

PATENT SPECIFICATION

1,154,643

DRAWINGS ATTACHED.



Date of Application and filing Complete Specification:
28 Sept., 1966. No. 43376/66.

Application made in United States of America (No. 499,574) on
21 Oct., 1965.

Complete Specification Published: 11 June, 1969.

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Index at Acceptance:—B8 A(2A3, 2B3).

Int. Cl.:—B 65 g 27/00.

COMPLETE SPECIFICATION.

Method and Apparatus for Orienting and Feeding Articles.

We, AMERICAN FLANGE & MANUFACTURING Co. INC., of 30 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, New York 10020, United States of America, a corporation of the State of Delaware, one of the States of the United States of America, do hereby declare the invention, for which we pray that a patent may be granted to us, and the method by which it is to be performed, to be particularly described in and by the following statement:—

This invention relates to a method and apparatus for orienting and feeding articles and is particularly concerned with an improvement in the field of vibratory bowl material handling.

Although vibratory bowls have proven highly effective for feeding certain types of articles at moderate speeds, these devices have been found to be limited in their ability to orient and feed relatively bulky, irregularly shaped, articles at the speeds required for automated production operations.

The orienting and feeding of articles with which the method and apparatus of this invention are concerned can be broken down into two stages. In the first stage articles, deposited in bulk within the bowl, are fed in a helical path about the periphery of the bowl by the vibratory action thereof and past a series of orienting stations. This handling of the articles within the bowl must be carried out accurately and efficiently, since recycling of the articles within the bowl should be minimized to avoid possible damage to them. In the second stage the articles are discharged from the bowl in properly oriented position. Speed is important in order to clear the orienting stations and to feed the properly oriented articles from the bowl at a high rate.

Inasmuch as the articles are conveyed along a helical path within the bowl, a

common practice has been to discharge them in a direction tangential to that path. The advantage thought to reside in this arrangement is that to discharge the articles from the bowl along an approximate continuation of the path followed within the bowl would result in higher efficiency than an arrangement that required the articles to substantially change their direction of travel upon leaving the bowl.

The present invention reverses this practice, particularly for handling relatively bulky, radially unsymmetrical articles, by feeding such articles past a series of orienting stations spaced along the helical path of a vibratory bowl and discharging them from the bowl in a plane extending at an angle to the vertical axis of the bowl so that they move upwardly and outwardly from the side wall of the bowl. It has been found that this arrangement is capable of feeding articles, otherwise considered difficult to handle, at speeds far in excess of the limits ordinarily imposed on vibratory bowl feeders. Nevertheless, this high feed rate is attained by relatively simple, inexpensive, means, while at the same time the overall accuracy and efficiency of the feeding operation is substantially improved.

According to the invention there is provided an apparatus for orienting and feeding radially unsymmetrical articles which have been randomly deposited in a vibratory bowl, comprising a substantially helical path disposed on the internal wall of said bowl, vibrating means operatively connected to said bowl for driving said randomly oriented articles from a central mass within said bowl along said helical path, orienting means on said path for imparting to each article passing therethrough the same orientation, stop means for terminating the

movement of said articles along said path and means for accelerating the oriented articles axially, upwardly, and radially out of said bowl in a direction substantially perpendicular to the vibratory motion of said articles.

Preferably, the articles are discharged in a direction axially upwardly and outwardly with respect to the side wall of the bowl.

One example of a manner of carrying the invention into effect will now be more fully described with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:—

Fig. 1 is a top plan view of a vibratory bowl with the article discharge structure partially broken away;

Fig. 2 is a cross-sectional elevation view taken on lines 2—2 of Fig. 1 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 3 is a cross-sectional elevation view taken on lines 3—3 of Fig. 1 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 4 is a sectional view taken on lines 4—4 of Fig. 2 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Figs. 5 and 6 are partial side views similar to Fig. 4 illustrating the operation of one of the article orienting stations;

Fig. 7 is a cross-sectional elevation view taken on lines 7—7 of Fig. 4 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 8 is a cross-sectional elevation view taken on lines 8—8 of Fig. 4 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 9 is a cross-sectional top view taken on lines 9—9 of Fig. 4 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 10 is a cross-sectional end view taken on lines 10—10 of Fig. 4 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 11 is an enlarged elevational view of another of the article orienting stations taken on lines 11—11 of Fig. 3 and looking in the direction of the arrows;

Fig. 12 is an enlarged cross-sectional elevation view of another of the orienting stations taken on lines 12—12 of Fig. 11 and looking in the direction of the arrows; and

Fig. 13 is an enlarged cross-sectional elevation view of still another article orienting station taken on lines 13—13 of Fig. 1 and looking in the direction of the arrows.

