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23 Linear Winch

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25 The present invention relates to linear winch assemblies which use grip assemblies to
26 clamp and pull a winch cable, and in particular to an improved gripper assembly for use in
27 such linear winch assemblies. Aspects of the invention include a linear winch assembly
28 including such a gripper assembly and a method of use.

29

30 Background to the invention

31

32 During the installation and maintenance of load bearing cables such as in marine
33 applications, it is necessary to lower and/or raise cables into position. Winch assemblies
34 must be capable of withstanding heavy loads from the weight of the cables and loads
35 attached to the cables.

1 In applications which use relatively short cable lengths with small loads conventional reel
2 winches may be used. However, for longer cable lengths with heavy loads reel winches
3 are not suitable as they require large drums to accommodate the longer cable and may
4 result in unacceptable loading applied to the drum. Furthermore, the reel winch may
5 prevent the tensioning and releasing of the cable from being accurately controlled.

6
7 It is known to use linear winches in combination with a reel winch. The linear winch is used
8 to pull the cable and maintain the tension on the cable while the reel winch reels or unreels
9 the cable on a reel drum.

10
11 Linear winches usually comprise two gripper assemblies which clamp and pull the cable in
12 a coordinated operation. As a first gripper assembly grips and pulls the cable a second
13 gripper assembly allows the cable to pass freely. As the second gripper assembly grips
14 and pulls the cable the first gripper assembly releases the cable and slides over the cable
15 to return to its initial position. The successive holding and releasing steps of the two
16 gripper assemblies allows the tension of the cable to be maintained as it is pulled.

17
18 US 4,569,507 describes a traction block for a linear winch comprising an elongate frame
19 and two clamping blocks which are mounted between lateral flanges on the frame so that
20 a relative longitudinal movement between each movable clamping block and the adjacent
21 flange of the frame causes a transverse movement of the respective movable clamping
22 block. The traction block also comprises a cover plate which is detachable fixed to the
23 traction block.

24
25 A disadvantage of this system is that the winch must be taken offline, the winch assembly
26 dismantled and components of the winch to be removed in order to lift the cable connector
27 clear of the winch assembly. This is time consuming and dangerous operation especially
28 when the cable is under tension.

29 30 Summary of the invention

31
32 It is an object of at least one aspect of the present invention to obviate or at least mitigate
33 the foregoing disadvantages of prior art linear winches.

34

1 It is another object of an aspect of the present invention to provide a linear winch assembly
2 with improved productivity and/or efficiency which is capable of reliably performing a range
3 of winching tasks over a wide range of cable lengths, sizes and loads.

4
5 It is further object of at least one aspect of the present invention to provide an improved
6 gripper assembly that is capable of improving the performance of a linear winch assembly
7 in which the gripper assembly is deployed.

8
9 It is another object of an aspect of the present invention to provide a robust, reliable,
10 sturdy linear winch assembly suitable for deployment in a wide range of winching
11 applications which is capable of passing a cable connector whilst maintaining the tension
12 on the cable and prolonging the working lifespan of the linear winch assembly.

13
14 Further aims and objects of the invention will become apparent from reading the following
15 description.

16
17 According to a first aspect of the invention, there is provided a linear winch assembly
18 comprising:
19 a first gripper assembly comprising a first gripper block;
20 a second gripper assembly comprising a second gripper block;
21 a first mechanism operable to move at least part of the first gripper block out of the
22 pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the first gripper
23 assembly and
24 a second mechanism operable to move at least part of the second gripper block
25 out of the pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the second
26 gripper assembly.

27
28 The above described linear winch assembly may facilitate the passing of a cable
29 connector through the linear winch assembly whilst maintaining the tension on the cable.
30 This may facilitate the efficient winching of long lengths of cable formed from a series of
31 short cables joined by connectors.

32
33 By providing a linear winch assembly with at least part of the gripper blocks capable of
34 moving out of the pathway of a cable connector, the winch assembly may facilitate the
35 passing of a cable connector through the body of the winch assembly without the use of a

1 crane or lifting mechanism. This may avoid dangerous, cumbersome and time consuming
2 operations which are required when using a crane or lifting mechanism to lift the tensioned
3 cable out of the pathway of components of the linear winch assembly.

4
5 Preferably the first mechanism is configured move the at least part of the first gripper block
6 to a position which is out of the pathway of the cable connector, wherein the position may
7 be within a linear winch housing. Further preferably the second mechanism is configured
8 to move the at least part of the second gripper block to a position which is out of the
9 pathway of the cable connector, wherein the position may be within a linear winch housing.

10
11 The first mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the first gripper block
12 laterally, vertically and/or horizontally to a position out of the pathway of a cable connector.
13 The first mechanism may be configured to rotate, lower, raise and/or displace the at least
14 part of the first gripper block to move out it out of the pathway of the cable connector.

15
16 The second mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the second gripper
17 block laterally, vertically and/or horizontally to a position out of the pathway of the cable
18 connector. The second mechanism may be configured to rotate, lower, raise and/or
19 displace the at least part of the second gripper block to move out it out of the pathway of
20 the cable connector.

21
22 The first mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the first gripper block
23 from an operative position in which the first gripper block is in the pathway of a cable
24 connector to an inoperative position in which the first gripper block is not in the pathway of
25 a cable connector.

26
27 The inoperative position of the first gripper block may be laterally, vertically and/or
28 horizontally offset from the operative position of the first gripper block.

29
30 The cable connector may extend radially outward from the cable to a first radial distance.
31 The inoperative position of the first gripper block may be laterally, vertically and/or
32 horizontally offset from the operative position of the first gripper block by a distance equal
33 to or greater than the first radial distance of the cable connector to allow the cable
34 connector to pass through the first gripper assembly.

35

1 The second mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the second gripper
2 block from an operative position in which the second gripper block is in the pathway of a
3 cable connector to an inoperative position in which the second gripper block is not in the
4 pathway of a cable connector.

5
6 The inoperative position of the second gripper block may be laterally, vertically and/or
7 horizontally offset from the operative position of the second gripper block.

