



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**

Luhr et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2008/0012251 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: Jan. 17, 2008**

(54) **SNOW SLED**

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(60) Provisional application No. 60/507,842, filed on Oct. 1, 2003. Provisional application No. 60/510,325, filed on Oct. 10, 2003.

Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**
B62B 13/02 (2006.01)
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **280/16**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A snow sled comprising a seating portion that includes a lightweight space frame having a suspension-type seat stretched among the space frame. The sled further includes a steering portion and articulated steering mechanism that links the steering portion to the seating portion. The articulated steering mechanism allows the steering portion to be pivoted laterally relative to the seating portion so as to make the sled readily steerable. A pair of rear skis are removably attachable to the seating portion. The steering portion includes a ski support and a pair of front skis pivotably attached to the ski support. Chatter and movement of the front skis are dampened by a pair of boots that engage the ski support and the respective front skis.

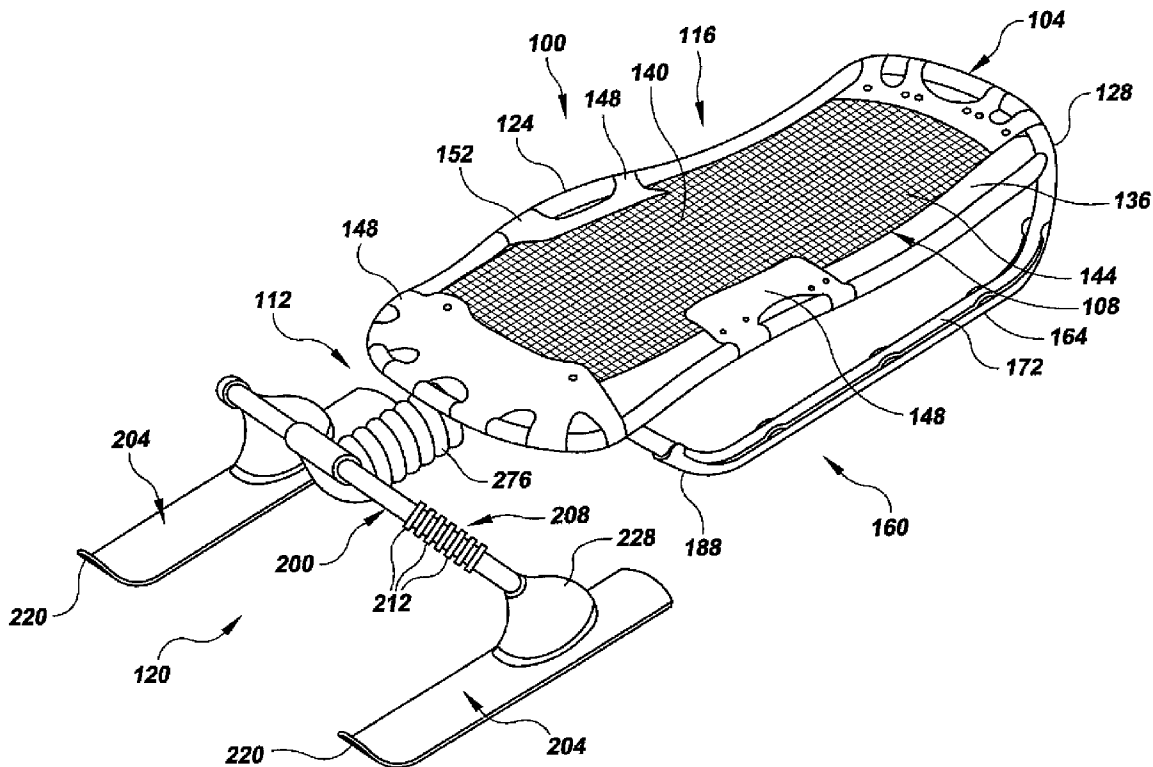
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(21) Appl. No.: **11/861,589**

(22) Filed: **Sep. 26, 2007**

Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/955,400, filed on Sep. 30, 2004, now Pat. No. 7,278,642.



