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(54) **SNOWMOBILE REAR SUSPENSION**

(71) Applicant: **BRP FINLAND OY**, Rovaniemi (FI)

(72) Inventors: **Esa Vaisanen**, Rovaniemi (FI); **Mika Korsumaki**, Rovaniemi (FI); **Petteri Jarvinen**, Rovaniemi (FI); **Joonas Mahonen**, Rovaniemi (FI)

(73) Assignee: **BOMBARDIER RECREATIONAL PRODUCTS INC.**, Valcourt (CA)

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Primary Examiner — Joseph M Rocca

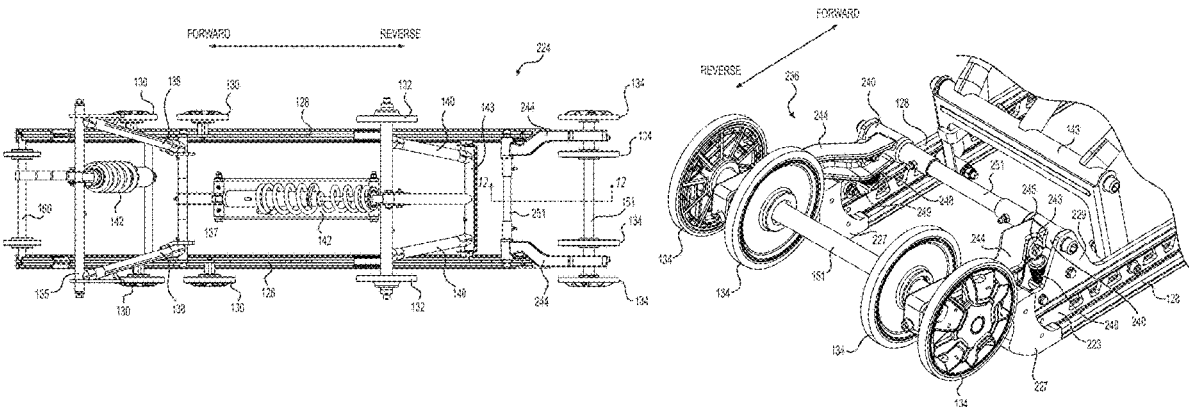
Assistant Examiner — Maurice L Williams

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — BCF LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

A rear suspension assembly for a vehicle having a chassis and an endless drive track, comprising at least one suspension arm pivotally connecting to the chassis; a pair of slide rails connected to the at least one suspension arm; at least one shock absorber assembly connected to the pair of slide rails and a rail extension assembly comprising at least one extension arm having a front end pivotally connected to a rear portion of at least one of the slide rails about a pivot axis, the at least one extension arm being pivotable between a raised position and a lowered position with respect to the pair of slide rails about the pivot axis, at least one rear idler wheel rotationally connected the at least one extension arm, and at least one biasing member biasing the at least one extension arm toward the raised position.

17 Claims, 12 Drawing Sheets



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		(2006.01)			
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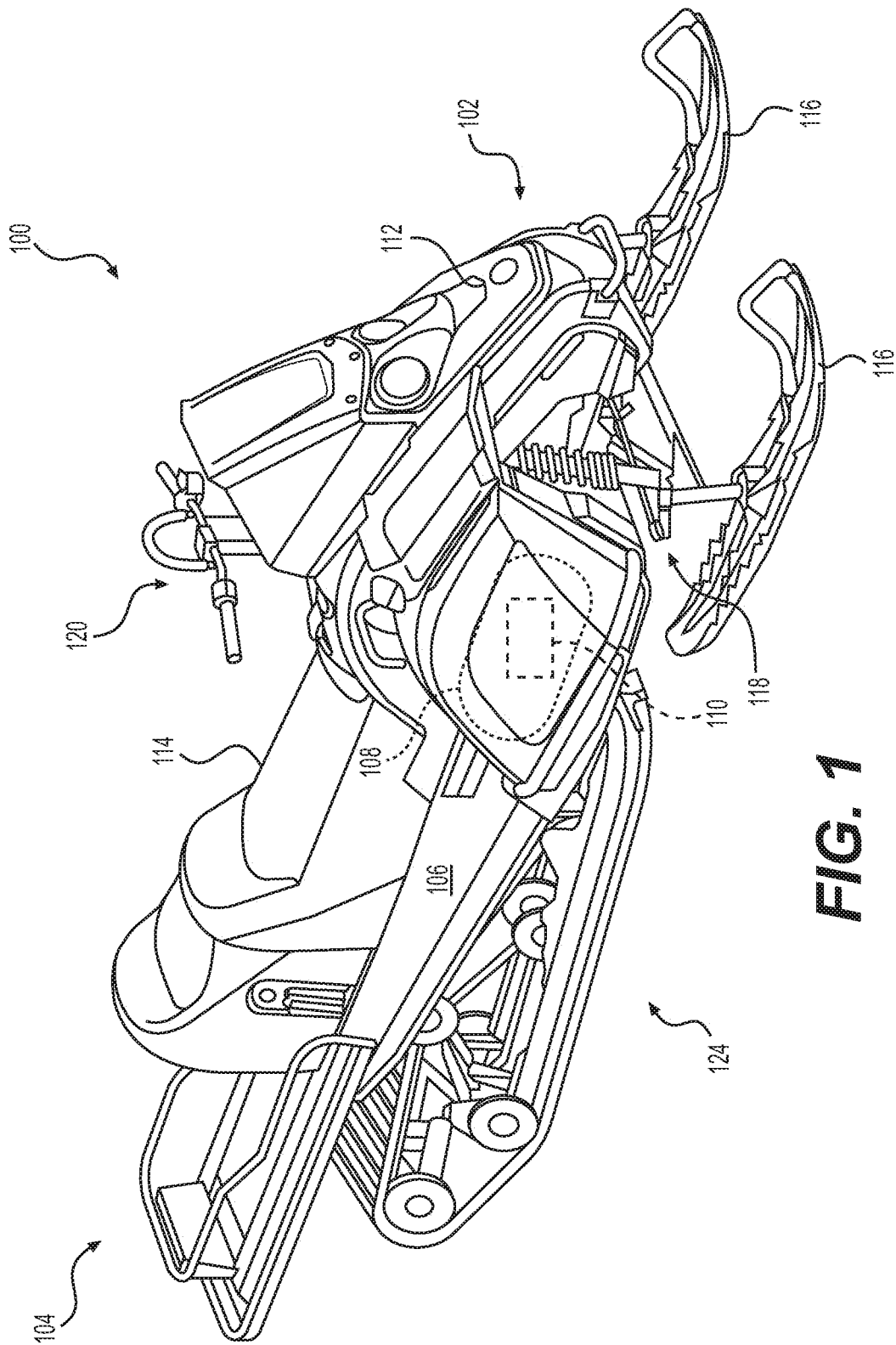


