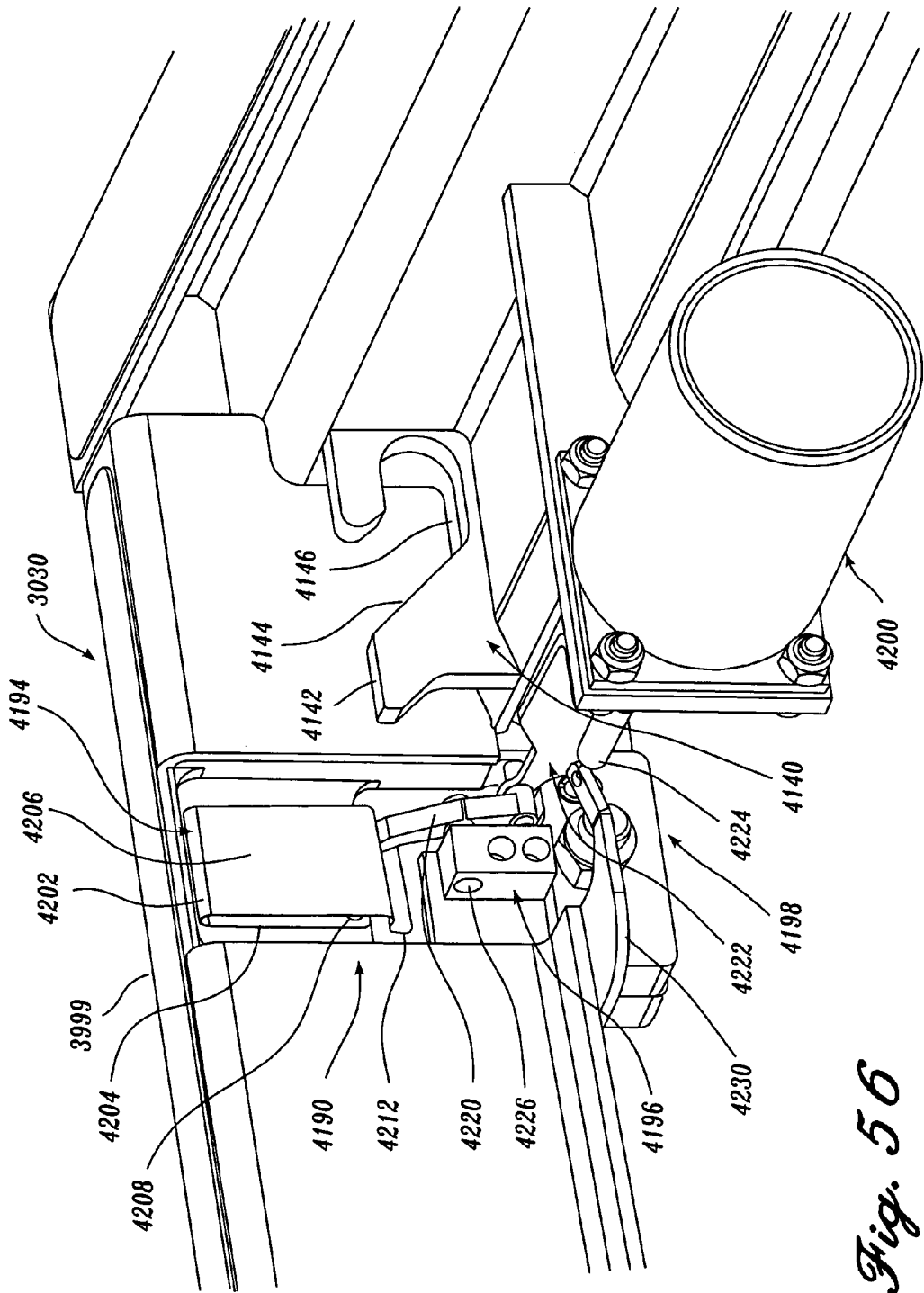


Fig. 56

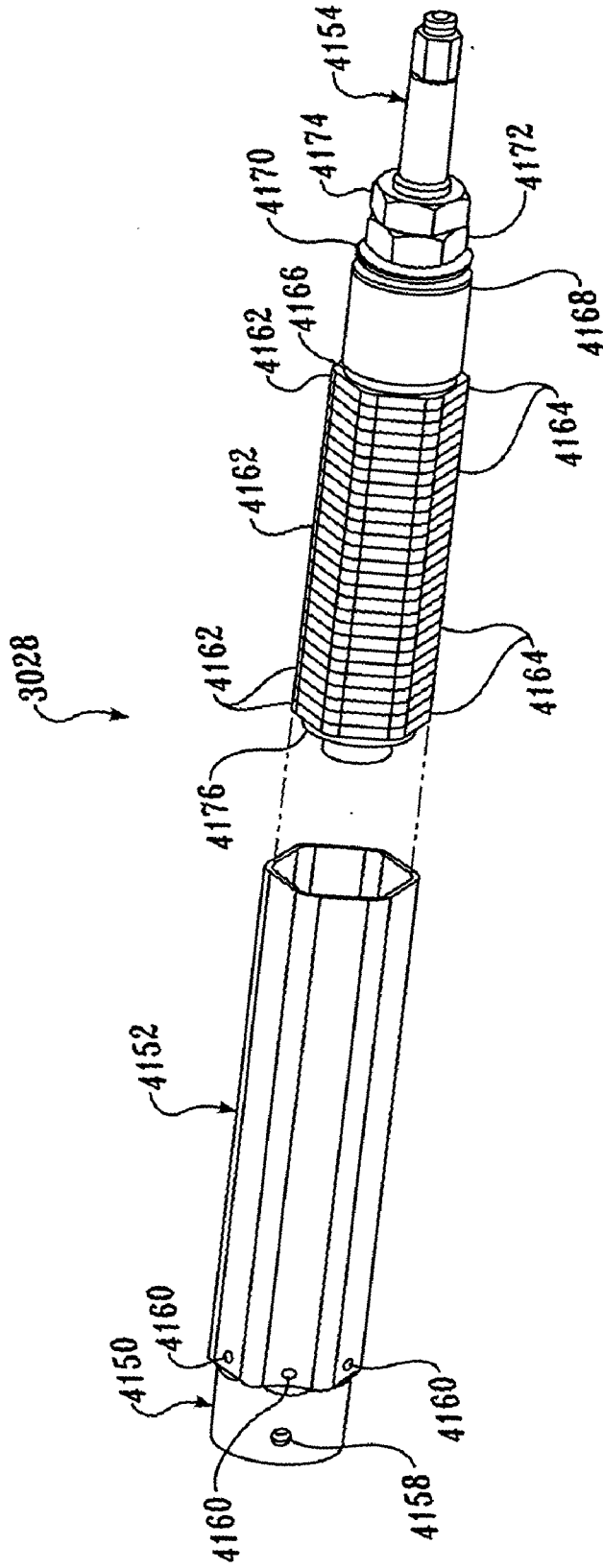


Fig. 58

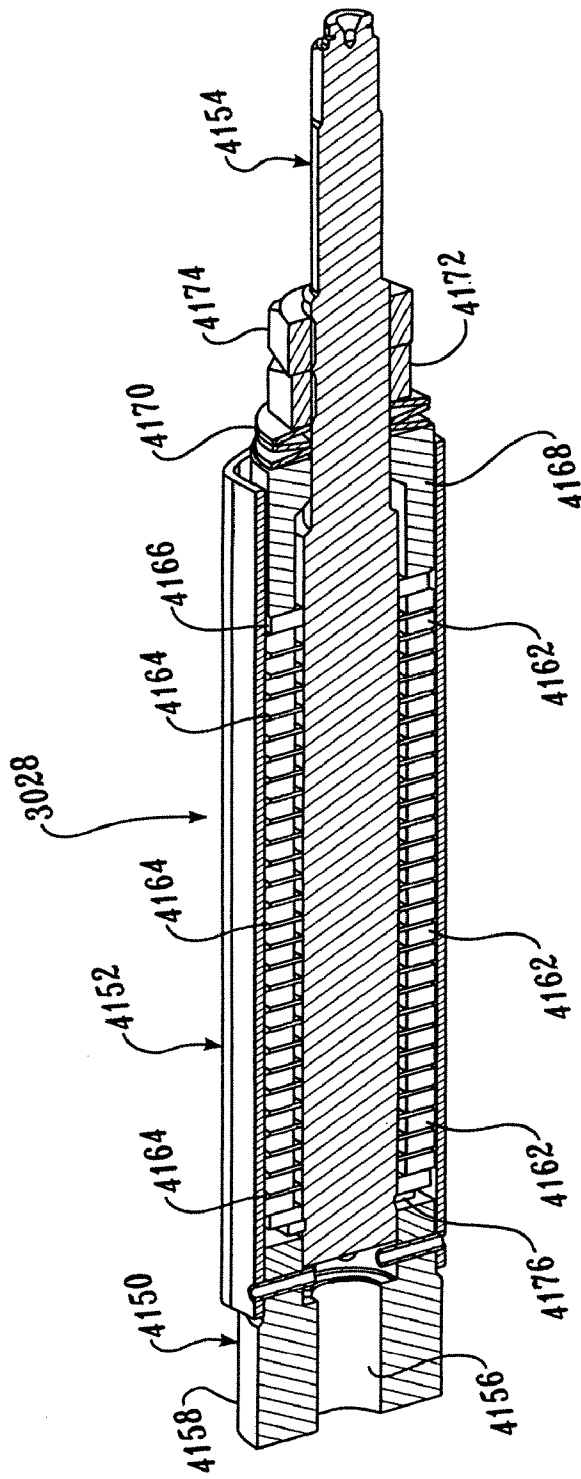


Fig. 59