8
9 The cable connector may extend radially outward from the cable to a first radial distance.
10 The inoperative position of the at least part of the second gripper block may be laterally,
11 vertically and/or horizontally offset from the operative position of the at least part of the
12 second gripper block by a distance equal to/or greater than the first radial distance of the
13 cable connector to allow the cable connector to pass through the second gripper
14 assembly.

15
16 Preferably, the first mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the first
17 gripper block to a vertically lower position which is out of the pathway of the cable
18 connector, wherein the position may be within a linear winch housing.

19
20 Preferably, the second mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the
21 second gripper block to a vertically lower position which is out of the pathway of the cable
22 connector, wherein the lower position may be within a linear winch housing.

23
24 The first mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the first gripper block
25 in a direction substantially transverse to the direction of travel of the cable and/or cable
26 connector. The second mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the
27 second gripper block in a direction substantially transverse to the direction of travel of the
28 cable and/or cable connector.

29
30 The first mechanism and/or second mechanism may comprise a hydraulic, pneumatic,
31 electric or mechanical actuator. In some embodiments, the actuator is a hydraulic cylinder.

32
33 Preferably the first gripper assembly and/or the second gripper assembly are configured to
34 sequentially grip and release a cable. The first gripper assembly and the second gripper

assembly may be configured to grip the cable simultaneously. One gripper assembly may be configured to grip the cable while the other gripper assembly releases the cable.

The linear winch assembly may facilitate a wide variety of cable lengths, sizes and loads which may result in improved productivity and/or efficiency.

The linear winch assembly may be used to winch a wide variety of cables including but not limited to lines, tether, rope, wire, wire rope, rods, umbilical, pipe, cord or conduit.

Preferably the first gripper assembly comprises a lid. Preferably the second gripper assembly comprises a lid. The lid may provide structural support and strength to the first and/or second gripper assembly. The lid may facilitate the gripper assembly and/or gripper block to direct a clamping force on the cable.

Preferably the first gripper assembly comprises a mechanism configured to open and close the lid. Preferably the second gripper assembly comprises a mechanism configured to open and close the lid.

The gripper block and/or lid may be configured to be moved to a position outside the winch assembly. The lid and/or gripper block may be configured to be moved to a position inside the winch assembly.

Preferably the linear winch assembly comprises a control unit. The control unit may be configured to control the operation of the linear winch. The control unit may be configured to control the reciprocating motion of the gripper assemblies along the longitudinal axis of the winch housing.

The control unit may be configured to control the laterally, vertically and/or horizontally positions of the gripper assemblies to enable controlled passing of the cable connector through the gripper assemblies. The control unit may be configured to control the position of the gripper assemblies in relation to one another to facilitate efficient winching.

The control unit may be configured to control the laterally, vertically and/or horizontally position of the gripper blocks and lids to control the passing of the cable connector through the gripper assemblies.

1 The control unit may be configured use feedback information relating to the position of the
2 gripper assemblies, the positions of the cable connector and/or the stroke length of
3 actuator to ensure that cable is winched and the cable connector is passed through the
4 winch in the most efficient manner.

5
6 The control unit may be configured to monitor the position of the cable connector and/or
7 gripper assemblies to ensure that the gripper assemblies are located in a correct position
8 to allow the cable connector to pass in an orderly manner and mitigate cable tension,
9 impacts and/or contact between the cable connector and the gripper assemblies.

10
11 Preferably the cable connector is selected from Spelter sockets, mooring sockets, wedge
12 sockets and/or wire rope clips.

13
14 According to a second aspect of the invention, there is provided a linear winch assembly
15 comprising:

16 a first gripper assembly comprising a lid and a first gripper block;
17 a second gripper assembly comprising a lid and a second gripper block;
18 a first mechanism operable to move at least part of the first gripper block out of the
19 pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the first gripper
20 assembly; and
21 a second mechanism operable to move at least part of the second gripper block out of the
22 pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the second gripper
23 assembly.

24
25 The first mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the first gripper block
26 laterally, vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of a cable connector. The first
27 mechanism may be configured to rotate, lower, raise and/or displace at least part of the
28 first gripper block to move out it out of the pathway of a cable connector.

29
30 The second mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the second gripper
31 block laterally, vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of a cable connector. The
32 second mechanism may be configured to rotate, lower, raise and/or displace the at least
33 part of the second gripper block to move out it out of the pathway of a cable connector.

34

1 The first mechanism may be configured to move at least part of the first gripper block to a
2 position which is out of the pathway of a cable connector, wherein the position is within the
3 housing of the linear winch assembly.

4
5 The second mechanism may be configured to move at least part of the second gripper
6 block to a position which is out of the pathway of a cable connector, wherein the position is
7 within the housing of the linear winch assembly.

8
9 Preferably, the first mechanism may be configured to lower at least part of the first gripper
10 block to a position within the housing of the linear winch assembly. Preferably, the second
11 mechanism may be configured to lower at least part of the second gripper to a position
12 within the housing of the linear winch assembly.

13
14 Preferably the first gripper assembly comprises a mechanism configured to open and
15 close the lid. Preferably the second gripper assembly comprises a mechanism configured to
16 open and close the lid.

17
18 Embodiments of the second aspect of the invention may include one or more features of
19 the first aspect of the invention or its embodiments, or vice versa.

20
21 According to a third aspect of the invention, there is provided a gripper assembly for a
22 linear winch assembly comprising:

23 a lid;

24 a gripper block; and

25 a mechanism operable to move at least part of the gripper block out of the pathway of a
26 cable connector to allow the cable connector to pass through the gripper assembly.

27
28 The mechanism is configured to move the at least part of gripper block in a rotary, linear
29 and/or translational movement out of the pathway of the cable connector.

30
31 The mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of gripper block laterally,
32 vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of the cable connector.

1 The mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the gripper block to a
2 position out of the pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the
3 gripper assembly, wherein the position is within a gripper assembly housing.