FIG. 1

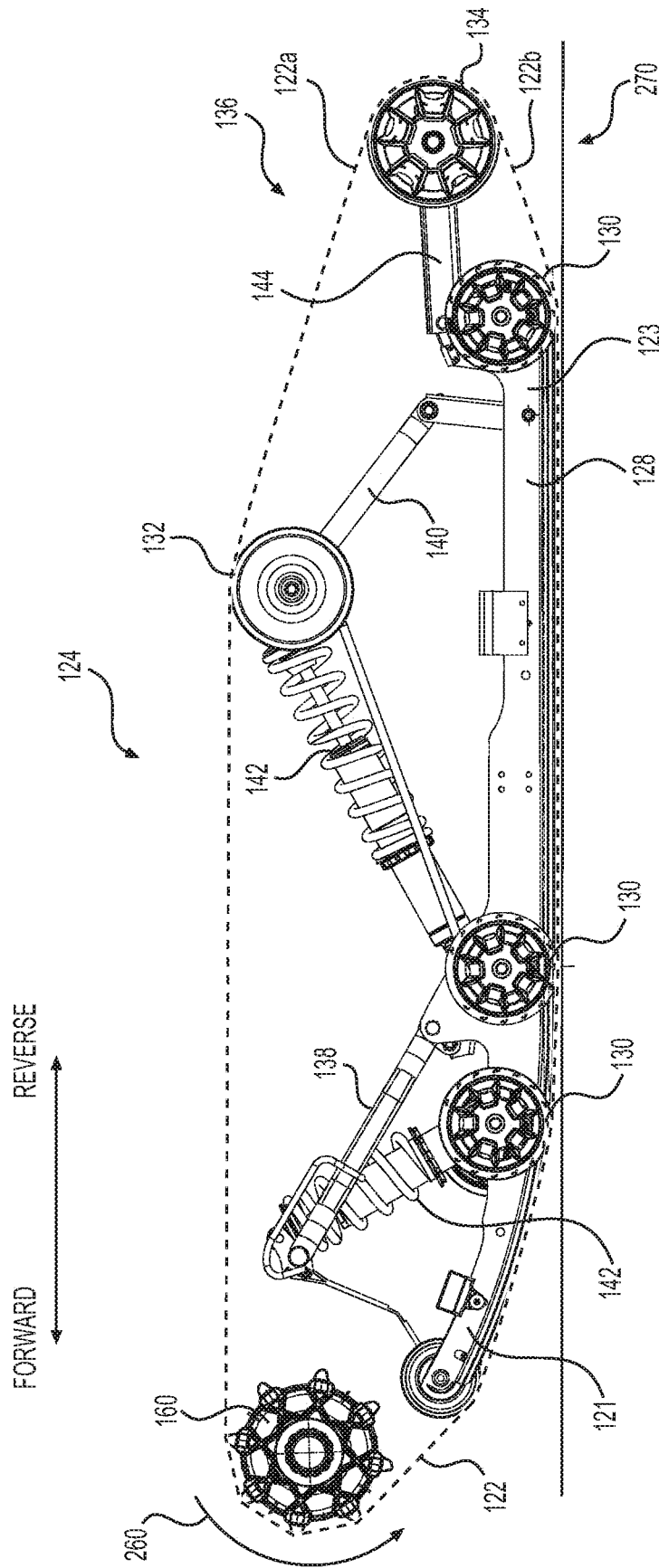


FIG. 2

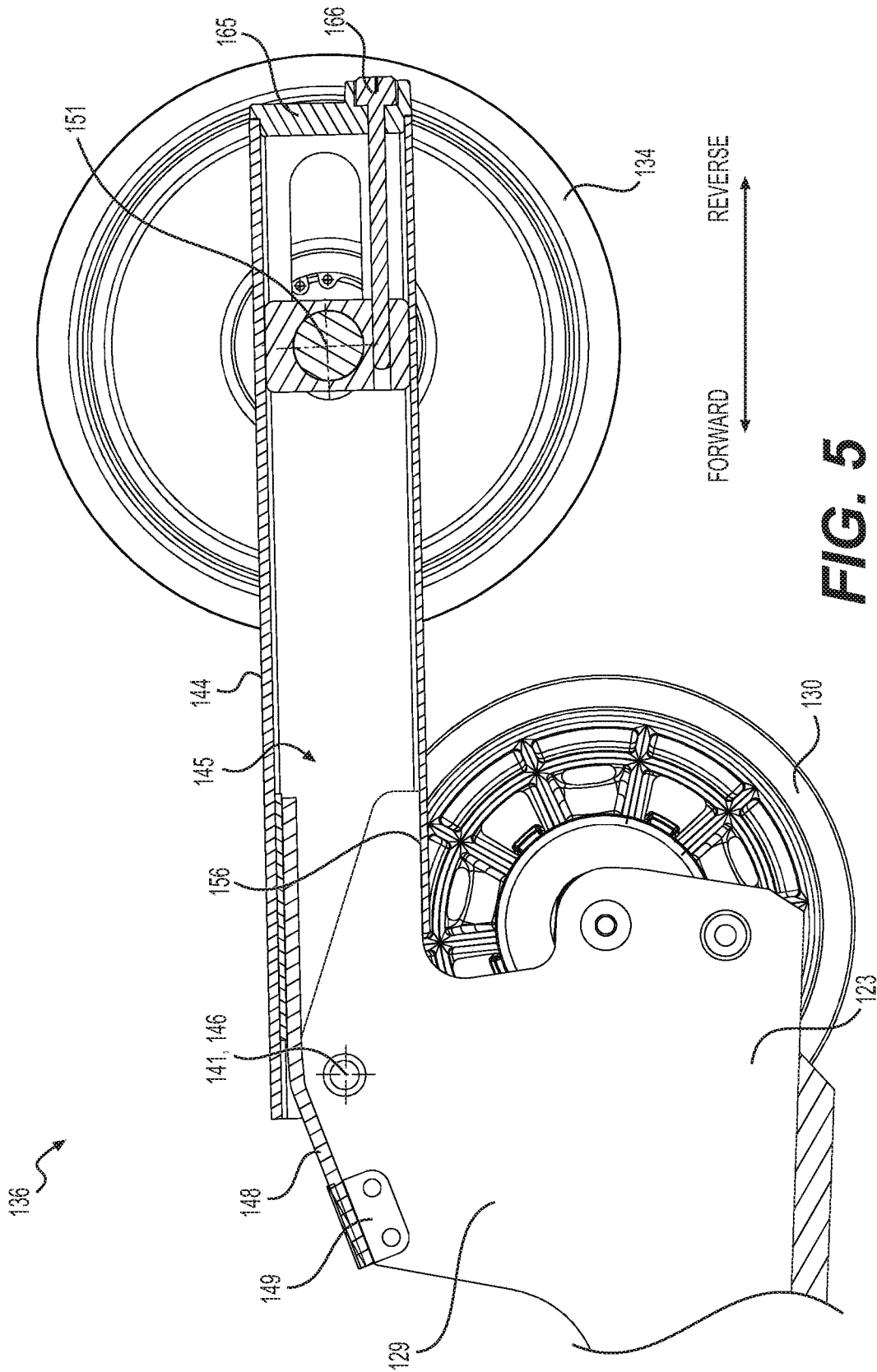


FIG. 5

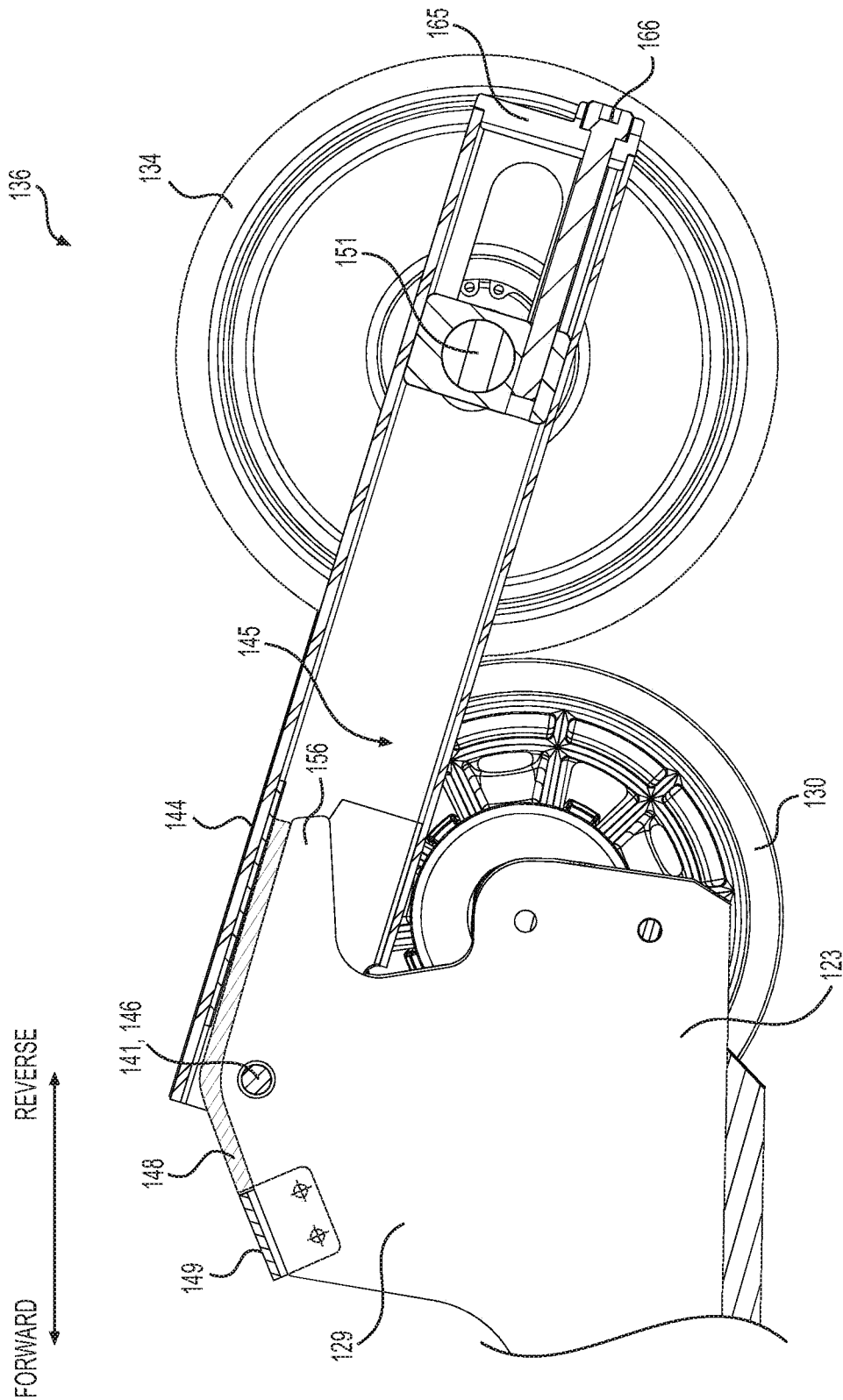


FIG. 6

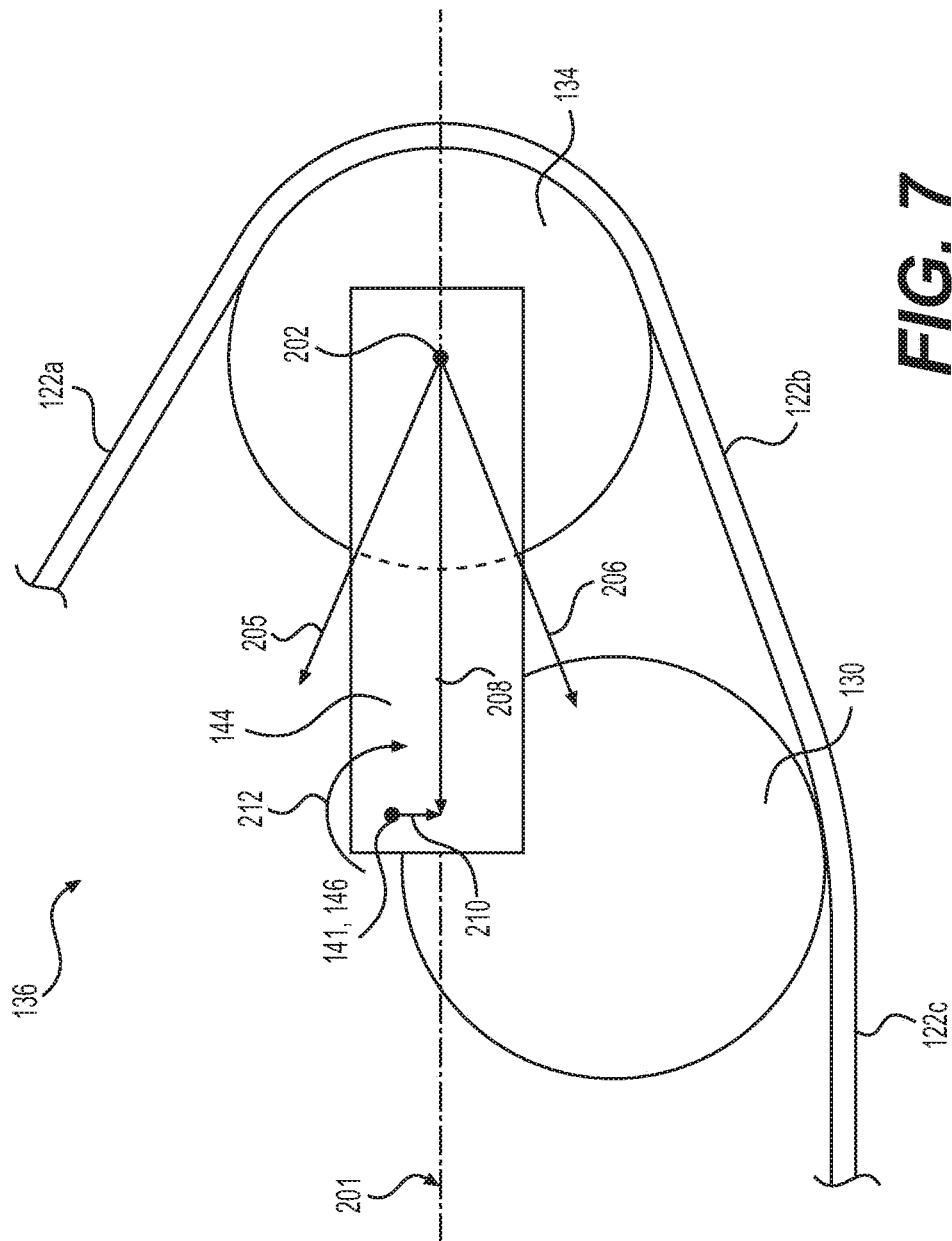


FIG. 7

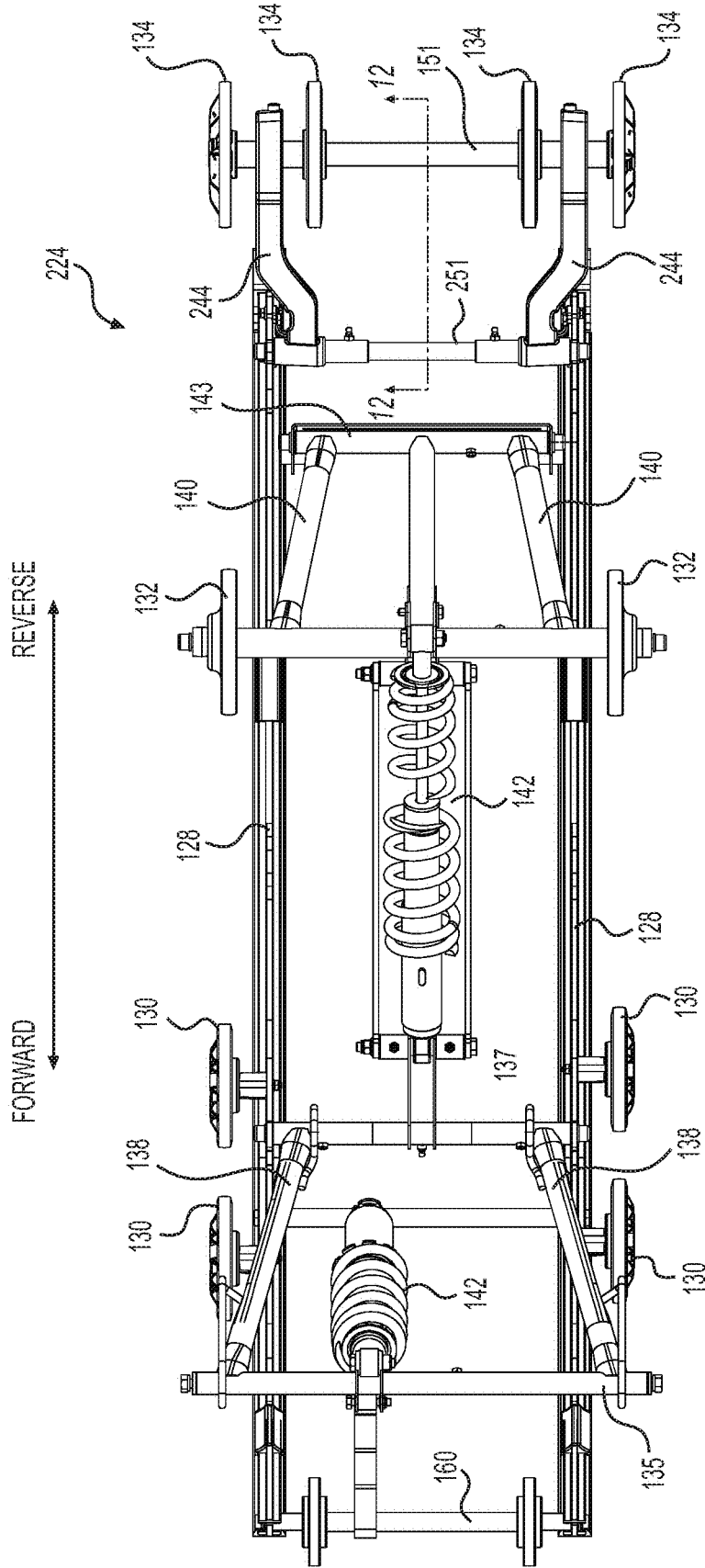


FIG. 8

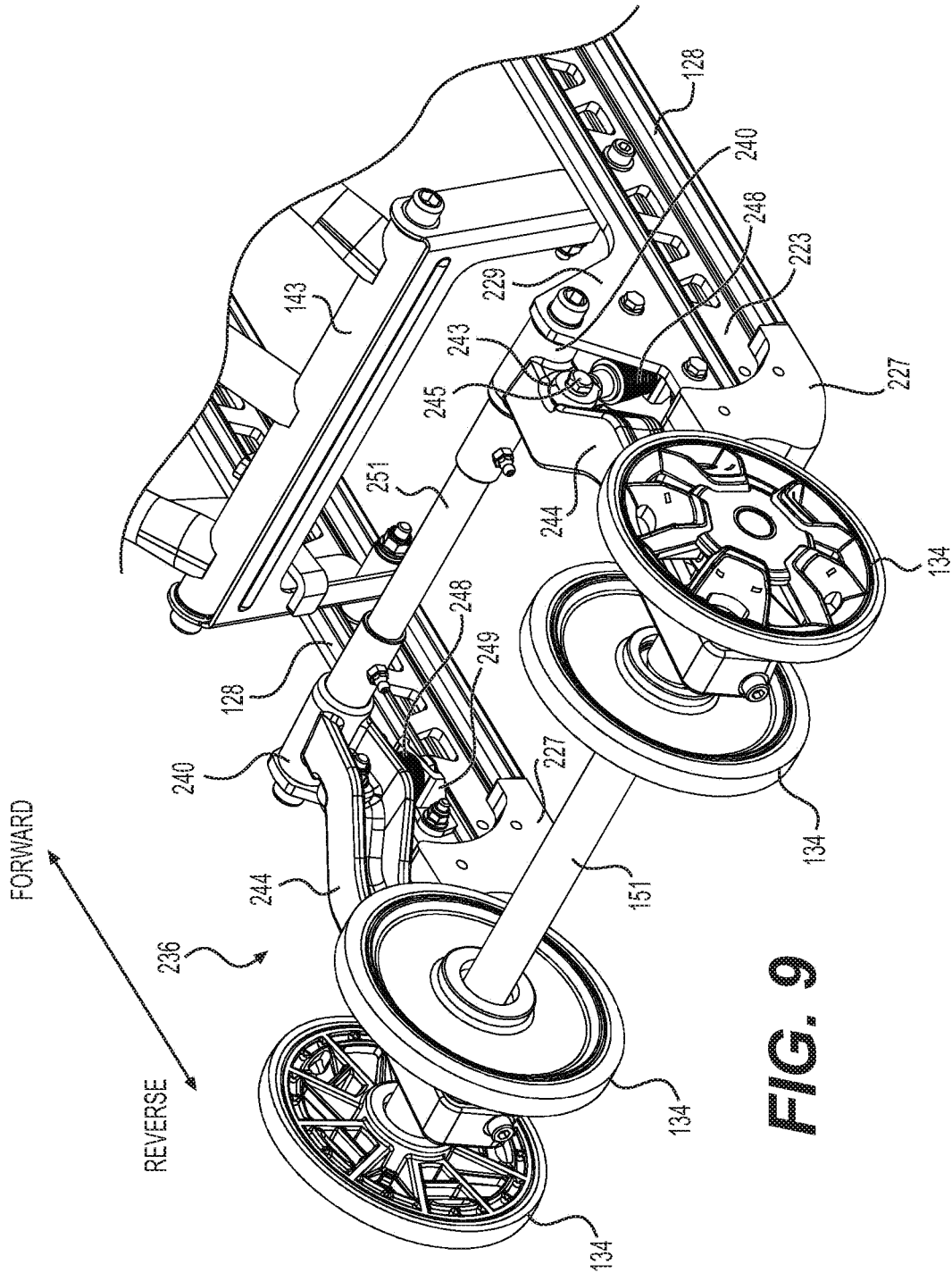


FIG. 9

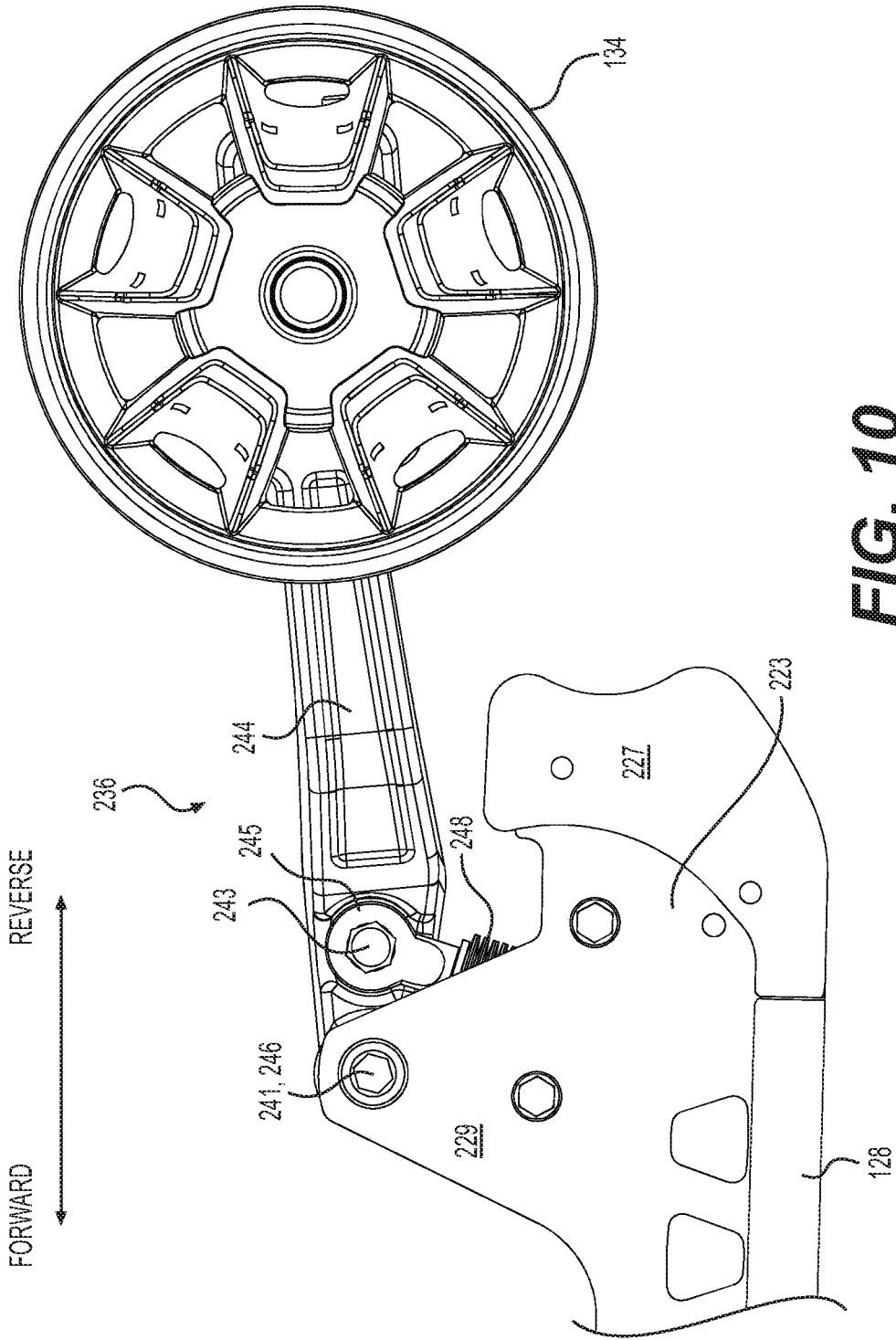


FIG. 10

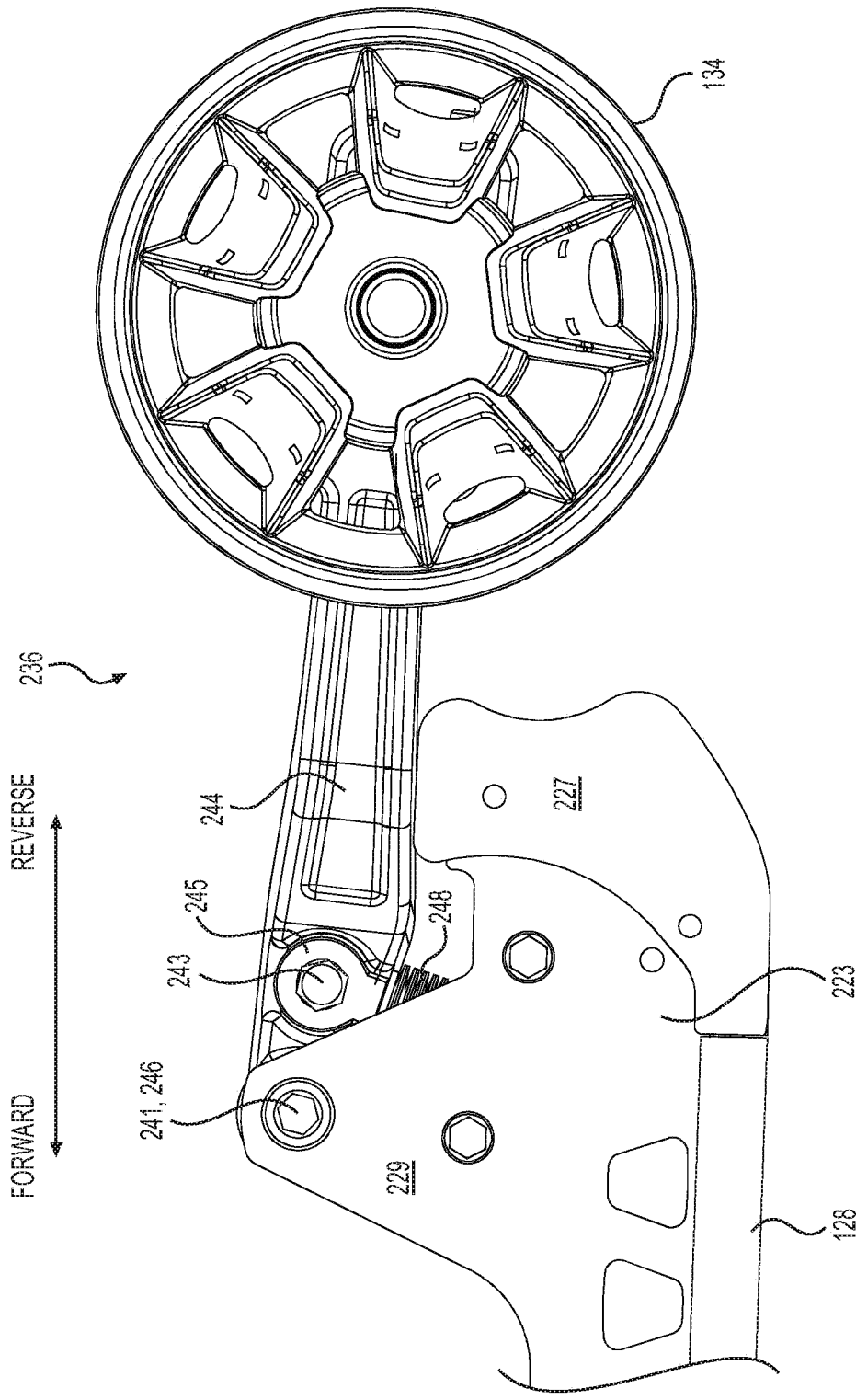


FIG. 11

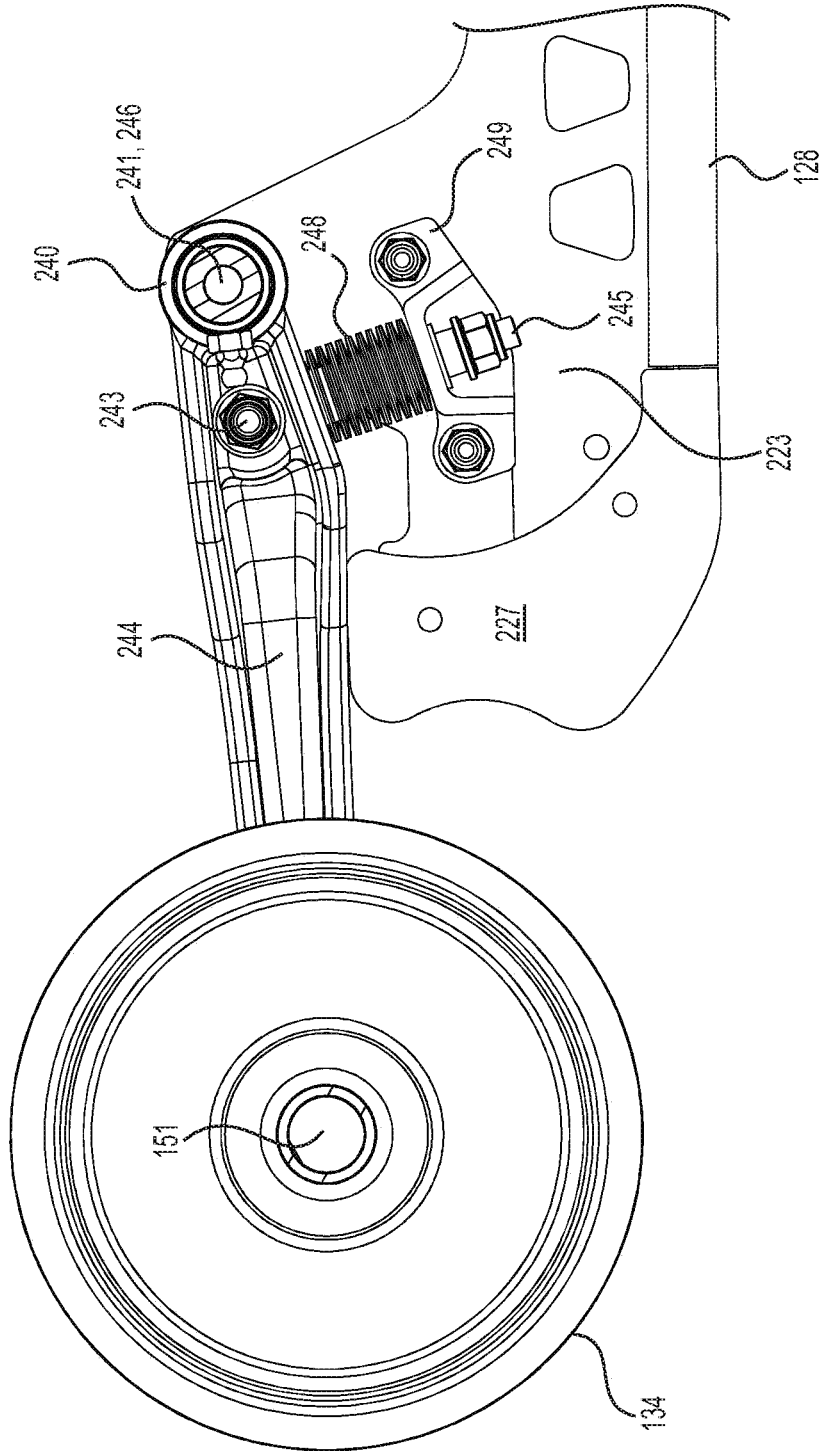


FIG. 12

SNOWMOBILE REAR SUSPENSION

CROSS-REFERENCE

The present application claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 62/234,787, filed Sep. 30, 2015, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD

The present technology relates to suspension assemblies for tracked vehicles, and more particularly to rear suspension assemblies for snowmobiles.

BACKGROUND

Conventionally, the rear suspension of a snowmobile supports an endless drive track that is driven by the motor to power the snowmobile. The endless drive track is tensioned to surround a pair of slide rails, a plurality of idler wheels, and at least one drive wheel or sprocket. A shock absorbing mechanism involving compressed springs and hydraulic dampers urges the slide rails away from the chassis of the snowmobile against the weight supported above the suspension in a static condition.

When a snowmobile is driven in reverse, particularly on soft snow, the rear portion of the track can dig into the snow and cause the vehicle to become stuck. In some snowmobiles, the rear suspensions are provided with a rear articulated portion that can pivot upward against a downward biasing force when sufficient force is applied to that portion of the rail. This force could be provided by contact with a bump or the pressure of the snow from underneath the articulated portion. When pivoted upward, the articulated portion provides a ramp so that when the vehicle is reversing in soft snow or over an obstacle, for example, the vehicle is continuously being pushed to the top of the snow and is prevented from becoming stuck. As soon as the upward force from the snow or obstacle is weaker than the force needed to overcome the downward biasing force, the articulated portion rotates back to its initial flat orientation.

In some conditions, such as when operating the snowmobile in reverse through very soft snow for example, the pressure on the articulated portion of the suspension may not be enough to overcome the downward biasing force. The articulated portion simply remains in its downward position and the track remains flat. In this case, there is no benefit obtained from the articulation.

