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SPECIFICATION

G00002

TERMINAL RETENTION SYSTEMField of the Invention

5 This invention generally relates to the art of electrical connectors and, particularly, to a system for retaining terminals in a connector housing.

Background of the Invention

10 Generally, a typical electrical connector includes an insulating or dielectric housing defining some form of mating configuration for mating the connector with a complementary mating connector or other connecting device. For example, the connector housing may define a male or plug connector, or the connector housing may define a female or socket connector. The dielectric housing may be a stand-alone component, or it may be adapted for mounting on a printed circuit board, in a panel or in association with other mounting structures.

15 One or more conductive terminals are mounted on or in the connector housing. The terminals can have a wide range of configurations depending on the use of the connector. However, the terminals typically have contact portions for engaging the contact portions of terminals in the complementary mating connecting device. One type of terminal is a stamped and formed terminal of sheet metal material, and such terminals may have a contact leg or blade of flat sheet metal material.

20 Some form of retention system must be employed to hold the terminals on or in the connector housing. The retention systems also vary widely. The terminals may be press-fit into terminal-receiving cavities, or the terminals may have latching portions for latching with complementary latches on the connector housing. One form of retention system involves overmolding a plastic housing about portions
25 of the terminals to rigidify and hold the terminals on the housing.

One of the problems with overmolded terminals as described above concerns retaining the terminals on the housing when the housing does not completely surround portions of the terminals. In other words, the connector may be designed for mounting on a circuit board, and the dielectric housing may be of molded plastic material having a mounting end or face. The terminals, such as stamped and formed sheet metal terminals, may have mounting legs which terminate in solder tails for connection to the circuit traces on the circuit board. The mounting legs may be embedded in planar faces of the housing at the mounting end thereof. An inner face of the mounting leg is engaged by a wall of the mold cavity during molding to position the mounting leg in the mold. Consequently, the inner face of the mounting leg will be exposed after molding the finished connector. Such mounting legs have a tendency to pull away from the housing, particularly since the solder tails are prone to engage extraneous objects during handling. The present invention is directed to solving these problems in such an electrical connector which includes a dielectric housing overmolded about metal terminals.

Summary of the Invention

An object, therefore, of the invention is to provide an electrical connector with a new and improved terminal retention system.

In the exemplary embodiment of the invention, the connector includes a dielectric housing having a recess defined by opposed side walls having inner surfaces. A plurality of terminals are mounted on the housing and include retention sections spaced along at least one of the opposed side walls and exposed inwardly thereof. A plurality of ribs project inwardly from the one side wall between the spaced retention sections of the terminals. Each rib has at least one side edge overlapping a side edge of a retention section of a respective one of the terminals to capture the sections in the side wall of the housing.

As disclosed herein, the dielectric housing is of molded plastic material, and the ribs are molded integrally therewith and overmolded about the terminals. The ribs preferably have trapezoidal cross sections, with the overlapping

side edges of the ribs being at the corners of the widest sides of the trapezoidal ribs. This allows for easy withdrawal of mold tooling away from the ribs.

The connector herein is designed for mounting on a circuit board, and the recess is located in a mounting end of the housing. The retention sections of the terminals are at mounting ends of the terminals which include solder tails projecting beyond the retention sections of the terminals. Preferably, both opposite side edges of each rib overlap the side edges of a pair of terminal retention sections between which the respective rib is disposed.

Other objects, features and advantages of the invention will be apparent from the following detailed description taken in connection with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The features of this invention which are believed to be novel are set forth with particularity in the appended claims. The invention, together with its objects and the advantages thereof, may be best understood by reference to the following description taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which like reference numerals identify like elements in the figures and in which:

FIGURE 1 is a top perspective view of an electrical connector embodying the concepts of the invention;

FIGURE 2 is a bottom perspective view of the connector;

FIGURE 3 is a top plan view of the connector;

FIGURE 4 is a bottom plan view of the connector;

FIGURE 5 is a side elevational view of the connector;

FIGURE 6 is an end elevational view of the connector;

FIGURE 7 is an enlarged, fragmented bottom perspective view of one end of the connector;

FIGURE 8 is a fragmented and enlarged view of retention sections of terminals according to one embodiment of the invention juxtaposed with an inner wall of the mold cavity;

FIGURE 9 is a fragmented and enlarged perspective view of the distal ends of terminals according to a second embodiment of the invention juxtaposed with an outer wall of a mold cavity; and

FIGURE 10 is a view similar to that of Figure 9, but with the distal ends of the terminals according to a third embodiment disposed in a mold cavity.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Referring to the drawings in greater detail, and first to Figures 1-6, the invention is embodied in an electrical connector, generally designated 10, which is designed for mounting on a circuit board. The connector includes a one-piece dielectric housing, generally designated 12, molded of plastic material or the like. The housing defines a mating end 14 and a mounting end or face 16. The housing is elongated and includes a metal securing member or "fitting nail" 18 at each longitudinal end thereof for fixing, as by soldering, to a pair of spaced securing pads on the circuit board. Mating end 14 of the housing has opposed side walls 20 including upper portions 21 that define a mating recess, generally designated 24, and a bottom wall 25. The upper portions 21 of opposed side walls have upper, inner surfaces 26.