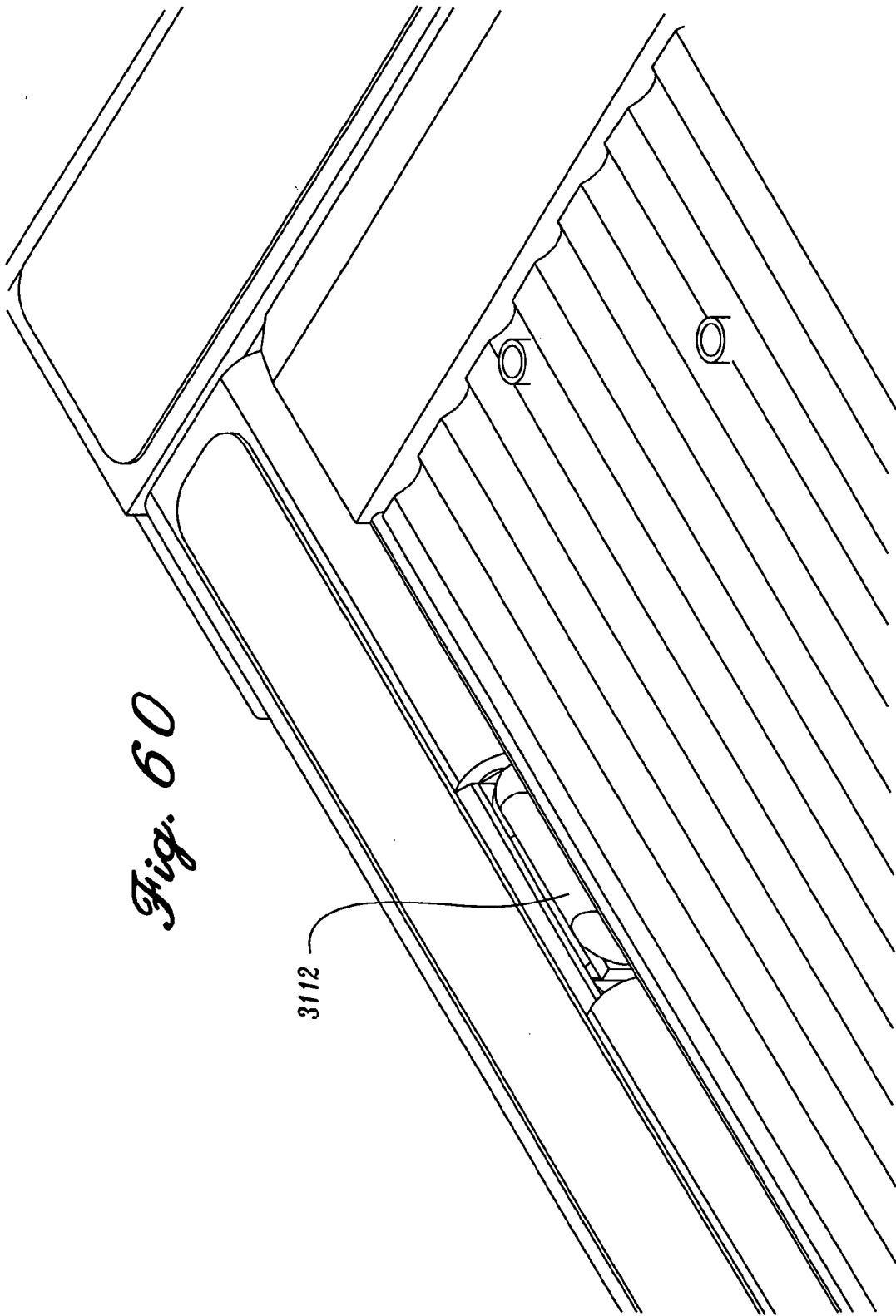


Fig. 60

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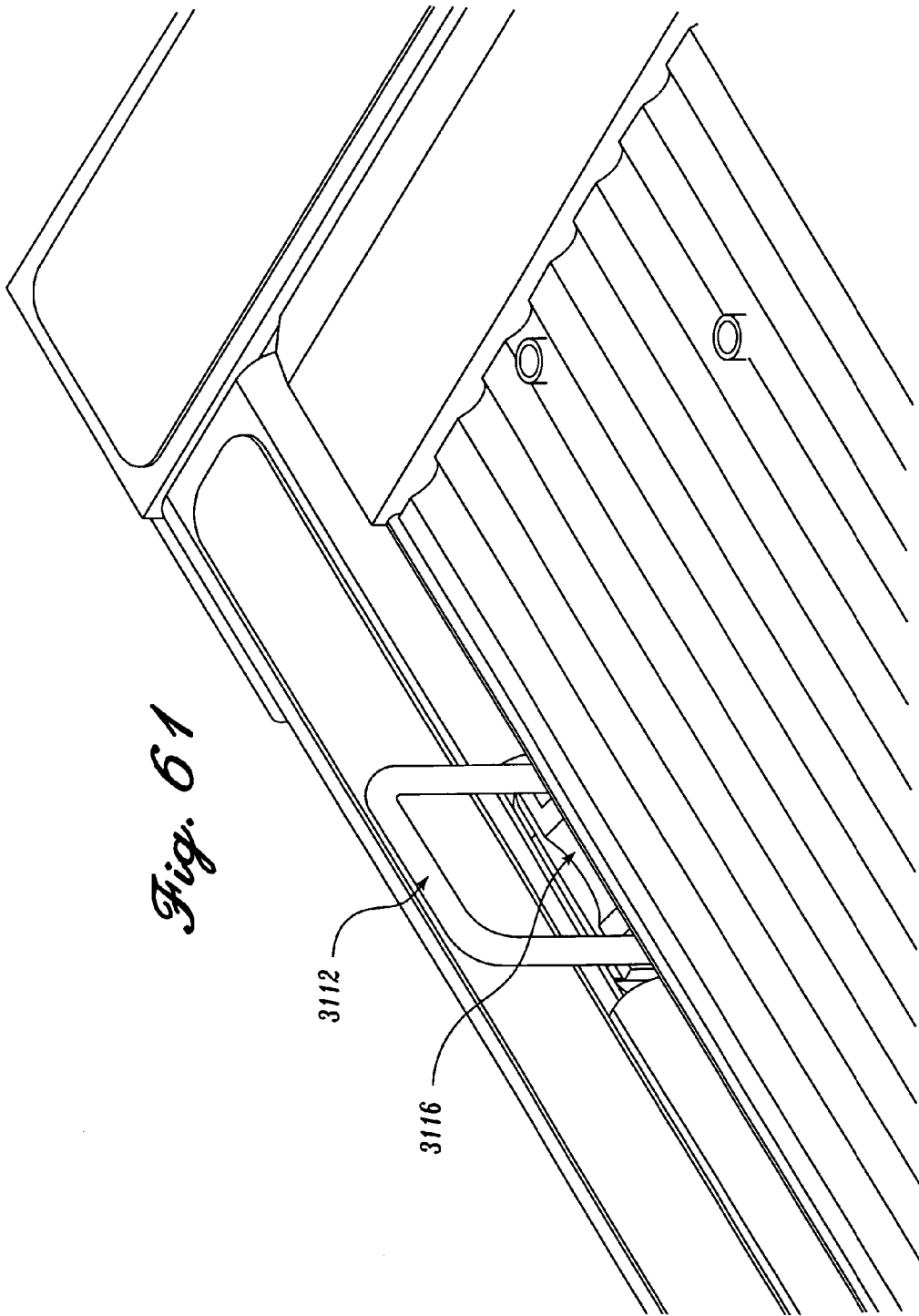