There are situations, however, where it is advantageous to have the articulated portion in the downward position to increase the track length along the ground. In a situation when a snowmobile is moving forward through deep snow or towing a trailer, for example, a larger endless drive track contact area with the ground helps propel the snowmobile forward. Thus there is also an interest in having the articulated portion in a lowered position in certain conditions.

In recent years, other vehicles including, but not limited to, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) have been equipped with endless track drive systems to adapt them for use in snowy conditions. Thus, other vehicles, including ATVs, could also benefit from improvements in suspension assemblies for tracked vehicles.

SUMMARY

It is an object of the present to ameliorate at least some of the inconveniences present in the prior art.

According to one aspect of the present technology, there is provided a rear suspension assembly for a vehicle having a chassis and an endless drive track, the rear suspension assembly comprising at least one suspension arm having a first end and a second end, the first end of the at least one suspension arm being adapted for pivotally connecting to the chassis, a pair of slide rails pivotally connected to the second end of the at least one suspension arm, at least one shock absorber assembly pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails, the at least one shock absorber assembly being adapted for biasing the pair of slide rails away from the chassis and a rail extension assembly comprising at least one extension arm having a front end pivotally connected to a rear portion of at least one of the pair of slide rails about a pivot axis, the at least one extension arm being pivotable between a raised position and a lowered position with respect to the pair of slide rails about the pivot axis, at least one rear idler wheel rotationally connected to a rear portion of the at least one extension arm and at least one biasing member biasing the at least one extension arm toward the raised position.

In some implementations, rear suspension assembly further comprises at least one stopper joined to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails, the at least one stopper abutting the at least one extension arm when the at least one extension arm is in the raised position.

In some implementations, the at least one stopper is integral with the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

In some implementations, the pair of slide rails includes a left slide rail and a right slide rail, the at least one extension arm includes a left extension arm pivotally connected to the left slide rail about the pivot axis and a right extension arm pivotally connected to the right slide rail about the pivot axis, the at least one rear idler wheel includes a rear left idler wheel rotationally connected to the left extension arm and a rear right idler wheel rotationally connected to the right extension arm and the at least one biasing member includes a left biasing member biasing the left extension arm and a right biasing member biasing the right extension arm.