4
5 The mechanism may be configured to move at least part of the gripper block between an
6 operative position in which the gripper block is in the pathway of a cable connector and an
7 inoperative position in which the gripper block is not in the pathway of a cable connector.

8
9 The inoperative position of the gripper block may be laterally, vertically and/or horizontally
10 offset from the operative position of the gripper block.

11
12 The cable connector may extend radially outward from the cable to a first radial distance.
13 The inoperative position of the gripper block may be laterally, vertically and/or horizontally
14 offset from the operative position of the gripper block by a distance equal to or greater than
15 the first radial distance of the cable connector to allow the cable connector to pass through
16 the gripper assembly.

17
18 The lid may be movably mounted on the gripper assembly. The lid may be configured to
19 be moved to a position out of the pathway of the cable connector. Preferably the lid is
20 pivotally mounted on the gripper assembly.

21
22 The gripper block may be configured to be rotated, lowered, raised and/or displaced to a
23 position out of the pathway of the cable connector. Preferably, the mechanism may be
24 configured to move the at least part of the gripper block to a vertically lower position which
25 is out of the pathway of the cable connector, wherein the lower position may be within a
26 gripper assembly housing.

27
28 Preferably the gripper block is movably mounted on a guide assembly.

29
30 The mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the gripper block to a
31 position parallel to the longitudinal axis of the cable connector and/or linear winch
32 assembly housing. The mechanism may be configured to move the at least part of the
33 gripper block to a position perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the cable connector
34 and/or gripper assembly housing.

1 Embodiments of the third aspect of the invention may include one or more features of the
2 first or second aspect of the invention or their embodiments, or vice versa

3
4 According to a fourth aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of operating a
5 linear winch assembly, the method comprising:
6 providing a linear winch assembly comprising:
7 at least one gripper assembly comprising a lid and a gripper block; and
8 a mechanism operable to move at least a part of the gripper block out of the pathway of a
9 cable connector;
10 moving at least a part of the gripper block out of the pathway of a cable connector;
11 and passing the cable connector through the gripper assembly.

12
13 The method may comprise moving the at least a part of the gripper block around the cable
14 connector to pass the cable connector through the gripper assembly. The method may
15 comprise moving the at least one gripper assembly to pass the cable connector through
16 the gripper assembly.

17
18 The method may comprise pulling in or paying out the cable to pass the cable connector
19 through the gripper assembly. The method may comprise providing a second gripper
20 assembly configured to pull in or pay out a cable. A second gripper assembly may be
21 provided and may be configured to pull the cable and cable connector through the first
22 gripper assembly.

23
24 The method may comprise moving the at least part of the gripper block laterally, vertically
25 and/or horizontally out of the pathway of a cable connector.

26
27 The method may comprise:
28 providing a second gripper assembly comprising:
29 a second lid;
30 a second gripper block; and
31 a second mechanism operable to move at least a part of the second gripper block out of
32 the pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the second
33 gripper block;
34 moving at least a part of the second gripper block out of the way of a cable connector;
35 pulling in or paying out a cable; and

1 passing the cable connector through the second gripper assembly.

2
3 Embodiments of the fourth aspect of the invention may include one or more features of the
4 first to third aspects of the invention or their embodiments, or vice versa.

5
6 According to a fifth aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of operating a linear
7 winch assembly comprising the steps of:

8 providing a linear winch assembly comprising:

9 a first gripper assembly comprising:

10 a lid;

11 a first gripper block and

12 a first mechanism operable to move at least a part of the first gripper block from an
13 operative position in which the first gripper block is in the pathway of a cable connector to
14 an inoperative position in which the first gripper block is not in the pathway of a cable
15 connector;

16 moving at least a part of the first gripper block from the operative to the inoperative
17 position; and

18 passing the cable connector through the first gripper assembly.

19
20 The method may comprise moving the first gripper block around the cable connector to
21 pass the cable connector through the gripper block.

22
23 The method may comprise moving the at least part of the first gripper block laterally,
24 vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of the cable connector.

25
26 The inoperative position of the first gripper block may be laterally, vertically and/or
27 horizontally offset from the operative position of the first gripper block.

28
29 The method may comprise pulling in or paying out the cable to pass the cable connector
30 through the gripper assembly.

31
32 The method may comprise moving the at least part of the first gripper block from an
33 inoperative position to the operative position when the cable connector has passed
34 through the gripper assembly.

1 The method may comprise providing:
2 a second gripper assembly comprising a lid;
3 a second gripper block and
4 a second mechanism operable to move at least a part of the second gripper block from an
5 operative position in which the second gripper block is in the pathway of a cable connector
6 to an inoperative position in which the second gripper block is not in the pathway of a
7 cable connector;
8 moving at least a part of the second gripper block from the operative to the inoperative
9 position; and
10 passing the cable connector through the second gripper assembly.

11

12 The method may comprise moving the at least part of the second gripper block from the
13 inoperative position to the operative position when the cable connector has passed
14 through the second gripper assembly.

15

16 The method may comprise moving the at least part of the first and/or second gripper block
17 laterally, vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of the cable connector.

18

19 The method may comprise moving the second gripper block around the cable connector to
20 pass the cable connector through the second gripper block.

21

22 The method may comprise the step of moving the at least part of the first and/or second
23 gripper assembly to pull in or pay out a cable. .

24

25 The method may comprise rotating, lowering, raising and/or displacing at least part of the
26 first and/or second gripper blocks to move out it out of the pathway of a cable connector.

27

28 Embodiments of the fifth aspect of the invention may include one or more features of the
29 first to fourth aspects of the invention or their embodiments, or vice versa

30

31 According to a sixth aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of operating a
32 gripper assembly comprising the steps of:

33 providing a gripper assembly comprising a lid;

34 a gripper block; and

35 a mechanism operable to move at least part of the gripper block;

moving at least part of the gripper block out of the pathway of a cable connector; and
passing the cable connector through the gripper assembly.

The method may comprise actuating the mechanism to move the gripper block out of the
pathway of a cable connector.

The method may comprise moving the at least part of the gripper block laterally, vertically
and/or horizontally out of the pathway of the cable connector.