The housing also defines an elongated mounting recess, generally designated 28, which is bounded by lower portions 30 of opposed side walls 20. The mating recess 24 and mounting recess 28 are separated by a bottom wall 25. Finally, a plurality of stiffening ribs 34 (Fig. 4) are molded integrally with and interconnect lower portions 30 of opposed side walls 20 and span mounting recess 28.

A plurality of terminals, generally designated 36, are insert-molded in housing 12 partially in upper portions 21 and lower portions 30 of opposed side walls 20 of mating recess 24 and mounting recess 28, respectively. Each terminal is stamped and formed of conductive sheet metal material and includes a contact section 38 having a distal end 40 bent outwardly at an angle to the contact section, and a retention section 42 having a solder tail 44 bent outwardly at an angle to the retention section. As best seen in Figures 1 and 3, contact sections 38 of the terminals have inside faces generally flush with upper inner surfaces 26 of opposed side walls 20.

Figures 2 and 7 best show a system for retaining sections of the terminals in the side walls of the housing. It should be understood that the system is disclosed herein for retaining retention sections 42 of the terminals. However, the system can be used for retaining other sections of the terminals, such as retaining contact sections 38 in side walls 20 within mating recess 24.

With that understanding, and referring to Figures 2 and 7, a plurality of ribs 46 are molded integrally with housing 12 to project inwardly of opposed side walls 20 between retention sections 42 of adjacent terminals 36. Side edges 48 of the ribs are molded to overlap and tightly capture side edges 50 of the terminal retention sections. Therefore, the ribs will resist any inward movement of the retention sections in the direction of arrow "A" (Fig. 7).

Preferably, ribs 46 are trapezoidal in cross-section as clearly seen in Figure 7. The ribs are oriented such that the side edges of the ribs which overlap the side edges of the terminal retention sections are at the corners of the widest sides 46a of the ribs. The narrowest sides 46b of the ribs face inwardly into recess 28.

Figure 8 shows terminals 36 on a carrier 37 being positioned against an inner wall 80 of a mold cavity before molten plastic is injected around the terminals. The two left terminals 36 in Figure 8 are truncated for illustrative purposes. The outside wall 80 of the mold cavity has an array of projecting terminal supports 82 defining valleys 84 between adjacent terminal supports. When the molten plastic is injected into the mold cavity, plastic filling the valley 84 forms ribs 46. The projections 82 engage terminal retention sections 42. The terminal supports 82 are tapered inwardly to create diverging mouths 49 between adjacent ribs 46 to facilitate withdrawing the terminal supports inwardly from the terminals 36 after the ribs are overmolded over the edges of the terminals.

Figure 9 shows terminals 36 on the carrier 37 being positioned against an outer wall 62 of a mold cavity before molten plastic is injected around the terminals. To precisely space the terminals in the housing of the connector, distal ends 40 of the terminals 36 are inserted into recesses 60 in outer wall 62 of the mold cavity. Figure 9 shows that the corners of distal ends 40 of the terminals are angled, as at 54, to define a tapered head 55. The recesses 60 are correspondingly tapered to accurately position each terminal 36 with respect to the mold and, consequently, the housing 12. Angled corners 54 of adjacent terminals 36 provide a tapered mouth between the distal ends of each pair of adjacent terminals. The tapered mouth is in

line with arrow "B" which defines the insertion direction of the partition 64 between adjacent recesses 60 in the wall 62 of the mold cavity.

Figure 9 shows that each contact section 38 of each terminal 36 has spacer tabs 52 projecting laterally from opposite edges 38a of the contact sections.

5 These spacer tabs maintain at least a minimum spacing between the contact sections and, particularly, between distal ends 40 of the terminals. This allows for the partition 64 of the wall 62 of the mold to enter between the distal ends 40 of the terminals in the direction of arrow "B" when the heads 55 are inserted into recesses 60. Preferably, the spacer tabs 52 are as thick as the contact section 38 of the terminal 36
10 to insure that edges of adjacent tabs 52 abut instead of overlap.