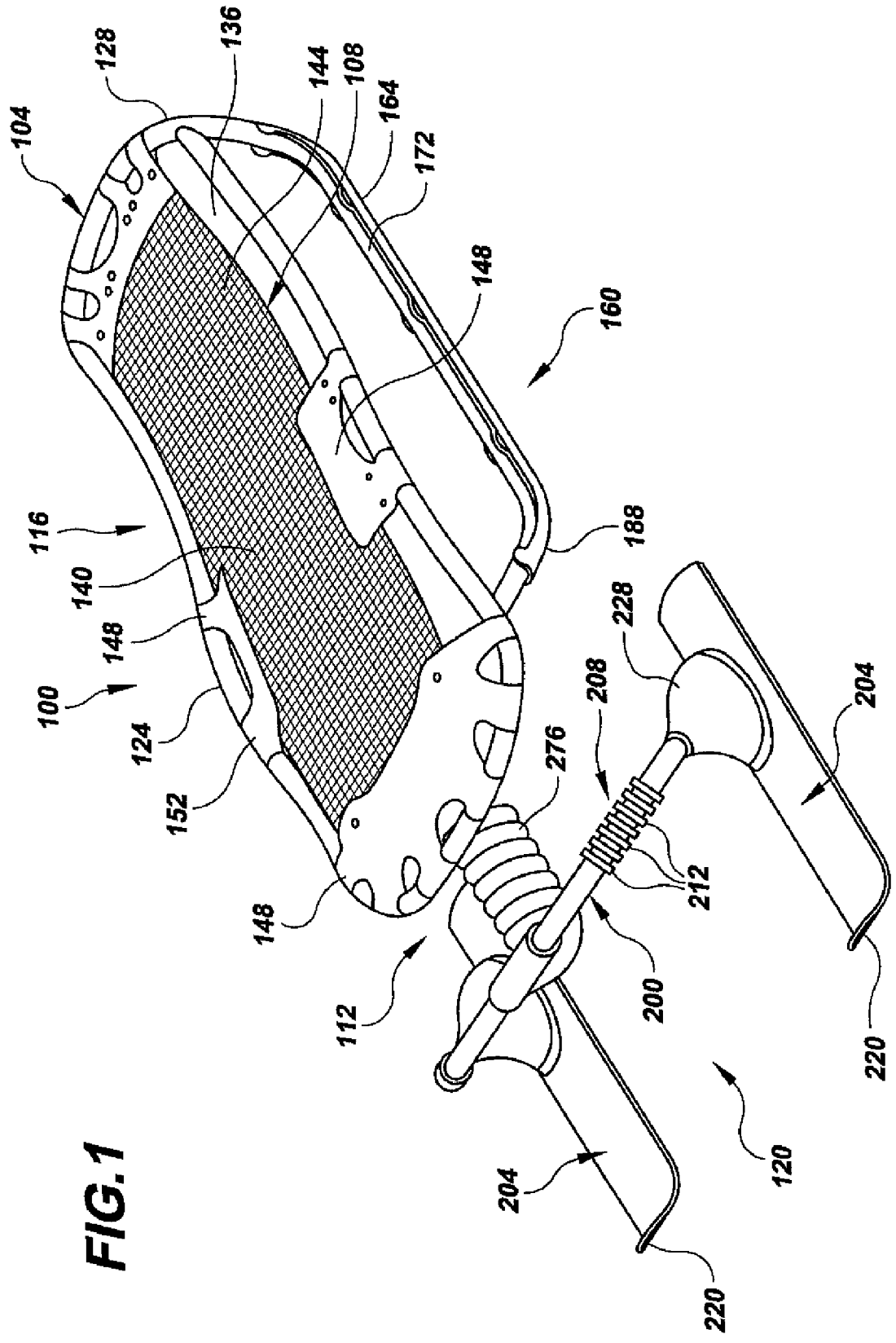


FIG. 1

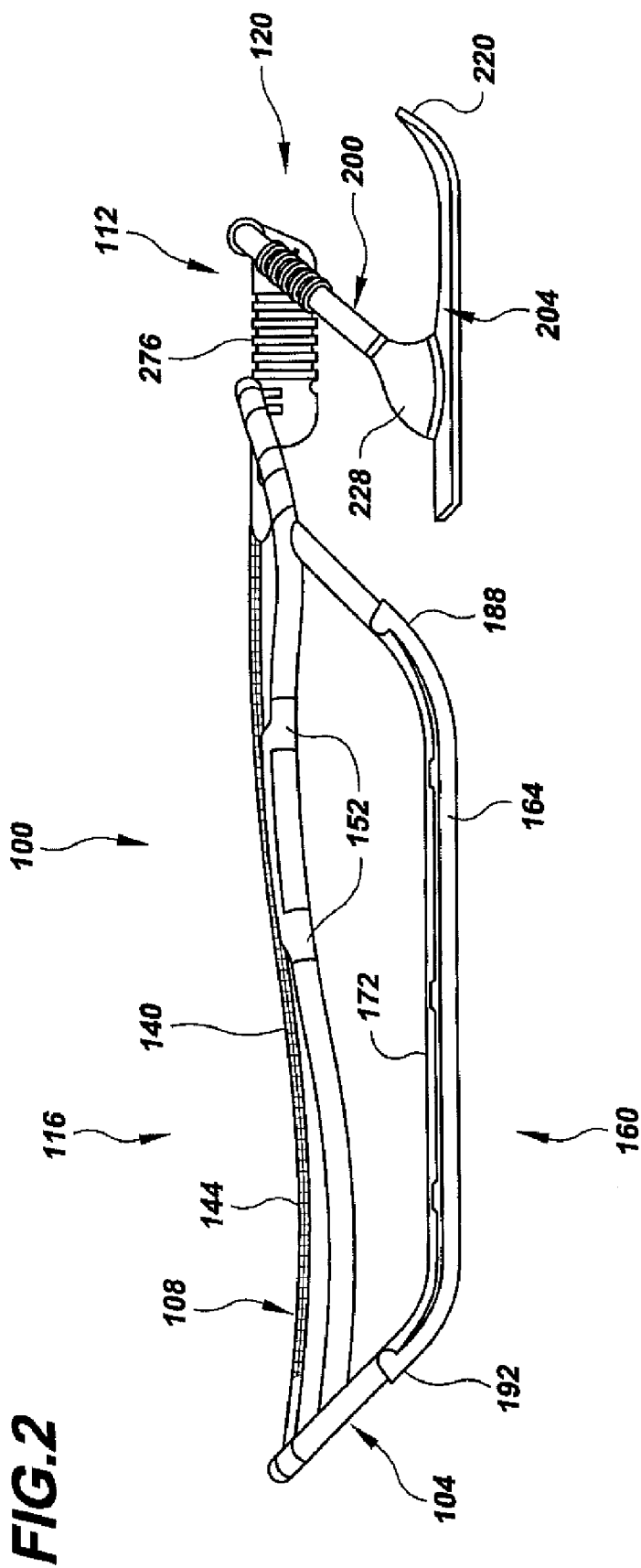
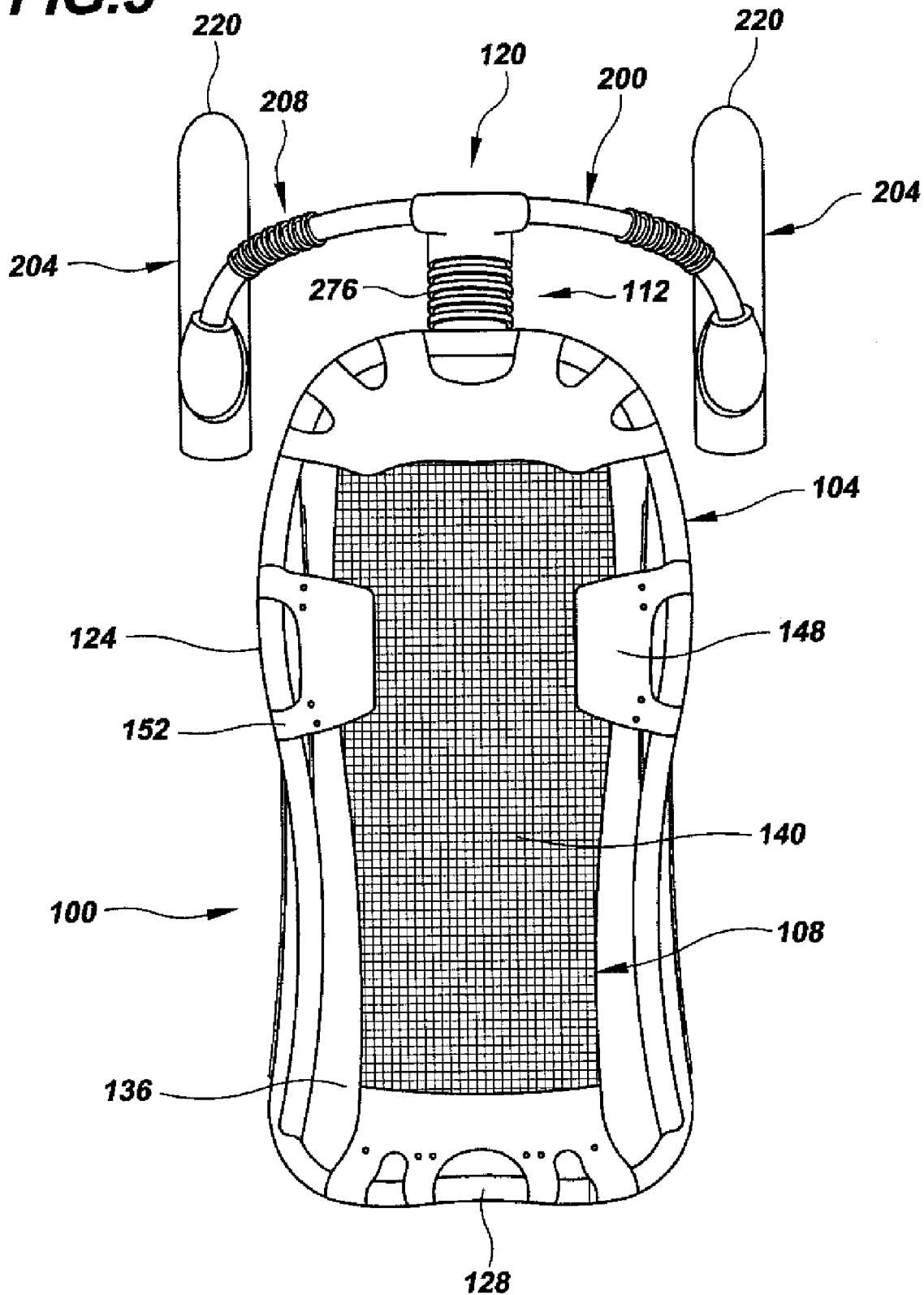