The method may comprise moving the lid out of the pathway of the cable connector.

Embodiments of the sixth aspect of the invention may include one or more features of the
first to fifth aspects of the invention or their embodiments, or vice versa.

According to a seventh aspect of the invention, there is provided a method of operating a
linear winch assembly, the method comprising:

providing a linear winch assembly comprising:

a first gripper assembly comprising a first lid and a first gripper block;

a first mechanism operable to move at least a part of the first gripper block;

a second gripper assembly comprising a second lid and a second gripper block;

a second mechanism operable to move at least a part of the second gripper block;

actuating the first mechanism to move at least a part of the first gripper block out of the
pathway of a cable connector;

passing the cable connector through the first gripper assembly;

actuating the second mechanism to move at least a part of the second gripper block out of
the pathway of a cable connector; and

passing the cable connector through the second gripper assembly.

The method may comprise actuating the first mechanism to move the at least part of first
grripper block laterally, vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of the cable
connector.

The method may comprise actuating the second mechanism to move the at least part of
second gripper block laterally, vertically and/or horizontally out of the pathway of the cable
connector.

1 The method may comprise pulling in or paying out the cable to pass the cable connector
2 through the first and/or second gripper assemblies.

3
4 The method may comprise moving the second gripper assembly to push or pull the cable
5 connector through the first gripper assembly. The method may comprise moving the first
6 gripper assembly to push or pull the cable connector through the second gripper
7 assembly.

8
9 The method may comprise moving the first gripper assembly to move the cable connector
10 through the first gripper and/or first gripper assembly. The method may comprise moving
11 the second gripper assembly to pass the cable connector through the second gripper block
12 and/or second gripper assembly.

13
14 Embodiments of the seventh aspect of the invention may include one or more features of
15 the first to sixth aspects of the invention or their embodiments, or vice versa

16
17 Brief description of the drawings

18
19 There will now be described, by way of example only, various embodiments of the
20 invention with reference to the following drawings (like reference numerals referring to like
21 features) in which:

22
23 Figures 1A and 1B present a linear winch comprising two gripper assemblies in
24 accordance with an embodiment the present invention, shown in perspective view;

25
26 Figures 2A and 2B present gripper assembly of the linear winch of Figure 1B, shown in an
27 enlarged perspective views;

28
29 Figures 3A, 3B and 3C present enlarged plan, perspective and cross-sectional views of
30 the gripper assembly of the linear winch of Figure 1B;

31
32 Figure 4A, 4B and 4C presents the gripper assembly of Figure 1B in cross-sectional view
33 and perspective views during stages of moving to a inoperative position with a wall of the
34 gripper assembly removed for clarity;

Figures 5A and 5B shows perspective views of the linear winch during stages of the cable connector passing through the gripper assembly; and

Figures 6A to 6D show perspective views of the linear winch to provide details on the gripper assembly 14 reverting to an operative state after passage of the cable connector through the gripper assembly.

Detailed description of preferred embodiments

An embodiment of the present invention is illustrated in Figure 1 and provides a number of advantages over prior art linear winches, specifically by providing robust and sturdy gripper assemblies, components of which are capable of being moved out of the pathway of a cable connector such as a socket so that the connector may pass through the winch. The linear winch is capable of performing a wide range of winching and tasks in a safe and time efficient manner.

Figures 1A and 1B shows perspective views of linear winch assembly 10. The linear winch assembly 10 has a housing 12. One side of the winch assembly in Figure 1B has been removed to improve the clarity of the drawing. The winch housing 11 can be seen to comprise a first gripper assembly 14 and a second gripper assembly 16. The first gripper assembly 14 and a second gripper assembly 16 are slidably mounted within housing 12.

Hydraulic cylinders 18 and 20 are mounted in the housing 12 and are connected to the gripper assemblies 14 and 16 respectively. The gripper assembly 14 is configured to be moved in reciprocating action along the longitudinal axis of the housing 12 by the extension and retraction of hydraulic cylinder 18. The gripper assembly 16 is configured to be moved in reciprocating action along the longitudinal axis of the housing 12 by the extension and retraction of hydraulic cylinder 20.

The gripper assemblies 14 and 16 are designed to engage and grip a cable 17. The hydraulic cylinders 18 and 20 are configured to move the gripper assemblies and the gripped cable 17 along the longitudinal axis of the linear winch assembly.

Figure 1B shows hydraulic cylinder 18 in a fully extended position and hydraulic cylinder 20 in a fully retracted position. A connector socket 19 is used to connect two sections of

1 cable 17a and 17b. The socket 19 is shown in Figure 1B positioned close to the gripper
2 assembly 14 but is unable to pass through the gripper assembly 14 as there is not sufficient
3 clearance to allow the socket 19 to pass through gripper assembly 14.

4
5 Figure 2A and 2B shows an enlarged perspective view of the gripper assembly 14. The
6 gripper assembly 14 comprises a gripper housing 24 having a base 24a and four walls
7 24b, 24c, 24d and 24e. Wall 24e has been removed from Figure 2 to improve the clarity of
8 the drawing. The walls 24b and 24d are perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the winch
9 assembly and have slots 26 which are dimensioned to allow a cable 17 and socket 19 to
10 pass through the walls 24b and 24d.

11
12 Hydraulic cylinder 18 is connected at one end to the wall 24b of the gripper housing 24
13 and is configured to slidably move the gripper housing 24 along the longitudinal axis of the
14 winch housing 12.

15
16 The gripper housing 24 comprises a lid section 28a and a gripper block 28b. The lid
17 section 28a is slidably mounted on the gripper block 28b. Hydraulic cylinders 21 and 23
18 are connected to the gripper block 28b and are configured to engage with lid members 29
19 to slide the lid section 28a relative to the gripper block 28b along the longitudinal axis of
20 the housing 12 by the extension and retraction of hydraulic cylinders 21 and 23. The lid
21 section 28a is configured to be slidably moved between a locked position shown in Figure
22 2A and an unlocked position shown in Figure 2B.