Referring now to Figs. 1—3 of the drawing, the vibratory feeder bowl 1, into which the randomly oriented articles 10 are either hand deposited in bulk or metered by a suitable metering device, is supported on a base 2 which acts as a housing for a conventional vibrating mechanism (not shown) driven either electromagnetically, mechanically or by air. A helical ramp 3 is formed in the side wall of the bowl starting at the bottom of the bowl and making about one and one-half turns to a point tangent to the upper edge of the side wall. The plane

surface of the ramp, at its point of beginning, rises from the surface of the bottom of the bowl and forms a shelf or ledge extending at right angles to the axis of the bowl for a short distance and then gradually inclines downwardly toward the centre of the bowl until at the point of tangency with the upper edge of the side wall said surface is inclined at approximately 30 degrees from the axis of the bowl. A retaining wall 4 is positioned adjacent the inner edge of the ramp 3 starting at the point where the plane surface of the ramp begins its gradual incline. A plurality of article orienting stations are positioned adjacent the ramp 3. For purposes of illustration the particular articles 10 being fed and oriented, but without limitation thereto, as more particularly shown in Fig. 12, are lightweight metal cap-shaped members each having a disc-like back panel 11, a cylindrical wall 12 therearound and a radially projecting ear 13. Each article is radially unsymmetrical and has a central axis extending axially through the panel 11 and a radial axis lying in the plane of the panel. The articles 10 are initially conveyed, generally in clusters, up the helical ramp 3 by the vibratory motion of the bowl 1 and are held on the ramp by the retaining wall 4. During the travel up the ramp 3 the articles first lie with the article panel 11 parallel to the ramp with the open side extending up or down and then, in accordance with the inclination of the surface of the ramp, gradually are positioned on their wall 12 with their ears swung downwardly over the retaining wall 4 as shown in Fig. 2. Other orienting means are provided to positively assure this position as will be described hereinafter.

The first orienting station that the articles pass is shown in detail in Figs. 11 and 12 and comprises a cam plate 14 extending outwardly from the plane surface of the ramp 3 a distance less than the thickness of the article wall 12 and spaced from the upper edge of the retaining wall 4 a distance slightly in excess of the diameter of the article being conveyed. The leading or downstream edge of the cam 14 has an inclined surface 15 extending from the plane surface of the ramp 3. The function of the cam plate 14 is to positively arrange the articles in a single row as they travel along the helical ramp. In Fig. 11 an article is shown riding on top of articles properly seated in a single row against the retaining wall 4. Upon contact with the inclined surface 15 of the cam plate 14 such an elevated article is kicked off into the bowl while the single row of articles seated upon the retaining wall pass through this station untouched below the cam plate 14 as shown in Fig. 12.

In the next orienting station only those

articles properly oriented about a respective radial axis are allowed to pass therethrough. This station is illustrated in detail in Fig. 13 and comprises an air jet fed through an orifice 16 in the ramp 3 from an air supply line 17. Articles passing over the orifice 16 with their open side extending outwardly toward the centre of the bowl tend to adhere to the ramp 3 due to the venturi effect created by the flow of air between the panel 11 of the adjacent article and ramp surface. In the event an article remains on the ramp at this point in an inverted open side down position, that is with the back panel 11 spaced from the ramp surface, the article will be blown off into the bowl.

The articles continue along the ramp 3 to the final orienting station where they are properly oriented about their respective central axis before being discharged from the bowl. With particular reference to Figs. 4, 5 and 6 it can be seen that as the articles approach the upper edge of the side wall of the bowl 1 they are fed onto a flat insert plate 20 which forms a continuation of the helical ramp 3. A camming plate 21 is secured to the upper edge of the insert plate 20 and is spaced therefrom by a spacer block 23 having a thickness sufficient to allow the body of the article 10 to freely pass between it and the plate 20. The leading edges of the camming plate 21 and spacer block 23 are chamfered at 22 and 24 respectively to assure that the ear 13 on each article 10 is directed downwardly as it passes between plates 20 and 21. Secured to the lower edge of plate 20 and in alignment with the spacer block 23 are a pair of spaced apart support blocks 25 and 26. The support block 25 is positioned adjacent rail 4 and its upper surface forms a continuation of the supporting surface of rail 4 for supporting the wall 12 of the article. The upper surface of support block 26 is positioned in horizontal alignment with block 25 but is spaced from block 25 a distance slightly greater than the diameter of the body of article 10 forming a space through which an article can fall.