In some implementations, the rear suspension assembly further comprises a left stopper joined to the rear portion of the left slide rail, the left stopper abutting the left extension arm when the left extension arm is in the raised position and a right stopper joined to the rear portion of the right slide rail, the right stopper abutting the right extension arm when the right extension arm is in the raised position.

In some implementations, the rail extension assembly further comprises a cross-member extending between the rear portions of the left and right extension arms, the rear left and rear right idler wheels being disposed on the cross-member.

In some implementations, the rail extension assembly further comprises two other rear idler wheels disposed on the cross-member between the left and right extension arms.

In some implementations, the at least one biasing member is at least one spring.

In some implementations, the at least one biasing member is at least one spring washer.

In some implementations, the at least one spring is at least one leaf spring having a front portion connected to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

In some implementations, a rear portion of the at least one leaf spring is located in an interior of the at least one extension arm.

According to another aspect of the present technology, there is provided a snowmobile comprising a chassis including a tunnel, the tunnel having a longitudinal direction, a

motor connected to the chassis, at least one front suspension assembly connected to the chassis, at least one ski connected to the chassis by the at least one front suspension assembly, an endless drive track disposed below the tunnel and being operatively connected to the motor and a rear suspension assembly supporting and tensioning the endless drive track, the chassis being connected to the endless drive track via the rear suspension, the rear suspension assembly comprising at least one suspension arm having a first end and a second end, the first end of the at least one suspension arm being adapted for pivotally connecting to the chassis, a pair of slide rails pivotally connected to the second end of the at least one suspension arm, at least one shock absorber assembly pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails, the at least one shock absorber assembly being adapted for biasing the pair of slide rails away from the chassis, and a rail extension assembly, the rail extension assembly having at least one extension arm having a front end pivotally connected to a rear portion of at least one of the pair of slide rails about a pivot axis, the at least one extension arm being pivotable between a raised position and a lowered position with respect to the pair of slide rails about the pivot axis, at least one rear idler wheel rotationally connected to a rear portion of the at least one extension arm and at least one biasing member biasing the at least one extension arm toward the raised position.