Fig. 61

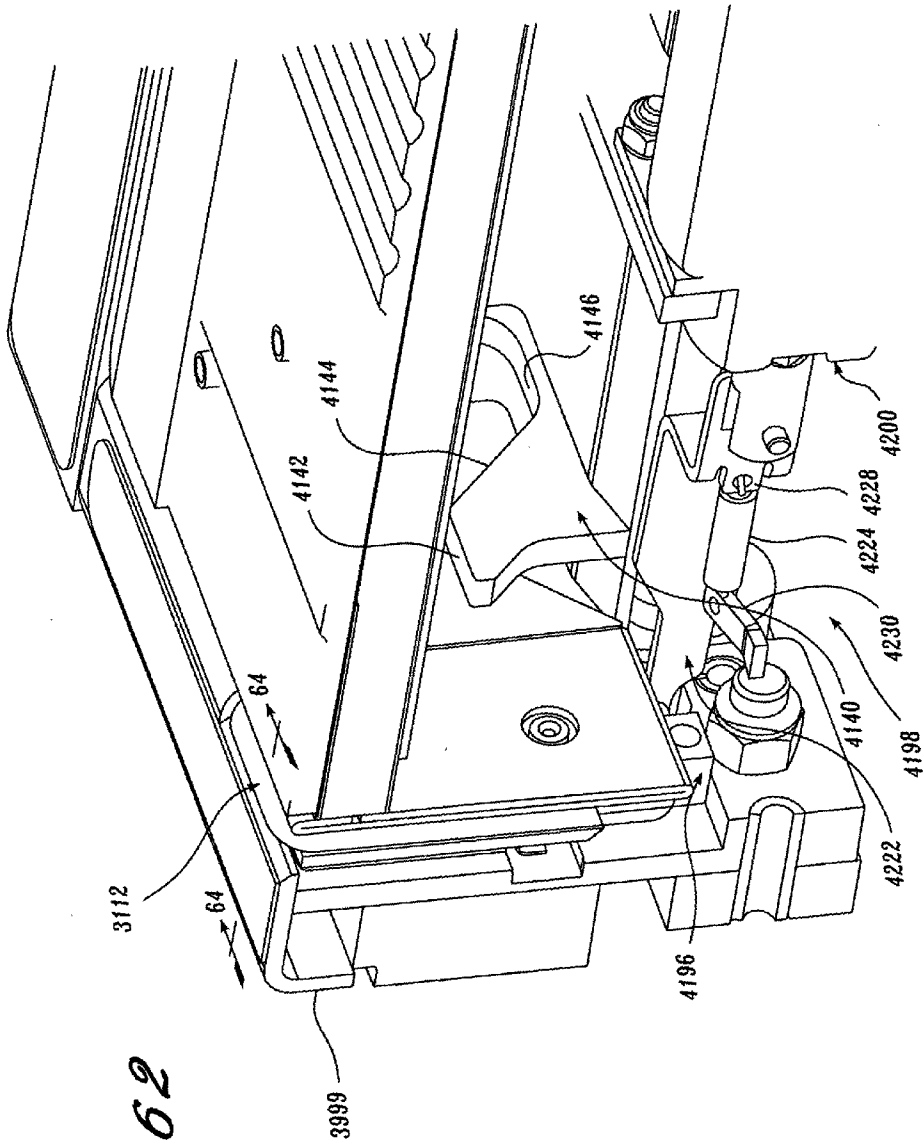


Fig. 62

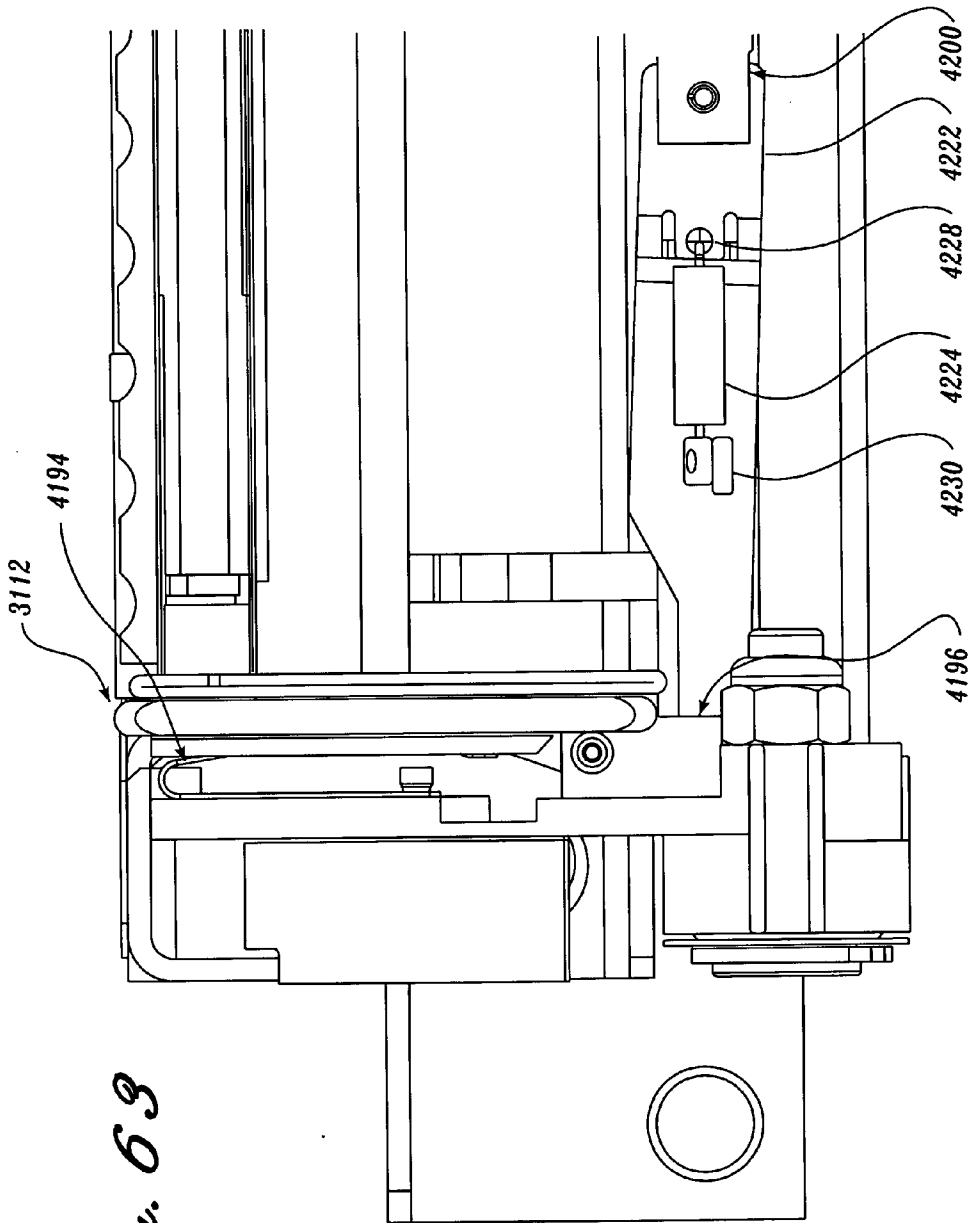


Fig. 63

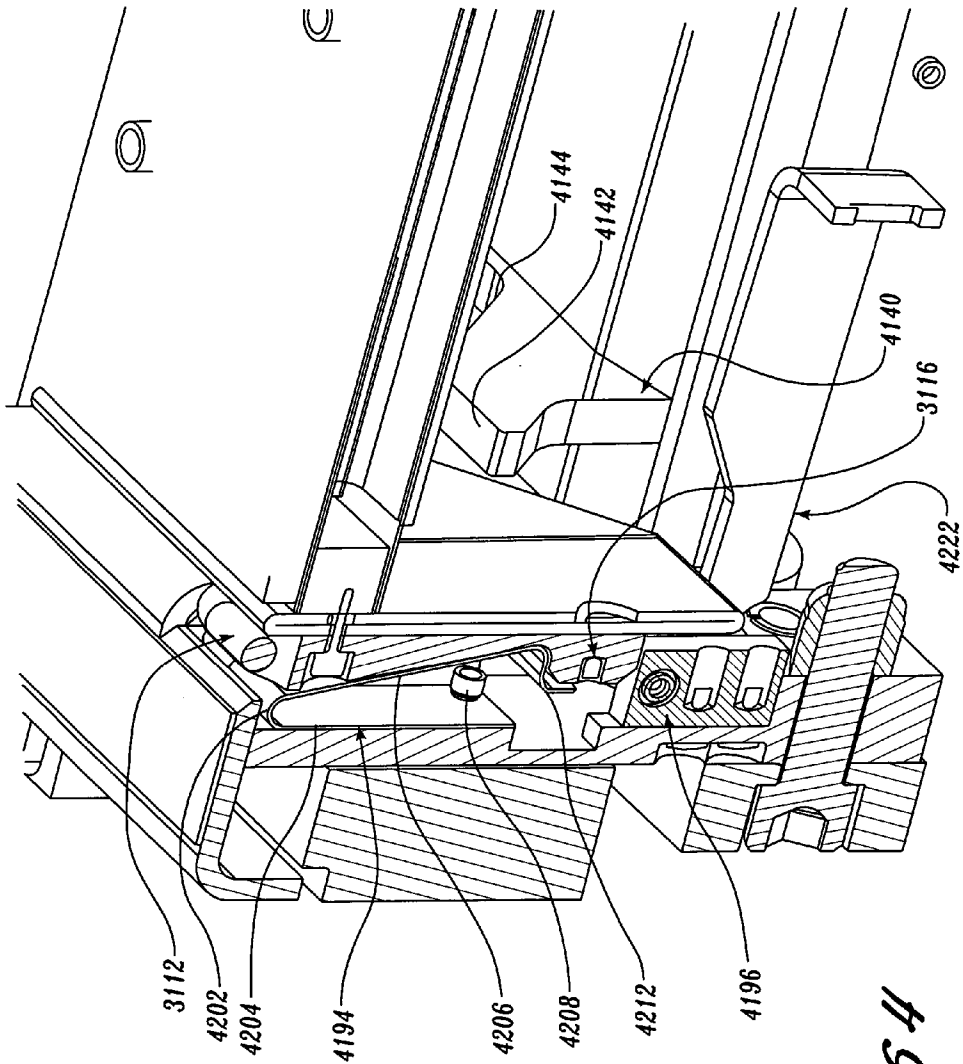


Fig. 64

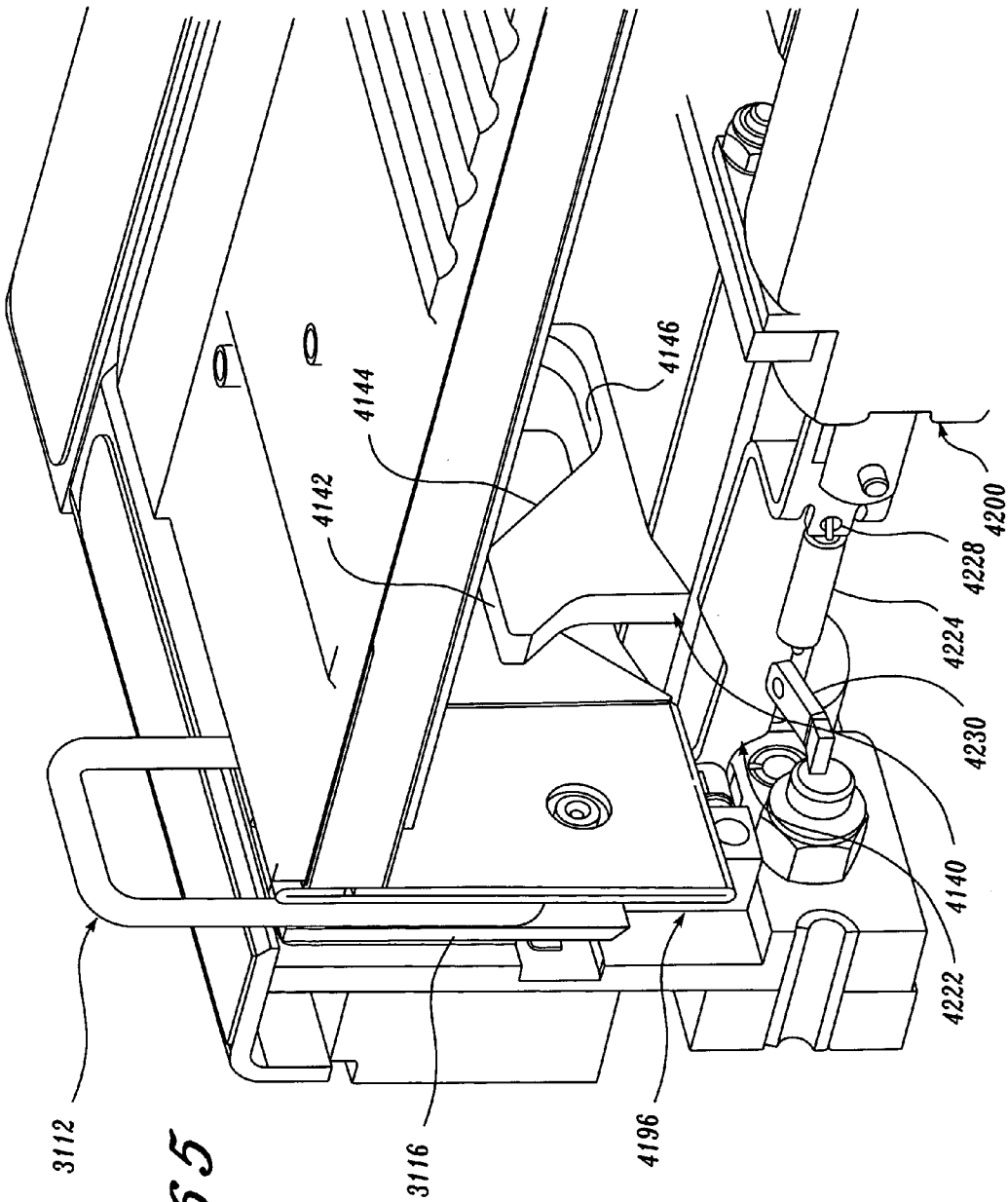


Fig. 65

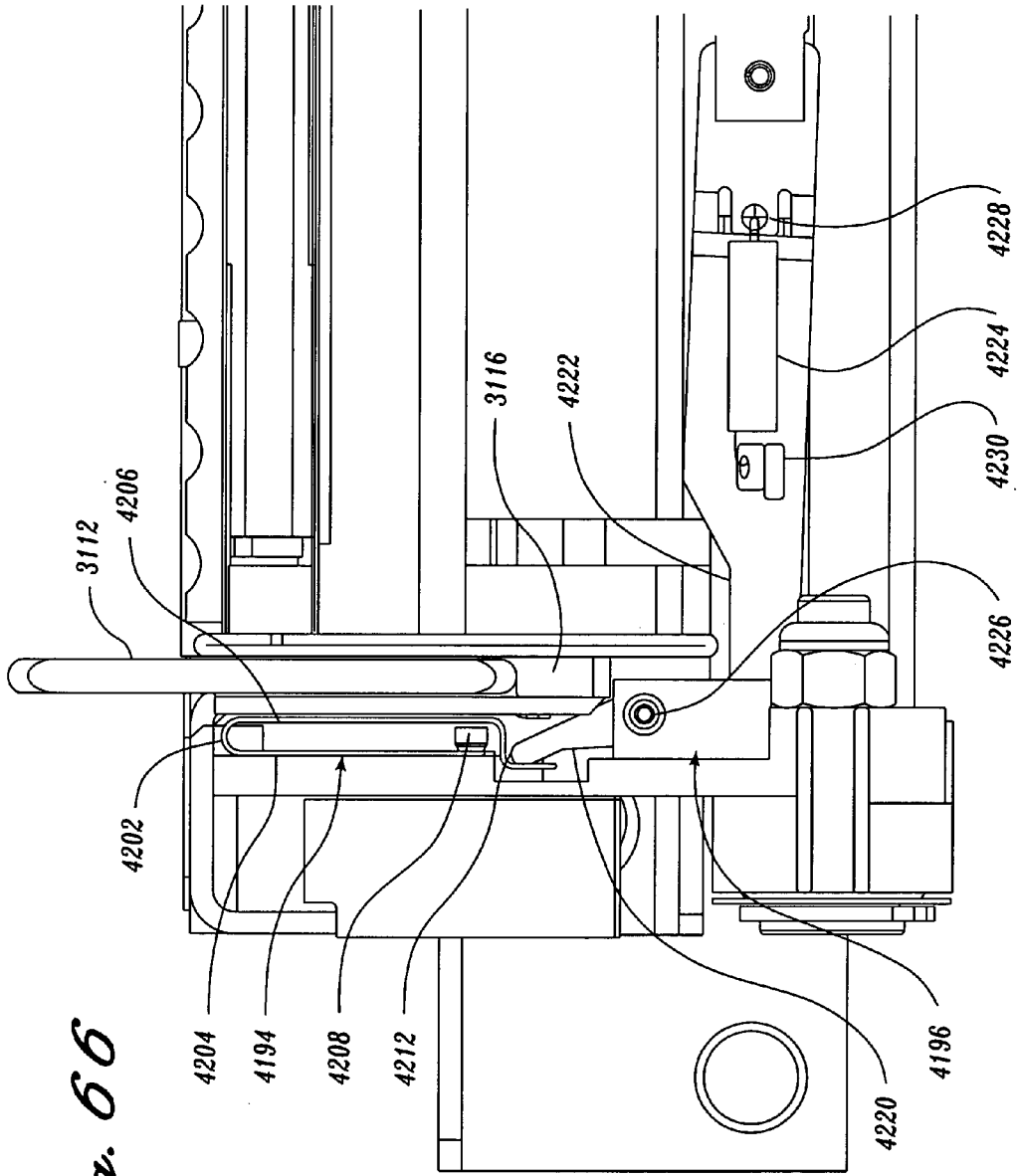


Fig. 66

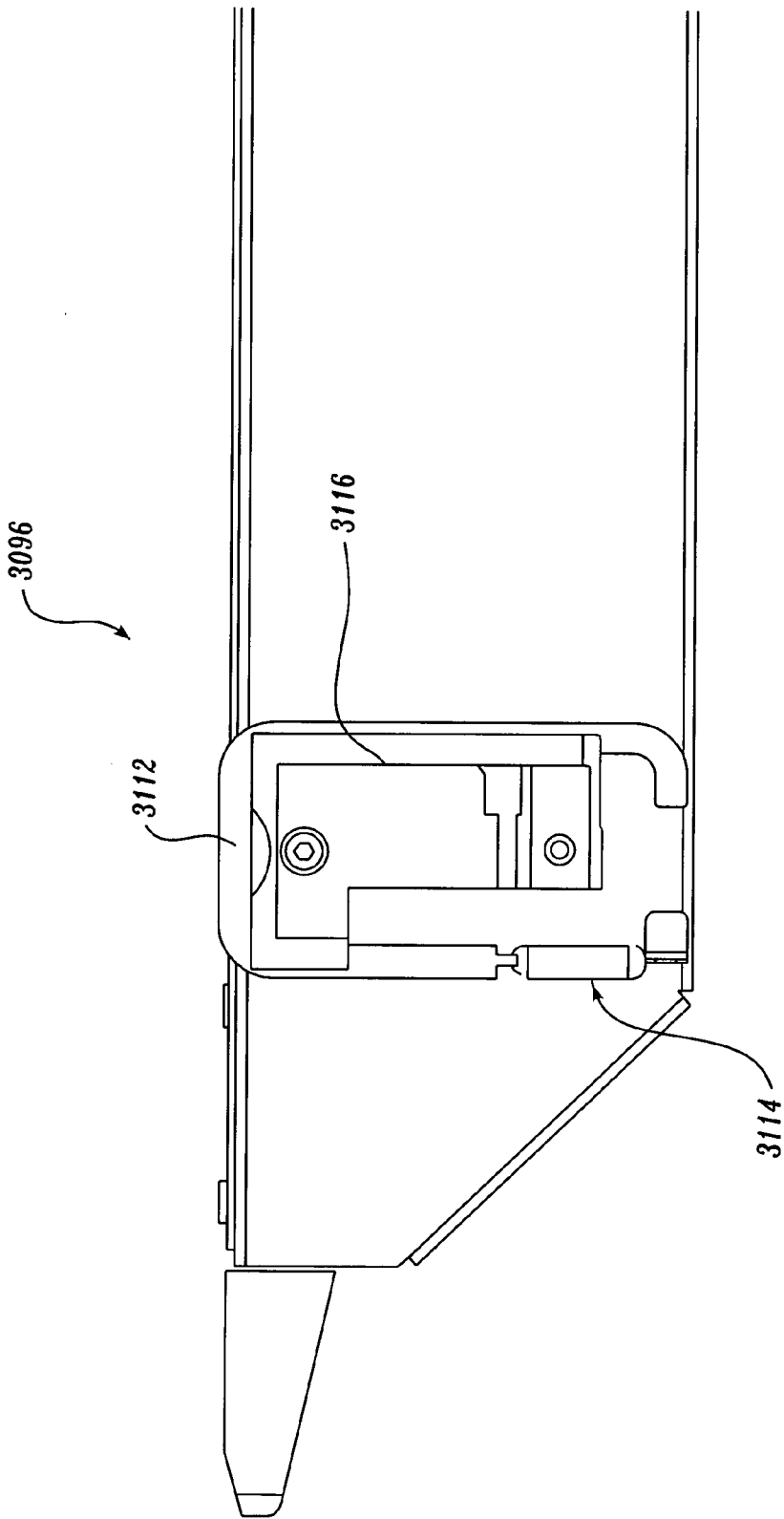


Fig. 67

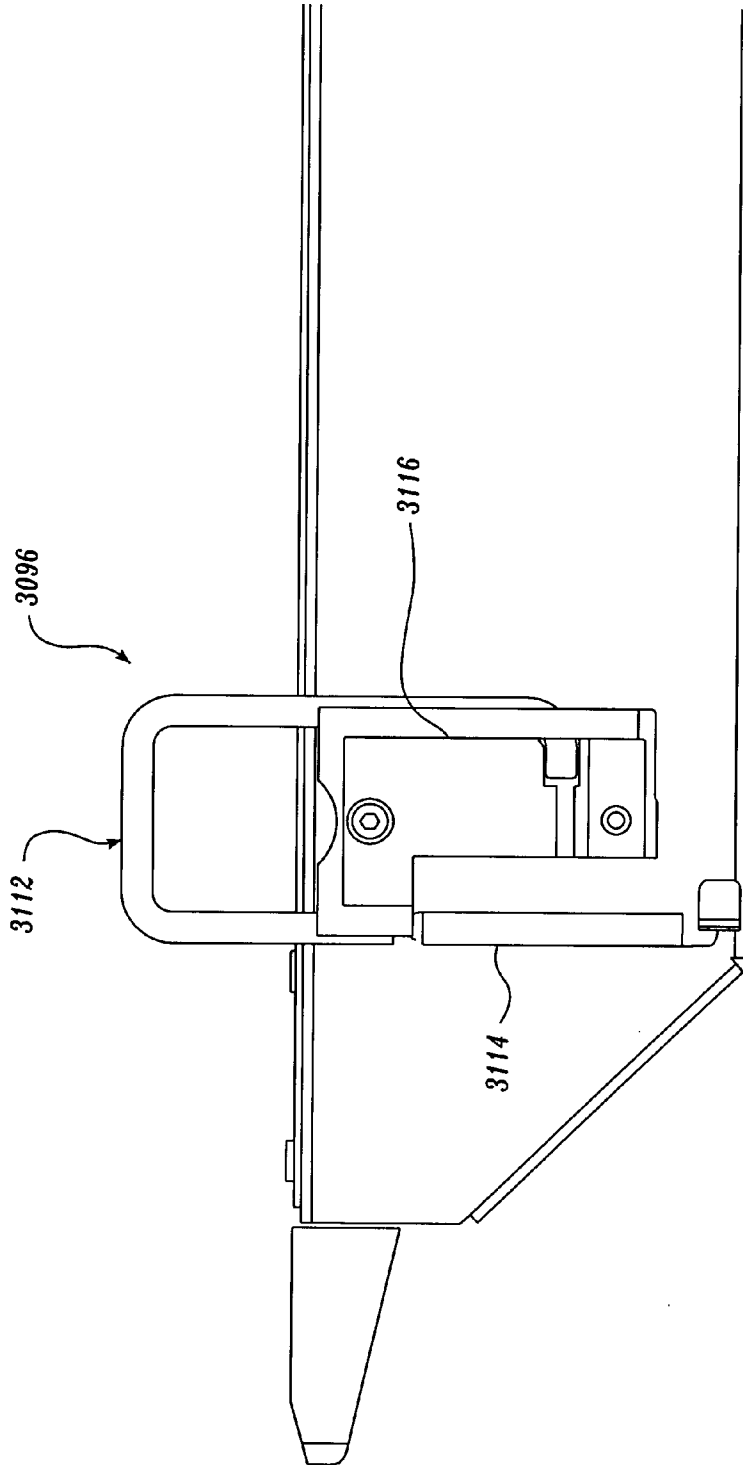


Fig. 68

VEHICLE FLIP-OUT RAMP

CROSS-REFERENCE(S) TO RELATED APPLICATION(S)

[0001] This is a continuation application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/747,024, filed Dec. 20, 2000, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,602,041, issued Aug. 5, 2003, which claims priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119(e) from U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/172,779, filed Dec. 20, 1999; U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/183,110, filed Feb. 17, 2000; U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial No. 60/206,651, filed May 24, 2000; and U.S. Provisional patent Application Serial No. 60/235,248, filed Sep. 25, 2000, all of which are hereby expressly incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention relates generally to wheelchair lifts and, more particularly, to a flip-out ramp for a vehicle.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) requires the removal of physical obstacles to those who are physically challenged. The stated objective of this legislation has increased public awareness and concern over the requirements of the physically challenged. Consequentially, there has been more emphasis in providing systems that assist such a person to access a motor vehicle, such as a bus or mini-van.

[0004] A common manner of providing the physically challenged with access to motor vehicles is a ramp. Various ramp operating systems for motor vehicles are known in the art. Some slide out from underneath the floor of the vehicle and tilt down. Others are stowed in a vertical position and are pivoted about a hinge, while still others are supported by booms and cable assemblies. The present invention is generally directed to a "flip-out" type of ramp. Such a ramp is normally stowed in a horizontal position within a recess in the vehicle floor, and is pivoted upward and outwards to a downward sloping extended position. In the extended position, the ramp is adjustable to varying curb heights.