FIG. 3



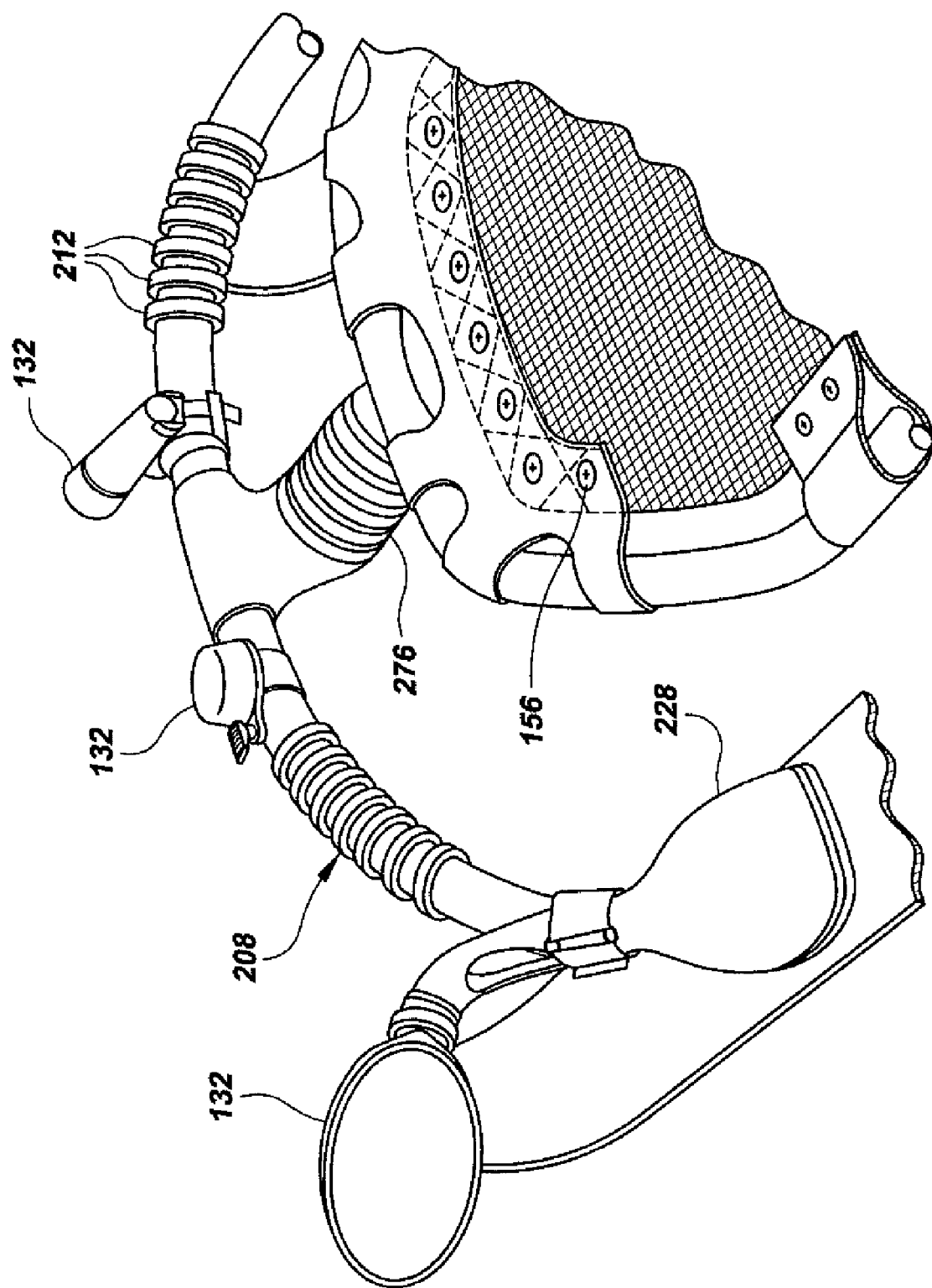
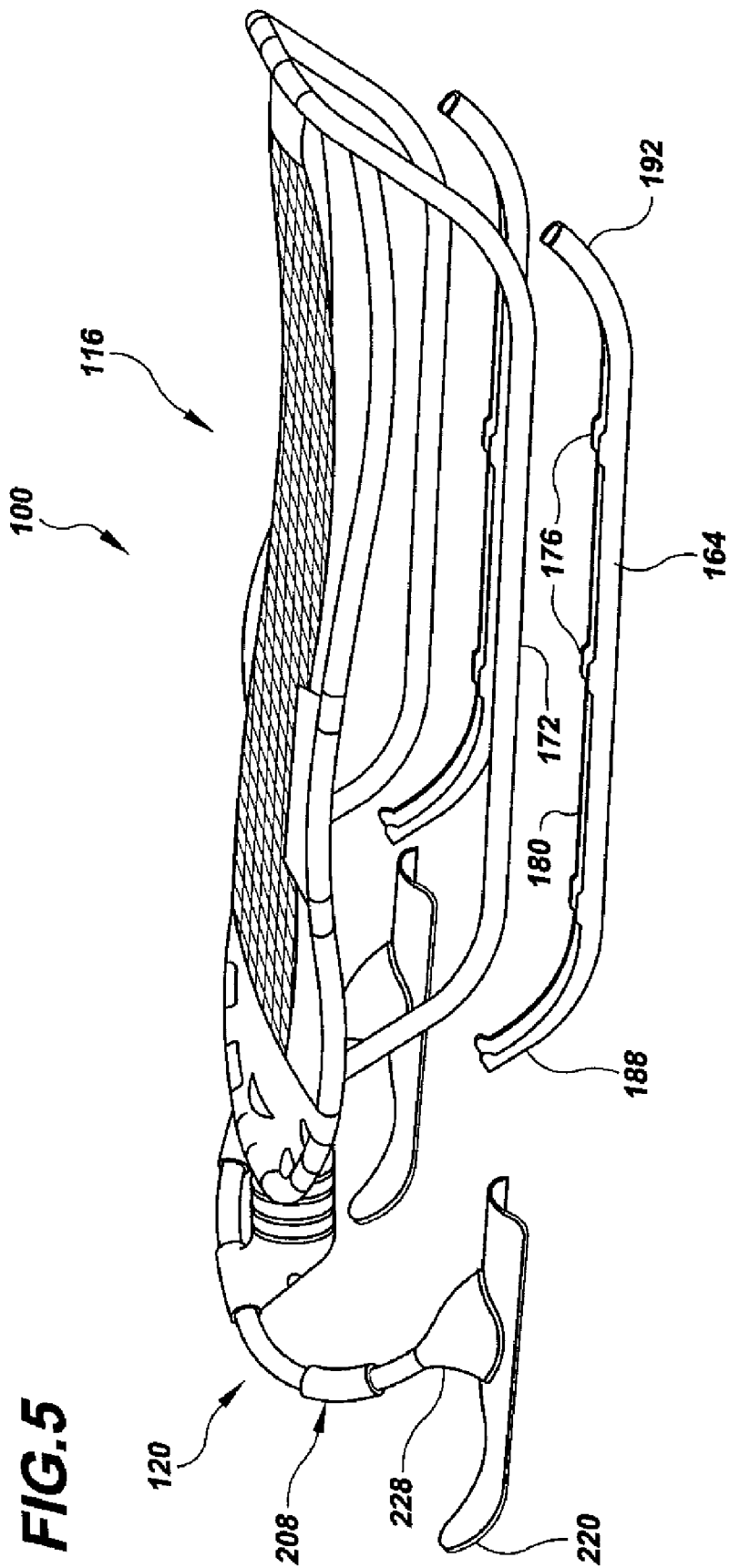