In some implementations, the snowmobile further comprises at least one stopper joined to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails, the at least one stopper abutting the at least one extension arm when the at least one extension arm is in the raised position.

In some implementations, the at least one stopper is integral with the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

In some implementations, the pair of slide rails includes a left slide rail and a right slide rail, the at least one extension arm includes a left extension arm pivotally connected to the left slide rail about the pivot axis and a right extension arm pivotally connected to the right slide rail about the pivot axis, the at least one rear idler wheel includes a rear left idler wheel rotationally connected to the left extension arm and a rear right idler wheel rotationally connected to the right extension arm and the at least one biasing member includes a left biasing member biasing the left extension arm and a right biasing member biasing the right extension arm.

In some implementations, the snowmobile further comprises a left stopper joined to the rear portion of the left slide rail, the left stopper abutting the left extension arm when the left extension arm is in the raised position and a right stopper joined to the rear portion of the right slide rail, the right stopper abutting the right extension arm when the right extension arm is in the raised position.

In some implementations, the rail extension assembly further comprises a cross-member extending between the rear portions of the left and right extension arms, the rear left and rear right idler wheels being disposed on the cross-member.

In some implementations, the rail extension assembly further comprises two other rear idler wheels disposed on the cross-member between the left and right extension arms.

In some implementations, the at least one biasing member is at least one leaf spring having a front portion connected to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

In some implementations, a rear portion of the at least one leaf spring is located in an interior of the at least one extension arm.

In some implementations, when the snowmobile is moving forward, the rail extension assembly experiences an upward biasing force applied by the at least one biasing member and a generally downward force applied by the endless drive track.