23
24 The lid section 28a is pivotally and slidably mounted on the gripper housing 24 via a rod 34
25 which is connected to the walls of the gripper housing 24. A hydraulic cylinder 36 is
26 connected to rod 34 via a coupling 37. The rod 34 has a hexagonal cross-section. The
27 hydraulic cylinder 36 and coupling 37 are configured to engage rod 34 to pivotally move
28 the lid section 28a between open and closed positions. Although, this example shows a
29 hexagonal cross-section rod and hydraulic cylinder to pivotally move the lid section
30 between open and closed positions it will also be clear that other rod cross sections and/or
31 other mechanisms may be used.

32
33 The gripper block 28b is movably mounted on guide rails 30 via guide wheels 31 mounted
34 on a base section of the gripper block 28b. Hydraulic cylinders 32 and 33 are connected at
35 one end to the gripper block 28b and to the base 24a of the gripper housing 24 at the other

end. The hydraulic cylinders 32 and 33 are configured to move the gripper block 28b along the sloped pathway of the guide rails 30. By moving the guide wheels 31 of the gripper block 28b along the sloped pathway of the guide rails 30 the gripper block 28b is lowered out of the pathway of the cable 17 and/or socket 19.

Although, this example shows guide rails 30 and guide wheels 31 are used to lower the gripper block 28b out of the pathway of the cable 17 and socket 19 other guide arrangements and/or mechanisms may be used. It will also be clear that other assembly components may be moved in other directions to move the assembly out of the pathway of the cable 17 and socket 19.

The lid section 28a and gripper block 28b have a wedge shape. The dimensions of the lid section 28a and gripper block 28b are such that when the wedge shape lid section 28a is positioned on top of the corresponding wedge shape gripper block 28b and moved by the actuation of hydraulic cylinders 21 and 23 in a general direction Y along the longitudinal axis of the housing 12, the inner surfaces of the wedged shape lid section 28a bears against the outer surfaces of the wedged shape gripper block 28b. In this position the lid is clamped onto the gripper block 28b. Figure 2A shows the lid section 28a in a clamped position.

However, actuation of hydraulic cylinders 21 and 23 to move lid section 28a in a general direction Z along the longitudinal axis of the housing 12 causes the inner surfaces of the wedged shape lid section 28a to move away from the outer surfaces of the wedged shape gripper block 28b. In this position the lid is released from the gripper block 28b. Figure 2B shows the lid section 28a in a released position.

Figures 3A, 3B and 3C show an enlarged plan, perspective and cross-sectional views of the gripper assembly 14. The lid section 28a has been removed for clarity. The gripper block 28b comprises two parallel bearing members 42 mounted on the gripper block 28b in a generally wedged shape. The gripper block 28b comprises a gripper slider 44 which houses two clamp members 46.

The clamp members 46 have inner faces 46a which have longitudinal semi-cylindrical grooves 46b that are dimensioned to receive the cable 17. The size and shape of the semi-cylindrical grooves 46b may be changed for different cable sizes and/or types.

1 The gripper block 28b is configured to restrain and grip the cable 17 and pull the cable in a
2 first direction as shown by arrow Y in Figure 3A and to release the cable and allow the
3 cable to move freely relative to the gripper block in the opposite direction of travel
4 represented by arrow Z in Figure 3A.

5
6 The outer surfaces 46c of the clamp members 46 have a wedge shape. The clamp
7 members 46 are configured to move perpendicular to the longitudinal axis of the housing
8 12 to bear against bearing members 42 when the gripper block 28b is moved in a general
9 direction Y. When the movable clamp members are moved in the direction Y, they transmit
10 a force to the bearing members 42. The bearing members 42 are fixed in the base section
11 of the gripper block 28b which causes a reaction force against the inner surfaces of the
12 clamp members 46 to clamp on to and grip the cable 17.

13
14 When the gripper block 28b is moved in a direction shown by arrow Z in Figure 3A, clamp
15 members 46 move away from the wedge bearing members 42. The reaction force acting
16 against the clamp members 46 by the bearing members 42 is reduced. The inner surfaces
17 of the clamp members 44 are moved away from the cable 17. The cable is free to move
18 within the clamp members 46 and the gripper assembly 14.

19
20 Figure 3C shows a hydraulic cylinder 45 connected at one end to the base section of the
21 gripper block 28b and to gripper slider 44 at the other end. The gripper slider 44 is
22 configured to be moved between a cable engaged position as shown in Figure 3B and a
23 cable release position as shown in Figure 4A.

24
25 In the cable engaged position as shown in Figure 3B the gripper slider is located in the
26 gripper block 28b between the bearing members 42. The clamp members 46 are moved
27 toward one another to engage the cable in the longitudinal semi-cylindrical grooves 46b.

28
29 In the cable release position as shown in Figure 4A the gripper slider 44 is located partially
30 outside the gripper block 28b. The clamp members 46 are moved away from one another
31 to allow the cable to be removed from the longitudinal semi-cylindrical grooves 46b.

32
33 Figure 4A to 4C presents the gripper assembly during stages of socket passing in cross-
34 sectional view and perspective views with a wall of the gripper assembly removed for
35 clarity.

1 The hydraulic cylinder 45 (shown in Figure 3C) is actuated to move the gripper slider 44
2 from a cable engaged position to a cable release position as shown in Figure 4A. The
3 gripper slider 44 is located partially outside the gripper block 28b. The clamp members 46
4 are moved away from one another to allow the cable to be removed from the longitudinal
5 semi-cylindrical grooves 46b.

6
7 The gripper assembly comprises guide rails 30. Each guide rail 30 comprises a first part
8 30a which positions the gripper block 28b at an operative position in which the gripper
9 block is in the pathway of the cable connector at an elevated position above the base 24a
10 of the gripper assembly 14. Each guide rail 30 comprises a second part 30b provides a
11 sloped guide path; and a third part 30c which positions the gripper block 28b at an
12 inoperative position in which the gripper block is not in the pathway of a cable connector
13 and is close to the base 24a of the gripper assembly 14.