[0005] Flip-out ramps on vehicles confront a variety of technical problems. Longer ramps are desirable because the resulting slope is lower and more accessible by wheelchair-bound passengers. Longer ramps are, however, heavier and require more torque about the hinge to be reciprocated between deployed and stowed positions. To satisfy this torque requirement, such flip-out ramps use large electric motors, pneumatic devices, or hydraulic actuators to deploy and stow the ramp. Many of such systems cannot be moved manually in the event of failure of the power source unless the drive mechanism is first disengaged. Some existing flip-out ramps can be deployed or stowed manually, but they are difficult to operate because one must first overcome the resistance of the drive mechanism. Moreover, some flip-out ramps create a dangerous situation in the event of a power failure because they could deploy and crush objects in the downward path.

[0006] As noted above, many existing flip-out ramps are equipped with hydraulic, electric or pneumatic actuating

devices. Such devices are obtrusive and make access to and from a vehicle difficult when the ramp is stowed. Moreover, many of such flip-out ramps have no energy storage capabilities to aid the lifting of the ramp and, thereby, preserve the life of the drive motor or even allow a smaller drive to be employed. Finally, operating systems for such flip-out ramps must have large power sources to overcome the torque placed on the hinge by the necessarily long moment arm of the flip-out ramp.

[0007] In view of the foregoing, there is a need for a compact and efficient operating system for a vehicle flip-out ramp.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] In accordance with the present invention, a wheelchair ramp assembly is provided. The wheelchair ramp assembly includes a frame attachable to a vehicle having a floor, a platform coupled to a portion of the frame, a ramp having a weight, and a reciprocating mechanism disposed between the ramp and platform. The reciprocating mechanism reciprocates the ramp between a deployed position and a stowed position in response to a force. The reciprocating mechanism counterbalances the weight of the ramp during actuation of the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions to reduce the force required to reciprocate the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions.

[0009] In accordance with certain aspects of this embodiment, the reciprocating mechanism includes a torsion assembly having a torsion rod extending between a rotating end and a fixed end of the reciprocating mechanism. As the ramp is reciprocated between the deployed and stowed positions, the weight of the ramp causes the torsion rod to twist about the fixed end and resist the weight of the ramp.

[0010] In accordance with still other aspects, the reciprocating mechanism includes an actuating arm rotatably attached to the torsion assembly and first and second bearing surfaces cooperatively coupled to the ramp, wherein the first and second bearing surfaces move in a predetermined path as the ramp reciprocates between the deployed and stowed positions to contact a portion of the actuating arm and cause the torsion rod to twist.

[0011] In accordance with still yet other aspects, the wheelchair assembly includes a preload assembly coupled to the torsion assembly, wherein the preload assembly twists the torsion rod from a neutral position to assist in reciprocating the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] The foregoing aspects and many of the attendant advantages of this invention will become more readily appreciated as the same become better understood by reference to the following detailed description, when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0013] **FIG. 1** is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp constructed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention with the flip-out ramp shown in the stowed position;

[0014] **FIG. 2** is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention with the flip-out ramp shown in the deployed position;

- [0015] FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional perspective view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention with the flip-out ramp shown
- [0016] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional planar view of a counter-balance assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0017] FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention showing a fixed attachment point of the flip-out ramp to a mounting structure;
- [0018] FIG. 6 is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention showing a rotating attachment point of the flip-out ramp to a mounting structure;
- [0019] FIG. 7 is a perspective cross-sectional view of a fixed attachment end of a counter-balance assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0020] FIG. 8 is a perspective cross-sectional view of a rotating attachment end of a counter-balance assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0021] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a ramp, drive motor assembly and pivot link assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention with structure removed for clarity;
- [0022] FIG. 10 is a perspective view of a pivot link assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;
- [0023] FIG. 11 is a cross-sectional perspective view of a pivot link assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing one end of the pivot link assembly;
- [0024] FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional side planar view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention showing the flip-out ramp in a partially deployed position;
- [0025] FIG. 13 is a cross-sectional side planar view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention showing the flip-out ramp in a substantially neutral position;
- [0026] FIG. 14 is a cross-sectional side planar view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing the flip-out ramp in the fully deployed position;
- [0027] FIG. 15 is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with the present invention and showing a first alternate embodiment of the counter-balance assembly;
- [0028] FIG. 16 is a partial perspective view of a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with the present invention and showing a more detailed view of the motor drive assembly and linkage assembly of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 15;
- [0029] FIG. 17 is an exploded view of the flip-out ramp assembly of FIG. 15 showing the major components of the flip-out ramp assembly;
- [0030] FIG. 18 is a perspective view of a torsion pin weldment for the counter-balance assembly;
- [0031] FIG. 19 is a top planar view of the torsion pin weldment of FIG. 18;
- [0032] FIG. 20 is a side planar view of the torsion pin weldment of FIG. 19 taken through Section 20-20;
- [0033] FIG. 21 is an end planar view of the torsion pin weldment of FIG. 18;
- [0034] FIG. 22 is a perspective view of the first alternate embodiment of the counter-balance assembly for the ramp assembly of FIG. 15 with portions of the ramp removed for clarity;
- [0035] FIG. 23 is a perspective view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 22, wherein the counter-balance assembly is rotated 180° from the view shown in FIG. 22;
- [0036] FIG. 24 is a side planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 22;
- [0037] FIG. 25 is a top planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 24;
- [0038] FIG. 26 is a partial cross-sectional side planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 24 taken through Section 26-26;
- [0039] FIG. 27 is a cross-sectional side planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 24 taken through Section 27-27;
- [0040] FIG. 28 is a top planar view of the flip-out ramp assembly, showing the flip-out ramp assembly in the fully deployed position;
- [0041] FIG. 29 is a partial cross-sectional side planar view of the flip-out ramp of FIG. 28, showing the counter-balance assembly and taken through Section 29-29 of FIG. 28;
- [0042] FIG. 30 is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp of FIG. 15 with the flip-out ramp shown in the stowed position;
- [0043] FIG. 31 is a top planar view of the flip-out ramp of FIG. 30;
- [0044] FIG. 32 is a partial cross-sectional side planar view of the flip-out ramp of FIG. 31 taken through Section 32-32;
- [0045] FIG. 33 is a perspective view of the flip-out ramp of FIG. 15 with the flip-out ramp shown in a substantially 90° deployment position.
- [0046] FIG. 34 is a top planar view of the flip-out ramp assembly of FIG. 33;
- [0047] FIG. 35 is a partial cross-sectional side planar view of the flip-out ramp assembly of FIG. 34 taken through Section 35-35;
- [0048] FIG. 36 is a perspective view of a second alternate embodiment of a counter-balance assembly for a flip-out ramp formed in accordance with the present invention with portions of the flip-out ramp assembly removed for clarity;
- [0049] FIG. 37 is an end planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 36;
- [0050] FIG. 38 is a side planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 37 and taken through Section 38-38;

[0051] FIG. 39 is a partial cross-sectional end planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 38 and taken through Section 39-39;

[0052] FIG. 40 is a cross-sectional side planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 37 and taken through Section 40-40;

[0053] FIG. 41 is a cross-sectional side planar view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 37 and taken through Section 41-41;

[0054] FIG. 42 is a perspective view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 36, where the counter-balance assembly is rotated 180° from the view shown in FIG. 36;

[0055] FIG. 43 is a partial view of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 42 with portions thereof removed for clarity;

[0056] FIG. 44 is a perspective view of a flip-out ramp assembly formed in accordance with the second alternate of the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 36;

[0057] FIG. 45 is a partial view of the flip-out ramp assembly of FIG. 44 showing the counter-balance assembly of FIG. 36;

[0058] FIG. 46 is a perspective view of a rear stub shaft of a ramp assembly of the present invention with the second alternate counter-balance assembly of FIG. 36;

[0059] FIG. 47 is a perspective view of a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention showing the flip out ramp in the closed position;

[0060] FIG. 48 is a perspective view of a counterbalance assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0061] FIG. 49 is a perspective view of a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing a stub shaft;

[0062] FIG. 50 is a perspective view of a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing an adjustment assembly to selectively preload the counterbalance assembly;

[0063] FIG. 51 is a perspective view of a drive assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with the present invention;

[0064] FIG. 52 is a perspective view of an idler and roller assembly for a drive assembly of a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing a chain tension assembly;

[0065] FIG. 53 is a perspective view of an attachment arm for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0066] FIG. 54 is a perspective view of a cam and roller assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0067] FIG. 55 is a perspective view of a portion of the cam and roller assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing one embodiment of a stow latch assembly in a locked position;

[0068] FIG. 56 is a perspective view of a portion of the cam and roller assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing one embodiment of a stow latch assembly in an unlocked position;

[0069] FIG. 57 is a perspective view of a clutch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0070] FIG. 58 is an exploded view of a clutch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0071] FIG. 59 is a cross-sectional perspective view of a clutch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0072] FIG. 60 is a partial perspective view of a handle assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing the handle assembly in a down position;

[0073] FIG. 61 is a partial perspective view of a handle assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing the handle assembly in an up position;

[0074] FIG. 62 is a partial perspective cutaway view of a handle assembly and stow latch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0075] FIG. 63 is a partial side view of a handle assembly and stow latch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0076] FIG. 64 is a partial cross-sectional perspective view of a stow latch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention;

[0077] FIG. 65 is a partial perspective view of a handle assembly and stow latch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing the handle assembly in an up position;

[0078] FIG. 66 is a side planar view showing a handle assembly and stow latch assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing the handle assembly in an up position;

[0079] FIG. 67 is a partial cross-sectional view of a handle assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention; and

[0080] FIG. 68 is a partial cross-sectional view of a handle assembly for a flip out ramp formed in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention and showing the handle assembly in an up position.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0081] FIGS. 1 and 2 illustrate one embodiment of a flip-out ramp assembly 20 (hereinafter "ramp assembly 20") constructed in accordance with the present invention. The ramp assembly 20 includes a drive assembly 22, a ramp 24, a moving floor 26, and a counter-balance assembly 28. The ramp assembly 20 is adapted to be mounted to frame structure 30 of a vehicle (not shown), such as a bus, by mounting bracket 32. The ramp assembly 20 is reciprocal

between a stowed position, as seen in FIG. 1, and a deployed position, as seen in FIG. 2. In the stowed position, the ramp 24 and moving floor 26 are stacked upon each other in a bi-fold manner, such that the lower surface of the ramp 24 is flush with the floor (not shown) of the vehicle. In the deployed position, the ramp extends outward and contacts a surface 29, such as a curb or road side.

[0082] As seen best by referring to FIG. 3, the ramp 24 is hingedly attached to the moving floor 26 by the counter-balance assembly 28. The ramp 24 includes side curbs 34. The side curbs 34 extend upwardly from each side of the ramp 24. Each side curb 34 enhances structural strength of the ramp 24 and provides a bumper for the sides of the ramp 24, thereby increasing the safety of the ramp assembly 20. The ramp 24 is constructed from well-known materials, such as stainless steel, and, in one embodiment, includes upper and lower panels 36a and 36b spaced by a core 38. The core 38 is suitably corrugated stainless steel extending between opposing sides of the upper and lower panels 36a and 36b. The outboard edge of the ramp 24 includes a tapered nose portion 40. The ramp 24 is wedged shape in cross section from the nose portion 40 to the inboard portion which is attached to the counter-balance assembly 28.