FIG. 4



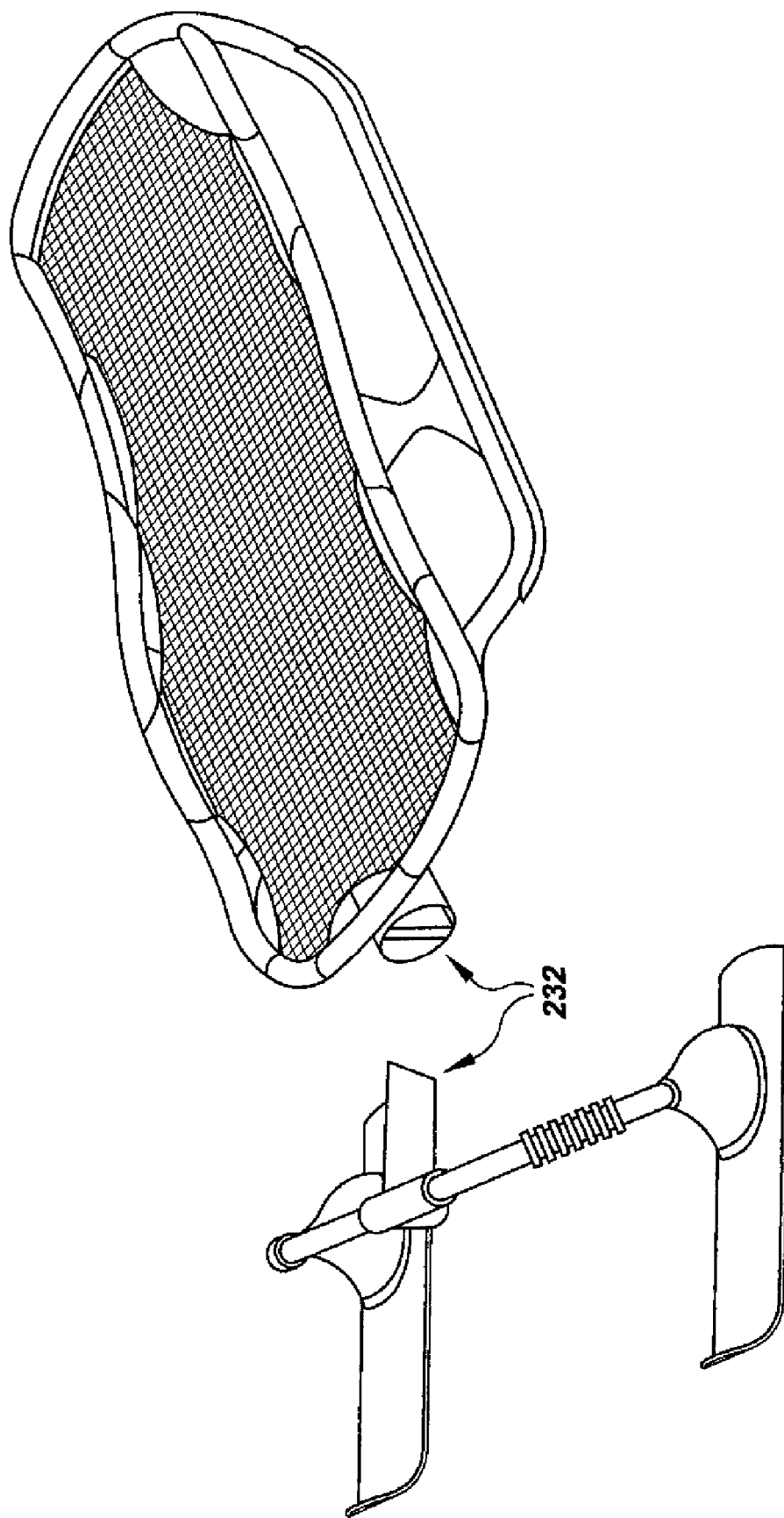
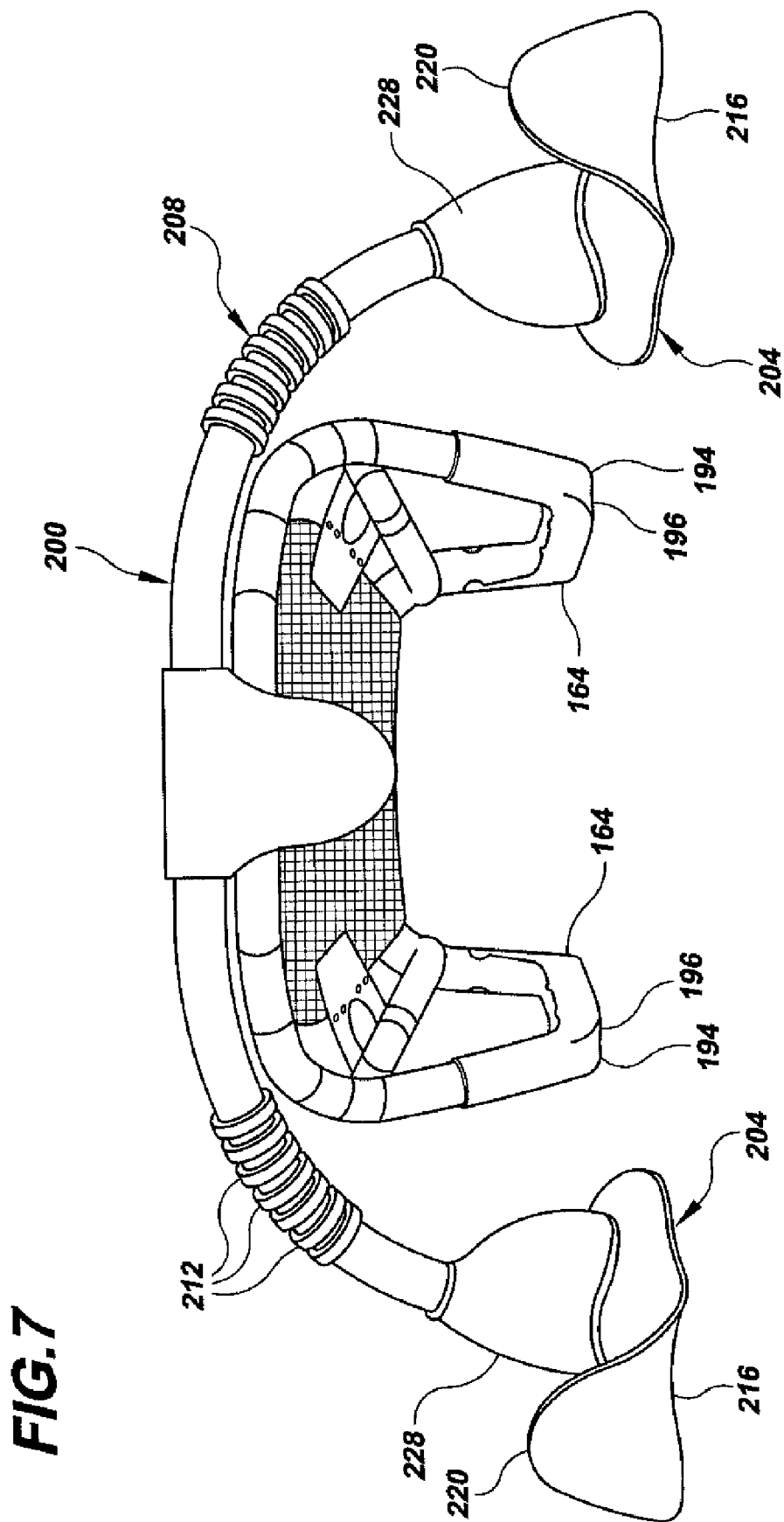
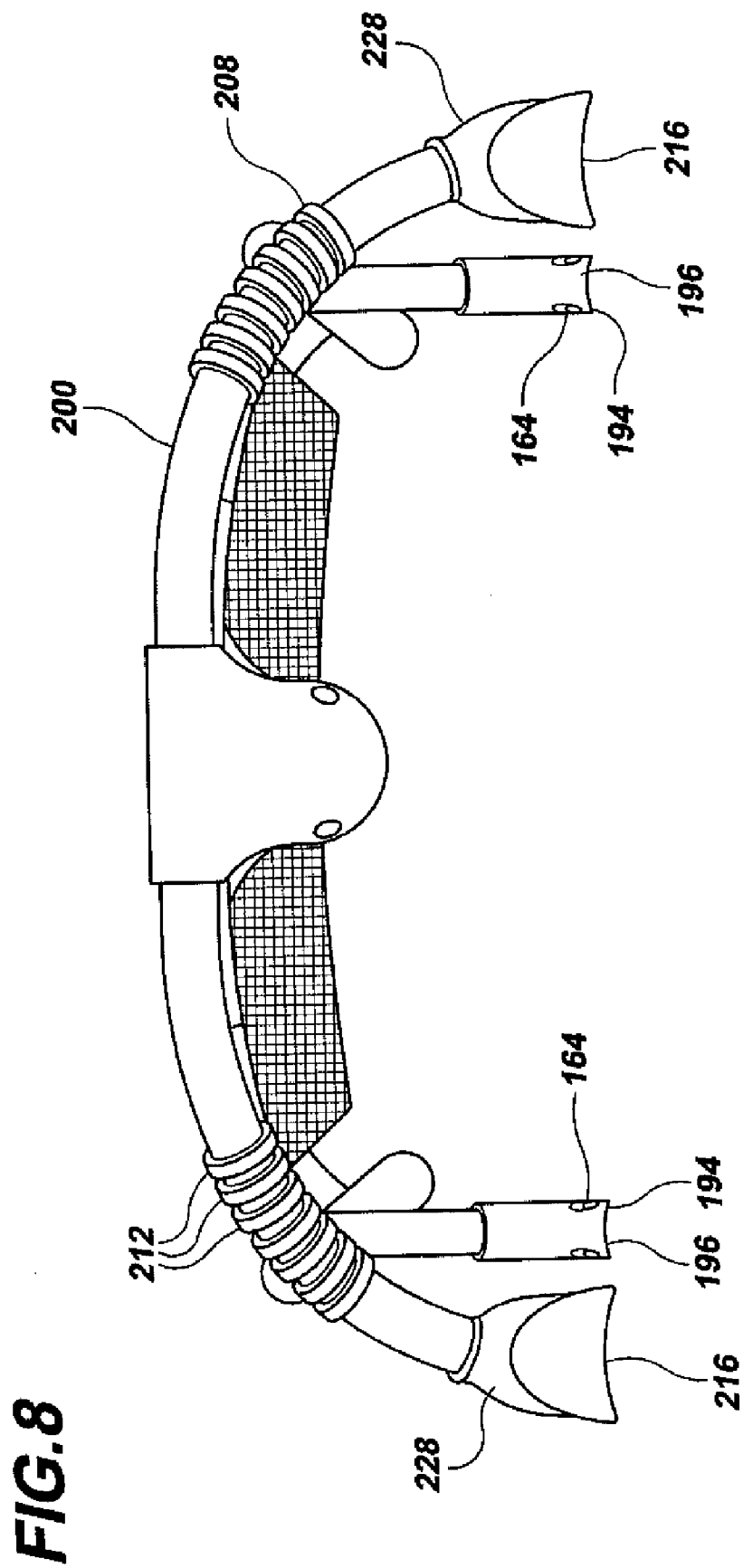