As the articles 10 are conveyed along the block 25 the camming edge 22 assures that the ear 13 is directed downwardly. If the ear is leading, as shown in Fig. 5, contact with the camming edge 22 will rotate the article in a clockwise direction. If the ear is trailing, as shown in Fig. 6, contact with the camming edge 22 will rotate the article in a counterclockwise direction. Each article then, upon reaching the block 26, is properly oriented open side up and with the ear extending in a downward direction. Movement of the fully oriented article along plate 20 terminates upon contacting the end block 30 which is also secured to the insert plate 20. To assist the articles in

their travel across the insert plate 20 and support blocks 25, 26 and into engagement with the end block 30, there is provided an air jet 31, connected to an air supply line 32, which is positioned above the articles and beyond the leading edge of the plate 20 as shown in Fig. 4. Under normal feeding conditions the air jet 31 will cause the articles to move along plate 20 and the support blocks 25 and 26 and to jump the gap between blocks 25, 26 and into contact with the end block 30. However, in the event the feeding is stopped outside the bowl for any reason the articles will back up in line against the end block 30 and drop through the space between the support blocks 25 and 26 into the bowl for recycling. Thus a controlled relief is provided so as to prevent the possibility of jamming and/or damage to the articles at some other point.

As seen in Figs. 3, 4 and 9 a discharge path is formed at right angles to the path of the fed articles along plate 20 and the support blocks 25 and 26. The trailing edge of plate 21 extends over a portion of the discharge path. The end block 30 has an overhang portion 33 which extends over another portion of the discharge path parallel to and spaced from the trailing edge of plate 21 and confining the body of the article in said discharge path. The ear 13 on each article extends outwardly in the space between the trailing edge of plate 21 and the overhang portion 33. A cover plate 37 is positioned over the outer surface of the plate 21 and the overhang portion 33 covering the space therebetween to provide a passage-way with sufficient clearance for free movement of the ear 13 on each article. The discharge path just described, can be seen in Fig. 2 as initially extending axially outwardly and upwardly at a 60° angle with respect to the axis of the bowl. Although this particular angle has been found to give good results for this particular article, other angles may be employed with other and different articles. In Figs. 5 and 6 it can be seen that it is impossible for the article to rotate so that the ear 13 is leading when the article reaches the discharge path. The overhang portion 33 prevents the ear from rotating in a counterclockwise direction as shown in Fig. 5 and the rounded lead in corner 27 of the trailing edge of plate 21 prevents the ear from rotating in a clockwise direction. At the upper edge of the insert plate 20 there is a gap indicated at 34 across which the article must jump from the vibrating bowl structure to a stationary track 40 positioned in alignment with the discharge path. The article is accelerated along the discharge path, as shown in Figs. 4 and 9, upwardly across the gap 34 into the track 40 by means

of an air jet 35, connected to air supply line 36, and mounted in the end block overhang portion 33.

5 The track 40 into which the articles are discharged is shown in Fig. 2 as being secured to a bracket 41 which is in turn held stationary by being connected to the base 2. A strip 42, as seen in Fig. 10, forms the base of the track 40 and has secured thereon a pair of side rails 43 and overhang strips 44 which together form a partially enclosed passageway for the body of the article with the ear 13 projecting outwardly between the strips 44. In order to assist in accelerating the articles away from the bowl an additional air jet 45, connected to air supply line 46, is mounted in the cover plate 47 fastened to the entrance end portion of the track 40 and spaced from the overhang strips 44 by means of spacer blocks 48 to provide clearance for the ear 13. Formed within the plate 47 is a cut out portion 49 to allow the air to quickly escape.