[0083] The moving floor assembly 26 is similarly constructed to the ramp 24 and includes an upper panel 42 and a corrugated panel 44 welded to the upper panel 42 to increase stiffness and reduce weight of the structure. The inboard edge of the moving floor 26 is attached to the frame structure 30 by a pivot link assembly 46. The other end of the moving floor 26 is pivotally attached to the side curb 34, as is described in greater detail below. When mounted to the vehicle frame structure 30, the vehicle floor (not shown) is substantially flush and is in close proximity with the upper panel 42 of the moving floor 26 when the ramp 24 is in the deployed position to provide smooth transition between the moving floor 26 and the vehicle floor.

[0084] As noted above, when the ramp assembly 20 is in the stowed position, the lower panel 36B of the ramp 24 is substantially co-planar with the floor (not shown) of the vehicle, thereby providing a smooth transition between the floor of the vehicle and the ramp assembly 20. Because of the wedge contour of the ramp 24 and corresponding shape of the moving floor 26, when articulated into the stowed position, the ramp 24 is nested with the moving floor 26. In particular, the upper panel 36a of the ramp 24 is adjacent the upper panel 42 of the moving floor 26, such that the floor surface (which is the lower panel 36b of the ramp 24) of the ramp 24 is flush with the vehicle floor.

[0085] Referring now to FIGS. 4-8, the counter-balance assembly 28 will be described in greater detail. The counter-balance assembly 28 includes a fixed end 48 and a rotating end 50. The fixed end 48 includes a bearing block 52, a key insert 54, and a torsion tube shaft 58. The moving floor 26 is pinned to the ramp 24 at the boss and pin structure 56. As seen best in FIG. 5, the moving floor 26 includes a lug 60 extending from one end and the lug 60 is pinned to the side curb 34 by a boss and pin structure 56. Movement of the ramp 24 is tied to the moving floor 26, such that the moving floor 26 moves with corresponding movement of the ramp 24 between stowed and deployed positions, as is described in greater detail below. Received within the key insert 54 is one end of a torsion rod 62, thereby locking the fixed end 48

of the counter-balance assembly 28 to the bearing block 52 to resist rotation of the torsion rod 62, as is described in greater detail below.

[0086] Referring now to FIG. 6, the rotating end 50 of the counter-balance assembly 28 will now be described in greater detail. The rotating end 50 includes a key insert 64, a bearing block 66, and a boss and pin structure 68. The rotating end 50 is similar to the fixed end 48 described above, with the exception that the key insert 64 of the rotating end 50 is attached to a torsion tube shaft 70 which, in turn, is attached to the ramp 24 and rotates with the ramp 24, as is described in greater detail below.

[0087] Still referring to FIGS. 4-8, the counter-balance assembly 28 includes a torsion tube 72 extending between the fixed and rotating ends 48 and 50. The rotating end 50 also includes a sprocket 74 fixed to the torsion tube shaft 70, such that when the drive assembly 22 is attached to the sprocket 74, the torsion rod 62 is twisted within the counter-balance assembly 28.

[0088] In operation, one end of the torsion rod 62 is fixed to the torsion tube shaft 70 by the key insert 64, such that as the drive assembly 22 causes the ramp 24 to rotate, the rotating end 50 of the torsion rod 62 twists to counter-balance the weight of the ramp 24. This reduces the load to drive the ramp 24 between stowed and deployed positions, thereby reducing motor drive requirements as well as improved weight and cost savings. Also, the counter-balance assembly 28 reduces the force required to manually operate the ramp 24 between stowed and deployed positions. The counter-balance assembly 28 preloads the ramp 24 in the stowed or deployed positions and is maintained in any position between the deployed and stowed positions by the combined resistance of the drive assembly 22, including the gear motor and/or system friction. The neutral position for the counter-balance assembly 28 is when the ramp 24 is nearly vertical, such that in either the stowed or deployed positions, the counter-balance assembly 28 is loaded because the torsion rod 62 is twisted from its normal shape or condition. This results in reduced load and forces required to reciprocate the ramp 24 between its stowed and deployed positions.

[0089] Referring now to FIGS. 9-11, the pivot link assembly 46 will be described in greater detail. The pivot link assembly 46 includes a bracket 76, a pivot rod 78, a spacer 80, and first and second links 82a and 82b. The bracket 76 is adapted to be fastened to frame structure 30 by well known fasteners, such as bolts and screws. The pivot rod 78 is attached by a well known fastener, such as a weld, to one end of the first and second pivot links 82a and 82b. The other end of the first and second pivot links 82a and 82b are pivotally attached opposite ends of the spacer 80. The inboard end of the moving floor 26 is pivotally attached to the pivot rod 78 by a well known fastener 90, such as a pin or shoulder screw, extending through a side plate 92 of the moving floor 26 and into the pivot rod 78.

[0090] Operation of the moving floor 26 may be best understood by referring to FIGS. 12-14. As the ramp 24 begins its actuation sequence from the stowed to the deployed position, the ramp 24 pivots about the counter-balance assembly 28. The moving floor 26 pivots about the spacer 80 and it also translates slightly outboard from its stowed position. Because the moving floor 26 is attached to

the pivot link assembly 46 by the links 82a and 82b, and attached to side curb 34 at boss 56, the moving floor acts as a coupler of a four bar linkage. Further, as the ramp 24 continues to the deployed position, the moving floor is raised upwardly to a position substantially flush with the floor of the vehicle by the pivot link assembly 46. Thus, as the ramp assembly 20 reciprocates between its deployed and stowed position, the moving floor 26 both rotates and translates into and out of flush position with the floor of the vehicle.

[0091] Referring now to FIGS. 15-30, a first alternate embodiment of a flip-out ramp 1020 formed in accordance with the present invention will now be described in greater detail. The flip-out ramp assembly 1020 is identical in materials and operation as the embodiment described above, with the exception that a new counter-balance assembly 1028 is included. As may be best seen by referring to FIG. 17, this embodiment of the flip-out ramp assembly 1020 includes three bearing points 1092a, 1092b, and 1092c. The counter-balance assembly 1028 includes a torsion pin weldment assembly 1094, a counter-balance linkage assembly 1096, an adjustment assembly 1098, and a torsion bar 1100.

[0092] The torsion pin weldment assembly 1094 may be best understood by referring to FIGS. 18-21. The torsion pin weldment assembly 1094 includes first and second support brackets 1110a and 1110b, first and second cam pins 1112a and 1112b, and first and second stub shafts 1114a and 1114b. The first and second cam pins 1112a and 1112b extend laterally between the first and second support brackets 110a and 110b. The second stub shaft 1114b may be integrally formed with and extends laterally from the second support bracket 110b. The first stub shaft 1114a includes a hex shaped cavity 1115 extending partially therethrough and is sized to receive a correspondingly shaped hex stub 1116b (FIG. 17) extending laterally from the ramp 1024. As a result, the ramp 1024 is keyed to the rotation of the torsion pin weldment assembly 1094.

[0093] Referring now to FIGS. 22-26, the counter-balance linkage assembly 1096 will now be described in greater detail. The counter-balance linkage assembly 1096 includes an arm 1120, a torsion arm 1122, a motor mount plate 1124, and a support plate 1126. The first and second stub shafts 1114a and 1114b of the torsion pin weldment assembly 1094 described above extends between opposed surfaces of the motor mount plate 1124 and a portion of the support plate 1126, which also includes bearings 1092b and 1092c sized to receive corresponding stub shafts 1114a and 1114b. The cam pins 1112a and 1112b of the torsion pin weldment assembly 1094 are positioned to engage a portion of the arm 1120, as described in greater detail below.

[0094] The torsion arm 1122 includes a clevis 1128 extending upwardly from the base of the torsion arm 1122. The clevis 1128 is sized to receive one end of the arm 1120 therebetween. The arm 1120 is rotatably attached within the clevis 1128 by a pin 1130 extending laterally through the clevis 1128 and the corresponding end of the arm 1120. The free end of the arm 1120 is cammed to included first and second saddles 1132a and 1132b.

[0095] As best seen by referring to FIG. 26, the first and second saddles 1132a and 1132b are sized to selectively receive the first and second cam pins 1112a and 1112b during actuation of the ramp platform 1024. The cam pins 1112a and 1112b are orientated such that when the ramp is

rotated through its range of motion, each cam pin separately engages one of the two saddles 1132a and 1132b. One cam pin functions from the stowed ramp position to the vertical position. The other cam pin functions from the vertical position to the fully deployed ramp position. Typically, only one pin at a time correspondingly engages one of the two saddles 1132a and 1132b, thereby causing the torsion arm 1122 to rotate and, thus, load the torsion rod 1100. The cam pins may simultaneously engage the saddles 1132a and 1132b when the ramp angle is nearly vertical, as seen in FIG. 26.

[0096] As may be best seen by referring back to FIG. 22, one end of the torsion bar 1100 is supported by the motor mount support plate 1124 and support plate 1126, and is keyed to the torsion arm 1122. The other end of the torsion bar 1100 is supported by a support block 1134 and is keyed to a tapered lever 1138 of an adjusting assembly 1098. The adjusting assembly 1098 allows preload or deadband adjustment of the counter-balance assembly 1028.

[0097] As best seen by referring to FIG. 27, the adjustment assembly 1098 includes a set screw 1136 and the tapered lever 1138. One end of the tapered lever 1138 is keyed to the torsion bar 1100 and is adapted to limit rotation of one end of the torsion bar 1100. The other end of the tapered lever 1138 is seated against the lower end of the set screw 1136. Adjustment of the set screw 1136 controls the preload or deadband stiffness of the torsion bar 1100.

[0098] Also seen in FIG. 27 is first bearing 1092a which is sized and adapted to receive a corresponding stub shaft 1116a (FIG. 17) extending laterally from one end of the ramp 1024.

[0099] The ramp assembly 1020 in the fully deployed position may be best understood by referring to FIGS. 28-29. As seen in FIG. 29, only one of the two cam pins (1112b) of the torsion pin weldment assembly 1094 is seated within the saddle 1132b of the arm 1120.

[0100] The ramp assembly 1020 in the fully stowed position may be best understood by referring to FIGS. 30-32. In the fully stowed position, and as may be best seen by referring to FIG. 32, cam pin 1112a is seated in the first saddle 1132a of arm 1120.

[0101] The ramp assembly 1020 in the near vertical position may be best understood by referring to FIGS. 33-35. As may be best seen by referring to FIG. 35, in the near vertical 90° position, both cam pins 1112a and 1112b are seated within the first and second saddles 1132a and 1132b of the arm 1120.

[0102] Referring now to FIGS. 36-46, another embodiment of a flip-out ramp 2020 of the current invention will now be described in greater detail. This embodiment is identical in materials and operation to the invention described above with the exception that a counterbalance assembly 2028 constructed in accordance with this embodiment of flip-out ramp assembly 2020 includes only two bearing points 2092a and 2092b instead of three bearing points.