FIG. 6





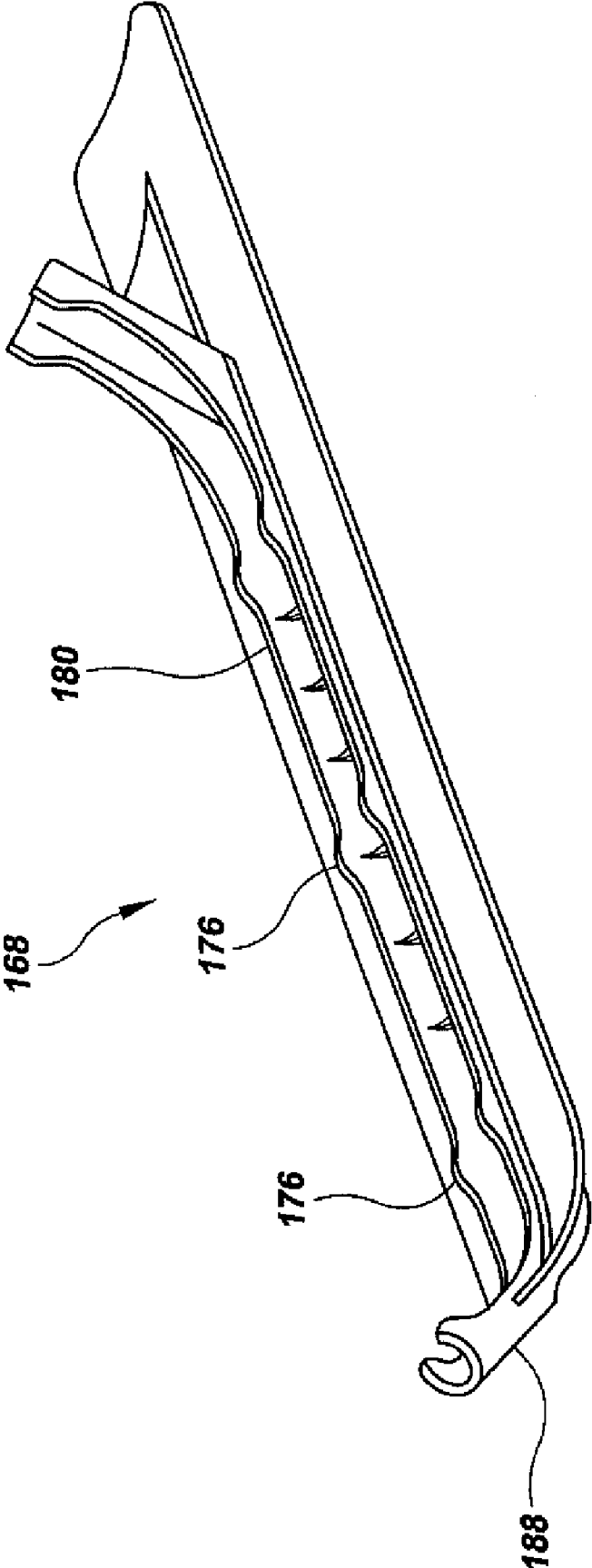


FIG. 10

FIG.11

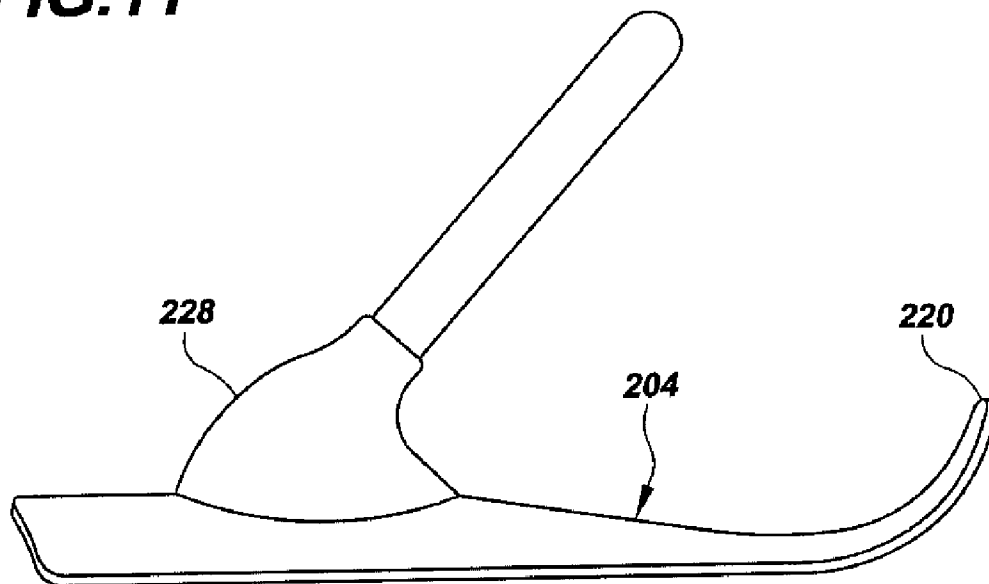


FIG.12

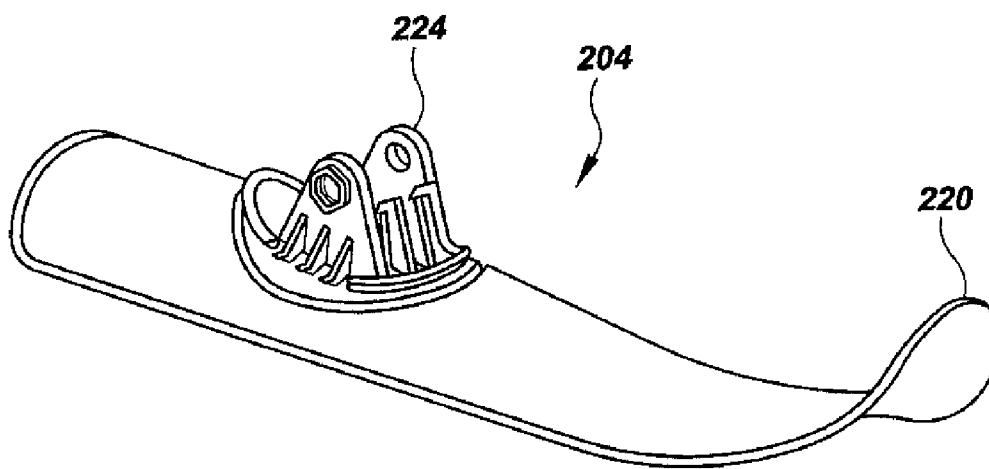


FIG. 13

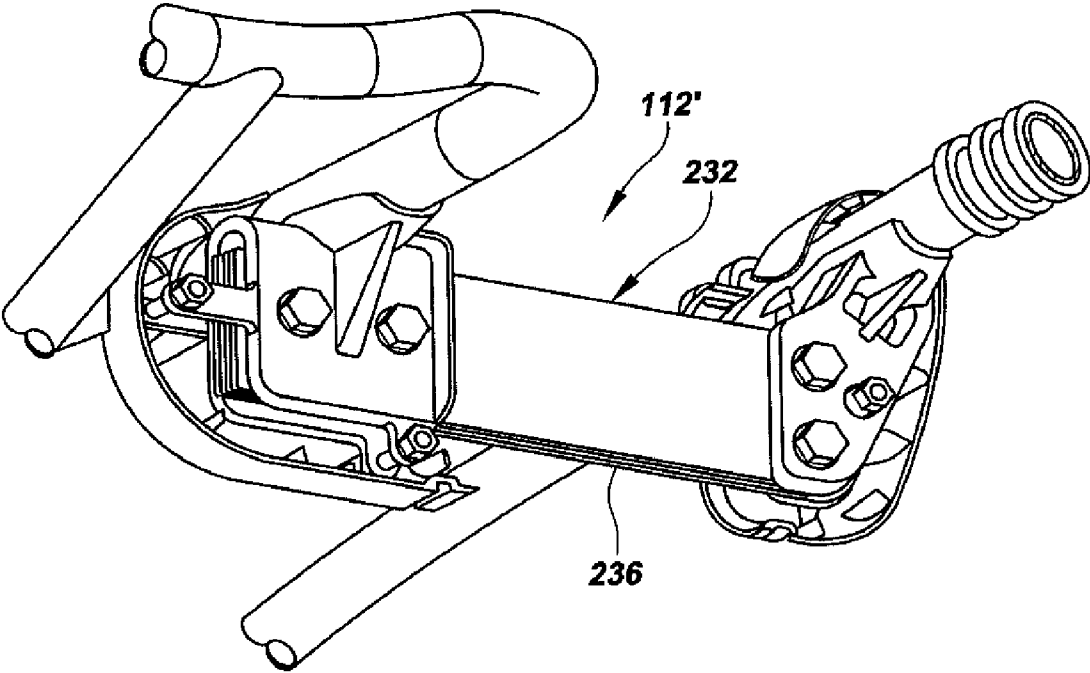
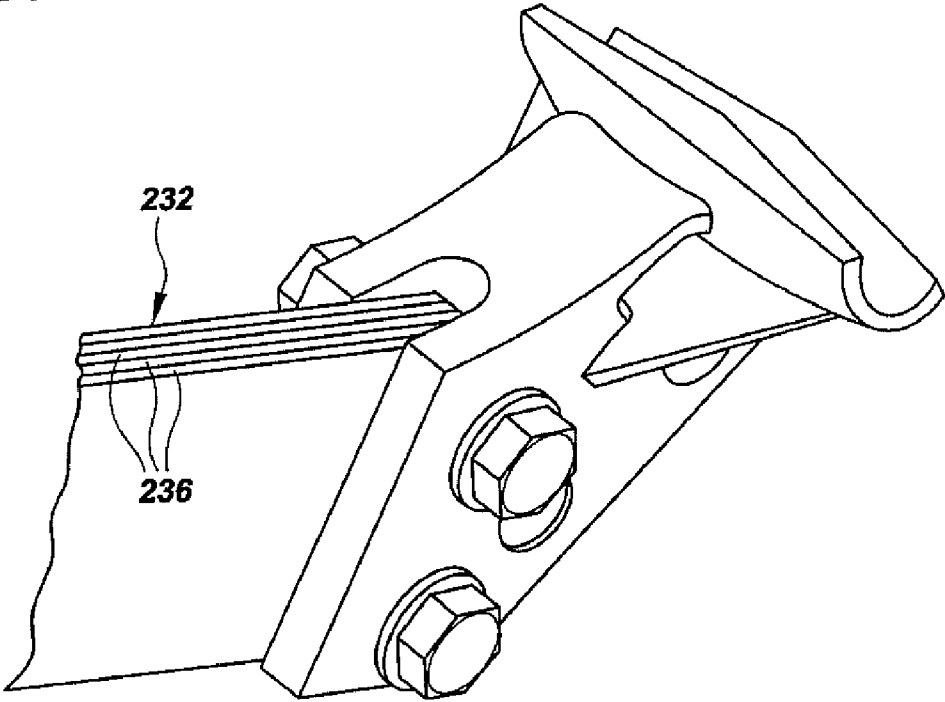


