United States Patent [19]

Petock

[11] 3,884,495

[45] May 20, 1975

[54] **WALKER**

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[22] Filed: **July 1, 1974**

[21] Appl. No.: **484,661**

[52] **U.S. Cl.**..... **280/87.02 W;** 248/345.1; 272/70.3; 297/5

[51] **Int. Cl.**..... **B62b 11/00**

[58] **Field of Search**..... 280/87.02 W; 272/70.3; 297/5, 6; 248/345.1

[56] **References Cited**

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[57] **ABSTRACT**

A walker is disclosed in which the members supporting the seat of the walker are provided with a resilient material covering. The resilient covering material may be of tubular construction thereby enabling it to be mounted on the seat supporting members by sliding it over such members. Alternatively, the resilient covering material may be in sheet form and mounted around the supporting members by wrapping it thereon. In such a case, the resilient material would be held in place by a covering material provided with fastening means, straps, adhesive or other suitable means. The resilient material is preferably a foam type of material and preferably extends downward over at least the outer portions of the wheels of the walker.

The purpose of the above abstract is to provide a non-legal technical statement of the disclosure of the contents of the instant patent application and thus serve as a searching-scanning tool for scientists, engineers and researchers. Accordingly, this abstract is not intended to be used in understanding or otherwise comprehending the principles of the present invention hereinafter described in detail, nor is it intended to be used in interpreting or in any way limiting the scope or fair meaning of the claims appended hereto.