[0103] As may be best seen by referring to FIGS. 42-46, the counter-balance linkage assembly 2096 includes an arm 2120 and a torsion arm 2122. In this embodiment, the rear stub shaft 2140 of the ramp assembly 2024 replaces the hex

stub shaft **1116b** of the first alternate embodiment. The rear shaft **2140** includes a spherical surface **2142** located on one end of the rear stub shaft **2140**. The outer face of the rear stub shaft **2140** includes a pair of cavities **2144a** and **2144b**. Each cavity **2144a** and **2144b** are sized to receive a corresponding cam pin **2112a** and **2112b**. As an alternative, each cam pin may be integral with the rear stub shaft **2140**.

[0104] Each cam pin **2112a** and **2112b** is fixed to rear stub shaft **2140** by welding or other means. Each cam pin **2112a** and **2112b** supports a bearing **2512**. The bearings **2512a** and **2512b** engage saddles **2132a** and **2132b** of arm **2120**. Torque rod **2100** is keyed to torque arm **2122** at one end and is keyed to tapered lever **2138** at the other end. Support block **2134** supports tapered lever **2138** on surface **2138a**. Motor mount plate **2124** supports bearing block **2124a**. Bearing **2124b** is housed in bearing block **2124a** (FIG. 39). Torsion arm **2122** is pivotally supported by bearing **2124b** at surface **2122a**. Thus, torsion arm **2122** is pivotally attached to motor mount plate **2124**.

[0105] The counter-balance assembly **2028** includes a second stub shaft **2148** extending from the first bearing member **2192a**. The rear stub shaft **2140** and stub shaft **2148**, located in ramp platform **2024**, are sized to be received within corresponding bearings **2092b** and **2092a**. Operation is the same as first alternate embodiment. Corresponding numbers start with 2xxx in place of 1xxx.

[0106] Referring now to FIGS. 47-68, a third alternate embodiment of the current invention will now be described in greater detail. Like the second alternate embodiment, the third alternate embodiment has two bearing points **3092a** and **3092b**. The flip-out ramp **3020** formed in accordance with the third embodiment of the present invention is similar in materials and operation to the alternate embodiments described above with the following exceptions. First, elements of the counterbalance linkage assembly **3022** have been repositioned or redesigned. Second, a new drive assembly **3024** (FIG. 52) has been provided. The moving floor **26** and **1026** of the previous embodiments has been replaced with a rising floor **3026**. A clutch assembly **3028** has been added. A unitized frame **3999** has been added. Finally, a stow latch assembly **3030** has been added. For conciseness, only the foregoing exceptions will be described in greater detail.

[0107] Referring to FIGS. 47-50, the counterbalance linkage assembly **3022** will now be described in greater detail. The counterbalance linkage assembly **3022** includes a torsion bar **3034**, a torsion arm **3036**, an actuating arm **3038**, and an adjustment assembly **3039**. The torsion bar **3034** is similar in operation and materials to the torsion bar **1100** (FIG. 22) described in the previous embodiments except that it has been moved from the outboard side (curb side) of the flip-out ramp assembly **3020** to the inboard side (road side). Specifically, the location of the torsion bar **3034** has been moved from the side of the ramp nearest the curb to a location towards the longitudinally extending centerline of the vehicle.

[0108] The actuating arm **3038** is similar in operation and materials to the actuating arm **1120** (FIGS. 22-26) described in the previous embodiments except that it has been lengthened. As set forth above for the arm **1120**, the actuating arm **3038** is suitably rotatably attached to torsion arm **3036** by a pin **3039** extending laterally through the corresponding end

of the actuating arm **3038**. The free end of the actuating arm **3038** is cammed to include first and second saddles **3040a** and **3040b**.

[0109] The torsion arm **3036** has been moved with the repositioned torsion bar **3034**. The torsion arm **3036** is similar to materials and operation to the torsion arm **1122** (FIGS. 22-26) of the first alternate embodiment and the torsion arm **2122** (FIGS. 42-46) of the second alternate embodiment. As best seen in FIG. 48, the linkage and operation of the torsion arm **3036** and the actuating arm **3038** has not changed in this third alternate embodiment. The torsion arm **3036** extends between the torsion bar **3034** and the actuating arm **3038**. One end of the torsion arm **3036** is pinned to a corresponding end of the actuating arm **3038** by a well known pin **3039**. The other end of the torsion arm **3036** is keyed to an end of the torsion bar **3034**.

[0110] As best seen in FIG. 49, the free end of the actuating arm **3038** has first and second saddles **3040a** and **3040b**. First and second bearings **3042a** and **3042b** are positioned on the end of first stub shaft **3046a** and engage saddles **3040a** and **3040b** in the same general way as described in the previous embodiments. Similar to the previous embodiments described above, rotation of first stub shaft **3046a** is keyed to the rotation of the ramp platform **3044**, such that when the ramp is rotated through its range of motion, the bearings **3042a** and **3042b** engage the first and second saddles **3040a** and **3040b**, stroking the actuating arm **3038** and thereby causing the torsion arm **3036** to rotate and place a load upon the torsion bar **3034**. As the end of the torsion bar **3034** is rotated by the torsion arm **3036**, the torsion bar **3034** twists to counterbalance the weight of the ramp.

[0111] Referring now to FIG. 50, the adjustment assembly **3039** will now be described in greater detail. The adjustment assembly **3039** includes a torsion rod assembly **4040**, a torsion lever weldment **4042**, and a torsion anchor assembly **4044**. The torsion rod assembly **4040** includes an anchor assembly **4050**, first and second retaining rings **4052a** and **4052b**, and an anchor eccentric **4054**. The anchor assembly **4050** is a substantially oblong link having a pair of sleeve bearings **4056a** and **4056b** disposed within opposite ends of the anchor assembly **4050**. The torsion rod assembly **4040** is fastened to the frame assembly by a pin **4060** extending through the first sleeve bearing **4056a** and fastened thereto by the first retaining ring **4052a**.

[0112] Rotatably disposed within the second sleeve bearing **4056b** is the anchor eccentric **4054**. The anchor eccentric **4054** includes a lever arm **4058** fastened to the anchor eccentric **4054** by the second retaining ring **4052b**. The anchor eccentric **4054** is attached to one end of the torsion lever weldment **4042**. The other end of the torsion lever weldment **4042** is keyed to an end of the torsion bar **3034**.

[0113] As attached, the torsion bar **3034** extends through the torsion lever weldment **4042**. The torsion lever weldment **4042** extends through the torsion anchor assembly **4044** and is seated in one end of the torsion anchor assembly **4044**. As seated within the torsion anchor assembly **4044**, the torsion bar **3034** is retained therein by a retaining ring **4062**. The torsion rod assembly **4040** includes a pair of spring pins **4064a** and **4064b** and is rigidly fastened to the ramp assembly by a well known lock nut **4066** and hex screw **4068**.

[0114] To preload the torsion bar 3034, a hex wrench (not shown) is inserted through a bore 4070 located in one end of the lever arm 4058 and into hex bore 4070a of eccentric 4054. The lever arm 4058 and eccentric 4054 are rotated into the position illustrated in FIG. 50. A well known hex head cap screw 4072 is inserted into the other end of the lever arm 4058 and into an internally threaded bore (not shown) located substantially midway between the first and second sleeve bearings 4056a and 4056b of the anchor assembly 4050. To remove the preload from the torsion bar 3034, the hex head cap screw 4072 is removed, and the lever arm 4058 of the anchor eccentric 4054 is rotated substantially 180° from the position illustrated in FIG. 50.

[0115] Referring now to FIGS. 51 and 52, the drive assembly 3024 will be described in greater detail. The drive assembly 3024 includes a gear motor 3052 and an idler and roller chain assembly 3054. The well-known gear motor 3052 is connected to a clutch 3028 which is connected to the idler and roller chain assembly 3054. The gear motor 3052 is keyed to the rotation of the ramp platform 3044 by way of the idler and roller chain assembly 3054. A suitable gear motor 3052 is model number IM-15, manufactured by Globe Motor.

[0116] As best illustrated in FIG. 52, the idler and roller chain assembly 3054 includes first and second sprocket assemblies 4080a and 4080b, an idler assembly 4082, a chain tension assembly 4084, and a drive chain 3056. The first sprocket assembly 4080a is fixed to one end of the second stub shaft 3046b, which is in turn keyed to rotation of the ramp platform 3044. As an alternative, the first sprocket assembly 4080a may be integral with the second stub shaft 3046b. Rotation of the first sprocket 4080a is keyed to the rotation of the second sprocket 4080b by the drive chain 3056.

[0117] The second sprocket assembly 4080b includes a retainer 4088, a retaining ring 4090, and a sprocket 4092. The second sprocket assembly 4080b is keyed to the clutch shaft 4154 at hex key 4154a (FIG. 57).

[0118] Still referring to FIG. 52, the chain tension assembly 4084 will now be described in greater detail. The chain tension assembly includes a chain tension weldment 4100, an idler 4102, a spacer 4104 and a square head set screw 4106. The chain tension weldment 4100 is keyed to the drive chain 3056 and includes a torsion arm retainer 4108 and a retaining ring 4110. A pair of cap screws 4112a and 4112b extend through opposite ends of the spacer 4104 and are operatively coupled to the set screw 4106.

[0119] Chain tension weldment 4100 is keyed at 4100b and 4100c and moves slideably on frame 3999 at guides 3999b and 3999c respectively. Guides 3999b and 3999c form opposite sides of slot 3999a. The head of set screw 4106 rests against the end of slot 3999a. Chain tension weldment is also slotted along the axis of set screw 4106 to allow clamping action when capscrews 4112a and 4112b are tightened.

[0120] As coupled to the set screw 4106, the tension in the drive chain 3056 may be adjusted to increase or decrease the tension in the drive chain 3056 by unclamping setscrew 4106 by loosening capscrews 4112a and 4112b, turning setscrew 4106 which moves chain tension weldment 4100 and thus idler 4102 along guides 3999b and 3999c, then clamping setscrew 4106 by tightening capscrews 4112a and 4112b.

[0121] Referring now to FIGS. 53-56, the rising floor 3026 will now be described in greater detail. The rising floor 3026 is similar in material and operation to the moving floor 26 and 1026 (FIGS. 2 and 15), except that when the ramp assembly is in the deployed position, the rising floor 3026 is made substantially flush to the vehicle floor by way of a cam and roller assembly 3062 (FIG. 54) instead of a pivot and link assembly 46.

[0122] The rising floor 3026 includes a floor weldment 4120, attachment arms 4122, and roller assemblies 4124. The floor weldment 4120 is substantially rectangular and forms the outside perimeter frame structure for the rising floor 3026. The attachment arms 4122 are suitably integrally formed with the floor weldment 4120 and project upwardly from the planar area of the rising floor 3026. The free ends of the attachment arms 4122 include a notch 4126 formed in the lower surface of each attachment arm 4122. The notches 4126 are sized to be slidably received on a pin 4128 projecting inwardly from each side of the ramp platform 3044 in an opposing manner. Attachment arms 4122 are similar in material and operation of lugs 60 of the first embodiment.