25 It has been discovered that stopping the substantially horizontal movement of the article within the bowl and then accelerating it radially and upwardly out of the bowl increases the feeding rate of such articles. Once each article sequentially contacts the end block 30 it has been fully oriented with an absolute minimum of interference with its movement along the helical path 3. One problem, heretofore unsolved, has been to get the articles out of the bowl in a simple efficient manner without losing the orientation and without slowing the feed rate. Curved and twisted tracks present jamming problems and also make it difficult to jump the gap between vibrating structure and stationary structure. The above-described article discharge arrangement has several advantages over known arrangements. To begin with it is simple in construction and operation. There are no moving parts and just as important the article itself does not have to be moved about its own axis or oriented as it is discharged. For this reason the arrangement is capable of operating at a higher feed rate than that usually associated with vibratory feeders. The speed at which the air jet 35 accelerated the articles from their horizontal path into their discharge path more than compensates for the momentary hesitation when each article contacts the end block 30. Furthermore, the point where each article jumps from vibrating structure to stationary structure has heretofore been an inherent trouble spot, particularly in those applications where the article being fed has an abrupt or irregular outline. However, by employing the discharge arrangement described, the articles are conveyed across the gap 34 at high speed and in fully oriented position

thus minimizing any possibility of jamming or even slowing down at this critical area.

Summarizing the operation, the articles are first bulk deposited in the vibratory bowl 1 whereupon they are conveyed, generally in clusters, along the helical path 3 by the vibratory motion of the bowl. At the first orienting station the articles are arranged in a single row by means of the cam plate 14 which kicks any excess articles back into the bowl. At the next orienting station those articles positioned open face up pass over the air jet 16 due to the venturi effect thereby created while those articles positioned open face down are blown back into the bowl. The final orientation of the article is effected by the camming plate 21 which cams the article ears 13 to a downwardly extending position. The articles are now fully oriented and in position to be discharged from the bowl. The article discharge is then carried out by accelerating the articles radially outwardly and upwardly with respect to the plane of the bowl.

The method and apparatus of the invention thus constitute a substantial improvement in the field of vibratory bowl feeders in providing a device which can accurately orient and feed relatively bulky, radially unsymmetrical articles at a rate heretofore thought beyond the capability of a vibratory bowl. Furthermore the novel concept of discharging the fully oriented articles axially upwardly out of the bowl across the gap between vibrating and stationary structure is fast, efficient and trouble free.

Variations of the above-described apparatus and method may be made within the scope of the following claims. For example the helical path along which the articles are conveyed during the orienting process could be located around the outside of the bowl instead of the inside. In this case, the article discharge might be directed axially upwardly and inwardly.

WHAT WE CLAIM IS:—

1. Apparatus for orienting and feeding radially unsymmetrical articles which have been randomly deposited in a vibratory bowl, comprising a substantially helical path disposed on the internal wall of said bowl, vibrating means operatively connected to said bowl for driving said randomly oriented articles from a central mass within said bowl along said helical path, orienting means on said path for imparting to each article passing therethrough the same orientation, stop means for terminating the movement of said articles along said path and means for accelerating the oriented articles axially, upwardly, and radially out of said bowl in a direction substantially per-

of an air jet 35, connected to air supply line 36, and mounted in the end block overhang portion 33.

5 The track 40 into which the articles are discharged is shown in Fig. 2 as being secured to a bracket 41 which is in turn held stationary by being connected to the base 2. A strip 42, as seen in Fig. 10, forms the base of the track 40 and has secured thereon a pair of side rails 43 and overhang strips 44 which together form a partially enclosed passageway for the body of the article with the ear 13 projecting outwardly between the strips 44. In order to assist in accelerating the articles away from the bowl an additional air jet 45, connected to air supply line 46, is mounted in the cover plate 47 fastened to the entrance end portion of the track 40 and spaced from the overhang strips 44 by means of spacer blocks 48 to provide clearance for the ear 13. Formed within the plate 47 is a cut out portion 49 to allow the air to quickly escape.

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pendicular to the vibratory motion of said articles.

5 2. Apparatus for orienting and feeding articles as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said articles accelerated upwardly out of said bowl are fed into a stationary discharge truck.

10 3. Apparatus for orienting and feeding articles as claimed in Claim 1 or 2, wherein article relief means are provided in said path between said orienting means and said stop means for directing articles into said bowl for recycling when the bowl overfeeds said discharge track.

15 4. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 3, wherein said articles are discharged from said helical path into a second path which

is substantially perpendicular to said first path.

5. Apparatus as claimed in Claim 4, 20 wherein said articles are discharged from said helical path along said second path at accelerated speed without interrupting the flow of articles in said first path.

6. Apparatus for orienting and feeding 25 articles substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

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Printed for Her Majesty's Stationery Office by Burgess & Son (Abingdon), Ltd.—1969.
Published at The Patent Office, 25 Southampton Buildings, London, W.C.2,
from which copies may be obtained.



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