14 Claims, 5 Drawing Figures

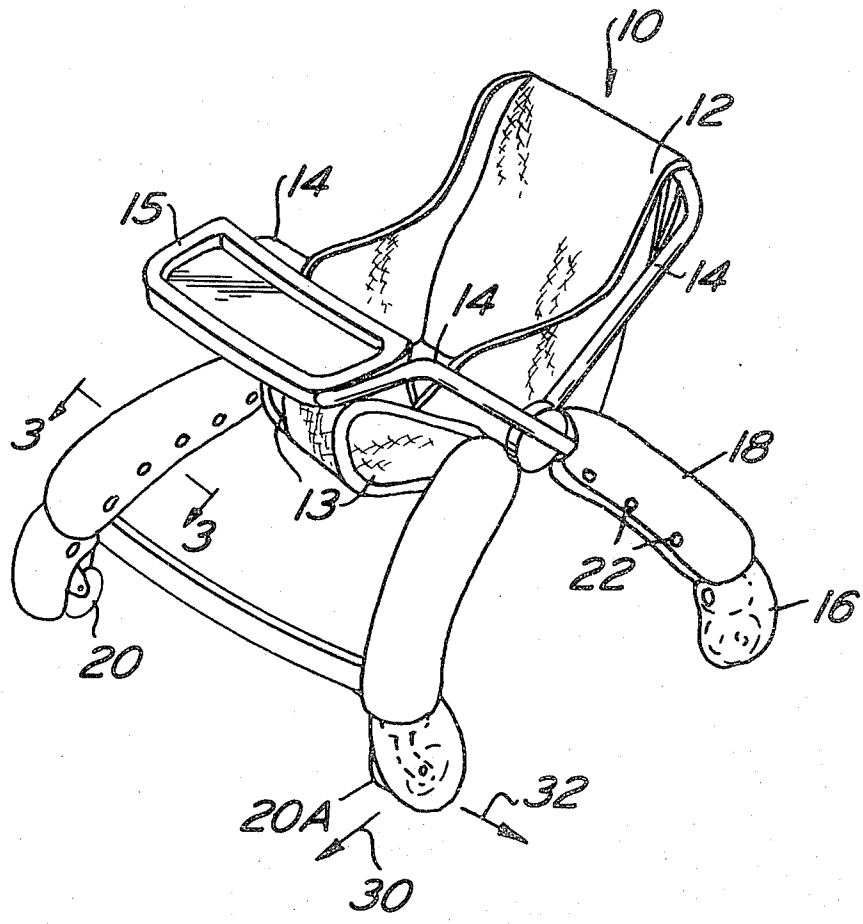


FIG. 1

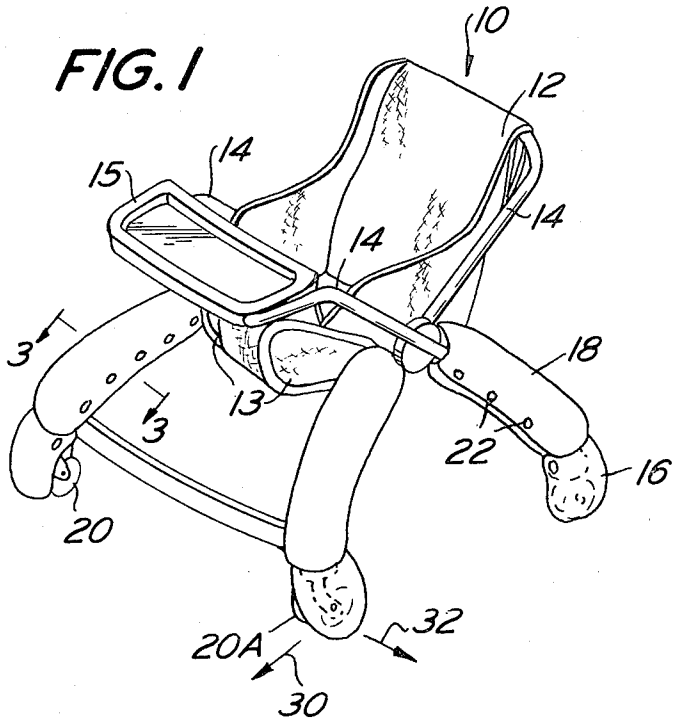
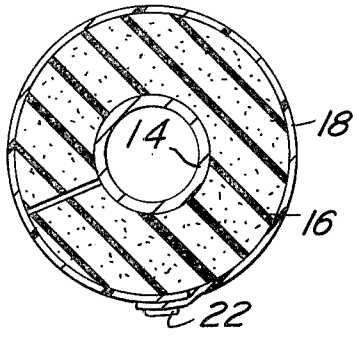


FIG. 3



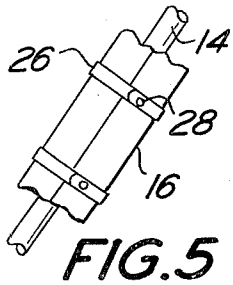


FIG. 5

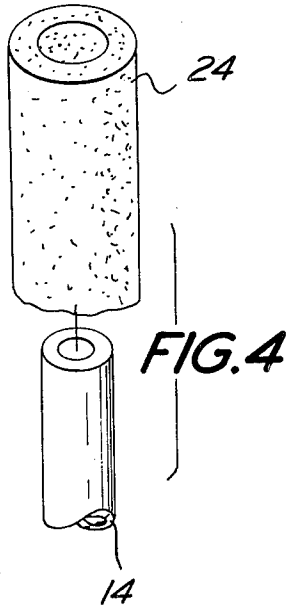


FIG. 4

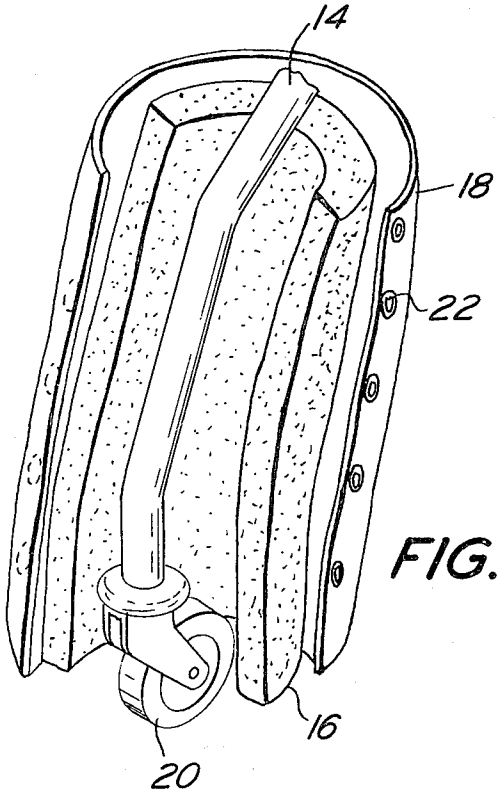


FIG. 2

WALKER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a walker or apparatus for assisting a human being in learning to walk. More particularly, the present invention relates to a padding construction for protecting furniture and other objects in the environment in which the walker is used.

In the past, most walker devices were not provided with any means for protecting furniture and other objects in the environment in which they were used. This resulted in considerable damage to furniture of all types, woodwork, doors and built in cabinets. This is especially so in the case of baby walkers wherein a very young child just beginning to walk has very little or no appreciation of the need to protect furniture and other objects. The child in such case very often rams the members which support the flexible seat into furniture, doors and various other objects.

The teachings of the prior art have not been satisfactory for overcoming this long standing problem. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 3,145,048-Dowdy, et al., disclose a resilient bumper mounted on the outer periphery of an annular frame on the walker which is only a few inches above the floor level. This bumper is mounted immediately above the wheels of the walker. A bumper of this type requires that the dimensions of the walker be significantly increased. This presents problems with respect to the child in the walker negotiating narrow passage ways. More importantly, no protection is provided to furniture and other objects where the bumper passes underneath the furniture and the supporting members come in contact with a portion of the furniture.