[0123] As seen best by referring to FIG. 54, the roller assembly 4124 includes a sleeve bearing 4130 and a retaining ring 4132. The roller assembly 4124 is coupled to the interior facing side of the frame weldment 4120 on a pin 4134. The roller assembly 4124 is fastened to the pin 4134 by the retaining ring 4132. As is described in greater detail below, the roller assembly 4124 is adapted to be received within a cam plate 4140. Although a single roller assembly 4124 is illustrated, it should be apparent that a second roller assembly identical to the first roller assembly 4124 is located on the opposite side of the frame weldment 4120, such that a pair of roller assemblies 4124 are located on opposite sides of the frame weldment 4120.

[0124] In operation, as the rising floor 3026 strokes with the rotation of the ramp platform 3044, it raises and is maintained at a level substantially flush with the adjacent vehicle floor (not shown), whether the ramp is deployed to a high curb or to ground level. To facilitate removal of the rising floor 3026, the cam plate 4140 is open above the roller and the lugs 4122 on the outboard end, which capture the trunnion pins 4128 on the ramp, are open on the bottom 4126. Therefore, there are no pins or fasteners to remove in order to remove the rising floor from the ramp assembly.

[0125] As best seen by referring to FIGS. 54-56, the cam plate 4140 is suitably formed from material, such as steel. The cam plate 4140 is contoured to position the rising floor 3026, such that it is either flush with the vehicle floor when the ramp assembly is in the deployed position or in a nested position when the ramp assembly is in the stowed position. In that regard, the cam plate 4140 includes a raised flat surface 4142, a sloping surface 4144, and a lower flat surface 4146.

[0126] As noted above, the roller assembly 4124 is sized to be received within the cam plate 4140, such that when the roller assembly 4124 is positioned on the raised flat surface 4142, the rising floor 3026 is flush with the vehicle floor. When the roller assembly 4124 is seated on the lower flat surface 4146 of the cam plate 4140, the rising floor 3026 is in a position below the vehicle floor, such that the articulating portion of the ramp platform 3044 is disposed on top

of the rising floor **3026**. As disposed on top of the rising floor **3026**, the articulating portion of the ramp platform **3044** is flush with the vehicle floor, thereby providing a level floor within the vehicle. The sloped surface **4144** extends between the raised flat surface **4142** and the lower flat surface **4146** to provide a smooth transition between the deployed and stowed positions.

[0127] Referring now to FIGS. 57-59, the clutch assembly **3028** will now be described in greater detail. The clutch assembly **3028** includes a clutch hub **4150**, a clutch housing **4152**, and a clutch shaft **4154**. The clutch hub **4150** is suitably a cylindrical member having a centrally located bore **4156** extending through the length of the clutch hub **4150**. The bore **4156** is sized and adapted to receive the output shaft of the gear motor **3052**, and is fastened to the output shaft by well-known fasteners, such as a key and set screw (not shown), extending through fastener holes **4158** located in the clutch hub **4150**. The clutch hub **4150** is coupled to the clutch housing **4152** by well-known pins **4160** extending through the clutch housing **4152** and into the clutch hub **4150**. As attached to the clutch housing **4152**, torque is transferred from the clutch hub **4150** to the clutch housing **4152**. Each pinhole of the clutch housing **4152** is sized to receive pins **4160** with sufficient clearance to allow the clutch assembly to center itself.

[0128] The clutch housing **4152** is hex shaped in cross-section and is suitably a tubular member sized to slidably receive the clutch shaft **4154** therein. The clutch shaft **4154** includes a plurality of friction disks **4162** and stainless steel shims **4164**. The clutch assembly **3028** also includes a spacer **4166**, a spring pad **4168**, a spring washer **4170**, and first and second hex jam nuts **4172** and **4174**. The outside diameter of the friction discs **4162** are hex shaped to key with the interior of the clutch housing **4152** and, therefore, rotate with the clutch hub **4150** and the clutch housing **4152**. The interior diameter of each shim **4164** is hex-shaped to key with the exterior of the clutch shaft **4154**.

[0129] A retaining ring **4176** is disposed at one end of the clutch shaft **4154**. Alternating friction discs **4162** and shims **4164** are slidably stacked on the clutch shaft **4154**. The spacer **4166** is disposed between the spring pad **4168** and the last friction disc **4162**. The spring washer **4170** is then slidably disposed on the clutch shaft **4154**, and then the first and second hex jam nuts **4172** and **4174** are threadably fastened to the clutch shaft **4154**, thereby fastening the structure to the clutch shaft **4154**. As an alternative, a suitably sized compression spring may be used in lieu of spring washer **4170**. The assembled clutch shaft **4154** is then slidably received within the clutch housing **4152**, such that one end of the clutch shaft **4154** is radially seated within the clutch hub **4150**. The other end of the clutch shaft **4154** extends outwardly from the clutch housing **4152** and is keyed for a drive sprocket **4092** (see FIG. 52). The other end of the clutch shaft **4154** also extends through frame **3999** at bearing **3998** (see FIG. 51).

[0130] Referring now to FIGS. 55, 56, and 60-68, the stow latch assembly **3030** will now be described in greater detail. The stow latch assembly **3030** includes a locking assembly **4190** and a handle assembly **3096**. As best seen by referring to FIGS. 55 and 56, the locking assembly **4190** includes a latch plate **4194**, a stop block **4196**, a linkage assembly **4198**, and a solenoid **4200**. The latch plate **4194** is

formed from a substantially flat rectangular plate of a thin gauge spring steel folded over onto itself, such that a live spring hinge **4202** is formed at the bend in the plate. As formed, the spring hinge **4202** extends between an attachment portion **4204** and a latch portion **4206**.

[0131] The attachment portion **4204** is fixed to the ramp frame **3999** by well-known fasteners **4208**, such as screws or rivets.

[0132] The free end of the latch portion **4206** is suitably bent to form a seat **4212**. The seat **4212** is adapted to receive a portion of the linkage assembly **4198**, as is described in greater detail below.

[0133] The stop block **4196** is suitably formed from a material, such as steel, and is a substantially rectangular member fastened to the ramp frame **3999** at a position below the locking assembly **4190**. The stop block **4196** is rigidly attached to the ramp frame **3999** by well known fasteners, such as bolts or rivets. The stop block **4196** is adapted to support the ramp platform in the stowed position, wherein the handle block **3116** of handle assembly **3096** bears on stop block **4196** (see FIG. 64). A portion of the linkage assembly **4198** is pivotally attached to the stop block **4196**.

[0134] As may be best seen by referring to FIGS. 55, 56, and 62, the linkage assembly **4198** includes a latch release lever **4220**, an actuating link **4222**, and a coil spring **4224**. The latch release lever **4220** is a substantially rectangular member pivotally attached to the stop block **4196** by a pin **4226** extending laterally through the mid-section of the latch release lever **4220**. One end of the latch release lever **4220** is disposed against the seat **4212** of the latch plate **4194**. The other end of the latch release lever **4220** is coupled to one end of the actuating link **4222** by a pin (not shown). As attached to the latch release lever **4220**, the actuating link **4222** pivots the latch release lever **4220** about the pin **4226** to displace the latch portion **4206** into an unlocked position (FIG. 56), such that the seat **4212** of latch plate **4194** disengages handle block **3116**.

[0135] The other end of the actuating link **4222** is operatively connected to the solenoid **4200** and the coil spring **4224**. As best seen by referring to FIG. 62, the actuating link **4222** is bent at two right angles, such that one end of the actuating link **4222** forms a substantially reverse S-shape. The coil spring **4224** extends between an attachment bore **4228** and an attachment arm **4230**. The attachment arm **4230** is rigidly attached to the ramp frame **3999** in a manner well known in the art. As attached, the coil spring **4224** biases the stow latch assembly **3030** into the locked position, as seen best by referring to FIG. 55.

[0136] Referring now to FIGS. 67 and 68, the handle assembly **3096** will now be described in greater detail. Attached to the outboard side of the ramp platform **3044**, the handle assembly **3096** includes a pull handle **3112**, handle bias spring **3114**, and a handle block **3116**.

[0137] The operation of the stow latch assembly **3030** is best seen in FIG. 64 where the latch plate **4194** engages the handle block **3116** when the ramp platform **3044** is in the stowed position. During normal powered operations, when deploy is selected, the solenoid **4200** actuates the latch release lever **4220** which in turn causes the latch plate **4194** to disengage the handle block **3116** (FIG. 66). When deploying the ramp manually from the stowed position, the opera-

tor lifts the pull handle **3112**, which disengages the latch plate **4194** from the handle block **3116**, enabling the operator to simply lift up the ramp platform **3044**.

[0138] Although the preferred embodiments of the present invention have been described above, it should be apparent that changes may be made thereto and still be within the scope of the present invention. As a nonlimiting example, the cam pins may be integrally formed with the rear stub shaft. Further, a manually operated flip-out ramp is also within the scope of the present invention. In this regard, such a flip-out ramp may be manufactured without the drive assembly and, therefore, manually reciprocated between stowed and deployed positions. As another non-limiting example, the reciprocating mechanism could independently drive the ramp and the raising floor.

[0139] While the preferred embodiment of the invention has been illustrated and described, it will be appreciated that various changes can be made therein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A wheelchair ramp assembly, comprising:

- (a) a platform mounted to a vehicle having a floor, the platform reciprocally mounted to the vehicle to reciprocate the platform between a raised position, wherein the platform is substantially flush with the floor, and a recessed position;
- (b) a ramp having a weight, the ramp coupled to a reciprocating mechanism for selective actuation between a deployed position and a stowed position in response to a force, wherein when the ramp is in the stowed position, the platform is in a plane located below the floor; and
- (c) a counterbalance assembly cooperatively coupled to the ramp to counterbalance the weight of the ramp during actuation of the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions to reduce the force required to reciprocate the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions.

2. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 1, wherein the platform is mounted to the vehicle by a frame.

3. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 1, further comprising a preload assembly coupled to the counterbalance assembly, the preload assembly adapted to selectively apply a load to the counterbalance assembly to assist in reciprocating the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions.

4. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 1, wherein the counter-balance assembly further comprises a torsion assembly having a rotating end and fixed end.

5. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 4, wherein the torsion assembly comprises a torsion rod extending between the rotating and fixed ends of the torsion assembly.

6. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 5, wherein the weight of the ramp causes the torsion rod to twist about the fixed end of the torsion assembly when the ramp is reciprocated between the deployed and stowed positions to resist the weight of the ramp.

7. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 6, wherein the counter-balance assembly further comprises an actuating arm rotatably attached to the torsion assembly and first and second bearing surfaces cooperatively coupled to the ramp, wherein the first and second bearing surfaces move in a predetermined path as the ramp reciprocates between the deployed and the stowed positions to contact a portion of the actuating arm and cause the torsion rod to twist.

8. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 7, wherein one end of the actuating arm includes a cammed surface, wherein the cammed surface is positioned for engagement with at one of the bearing surfaces, such that as the ramp is reciprocated between the deployed and stowed positions, at least one of the bearing surfaces engages a portion of the cammed surface, thereby twisting the torsion rod to counterbalance the weight of the ramp.

9. The wheelchair ramp assembly of claim 8, further comprising a preload assembly coupled to the torsion assembly, the preload assembly twists the torsion rod from a neutral position to assist in reciprocating the ramp between the deployed and stowed positions.

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