14
15 Upper guide rails 31 are located above the first part 30a of guide rail 30 and partially along
16 second part 30b to ensure that the gripper block 28b is accurately positioned in the
17 operative position.

18
19 The operative position of the gripper block 28b may be defined as the position that the
20 gripper block 28b is located during normal winching of the cable by the gripper assembly
21 14. The inoperative position of the gripper block 28b may be defined as the position
22 wherein the gripper block 28b is located at the third part 30c of guide rail 30 out of the
23 pathway of the socket 19 to allow socket 19 to pass through the gripper assembly 14.

24
25 The operative position of the lid section 28a may be defined as the position that the lid
26 section 28a is located during normal winching of the cable by the gripper assembly 14.
27 The inoperative position of the lid section 28a may be defined as the position wherein the
28 lid section 28a is moved to an open position.

29
30 Guide rails 30 are configured to receive wheels which are connected to the base section of
31 the gripper block 28b as shown in Figures 4A. Hydraulic cylinders 32 and 33 are actuated
32 to pull the gripper block 28b along guide rails 30. This action lowers the gripper block away
33 from the lid section. The hydraulic cylinders 32 and 33 are configured to position the
34 gripper block at the third part 30c of guide rail 30 when the cylinders are at their fully

1 retracted position as shown in Figure 4B. At this lower position the gripper block 28b is
2 moved out of the pathway of the socket 19.

3
4 Hydraulic cylinder 36 is actuated to pivot the lid section 28a between a closed position and
5 an open position. Figure 4C shows the gripper assembly 14 in a socket pass position. In
6 the socket pass position the gripper block 28b is located at the third part 30c of guide rail
7 and the lid section 28a is pivoted to an open position. The gripper block 28b and lid section
8 28a have been moved out of the pathway of the cable socket 19. The socket now has
9 sufficient clearance to pass through the gripper assembly 14.

10
11 Although this example describes the gripper block being moved vertically out of the
12 pathway of the cable connector. It will be clear that alternatively the gripper block may be
13 moved in laterally, horizontally and/or vertically out of the pathway of the cable connector.

14
15 Figures 5A and 5B shows perspective views of the linear winch with the gripper assembly
16 14 in an inoperative socket pass configuration to provide details on the movement of the
17 socket through the gripper assembly 14. The hydraulic cylinder 18 is actuated to a
18 retracted position to move the gripper assembly 14 in a direction shown as arrow Z in
19 Figure 5A to move the gripper assembly around the socket 19. The socket 19 is able to
20 pass through the slot 26 in the gripper assembly 14. The inoperative state of the gripper
21 assembly provides clearance for the socket 19. The retraction of hydraulic cylinder 18
22 moves the gripper assembly 14 such that the socket is positioned within the gripper
23 assembly 14. In order to fully pass the socket through the gripper assembly 14 the cable
24 and socket is pulled by the second gripper assembly 16.

25
26 Hydraulic cylinder 20 is actuated to an extended position to move the gripper assembly 16
27 in a direction shown as arrow Y in Figure 5B. The cable 17 and socket 19 are pulled
28 through the gripper assembly 14 in the inoperative state.

29
30 Hydraulic cylinder 18 may be dimensioned such that its stroke length is sufficient to move
31 the gripper assembly 14 around the socket 19 so that the socket completely passed
32 through the gripper assembly 14.

33

Figures 6A to 6D show perspective views of the linear winch to provide details on how the gripper assembly 14 reverts to an operative state after passage of the socket through the gripper assembly 14.

Figure 6A shows the gripper block 28b located in an inoperative position where the gripper block 28b is located at the third part 30c of guide rail 30. Hydraulic cylinder 36 is actuated to a retracted position to rotate the rod 34 and pivot the lid section 28a from a generally vertical open position to a generally closed horizontal position. The lid section 28a in the closed position is supported by tabs 71 on wall 24e of the gripper assembly housing 24. Although in Figure 6A wall 24e is removed for clarity, the location of tabs 71 is shown.

Hydraulic cylinders 32 and 33 are actuated to push the gripper block 28b along guide rails 30 from the third part 30c along the second part 30b to a first part 30a which positions the gripper block 28b at an operative position which is parallel with the longitudinal axis of in the housing 12 at an elevated position above the base 24a of the gripper assembly 14.

As the gripper block 28b is moved from an inoperative position to an operative position the gripper slider 44 is located in the cable release position where the gripper slider 44 is located partially outside the gripper block 28b. The clamp members 46 are spaced apart from one another to allow the clamp members 46 to be positioned around cable 17 such that the cable 17 is located within the longitudinal semi-cylindrical groove 46b.

In this operative position shown in Figure 6B, the upper part of the gripper block 28b is surrounded by the lid section. The lid is in an unlocked position.

The hydraulic cylinder 45 is actuated to move the gripper slider 44 from a cable released position to a cable engaged position where the gripper slider 44 is positioned between the bearing members 42 as shown in Figure 6B. The clamp members are moved toward one another to engage the cable in the longitudinal semi-cylindrical grooves 46b.

Figure 6D shows the actuation of hydraulic cylinders 21 and 23 in a general direction Y along the longitudinal axis of the housing 12 to move the lid section 28a from an unlocked position to a locked position. In the unlocked position the wedged shape lid section 28a is positioned on top of the corresponding wedged shape gripper block 28b. The inner

1 surfaces of the wedged shape lid section 28a do not bear against the outer surfaces of the
2 wedged shape gripper block 28b.

3
4 The actuation of hydraulic cylinders 21 and 23 in a general direction Y moves the lid
5 section 28b to a locked position such that the inner surfaces of the wedged shape lid
6 section 28a bears against the outer surfaces of the wedged shape gripper block 28b. In
7 this locked position the lid is clamped onto the gripper block 28b. In the locked position
8 the lid provides structural support to the gripper block and may facilitate the gripper block
9 to direct its clamping force to the cable.