A similar type bumper arrangement is disclosed by U.S. Pat. No. 3,183,028-Williams. Williams discloses an annular bumper which is mounted on extension members extending from the members supporting the flexible seat. The bumper on the extension members extends even further than that disclosed by Dowdy, et al., thereby requiring an even larger minimum space in order to enable the walker to pass and still suffers from the defect of not providing protection to furniture and other objects when the members supporting the seat come in contact with such overhanging furniture and other objects.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention provides a significant and important advantage of protecting furniture and other objects in which the walker is used without substantially increasing the dimensions of the walker.

Another advantage of the present invention is that, in one embodiment, the padding is easily removable for cleaning.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it provides protection for furniture in a manner that is economical and easily manufactured.

Another advantage of the present invention is that it may be applied to existing walkers.

Briefly, in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention, an apparatus is provided for assisting a human being in learning to walk. The apparatus includes a flexible seat and a plurality of upwardly extending members for supporting the seat mounted on wheels for free movement. A resilient material surrounds at least a part of each of the plurality of members extending at least from a point substantially adjacent said wheels to a point of a height substantially adjacent said flexible seat thereby minimizing the likelihood of damage to objects, in the environment in which the apparatus is used, by the plurality of members.

In accordance with another embodiment of the present invention, a kit is provided for use in making a baby walker less likely to damage objects in the environment in which it is used. The baby walker includes a flexible seat and a plurality of upwardly extending members for supporting the seat mounted on wheels for free movement. The kit comprises a plurality of pieces of resilient material constructed of a shape adapted to be mounted on at least a part of each of the plurality of members supporting the seat of the walker. Each of the plurality of pieces of resilient material are adapted to extend at least from a point substantially adjacent said wheels to a point of a height substantially adjacent the flexible seat.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For the purpose of illustrating the invention, there are shown in the drawings forms which are presently preferred; it being understood, however, that this invention is not limited to the precise arrangements and instrumentalities shown.

FIG. 1 is a view in perspective of an apparatus in accordance with one embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a view in perspective showing the structure of the invention in slightly modified form from that shown in FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a cross sectional view taken along line 3—3 of FIG. 1.

FIG. 4 is a view in perspective of another embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is an elevation view of another embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to the drawings in detail, wherein like numerals indicate like elements, there is shown in FIG. 1 a walker **10**. Walker **10** is provided with a flexible seat **12** having appertures **13** through which the legs of a young child or baby may pass. The flexible seat **12** is provided with a plurality of members **14** for supporting the flexible seat **12**. A tray **15** may be mounted on the members **14** as shown. The flexible seat **12**, member **14**, tray **15** and their interconnections are well known in the art and need not be described here in detail.

A resilient material **16** is provided to surround at least a portion of members or support members **14**. As shown in FIGS. **1**, **2**, **3** and **5**, the resilient material is in sheet form and is wrapped around support members **14**. This resilient material may be of any well known type such as rubber. However, the resilient material, when used in either sheet form or tubular form, is preferably a foam type material, such as foam rubber, foam polystyrene or foam polyurethane.

As shown in FIG. **1**, the resilient material preferably extends down over wheels **20**. Wheels **20** support the plurality of members **14** for free movement of the walker **10**. As shown in FIG. **1**, the resilient material need only cover the sections of the wheel which would come in contact with other objects. For example, it is

sufficient that wheel **20A** have padding or resilient material in the directions of arrows **30** and **32.**

As shown in FIG. **1,** the resilient material may be provided with a covering material **18.** The covering material **18** may be a vinyl type material, canvas, natural or synthetic fabric, synthetic resin flexible plastic material or any other suitable cleanable material, synthetic or natural. The covering material **18** is provided with fasteners **22.** Fasteners **22** may be snap fasteners, as shown, clasps or any other suitable type of fastener well known in the art.

The covering material **18** should be a material which is readily cleanable. Often times, a young child or baby using the walker will spill various foods and liquids on the covering **18** or soil it by other means. Therefore, the provision of the covering material provides a significant advantage in allowing the padding means of the present invention to be readily cleanable since the covering material is easily removed and washable by conventional means.

Referring to FIG. **2,** there is shown the resilient material **16** and covering material **18** partially unwrapped from support member **14.** The upper portion of FIG. **2** also helps to illustrate the detail of the structure shown in FIGS. **1** and **3.** However, FIG. **2** shows another embodiment of the present invention wherein the resilient material **16** and the covering material **18** completely surround the wheel **20** and its journalling structure.