In some implementations, when the snowmobile is moving forward above a predetermined speed, tension in the endless drive track applies a generally downward force on the rail extension assembly, the generally downward force being greater than an upward biasing force applied by the at least one biasing member, thereby pivoting the at least one extension arm toward the lowered position.

According to yet another aspect of the present technology, there is provided a snowmobile comprising a chassis including a tunnel, the tunnel having a longitudinal direction, a motor connected to the chassis, at least one front suspension assembly connected to the chassis, at least one ski connected to the chassis by the at least one front suspension assembly, an endless drive track disposed below the tunnel and being operatively connected to the motor and a rear suspension assembly supporting and tensioning the endless drive track, the chassis being connected to the endless drive track via the rear suspension, the rear suspension assembly comprising at least one suspension arm having a first end and a second end, the first end of the at least one suspension arm being adapted for pivotally connecting to the chassis, a pair of slide rails pivotally connected to the second end of the at least one suspension arm, at least one shock absorber assembly pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails, the at least one shock absorber assembly being adapted for biasing the pair of slide rails away from the chassis, and a rail extension assembly, the rail extension assembly having at least one extension arm having a front end pivotally connected to a rear portion of at least one of the pair of slide rails about a pivot axis, the at least one extension arm being pivotable between a raised position and a lowered position with respect to the pair of slide rails about the pivot axis, at least one rear idler wheel rotationally connected to a rear portion of the at least one extension arm, and at least one biasing member biasing the at least one extension arm toward the raised position and wherein when the snowmobile is moving forward above a predetermined speed, tension in the endless drive track applies a generally downward force on the rail extension assembly, the generally downward force being greater than an upward biasing force applied by the at least one biasing member, thereby pivoting the at least one extension arm toward the lowered position.

In some implementations, the snowmobile further comprises at least one stopper joined to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails, the at least one stopper abutting the at least one extension arm when the at least one extension arm is in the raised position.

In some implementations, the at least one stopper is integral with the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

In some implementations, the pair of slide rails includes a left slide rail and a right slide rail, the at least one extension arm includes a left extension arm pivotally connected to the left slide rail about the pivot axis and a right extension arm pivotally connected to the right slide rail about the pivot axis, the at least one rear idler wheel includes a rear left idler wheel rotationally connected to the left extension arm and a rear right idler wheel rotationally connected to the right extension arm and the at least one biasing member includes a left biasing member biasing the left extension arm and a right biasing member biasing the right extension arm.

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In some implementations, the snowmobile further comprises a left stopper joined to the rear portion of the left slide rail, the left stopper abutting the left extension arm when the left extension arm is in the raised position and a right stopper joined to the rear portion of the right slide rail, the right stopper abutting the right extension arm when the right extension arm is in the raised position.

In some implementations, the rail extension assembly further comprises a cross-member extending between the rear portions of the left and right extension arms, the rear left and rear right idler wheels being disposed on the cross-member.

In some implementations, the rail extension assembly further comprises two other rear idler wheels disposed on the cross-member between the left and right extension arms.

In some implementations, the at least one biasing member is at least one leaf spring having a front portion connected to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

In some implementations, the at least one biasing member is at least one spring washer.

In some implementations, a rear portion of the at least one leaf spring is located in an interior of the at least one extension arm.

In some implementations, when the snowmobile is moving forward, the rail extension assembly experiences an upward biasing force applied by the at least one biasing member and a generally downward force applied by the endless drive track.

For the purposes of the present application, terms related to spatial orientation such as forward, rearward, front, rear, upper, lower, left, and right, are as they would normally be understood by a driver of the snowmobile sitting thereon in a normal driving position with the vehicle being upright and steered in a straight ahead direction.

Implementations of the present technology each have at least one of the above-mentioned object and/or aspects, but do not necessarily have all of them. It should be understood that some aspects of the present technology that have resulted from attempting to attain the above-mentioned object may not satisfy this object and/or may satisfy other objects not specifically recited herein.

Additional and/or alternative features, aspects, and advantages of implementations of the present technology will become apparent from the following description, the accompanying drawings, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

For a better understanding of the present technology, as well as other aspects and further features thereof, reference is made to the following description which is to be used in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, where:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view, taken from a front, right side of a snowmobile having a rear suspension assembly according to one implementation of the present technology;

FIG. 2 is a left side elevation view of a rear suspension assembly having a rail extension assembly of the snowmobile of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a top plan view of the rear suspension assembly having the rail extension assembly of FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a perspective view, taken from a rear, right side of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 2, taken along line 5-5 of FIG. 3;

FIG. 6 is a cross-sectional view of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 2, taken along line 5-5 of FIG. 3, with the rail extension assembly pivoted to the lowered position;

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FIG. 7 is a schematic illustration of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 4;

FIG. 8 is a top plan view of a rear suspension assembly having a rail extension assembly according to another implementation of the present technology;

FIG. 9 is a perspective view, taken from a rear, right side of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 8;

FIG. 10 is a left side elevation view of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 8;

FIG. 11 is the left side elevation view of FIG. 10, with the rail extension assembly pivoted to a lowered position; and

FIG. 12 is a cross-sectional view of the rail extension assembly of FIG. 8, taken along line 12-12 of FIG. 8, with the rail extension assembly pivoted to the lowered position.

It should also be noted that, unless otherwise explicitly specified herein, the drawings are not to scale.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

The present technology will be described herein with respect to snowmobiles. It is contemplated that aspects of the present suspension assembly could also be applied to other types of tracked vehicles, including, but not limited to, ATVs having endless drive tracks.

A snowmobile **100** having a rear suspension assembly **124** is illustrated in FIG. 1. The snowmobile **100** has a front end **102** and a rear end **104**. The snowmobile **100** has a chassis including a tunnel **106** and a motor cradle **108** (in dotted lines). A motor **110** (in dotted lines) is supported by the motor cradle **108**. It is contemplated that the motor **110** could be different types of motors capable of powering the snowmobile **100**, including but not limited to, an internal combustion engine and an electric motor.

A number of fairings **112** are supported on the chassis to provide aesthetic appeal and protect certain components of the snowmobile **100**. A seat **114** is provided above the tunnel **106** for accommodating a driver and one passenger. It is also contemplated that a seat **114** could accommodate only the driver or the driver and more than one passenger.

Two skis **116** at the front end **102** of the snowmobile **100** are connected to the chassis via a front suspension system **118**. It is contemplated that the snowmobile **100** could have only one ski or multiple skis connected via the front suspension system **118**. A steering assembly **120** is provided generally forward of the seat **114**, and is operatively connected to the skis **116** such that turning the steering assembly **120** turns the skis **116** to steer the snowmobile **100**.

The rear suspension assembly **124** is illustrated in FIGS. 2 and 3. An endless drive track **122** is partially disposed in the tunnel **106** and is supported by the rear suspension assembly **124**. The endless drive track **122** is driven by a sprocket **160**. The sprocket **160** is driven the motor **110** via a transmission (not shown) to propel the snowmobile **100**. The endless drive track **122** is illustrated schematically in dotted lines in FIG. 2.

The rear suspension assembly **124** includes a pair of slide rails **128** that generally position and guide the endless drive track **122**, the pair of slide rails **128** being specifically a right slide rail **128** and a left slide rail **128**. The slide rails **128** have a curved forward end **121** to follow the endless drive track **122** and a flat bottomed rear portion **123** to ensure proper traction between the endless drive track **122** and the ground. The rear portions **123** of the slide rails **128** each have a plate **129**, which is a raised portion of the rear portions **123**. Differently shaped slide rails **128** are also within the scope of the present technology.

The rear suspension assembly **124** is connected to the chassis via the tunnel **106** (shown in FIG. 1) via two front suspension arms **138** and two rear suspension arms **140**. The front suspension arms **138** are pivotally connected to the tunnel **106** at their upper ends via a laterally extending bar **135**, and pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails **128** at their lower ends via a laterally extending bar **137**. It is contemplated that the rear suspension assembly **124** could include only one or more than two front suspension arms **138**. The rear suspension arms **140** are pivotally connected to the tunnel **106** at their upper ends via a laterally extending bar **139**, and pivotally connected to an upper end of a rocker arm **143** at their lower ends. The lower ends of the rocker arm **143** are pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails **128**. It is contemplated that the rear suspension assembly **124** could include only one or more than two rear suspension arms **140**.

Two shock absorber assemblies **142** bias the pair of slide rails **128** downward against the endless drive track **122** to ensure proper contact therebetween. Rear suspension assemblies **124** constructed with a single shock absorber assembly **142** or with more than two shock absorber assemblies **142** are also contemplated.

Three pairs of lower wheels **130** and one pair of upper wheels **132** engage the endless drive track **122** to further guide the endless drive track **122**. Four idler wheels **134** are supported on a rail extension assembly **136** to further guide the track **122**, as will be described in more detail below with respect to FIGS. 4 to 6. It is contemplated that the rear suspension assembly **124** could be provided with more or less lower wheels **130**, upper wheels **132** and/or idler wheels **134** than illustrated.

The rail extension assembly **136** is an articulated rearward portion of the rear suspension assembly **124** and will now be described with respect to FIGS. 4 to 6. The rail extension assembly **136** has a right extension arm **144** and a left extension arm **144** connected to the rear portions **123** of the right and left slide rails **128** respectively. The rail extension assembly **136** pivots about the pivot axis **146** at the pivot point **141**, where the extension arms **144** connect to the rear portions **123**. The rail extension assembly **136** pivots between a raised position (seen in FIG. 5) and a lowered position (seen in FIG. 6) with respect to the pair of slide rails **128**. It is contemplated that the rail extension assembly **136** could include more or less than two extension arms **144**. It is also contemplated that the rail extension assembly **136** could pivot about a pivot point **141** located elsewhere than the rear portion **123** of the slide rails **128**.