10
11 Figure 6D shows the gripper assembly in an operative position where actuation of the
12 hydraulic cylinder 18 to move the gripper assembly 14 in a direction shown by arrow Y
13 results in the gripper assembly 14 gripping the cable and moving the cable in a direction Y.
14 If the hydraulic cylinder 18 moves the gripper assembly 14 in a direction shown by arrow Z
15 the gripper assembly in an operative position direction Y allows the cable to move freely
16 within the gripper assembly.

17
18 The gripper assembly 14 is operable to move between an operative position and
19 inoperative position. In the operative position the gripper assembly is configured to grip
20 and release the cable. In the inoperative position the gripper assembly is configured to be
21 moved out of the pathway of the cable socket.

22
23 In order to pass the socket 19 through the gripper assembly 14, the gripper block 28b
24 releases the cable and moves to an inoperative position to provide a pathway for the
25 socket 19 to pass through the gripper assembly 14. When the gripper assembly 14 is
26 positioned in the inoperative position, the gripper assembly 16 is positioned in an operative
27 position to grip, hold, pull and/or push the cable. The gripper assembly 16 is configured to
28 maintain the tension of the cable when the gripper assembly 14 is positioned in an
29 inoperative position. The gripper assembly 16 is configured to moves the cable along the
30 longitudinal axis of the winch assembly to facilitates the passing of the socket 19 through
31 the gripper assembly 14.

32
33 The actions of passing the socket 19 through the gripper assembly 16 are the same as the
34 above described method of passing the socket through the gripper assembly 14. The
35 gripper assembly 14 is maintained in an operative position during the passing of the socket

1 through the gripper assembly 16 to hold, pull and/or push the cable. The gripper assembly
2 14 is configured to maintain the tension of the cable 17 when the gripper block of the
3 gripper assembly 16 is positioned in an inoperative position to allow the socket to pass.
4 The gripper assembly 14 is configured to move the cable 17 along the longitudinal axis of
5 the winch assembly which facilitates the passing of the socket 19 through the gripper
6 assembly 16.

7
8 Although this example describes two gripper assemblies 14 and 16 in the winch to pull the
9 cable 17, additional gripper assemblies may be used in combination to provide additional
10 pulling and/or pushing force when winching heavy loads.

11
12 Although this example describes a single hydraulic cylinders connected to each of the
13 gripper assemblies 14 and 16, additional hydraulic cylinders may be connected between
14 the housing 12 and each gripper assembly which may be used in combination with the
15 hydraulic cylinders 18 and 20 to provide additional pulling and /or pushing force when
16 winching heavy loads.

17
18 Although, this example shows the lid section 28a being pivoted to an open position before
19 the socket is able to pass through the gripper assembly 14, it will be clear that the gripper
20 block 28b and the lid section 28a may be dimensioned or arranged such that the socket
21 may pass through the gripper assembly when the lid section 28a is in a closed position
22 and the gripper block 28b is in an inoperative position.

23
24 Throughout the specification, unless the context demands otherwise, the terms 'comprise'
25 or 'include', or variations such as 'comprises' or 'comprising', 'includes' or 'including' will be
26 understood to imply the inclusion of a stated integer or group of integers, but not the
27 exclusion of any other integer or group of integers. Furthermore, relative terms such as",
28 "horizontal" , "vertical" , raise, lower and the like are used herein to indicate directions and
29 locations as they apply to the appended drawings and will not be construed as limiting the
30 invention and features thereof to particular arrangements or orientations.

31
32 The foregoing description of the invention has been presented for the purposes of
33 illustration and description and is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to
34 the precise form disclosed. The described embodiments were chosen and described in
35 order to best explain the principles of the invention and its practical application to thereby

1 enable others skilled in the art to best utilise the invention in various embodiments and
2 with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. Therefore,
3 further modifications or improvements may be incorporated without departing from the
4 scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

5
6 The invention provides a linear winch assembly, gripper assembly and a method of use.
7 The linear winch assembly comprises a first gripper assembly comprising a first gripper
8 block operable to grip a cable and a second gripper assembly comprising a second gripper
9 block operable to grip a cable. The winch assembly comprises a first mechanism operable
10 to move at least part of the first gripper block out of the pathway of a cable connector to
11 allow the connector to pass through the first gripper assembly. The winch assembly also
12 comprises a second mechanism operable to move at least part of the second gripper block
13 out of the pathway of a cable connector to allow the connector to pass through the second
14 gripper assembly

15
16 The sequential passing of the cable connector through each gripper assembly allows the
17 winch assembly to maintain the cable tension. The first gripper assembly may be moved to
18 an inoperative position out of the pathway of the socket while the second assembly
19 maintains the cable tension and applied a pulling force to the cable. The second gripper
20 assembly may subsequently be moved to an inoperative position out of the pathway of the
21 cable connector while the first gripper assembly maintains the cable tension and applied a
22 pulling force to the cable.

23
24 The linear winch assembly is able to perform tasks involving pulling in or paying out long
25 cables with cable socket connections. The assembly is capable of passing the cable
26 connector while maintaining cable tension from heavy loads.

27
28 Another benefit of the improved gripper assembly is that it may improve the performance
29 of the winch assembly by facilitating the passage of a cable connector quickly and safely
30 through the gripper assembly without having to use a crane or lifting equipment.

31
32 Various modifications to the above described embodiments may be made within the scope
33 of the invention herein intended.