FIG. **5** illustrates an embodiment of the present invention wherein straps **26** are used to retain resilient material **16,** which is of the sheet type. The straps **26** are provided with fasteners **28.** The straps **26** may also be used in conjunction with an embodiment wherein both the resilient material **16** and the covering material **18** are used. In the alternative, the straps **26** may be eliminated by adhesively bonding the resilient material **16** to support member **14** by a suitable adhesive well known in the art.

Referring now to FIG. **4,** there is shown another embodiment of the present invention wherein resilient material **24** of a tubular construction is shown. The tubular resilient material does not require any fastening means to hold it in place. However, straps or adhesive may be used to ensure no movement of the resilient material. The resilient material **24** may be slid over the support members **14.** If resilient material **24** is installed at the time of initial manufacturing, the resilient material **24** may preferably be slid over support member **14** prior to the time of installation of wheels **20.** If the resilient material **24** is being installed at a later time, the wheels **20** may be preferably removed, and resilient material **24** slid over support member **14.** In the case where the tubular material is installed after the time of manufacture, the wheels **20** are conventionally easily removable by pulling them out of support members **14** in which they are usually retained by a spring member expanded against the inner walls of support member **14.**

The present invention includes kits of resilient material with or without fastening means and covering materials. For example, kits of resilient material **16** may be provided for walkers which have been previously manufactured. These kits could include resilient material with straps **16** or with a covering material **18.** The kits may also be comprised simply of four pieces of tubular resilient material **24** or may include four pieces of resilient material **24** and a covering means **18** for ease in cleaning. Although four pieces of resilient material have been used for ease in illustrating the kit, it will be apparent that any number less than **4** may be sold in a kit. This is especially so in the case where a walker may use only **3** supporting members **14.**

It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that various modifications, additions, and changes in the structure of the invention may be made while remaining within the spirit and scope of the present invention. For example, the form of walker illustrated in FIG. **1** has been chosen only for illustrative purposes. A completely different type of walker could be used, such as one having a seat supported on three members. Furthermore, it is obvious that various other types of fasteners may be used. Furthermore, various changes may be made in the portions of the support members which are protected by the resilient material.

In view of the above, the present invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential attributes thereof and, accordingly, reference should be made to the appended claims, rather than to the foregoing specification as indicating the scope of the invention.

I claim:

1. An apparatus for assisting a human being in learning to walk, comprising: a flexible seat, a plurality of upwardly extending members for supporting said seat, said plurality of members being supported on wheels for free movement, and a resilient material surrounding at least a part of each of said plurality of members extending at least from a point substantially adjacent said wheels to a point of a height substantially adjacent said flexible seat thereby minimizing the likelihood of damage to objects, in the environment in which the apparatus is used, by said plurality of members.

2. Apparatus in accordance with claim **1** wherein said resilient material is a foam material.

3. Apparatus in accordance with claim **2,** including a covering material mounted over said foam resilient material.

4. Apparatus in accordance with claim **3** wherein said covering material is provided with a fastening means thereby providing easy removal for cleaning.

5. Apparatus in accordance with claim **1** wherein said resilient material is tubular and is mounted over said plurality of members.

6. Apparatus in accordance with claim **1** wherein said resilient material extends in the form of a pad at least partially around said wheels supporting said plurality of members.

7. Apparatus in accordance with claim **1** wherein said resilient material is wrapped around at least a portion of each of said plurality of members and retained in place by a plurality of straps.

8. A kit for use in making a baby walker less likely to damage objects in the environment in which it is used, said baby walker including a flexible seat and a plurality of upwardly extending members for supporting said seat, said plurality of members being mounted on wheels for free movement, comprising: a plurality of pieces of resilient material constructed of a shape adapted to be mounted on at least a part of each of the plurality of members supproting said seat of said walker, each of said plurality of pieces of resilient material being adapted to extend at least from a point substantially adjacent said wheels to a point of a height substantially adjacent said flexible seat.

9. A kit in accordance with claim 8 wherein said pieces of resilient material are comprised of a foam resilient material.

10. A kit in accordance with claim 9, including a plurality of pieces of covering material for mounting over said plurality of pieces of foam resilient material.

11. A kit in accordance with claim 10 wherein said plurality of pieces of covering material are provided with fastening means thereby providing easy removal for cleaning.

12. A kit in accordance with claim 8 wherein said plurality of pieces of resilient material are tubular and are adapted to be mounted over said plurality of members.

13. Apparatus in accordance with claim 8 wherein said plurality of pieces of resilient material are constructed of a shape adapted to extend in the form of a pad at least partially around said wheels supporting said plurality of members.

14. Apparatus in accordance with claim 8 wherein said plurality of pieces of resilient material are adapted to be wrapped around said plurality of members and wherein said kit is provided with a plurality of straps to retain said plurality of pieces of resilient material in place.

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