FIG. 14



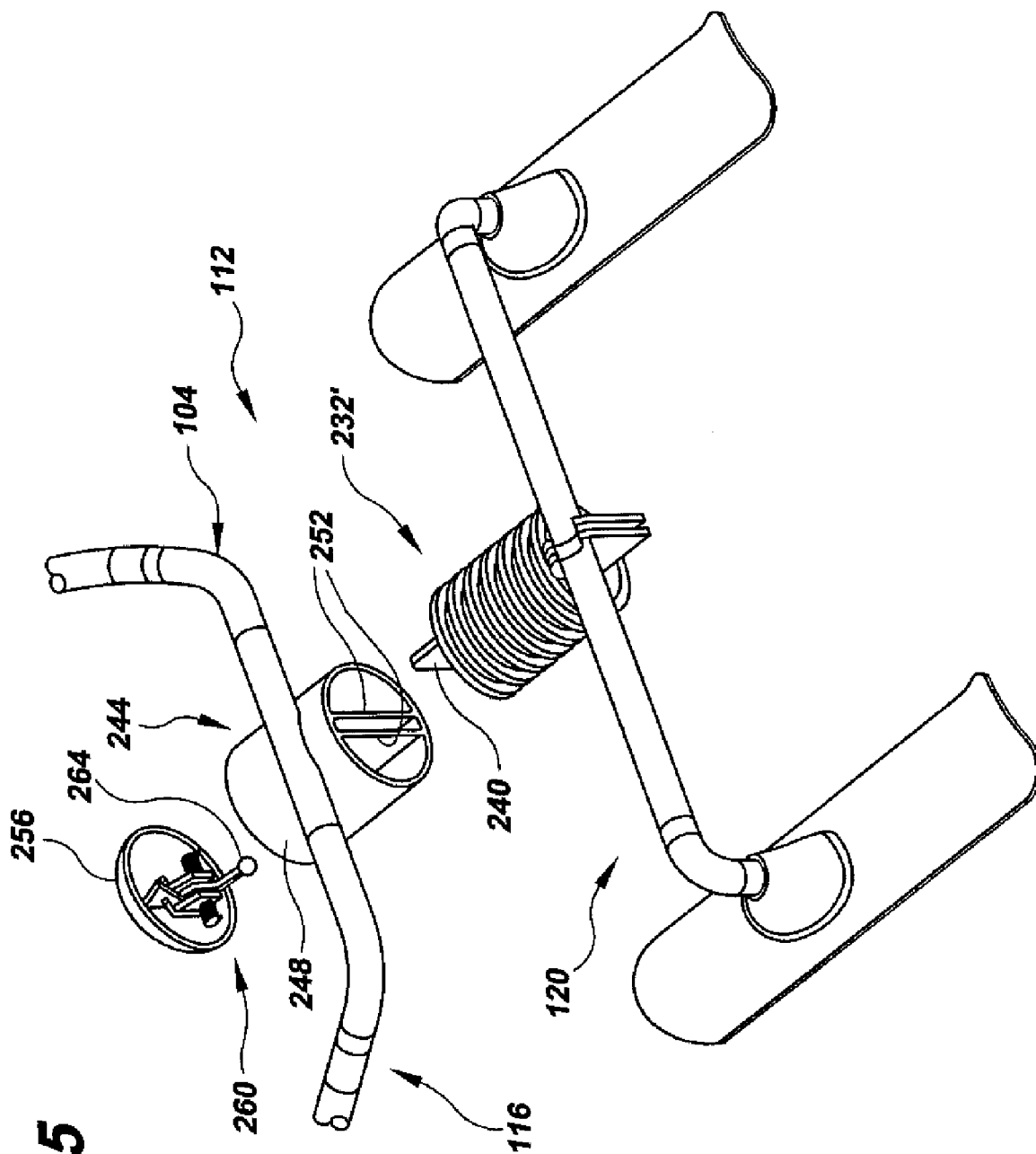
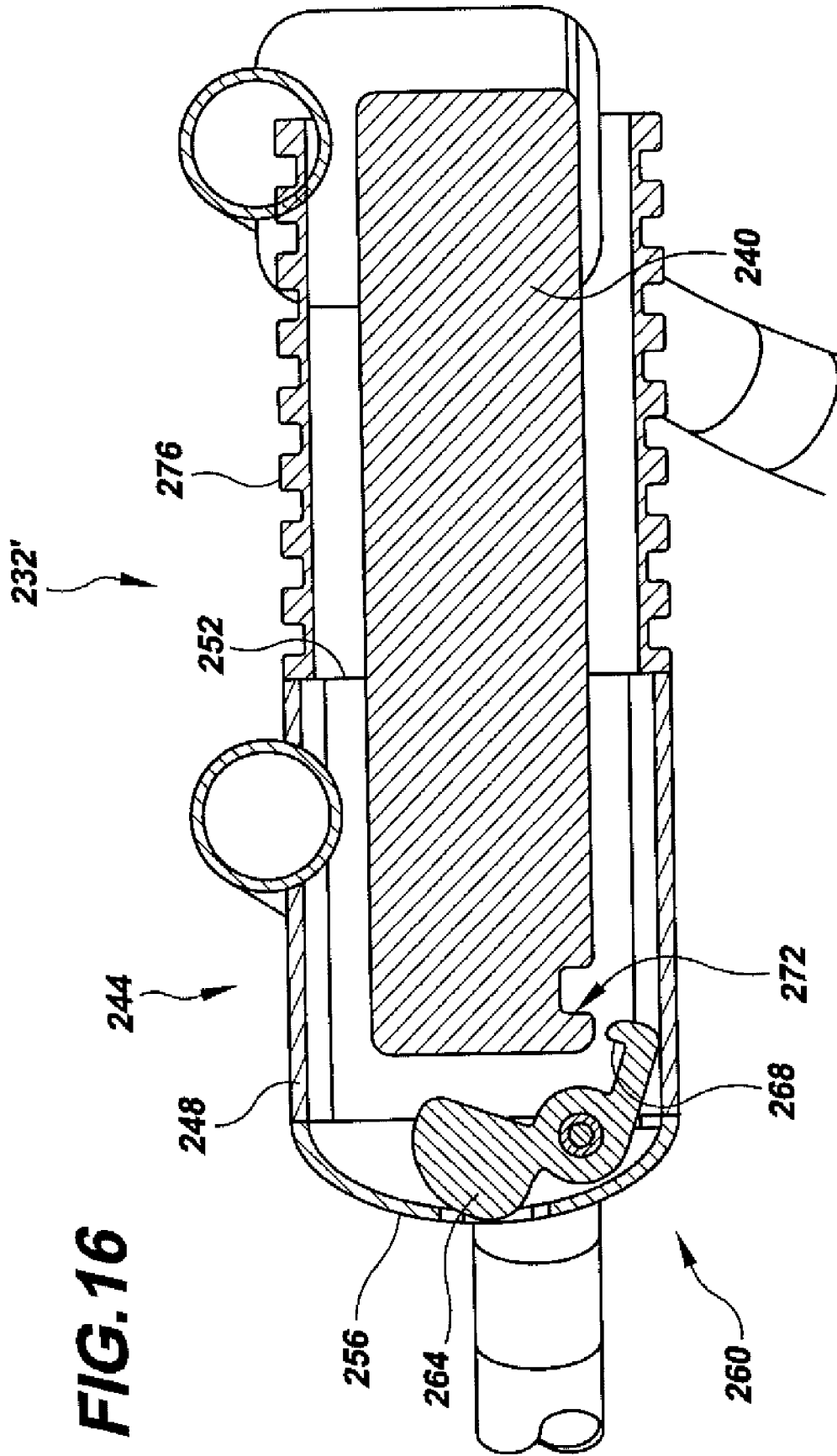


FIG. 15



SNOW SLED

RELATED APPLICATION DATA

[0001] This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/955,400, filed on Sep. 30, 2004, and titled "Snow Sled," now U.S. Pat. No. 7,278,642, which claims the benefit of priority of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/507,842, filed Oct. 1, 2003, and titled "Snow Sled," and U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/510,325, filed on Oct. 10, 2003, and titled "Snow Sled." All three of the above applications are incorporated by reference herein in their entireties.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0002] The present invention generally relates to the field of sports and recreational equipment. In particular, the present invention is directed to a snow sled having features that enhance the steerability, performance, safety and comfort of the sled.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0003] Snow sleds have been used for many years for recreational purposes. Most current snow sleds have numerous limitations that generally make them suitable only for kids, or very limited use. These sleds are typically inexpensive and are generally uncontrollable, slow and/or heavy, which can also make them inherently dangerous. Additionally, current sleds are usually large and uncomfortable and can only be adequately used under certain types of snow conditions, such as packed powder. These limitations have not been adequately addressed in the snow sled market.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] In one implementation, the present invention is directed to a snow sled for use by a person on snow. The snow sled includes a longitudinal central axis and first and second longitudinal sides spaced from the longitudinal central axis on opposite sides of the longitudinal central axis. The snow sled also includes a body comprising a seating portion having an upper surface and a lower surface spaced from the upper surface. The upper surface is for receiving a person in either a seated or lying position during use. The body also includes a pair of spaced-apart snow-engaging members for supporting the body on snow during use. The pair of spaced apart snow-engaging members support the seating portion on corresponding respective ones of the first and second longitudinal sides so that the lower surface of the seating portion is spaced from the snow. The body includes a leading end when the snow sled is properly used. A steering portion comprising a ski support is pivotably secured to the body at the leading end proximate the longitudinal central axis so that the snow sled is steerable by pivoting the ski support side to side during use. The ski support includes first end and second ends spaced from one another on opposite sides of the longitudinal central axis. First and second skis are attached to the ski support at corresponding respective ones of the first and second ends.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0005] For the purpose of illustrating the invention, the drawings show a form of the invention that is presently preferred. However, it should be understood that the present

invention is not limited to the precise arrangements and instrumentalities shown in the drawings, wherein:

[0006] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a snow sled of the present invention;

[0007] FIG. 2 is a side elevational view of the sled of FIG. 1;

[0008] FIG. 3 is a plan view of the sled of FIG. 1;

[0009] FIG. 4 is an enlarged perspective partial view of the sled of FIG. 1 showing some accessories attached thereto;