One idler wheel **134** is rotationally connected to the right of the right extension arm **144** and another idler wheel **134** is similarly rotationally connected to the left of the left extension arm **144**. Both of the rear idler wheels **134** are disposed on a cross-member **151** passing through a rear portion of the extension arms **144**, thereby rotationally connecting the rear idler wheels **134** to the extension arms **144**. Another two idler wheels **134** are disposed on the cross-member **151**, between the two extension arms **144**. As described above, it is contemplated that more or less than four idler wheels **134** could be included. It is also contemplated that some implementations could include only one pair of exterior idler wheels **134**, with a right idler wheel **134** disposed to the right side of the right extension arm **144** and a left idler wheel **134** disposed to the left side of the left extension arm **144**. It is further contemplated that some implementations could include only one pair of interior idler wheels **134**, with a right idler wheel **134** disposed to the left

side of the right extension arm **144** and a left idler wheel **134** being disposed to the right side of the left extension arm **144**.

A right biasing member **148** and a left biasing member **148** are included for the right and left extension arms **144** to bias the rail extension assembly **136** toward the raised position. As illustrated in FIGS. 5 and 6 for the right extension arm **144**, the biasing members **148** are leaf springs **148**. It is contemplated that different forms of biasing members **148** may be implemented, including, but not limited to, torsion springs, coil springs, and resilient material. The leaf springs **148** will be discussed below in relation to the right extension arm **144**; the details also apply mutatis mutandis to the left extension arm **144**.

A front end of the leaf spring **148** is connected to the plate **129** of the rear portion **123** of the right slide rail **128**. The leaf spring **148** is anchored by a bracket **149** to a top of the plate **129**. As the top of the plate **129** of the right slide rail **128** is slanted slightly upwards (as seen in FIG. 5), the leaf spring **148** extends rearward and upward from its front end until it reaches the right extension arm **144**. The rear end of the leaf spring **148** is disposed in an interior space **145** defined by the right extension arm **144**. The weight of the right extension arm **144**, along with all the components connected to it (including the rear idler wheels **134**), applies a force in the generally downward direction, acting against the rear end of the leaf spring **148** in the interior **145** of the right extension arm **144**. The leaf spring **148** is calibrated to apply enough generally upward force to the right extension arm **144** such that the weight is at least balanced and such that in a static situation, the right extension arm **144** remains in the raised position, as illustrated by FIG. 5.

As seen in FIG. 5, a right stopper **156** integral to the plate **129** of the rear portion **123** of the right slide rail **128** is provided to limit the upward motion of the right extension arm **144**. Equally there is a left stopper **156** provided for the left extension arm **144** (shown in dotted lines in FIG. 4). The position where the extension arms **144** abut their respective stoppers **156** defines the raised position. It is contemplated that the stopper could take multiple other forms, including, but not limited to, an abutment mechanically joined to one or both slide rails **128**, a stopper or an abutment external to the extension arms **144**, and a stopper **156** associated with the biasing member **148**. It is also contemplated that the stoppers **156** could be coated with a resilient material, such as rubber, to cushion the impacts of the movement of the rail extension arms **144** thereon while the snowmobile **100** is in operation. It is further contemplated that, in some implementations, the plate **129** could not include the stopper **156** and the extension arms **144** could move beyond the "raised" position.

In the raised position, the rear portion of the rear suspension assembly **124** is in a position for reversing, either in standard conditions, for soft snow or for passing over bumps or obstacles. Additionally, having the rear portion of the rear suspension assembly **124** in the raised position is also desirable under certain operating conditions where the snowmobile **100** moves forward. When the snowmobile **100** has a shorter portion of the endless drive track **122** in contact with the ground, the snowmobile **100** is easier to steer, which could be desirable when traversing hard-packed snow.

In FIG. 6, the rail extension assembly **136** is shown in the lowered position. Details of how the rail extension assembly **136** is pivoted toward the lowered position will be discussed more thoroughly below. It is contemplated that the lowered position could be limited in several ways, including but not limited to: by contact between the extension arms **144** and

the plate 129 and by an additional lower stopper. Additionally, tension in the endless drive track 122 in standard operation may also limit the lowered position of the rail extension assembly 136. It is contemplated that one or more stoppers providing additional limits on the downward motion of the rail extension assembly 136 could be included. It is contemplated that the stoppers 156 could be configured to also limit the downward motion of the rail extension assembly 136.

It should be noted that depending on conditions of operation of the snowmobile 100, the rail extension assembly 136 may also be found in a position between the raised position and the lowered position. The raised and lowered positions are merely meant to describe the limits of the range of motion of the rail extension assembly 136.

The static position of the rail extension assembly 136 will depend in part on the static tension of the endless drive track 122 around the rear suspension assembly 124, the specifics of which will be discussed below. The tension of the endless drive track 122 is adjustable via a tensioner 165 on each of the right and left extension arms 144. By turning an adjustment screw 166 in the tensioner 165, the cross-member 151 (and thus the idler wheels 134 disposed thereon) is shifted rearward or forward in a slot 167 in the extension arms 144. By shifting the cross-member 151 rearward by the tensioner 165, the tension is increased in the endless drive track 122, as the rear suspension assembly 124 has a larger overall perimeter and the endless drive track 122 will be more tightly fit around it. Shifting the cross-member 151 forward in the slot 167 similarly reduces the tension in the endless drive track 122, as the perimeter of the rear suspension assembly 124 is smaller and the endless drive track 122 is less tightly fit around the rear suspension assembly 124.

The tension in the endless drive track 122 is also affected by operating conditions when the snowmobile 100 is in use. The details of how the rail extension assembly 136 is pivoted toward the lowered position by the tension in the endless drive track 122 will now be discussed with respect to FIGS. 2 and 7.

When the snowmobile 100 is operated in the forward direction, tension in the endless drive track 122 is increased. First, the sprocket 160 driving the endless drive track 122 in the direction 260 (as illustrated in FIG. 2) increases the tension in an upper region 122a of the endless drive track 122 and causes a force pulling in the forward direction with respect to the snowmobile 100. In a lower region 122b of the endless drive track 122, tension increases due to the endless drive track's 122 engagement with the ground, creating a pulling force also pulling in the forward direction. Certain operating conditions of the snowmobile 100 can lead to more tension in the drive track 122, including but not limited to: operating above a certain forward speed, operating in deep snow and towing a load behind the snowmobile 100.

As seen in FIG. 7, where the rail extension assembly 136 is drawn schematically for clarity, a force 205 acts upon each idler wheel 134 from the upper region 122a, which can be considered to act upon the rear idler wheel 134 at its center point 202. Another force 206 acts upon each rear idler wheel 134 at its center point 202 from the lower region 122b. The sum of these two forces 205 and 206 is represented as resulting force 208, which pulls the rear idler wheels 134 in generally horizontal and forward directions.

As the resulting force 208 emanates from the center point 202 of the idler wheel 134 and is generally horizontally oriented, a torque 212 is applied to the extension arm 144. As the center point 202 of the idler wheels 134 is lower than the pivot axis 146 of the extension arms 144, there is a lever

arm 210 between the pivot axis 146 and the axis of the resulting force 208, illustrated by the arrow 210 originating at the pivot axis 146 and ending at the line 201 transecting the center 202 of the rear idler wheel 134. It should be noted that the lever arm 210 is a mathematical construct to describe the offset between a pivot point 141 and an applied force 208, and does not represent a physical element of the present implementation.

The arrangement of the lever arm 210 and the resulting force 208 results in the torque 212 in the direction indicated in FIG. 7, where increasing tension in the endless drive track 122 as described above increases the torque 212. The direction of the torque 212 biases the extension arms 144 in a generally downward direction, toward the lowered position. If the torque 212 reaches a given magnitude, it will urge the rail extension assembly 136 toward the lowered position (seen in FIG. 6), at least partially overcoming the upward biasing force exerted by the leaf spring 148.

As discussed above, the leaf spring 148 is calibrated to provide enough upward biasing force such that the extension arms 144 and thus the rail extension assembly 136 remains generally in the raised position during certain operating conditions of the snowmobile 100, including when the snowmobile 100 moves rearward, and when the snowmobile 100 is at rest. The leaf spring 148 is simultaneously calibrated to also allow the rail extension assembly 136 to be pulled down if enough torque 212 is induced. In cases where the tension and thus torque 212 increases above a certain threshold, the rail extension assembly 136 is pulled down to the lowered position, such that the portion of the endless drive track 122 extending between the rear wheels 130 and the idler wheels 134 engages with the ground and helps propel the snowmobile 100 forward. Often, cases where the tension greatly increases correspond to situations where a longer endless drive track 122 would be advantageous, including but not limited to: operating above a certain forward speed, operating in deep snow and towing a load behind the snowmobile.

Another implementation of a rail extension assembly 236 of a rear suspension assembly 224 will now be described with respect to FIGS. 8 to 12. The rail extension assembly 236 has a right extension arm 244 and a left extension arm 244. The extension arms 244 connect to a forward cross-member 251 via forward portions 240 of the extension arms 244. The forward cross-member 251 connects to and extends between raised plates 229 of rear portions 223 of the right and left slide rails 128. The rail extension assembly 236 pivots about a pivot axis 246 at a pivot point 241, where the forward cross-member 251 connects to the rear portions 223. The extension arms 244 rotate about the forward cross-member 251. The rail extension assembly 236 pivots between a raised position (seen in FIG. 10) and a lowered position (seen in FIGS. 11 and 12) with respect to the pair of slide rails 128.