1 Claims

- 2
- 3 1. A linear winch assembly comprising:
 - 4 a first gripper assembly comprising a first gripper block;
 - 5 a second gripper assembly comprising a second gripper block;
 - 6 a first mechanism operable to move at least part of the first gripper block between
 - 7 an operative position in which the first gripper block is configured to grip
 - 8 and release a cable and an inoperative position which is laterally, vertically and/or
 - 9 horizontally offset from the operative position and is configured to provide a pathway
 - 10 for a connector on the cable through the first gripper assembly and
 - 11 a second mechanism operable to move at least part of the second gripper block
 - 12 between an operative position in which the second gripper block is configured
 - 13 to grip and release a cable and an inoperative position which is laterally, vertically
 - 14 and/or horizontally offset from the operative position and is configured to provide a
 - 15 pathway for a connector on the cable through the second gripper assembly.
 - 16
- 17 2. The linear winch assembly according to claim 1 wherein the first mechanism is
- 18 configured to move the at least part of the first gripper block to a position which is out
- 19 of the pathway of the cable connector, wherein the position is within a linear winch
- 20 housing.
- 21
- 22 3. The linear winch assembly according to claim 1 or 2 wherein the second mechanism
- 23 is configured to move the at least part of the second gripper block to a position which
- 24 is out of the pathway of the cable connector, wherein the position is within a linear
- 25 winch assembly housing.
- 26
- 27 4. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding claim wherein the first gripper
- 28 assembly and/or the second gripper assembly are configured to sequentially grip
- 29 and release the cable.
- 30
- 31 5. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding claim wherein the first gripper
- 32 assembly and/or the second gripper assembly are configured to move within the
- 33 linear winch assembly to pull and/or push a cable.
- 34

- 1 6. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding wherein one gripper
2 assembly is configured to grip the cable while the other gripper assembly is
3 configured to release the cable.
- 4
- 5 7. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding wherein the at least part of
6 the first gripper block and the at least part of the second gripper block are configured
7 to sequentially move out of the pathway of the cable connector.
- 8
- 9 8. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding claim wherein the first
10 mechanism and/or second mechanism comprise a hydraulic, pneumatic, electric or
11 mechanical actuator.
- 12
- 13 9. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding wherein the first gripper
14 assembly comprises a first lid and the second gripper assembly comprises a second
15 lid.
- 16
- 17 10. The linear winch assembly according to claim 9 wherein the first gripper assembly
18 comprises a mechanism configured to open and close the first lid and the second
19 gripper assembly comprises a mechanism configured to open and close the second
20 lid.
- 21
- 22 11. The linear winch assembly according to any preceding claim comprising a control
23 unit.
- 24
- 25 12. The linear winch assembly according to claim 11 wherein the control unit is
26 configured to control the position of the first and/or second gripper assemblies to
27 enable controlled passing of the cable connector through the winch assembly.
- 28
- 29 13. The linear winch assembly according to claim 11 or claim 12 wherein the control unit
30 is configured to use feedback information relating to the position of the gripper
31 assemblies to ensure that the gripper assemblies are located in a correct position to
32 provide a pathway for the connector on the cable to pass.
- 33
- 34 14. A gripper assembly for a linear winch assembly comprising;
35 a lid;
36 a gripper block; and

1 a mechanism operable to move at least part of the gripper block between an
2 operative position in which the gripper block is configured to grip and release a cable
3 and an inoperative position which is laterally, vertically and/or horizontally offset from
4 the operative position and is configured to provide a pathway for a connector on the
5 cable through the gripper assembly.
6

7 15. The gripper assembly according to claim 14 wherein the inoperative position of the
8 gripper block is within a gripper assembly housing.
9

10 16. The gripper assembly according to any of claims 14 to 15 wherein the lid is movably
11 mounted on the gripper assembly.
12

13 17. The gripper assembly according to any of claims 14 to 16 wherein the lid is pivotally
14 mounted on the gripper assembly.
15

16 18. The gripper assembly according to any of claims 14 to 17 wherein the lid is
17 configured to be moved to a position out of the pathway of the cable connector.
18

19 19. The gripper assembly according to any of claims 14 to 18 wherein the gripper
20 assembly comprises a guide assembly.
21

22 20. The gripper assembly according to claim 19 wherein the gripper block is movably
23 mounted on the guide assembly.
24

25 21. The gripper assembly according to claim 19 or claim 20 wherein the mechanism is
26 configured to move the gripper block along the guide assembly between the
27 operative position and the inoperative position.
28

29 22. A method of operating a linear winch assembly, the method comprising:
30 providing a linear winch assembly comprising:
31 a first gripper assembly comprising a lid and a gripper block; and
32 a mechanism operable to move at least part of the gripper block between an
33 operative position in which the first gripper block is configured to grip and release a
34 cable and an inoperative position which is laterally, vertically and/or horizontally
35 offset from the operative position;
36 moving at least a part of the gripper block to the inoperative position;
37 and passing the cable connector through the gripper assembly.

- 1 23. The method as claimed in claim 22 comprising moving the first gripper assembly to
2 pass the cable connector through the first gripper assembly.
3
- 4 24. The method as claimed in claim 22 or claim 23 comprising moving the at least part of
5 the first gripper block from the inoperative position to the operative position when the
6 cable connector has passed through the first gripper assembly.
7
- 8 25. The method as claimed in any of claims 22 to 24 comprising:
9 providing a second gripper assembly comprising:
10 a second lid;
11 a second gripper block; and
12 a second mechanism operable to move at least part of the second gripper block
13 between an operative position in which the second gripper block is configured to grip
14 and release a cable and an inoperative position which is laterally, vertically and/or
15 horizontally offset from the operative position;
16 moving at least a part of the second gripper block to the inoperative position; and
17 passing the cable connector through the second gripper assembly.
18
- 19 26. The method as claimed in claim 25 comprising moving the at least part of the second
20 gripper block from the inoperative position to the operative position when the cable
21 connector has passed through the second gripper assembly.
22
- 23 27. The method as claimed in any of claims 22 to 26 comprising moving the first and/or
24 second gripper assembly to pull in or pay out a cable.
25
- 26 28. The method as claimed in any of claims 22 to 27 comprising moving the second
27 gripper assembly to push and/or pull the cable to move the cable connector through
28 the first gripper assembly.
29
- 30 29. The method as claimed in any of claims 22 to 28 comprising moving the first gripper
31 assembly to push and/or pull the cable to move the cable connector through the
32 second gripper assembly.
33
- 34 30. The method as claimed in any of claims 22 to 29 comprising moving the first gripper
35 assembly to move the cable connector through the first gripper assembly.
36

- 1 31. The method as claimed in any of claims 25 to 30 comprising moving the second
- 2 gripper assembly to pass the cable connector through the second gripper assembly.
- 3