[0010] FIG. 5 is a partially exploded view of the sled of FIG. 1;

[0011] FIG. 6 is an enlarged perspective view of the sled of FIG. 1 showing the steering portion detached from the seating portion and without the protective boot over the steering linkage;

[0012] FIG. 7 is an enlarged perspective front view of the sled of FIG. 1;

[0013] FIG. 8 is an enlarged front elevational view of the sled of FIG. 1;

[0014] FIG. 9 is an enlarged perspective view of a rear ski of the present invention usable with the sled of FIG. 1;

[0015] FIG. 10 is an enlarged perspective view of an alternative rear ski of the present invention usable with the sled of FIG. 1;

[0016] FIG. 11 is an enlarged partial side elevational view of the steering portion of the sled of FIG. 1;

[0017] FIG. 12 is a perspective view of the ski of the steering portion of FIG. 11;

[0018] FIG. 13 is an enlarged cutaway view of a steering mechanism of the present invention usable with the sled of FIG. 1;

[0019] FIG. 14 is an enlarged partial view of the steering mechanism of FIG. 13;

[0020] FIG. 15 is an enlarged exploded view of an alternative steering mechanism of the present invention usable with the sled of FIG. 1; and

[0021] FIG. 16 is an enlarged cross-sectional view of the steering mechanism of FIG. 15.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0022] Referring to the drawings, FIGS. 1-8 illustrate a sled 100 of the present invention. In general, sled 100 includes a number of features that enhance its performance and provide physical comfort to a rider (not shown). For example, sled 100 may include a space frame 104 that permits the sled to be relatively lightweight yet provide significant strength and rigidity. Sled 100 may additionally include a suspension-type seat 108 that not only contributes to a lightweight design, but also enhance the comfort of the rider during use. Further, sled 100 may be provided with an articulated steering mechanism 112 that enhances the maneuverability of the sled. Finally, sled 100 is modular which means most of the components can be easily removed for replacement without special tools. These and other

features of a sled of the present invention, such as sled **100**, are described below in detail.

[0023] Sled **100** may include a seating portion **116** and a steering portion **120** linked together by a steering mechanism **112**. Seating portion **116** may include space frame **104**, which may comprise one or more elongate members, such as members **124**, **128**. Members **124**, **128** may be made of a lightweight material, such as aluminum, titanium or a carbon fiber composite, among others. In addition, members **124**, **128** preferably, but not necessarily, have a tubular configuration. Members **124**, **128** may be joined to one another using any suitable type of connection, such as a welded connection, bonded connection or mechanically-fastened connection, among others. Those skilled in the art will appreciate the various types of materials, configurations and connections that may be used, such that exhaustive lists need not be provided for those skilled in the art to appreciate the broad scope of the present invention.

[0024] Members **124**, **128** may have any desired cross-sectional shape, such as circular, rectangular or oval, among others. Although only two members **124**, **128** are illustrated, those skilled in the art will appreciate that, depending upon the configuration of each member and the overall configuration of frame **104**, more or fewer members may be used. Tubular members **124**, **128** may also be of applicable size to accept accessories **132** (FIG. 4) normally used for bicycles, such as lights, horns, bells, mirrors and water bottles, among others. Those skilled in the art will understand how to attach these accessories, e.g., using techniques known in the bicycle manufacturing industry. In other embodiments, frame **104** may not be made of tubular members **124**, **128**, but rather another type of structure. For example, frame **104** may be a monolithic plastic molding. Frame **104** may generally define an opening **136** that may or may not extend vertically through the entire frame. In other embodiments (not shown), opening **136** may be part of a recess that does not extend completely through frame **104**.

[0025] Seating portion **116** of sled **100** may further include seat **108** located generally within opening **136**. Seat **108** may comprise a membrane **140** stretched among various portions of frame **104**, e.g., among portions of frame members **124**, **128**. Membrane **140** may be made of a lightweight fabric, film or combination of the two, among other things. In one embodiment, membrane **140** may comprise thermoplastic fibers, or reinforcing filaments, woven with filler material. Membrane **140** may include a seating surface **144** where a user sits or lies while using sled **100**. It is noted that seat **108** need not be of a suspension-type in other embodiments. Rather, seat **108** may comprise one or more other members (not shown) that work primarily in bending and/or compression, rather than primarily in tension as occurs in membrane **140**. If seat **108** is a suspension-type seat, membrane **140** may be stretched, or preloaded, so as to provide the desired suspension characteristics. Seat **108** may be similar in construction to the construction used to make certain types of chairs, bicycle seats and automobile seats. This type of construction is disclosed generally in, e.g., U.S. Pats. Nos. 6,035,901, 6,386,634 and 6,540,950, which are incorporated herein by reference.

[0026] Depending upon the design of seat **108**, membrane **140** may be attached to one or more support attachments **148** that either attach directly to frame **104** as shown, or are

configured to engage one or more connecting members (not shown) that connect each support attachment to the frame. In the embodiment shown, each support attachment **148** is made of a semirigid thermoplastic material sewn to membrane **140**. In alternative embodiments, each support attachment **148** may be more or less rigid, made of a different material, made of an elastomeric material, and/or secured to membrane **140** by other means. For example, each support attachment **148** may be secured to membrane **140** by adhesive bonding or mechanically using a channel and spline-type connection. Each support attachment **148** may include a loop portion **152** looped around a corresponding respective tubular member **124**, **128** and folded back onto, and attached to, itself, such as by mechanical interlock **156** (FIG. 4), e.g., with studs and grommets, rivets, meltbonding, adhesive bonding or other means.

[0027] Referring to FIGS. 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8, and also to FIG. 9, a lower portion **160** of seating portion **116** may include one or more skis **164** designed for sliding on snow. Each ski **164** may be configured to be readily detachable from frame **104** for the ease of replacement with new skis or alternative skis designed, e.g., for use in a different snow condition. For example, ski **164** may be particularly designed for hard-packed snow, whereas an alternative type of ski, e.g., ski **168** of FIG. 10, may be designed for unpacked powder snow. In the present embodiment, each ski **164**, **168** is configured for quick mounting on corresponding respective portions **172** of member **128** using a plurality of interference-type clips **176** and an overbite **180** created by the ski conformally engaging the cylindrical shape of member **128** more than half of the circumference of the cylindrical shape. Those skilled in the art will readily appreciate that other types of quick connect means may also, or alternatively, be used. Of course, skis **164**, **168** may be fixedly attached to frame **104** or integral with the frame in other embodiments.

[0028] Regarding skis **164**, each such ski may include a central longitudinal recess **184** for conformally receiving corresponding respective portion **172** of second tubular member **128**. Each ski **164** may include an upturned leading end **188** and an upturned trailing end **192** for enhancing the performance of the ski in various snow conditions. Each ski **164** may have a concave snow-engaging surface **194** extending substantially along the entire length and width of the ski. Each ski **164** may further include one or more strakes (not shown) on its snow-engaging surface **196** to increase the maneuverability and controllability of sled **100**. Skis **164** may be made of any suitable material, such as plastic, wood, metal or fiber reinforced composite, among others. High-density polyethylene and ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene are two types of plastic suitable for making skis **164** due to their low sliding resistance on snow and durability, among other characteristics. Each ski **164** may further include patterned textures (not shown) on its snow-engaging surface **196** to decrease sliding resistance and/or increase the maneuverability and controllability of sled **100**.

[0029] As shown in FIGS. 1-8, steering portion **120** may include a ski support **200** and one or more skis **204** operatively attached to the ski support. Ski support **200** may be configured, and/or made of one or more materials, to match frame **104** of seating portion **116**, if desired. For example, as shown, frame **104** is made of metal tubular members **124**, **128**. Accordingly, ski-support **200** may likewise be made of one or more tubular metal members. Of course, if frame **104**

were made of a monolithic plastic molding, ski support **200** may similarly be made of a suitable monolithic plastic molding. Ski support **200** may include foot/hand rests/grips **208** where a user may rest his/her feet or grip with his/her hands during use and may apply the necessary forces for steering sled **100** during use. Foot/hand rests/grips **208** may be made of a suitable material, e.g., rubber or plastic, and may include ribs **212** or other structures for inhibiting sliding of a user's feet or hands on the foot/hand rests/grips. Steering of sled **100** is discussed below.

[0030] Referring to FIGS. 7, 8, 11 and 12, each ski **204** may have a concave snow-engaging surface **216** extending substantially along the entire length and width of the ski. Each ski **204** may further include one or more strakes (not shown) extending along snow engaging surface **216** to enhance the lateral grip of that ski during steering conditions. Each ski **204** may also include patterned textures (not shown) on its snow engaging surface **216** to decrease sliding resistance and/or increase the maneuverability and controllability of sled **100**. Each ski **204** may include an upwardly-turned leading end **220** and an upwardly-turned trailing end (not shown) for enhancing the performance of the ski in various snow conditions. Like rear skis **164**, front skis **204** may be made of any suitable material, such as plastic, wood, metal or fiber reinforced composite, among others. High-density polyethylene or ultra-high molecular weight polyethylene may be particularly desirable. In addition, skis **204** may be configured so as to be readily replaceable with new skis and/or skis (not shown) designed for a different snow condition.