A right biasing member 248 and a left biasing member 248 are included for the right and left extension arms 244 to bias the rail extension assembly 236 toward the raised position. As illustrated in FIGS. 10 to 12 for the left extension arm 244, the biasing members 248 are spring washers 248. The left extension arm 244 and the left spring washer 248 will be discussed below; the details also apply mutatis mutandis to the right extension arm 244 and right spring washer 248.

The left extension arm 244 is biased toward the raised position by the left spring washers 248. The washers 248 are disposed around an eye bolt 245. A top end of the eye bolt 245 is fastened to the extension arm 244 by a bolt 243, but

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it is contemplated that another type of fastener could be used. The eye bolt **245** connects, via a nut **247**, to a bracket **249** fastened to the rear portion **223** of the left slide rail **128**. The bracket **249** is fastened by two bolts, but it is contemplated that the bracket **249** could be fastened to the slide rail **128** by different means, including, for example, rivets. It is also contemplated that the eye bolt **245** could be fastened directly to the slide rail **128**.

Similarly to the leaf springs **148** discussed above, the spring washers **248** are calibrated to provide enough upward biasing force such that the extension arms **244** and thus the rail extension assembly **236** remains generally in the raised position during certain operating conditions of the snowmobile **100**, including when the snowmobile **100** moves rearward, and when the snowmobile **100** is at rest. The spring washers **248** are simultaneously calibrated to also allow the rail extension assembly **236** to be pulled down if enough torque **212** is induced.

For the rail extension assembly **236**, the raised position is defined by the length of the eye bolt **245**. As the distance between the eye of the eye bolt **245** and the nut **247** holding the eye bolt **245** in the bracket **249** is rigid, this limits the upward motion of the rail extension assembly **236**. It is contemplated that the eye bolt **245** and the nut **247** could be arranged such that the rail extension assembly **236** could have higher or lower raised positions than that illustrated in the Figures. The lowered position of the rail extension assembly **236** is defined by plastic end caps **227** of the slide rails **128**. When the rail extension assembly **236** are pulled downward by tension in the endless track **122**, the assembly **236** abuts a top side of the plastic end caps **227**. It is contemplated that the end caps **227** could be integral with the slide rails **128**. It is also contemplated that the rail extension assembly **236** could abut the slide rails **128** directly.

Remaining components of the rear suspension assembly **224** and the rail extension assembly **236** are identical to those discussed with respect to the rear suspension assembly **124** and the rail extension assembly **136** and need not be repeated here. Further, details of how the rail extension assembly **236** is pivoted toward the lowered position by the tension in the endless drive track **122** are generally the same as those discussed with respect to the rail extension assembly **136** and need not be repeated here.

Modifications and improvements to the above-described embodiments of the present technology may become apparent to those skilled in the art. The foregoing description is intended to be exemplary rather than limiting. The scope of the present technology is therefore intended to be limited solely by the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A snowmobile comprising:

- a chassis including a tunnel, the tunnel having a longitudinal direction;
- a motor connected to the chassis;
- at least one front suspension assembly connected to the chassis;
- at least one ski connected to the chassis by the at least one front suspension assembly;
- an endless drive track disposed below the tunnel and being operatively connected to the motor; and
- a rear suspension assembly supporting and tensioning the endless drive track, the chassis being connected to the endless drive track via the rear suspension, the rear suspension assembly comprising:

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at least one suspension arm having a first end and a second end, the first end of the at least one suspension arm being adapted for pivotally connecting to the chassis,

a pair of slide rails pivotally connected to the second end of the at least one suspension arm,

at least one shock absorber assembly pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails, the at least one shock absorber assembly being adapted for biasing the pair of slide rails away from the chassis, and

a rail extension assembly, the rail extension assembly having:

- at least one extension arm having a front end pivotally connected to a rear portion of at least one slide rail of the pair of slide rails about a pivot axis, the at least one extension arm being pivotable between a raised position and a lowered position with respect to the pair of slide rails about the pivot axis,

- at least one rear idler wheel rotationally connected to a rear portion of the at least one extension arm, and

- at least one biasing member biasing the at least one extension arm toward the raised position, the at least one biasing member being operatively connected between the rear portion of the at least one slide rail of the pair of slide rails and the at least one extension arm, the at least one biasing member being supported between the at least one slide rail of the pair of slide rails and the at least one extension arm by first and second fasteners, the first fastener being fastened to the at least one slide rail of the pair of slide rails, and the second fastener being fastened to the at least one extension arm.

2. The snowmobile of claim **1**, wherein:

- the pair of slide rails includes a left slide rail and a right slide rail;

- the at least one extension arm includes a left extension arm pivotally connected to the left slide rail about the pivot axis and a right extension arm pivotally connected to the right slide rail about the pivot axis;

- the at least one rear idler wheel includes a rear left idler wheel rotationally connected to the left extension arm and a rear right idler wheel rotationally connected to the right extension arm; and

- the at least one biasing member includes a left biasing member biasing the left extension arm and a right biasing member biasing the right extension arm.

3. The snowmobile of claim **2**, wherein the rail extension assembly further comprises a cross-member extending between the rear portions of the left and right extension arms, the rear left and rear right idler wheels being disposed on the cross-member.

4. The snowmobile of claim **1**, wherein the at least one biasing member is at least one spring washer.

5. The snowmobile of claim **1**, wherein when the snowmobile is moving forward, the rail extension assembly experiences an upward biasing force applied by the at least one biasing member and a generally downward force applied by the endless drive track.

6. The snowmobile of claim **1**, wherein when the snowmobile is moving forward above a predetermined speed, tension in the endless drive track applies a generally downward force on the rail extension assembly, the generally downward force being greater than an upward biasing force

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applied by the at least one biasing member, thereby pivoting the at least one extension arm toward the lowered position.

7. A snowmobile comprising:

a chassis including a tunnel, the tunnel having a longitudinal direction;

a motor connected to the chassis;

at least one front suspension assembly connected to the chassis;

at least one ski connected to the chassis by the at least one front suspension assembly;

an endless drive track disposed below the tunnel and being operatively connected to the motor; and

a rear suspension assembly supporting and tensioning the endless drive track, the chassis being connected to the endless drive track via the rear suspension, the rear suspension assembly comprising:

at least one front suspension arm having a first end and a second end, the first end of the at least one front suspension arm being pivotally connected to the chassis,

a pair of slide rails pivotally connected to the second end of the at least one front suspension arm,

at least one rear suspension arm having a first end and a second end, the at least one rear suspension arm being disposed rearward of the at least one front suspension arm, the first end of the at least one rear suspension arm being pivotally connected to the chassis, the second end of the at least one rear suspension arm being pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails,

at least one shock absorber assembly pivotally connected to the pair of slide rails, the at least one shock absorber assembly being adapted for biasing the pair of slide rails away from the chassis, and
a rail extension assembly, the rail extension assembly having:

at least one extension arm having a front end pivotally connected to a rear portion of at least one slide rail of the pair of slide rails about a pivot axis, the pivot axis being disposed rearward of the second end of the at least one rear suspension arm, the at least one extension arm being pivotable between a raised position and a lowered position with respect to the pair of slide rails about the pivot axis,

at least one rear idler wheel rotationally connected to a rear portion of the at least one extension arm, and

at least one biasing member biasing the at least one extension arm toward the raised position, and

wherein when the snowmobile is moving forward above a predetermined speed, tension in the endless drive track applies a generally downward force on the rail extension assembly, the generally downward force being greater than an upward biasing force

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applied by the at least one biasing member, thereby pivoting the at least one extension arm toward the lowered position.

8. The snowmobile of claim 7, further comprising at least one stopper joined to the rear portion of the at least one slide rail of the pair of slide rails, the at least one stopper abutting the at least one extension arm when the at least one extension arm is in the raised position.

9. The snowmobile of claim 8, wherein the at least one stopper is integral with the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

10. The snowmobile of claim 7, wherein:

the pair of slide rails includes a left slide rail and a right slide rail;

the at least one extension arm includes a left extension arm pivotally connected to the left slide rail about the pivot axis and a right extension arm pivotally connected to the right slide rail about the pivot axis;

the at least one rear idler wheel includes a rear left idler wheel rotationally connected to the left extension arm and a rear right idler wheel rotationally connected to the right extension arm; and

the at least one biasing member includes a left biasing member biasing the left extension arm and a right biasing member biasing the right extension arm.

11. The snowmobile of claim 10, further comprising:

a left stopper joined to the rear portion of the left slide rail, the left stopper abutting the left extension arm when the left extension arm is in the raised position; and

a right stopper joined to the rear portion of the right slide rail, the right stopper abutting the right extension arm when the right extension arm is in the raised position.

12. The snowmobile of claim 10, wherein the rail extension assembly further comprises a cross-member extending between the rear portions of the left and right extension arms, the rear left and rear right idler wheels being disposed on the cross-member.

13. The snowmobile of claim 12, wherein the rail extension assembly further comprises two other rear idler wheels disposed on the cross-member between the left and right extension arms.

14. The snowmobile of claim 7, wherein the at least one biasing member is at least one spring washer.

15. The snowmobile of claim 7, wherein the at least one biasing member is at least one leaf spring having a front portion connected to the rear portion of the at least one of the pair of slide rails.

16. The snowmobile of claim 15, wherein a rear portion of the at least one leaf spring is located in an interior of the at least one extension arm.

17. The snowmobile of claim 7, wherein when the snowmobile is moving forward, the rail extension assembly experiences an upward biasing force applied by the at least one biasing member and a generally downward force applied by the endless drive track.

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