[0031] Each ski **204** may be pivotably attached to a corresponding respective end of ski support **200** with a pivot joint **224** so that the ski may pivot in a substantially vertical plane within a limited range of motion relative to the ski support. Each pivot joint **224** may be covered with a suitable protective boot **228** that keeps snow and/or ice from interfering with the pivoting action of the respective ski **204**. The protective boot **228** may also dampen movement of ski **204** relative to the respective ski support **200** and reduce chatter of ski **204** against snow. The dampening and reduction of chatter are due, in part, by the resilient stiffness of the boot **228**. Boot **228** may be made of any suitable material, such as rubber, plastic, metal mesh or other flexible material. The end of each ski support **200** may include an end cap (not shown) to dissipate and evenly distribute pressure on pivot joint **224**.

[0032] Steering mechanism **112** generally couples steering portion **120** to seating portion **116** and allows the steering portion **120** to be pivoted laterally relative to the seating portion **116** so as to make sled **100** readily steerable. Although steering mechanism **112** may take many forms, FIGS. 13 and 14 particularly illustrate steering mechanism **112'** that is presently preferred. Steering mechanism **112'** may include a steering linkage **232** rigidly connected to ski support **200** of steering portion **120**. Steering linkage **232** may be configured to provide a relatively large stiffness in a vertical direction and a relatively small stiffness in a horizontal direction, i.e., side-to-side relative to seating portion **116**. Such a configuration permits a user to readily pivot steering portion **120** relative to seating portion **116** by deflecting linkage **232** toward one side of sled **100** or the other, while permitting little flexing of the linkage in a vertical plane. Such a configuration also provides for shock

absorption due to torque and twisting of the steering linkage **232** as sled **100** engages uneven or rough terrain.

[0033] One configuration of linkage **232** that provides high vertical stiffness and low horizontal stiffness is a sandwich of members, such as plates **236**, having a relatively large moment of inertia in the vertical direction and a relatively small moment of inertia in the horizontal direction. The resistance of the linkage **232** in the horizontal plane may be provided by the inherent stiffness of plates **236**, as well as the friction of the plates as they slide against one another when the steering portion **120** is pivoted laterally. When plates **236** are made of steel, the sandwiching of the plates has been found to reduce the likelihood that the plates will become permanently deformed in the event that excessive force is applied to the steering portion **120** while turning sled **100**. Plates **236** may alternately be made of any suitable material other than steel that is resiliently flexible over the maximum anticipated range of motion of steering portion **120** relative to seating portion **116**. In addition, the sandwiched members need not be flat plates **236**, but rather may have any shape such that the members can be stacked, sandwiched or nestled with one another.

[0034] An alternative to linkage **232** that also provides high vertical stiffness and low horizontal stiffness is a linkage **232'** that includes a cantilever bar **240**, as shown in FIGS. 15 and 16 in connection with steering linkage **112**. Cantilever bar **240** may have a relatively large moment of inertia in the vertical direction and a relatively small moment of inertia in the horizontal direction. Cantilever bar **240** may be made of any suitable material that is resiliently flexible over the maximum anticipated range of motion of steering portion **120** relative to seating portion **116**. Examples of such materials include stainless steel, tungsten, spring steel, plastic, wood and fiber-reinforced composites, among others. The stiffness and strength of the cantilever bar **240** allows the horizontal width of the steering linkage **232'** to be a fraction (one-tenth or less) of the horizontal width of steering portion **120** and the horizontal width of seating portion **116**. In one embodiment wherein cantilever bar **240** is a stainless steel bar about 8 inches long, the thickness of the bar is on the order of about $\frac{3}{32}$ inch to about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch and the height of the bar is on the order of about 1 inch to about 2 inches. Of course, the dimensions of steering linkage **232'** will vary depending upon such factors as design weight capacity of sled **100** (FIG. 1), weight distribution between front skis **204** and rear skis **164**, length of the steering linkage **232'** and desired response of the steering linkage, among others.

[0035] Steering mechanism **112** may further include a receiver **244** connected to frame **104** of seating portion **116** for receiving steering linkage **232'**. Receiver **244** may be configured to removably receive steering linkage **232'** and/or to allow the length of the steering linkage extending from the receiver to be adjusted. Varying this length allows a user to adjust the lateral stiffness of steering linkage **232'** to make the steering response either tighter or looser to suit, among other things, the strength and comfort of the user and snow, trail and sledding style conditions. Of course, receiver **244** may alternatively be attached to steering portion **120** and steering linkage **232'** rigidly attached to seating portion **116**.

[0036] Receiver **244** may include a housing **248** containing a pair of lateral supports **252** spaced apart by a distance

slightly larger than the width of cantilever bar **240**, or another steering linkage (not shown) such as a steering linkage similar to sandwiched plates **236** of FIGS. **13** and **14**, so as to snugly receive the cantilever bar or other steering linkage. Lateral supports **252** inhibit rotation of cantilever bar **240** or other steering linkage, and hence steering portion **120** of sled **100**, relative to seating portion **116**. Receiver **244** may further include a rear cap **256** and a latch assembly **260** for removably securing cantilever bar **240** or sandwiched plates **236** within the receiver. Latch assembly **260** may include a pivotable latch **264** having a catch **268** that is engagable with a corresponding catch **272** on cantilever bar **240** or sandwiched plates **236** to hold the cantilever bar or sandwiched plates in place. Alternative means for securing steering linkage **232'** or other steering linkage to receiver **244** include a pin, snap, bolt or clamp, among others. In an embodiment wherein the extension of steering linkage **232'** can be varied, the steering linkage may contain a plurality of apertures (not shown) spaced apart along its length. Correspondingly, receiver **244** may include a removable pin (not shown) that a user can disengage from one aperture and engage into another aperture so as to change the extension of steering linkage **232'** from the receiver. Those skilled in the art will appreciate the variety of means that may be used to hold steering linkage **232'** in receiver **244** and/or allow a user to adjust the length of the steering linkage extending from the receiver. Steering linkage **232'** may be protected by a boot **276**, such as a bellows-type boot, made of, e.g., rubber, plastic, metal mesh or other flexible material to inhibit snow and/or ice from accumulating in steering mechanism **112**.

[0037] In alternative embodiments, seating portion **116** may include a rear receiver (not shown) for receiving a coupling link for linking sled **100** (FIG. **1**) to the steering receiver **244** of the seating portion of a similar second sled so as to link the second seating portion to the first sled. This can be accomplished by removing steering portion **120** from the second sled and linking the corresponding seating portion **116** to the rear receiver of the first sled. As many seating portions **116** as desired can be linked together and with a lead sled **100** in such a manner. The rear receiver may be any suitable receiver, such as a conventional hitch, e.g., a pin-type or ball-type hitch. In this case, the coupling link would be configured for engaging the hitch at one end and steering receiver at the other end. In other embodiments, the rear receiver may be similar to steering receiver **244**. In this case, the coupling link would have opposing ends configured to engage to the two like receivers. For example, in the embodiment of receiver **244** described above wherein latch **264** engages catch **272** on cantilever bar **240**, a suitable coupling link would have a like catch at each of its ends.

[0038] Although the invention has been described and illustrated with respect to exemplary embodiments thereof, it should be understood by those skilled in the art that the foregoing and various other changes, omissions and additions may be made therein and thereto, without parting from the spirit and scope of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A snow sled for use by a person on snow, comprising:
 - a longitudinal central axis;
 - first and second longitudinal sides spaced from said longitudinal central axis on opposite sides of said longitudinal central axis;
 - a body that includes:
 - a seating portion having an upper surface and a lower surface spaced from said upper surface, said upper surface for receiving a person in either a seated or lying position during use;
 - a pair of spaced-apart snow-engaging members for supporting said body on snow during use, said pair of spaced apart snow-engaging members supporting said seating portion on corresponding respective ones of said first and second longitudinal sides so that said lower surface of said seating portion is spaced from said snow; and
 - a leading end when the snow sled is properly used; and
 - a steering portion comprising:
 - a ski support pivotably secured to said body at said leading end proximate said longitudinal central axis so that the snow sled is steerable by pivoting said ski support side to side during use, said ski support including first end and second ends spaced from one another on opposite sides of said longitudinal central axis; and
 - first and second skis attached to said ski support at corresponding respective ones of said first and second ends.
2. A snow sled according to claim 1, wherein said first and second snow engaging members are skis.
3. A snow sled according to claim 1, wherein said first and second snow engaging members are runners.
4. A snow sled according to claim 1, wherein said steering portion further comprises a linkage linking said ski support to said seating portion.
5. A snow sled according to claim 4, wherein said linkage is substantially flexible side-to-side and substantially rigid down-to-up.
6. A snow sled according to claim 1, wherein said ski support includes a curved central tubular portion supporting said first and second skis.
7. A snow sled according to claim 1, wherein said ski support includes hand/foot grips.
8. A snow sled according to claim 1, wherein said body comprises substantially tubular members and said upper surface of said seating portion is defined by a membrane supported by said substantially tubular members.
9. A snow sled according to claim 1, further comprising:
 - a first boot engaging said first ski and said ski support; and
 - a second boot engaging said second ski and said second support;
 wherein each of said first and second are designed to dampen chatter of corresponding respective ones of said first and second skis during use of the snow sled.

* * * * *