Figure 10 shows an alternate embodiment wherein the sides of distal ends 40 of terminals 36 are curved, as at 56 to define curved heads 58. The recesses 66 are correspondingly curved to receive curved heads 58. The corresponding curved heads 58 and recesses 66 include fewer jagged surfaces thereby facilitating smooth
15 insertion of the heads 58 into recesses 66. The curved sides of the distal ends 40 define a rounded mouth between adjacent terminals for receiving the partition 70 between recesses 66 of the mold wall 68 in the direction of arrow "B" when heads 58 are inserted into recesses 66. Preferably, the curvature of rounded sides or edges 56 of distal ends 40 is parabolic to define parabolic profiles for the sides of the mouth which
20 receive the partition 70 between recesses 66 of the mold wall 68 when heads 58 are inserted into recesses 66.

It will be understood that the invention may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or central characteristics thereof. The present examples and embodiments, therefore, are to be considered in all respects as
25 illustrative and not restrictive, and the invention is not to be limited to the details given herein.

CLAIMS:

1. An electrical connector (10), comprising:
a dielectric housing (12) having a recess (28) defined by opposed side walls (30) having inner surfaces (32);
5 a plurality of terminals (36) mounted on the housing (12) and including retention sections (42) spaced along at least one of the opposed side walls (30) and exposed at the inner surface (32) thereof; and
a plurality of ribs (46) projecting inwardly from said at least one side wall (30) between the spaced retention sections (42) of the terminals, the ribs each
10 having at least one side edge (48) overlapping a side edge (50) of a respective one of the terminal retention sections (42) to capture the sections in the at least one side wall (30) of the housing (12).

2. The electrical connector of claim 1 wherein said ribs (46) have trapezoidal cross sections with said side edges (48) of the ribs being at the corners of
15 the widest sides (46a) of the trapezoidal ribs.

3. The electrical connector of claim 1 wherein said dielectric housing (12) is of molded plastic material and said ribs (46) are molded integrally therewith.

4. The electrical connector of claim 3 wherein said side edges (48) of the ribs (46) are overmolded over said side edges (50) of the terminal retention
20 sections (42).

5. The electrical connector of claim 1 wherein both opposite side edges (48) of each rib (46) overlap the side edges (50) of a pair of terminal retention sections (42) between which the respective rib is disposed.

6. The electrical connector of claim 1 wherein said terminals (36) are
25 at least partially insert molded in the housing (12).

7. The electrical connector of claim 1 wherein the connector is adapted for mounting on a printed circuit board, said recess (28) is located in a mounting end (16) of the housing (12), and said retention sections (42) of the terminals (36) are at mounting ends of the terminals.

5 8. The electrical connector of claim 7 wherein said mounting ends of the terminals (36) include solder tails (44) projecting beyond said retention sections (42) of the terminals.

9. An electrical connector (10) for mounting on a surface of a circuit board, comprising:

10 a housing (12) molded of dielectric material and having a mating end (14) and a mounting end (16) with a recess (28) in the mounting end, the recess being defined by opposed side walls (30);

 a plurality of terminals (36) at least partially insert molded in the housing (12) and including retention sections (42) at mounting ends of the terminals which include solder tails (44) projecting beyond the retention sections (42) of the terminals, the retention sections being spaced along the opposed side walls (30) of the recess (28) and exposed inwardly of the side walls; and

 a plurality of ribs (46) molded integrally with the housing (12) and projecting inwardly from said opposed side walls (30) between the spaced retention sections (42) of the terminals (36), the ribs each having side edges (48) overmolded over side edges (50) of the respective terminal retention sections (42) to capture the sections in the opposed side walls (30) of the housing (12).

20 10. The electrical connector of claim 9 wherein said ribs (46) have trapezoidal cross sections with said side edges (48) of the ribs being at the corners of the widest sides (46a) of the trapezoidal ribs.

11. An electrical connector (10) for mounting on a surface of a circuit board, comprising:

a housing (12) molded of dielectric material and having a mating end (14) and a mounting end (16) with a recess (28) in the mounting end, the recess being defined by opposed side walls (30);

a plurality of terminals (36) at least partially insert molded in the housing (12) and including retention sections (42) spaced along at least one of the opposed side walls (30) and exposed inwardly thereof; and

a plurality of ribs (46) molded integrally with the housing (12) and projecting inwardly from said at least one side wall (30) between the spaced retention sections (42) of the terminals (36), the ribs each having at least one side edge (48) overmolded about a side edge (50) of a respective one of the terminal retention sections (42) to capture the sections in the at least one side wall (30) of the housing (12).

12. The electrical connector of claim 11 wherein said ribs (46) have trapezoidal cross sections with said side edges (48) of the ribs being at the corners of the widest sides (46a) of the trapezoidal ribs.

13. The electrical connector of claim 11 wherein said mounting ends of the terminals (36) include solder tails (44) projecting beyond said retention sections (42) of the terminals.

14. The electrical connector of claim 11 wherein both opposite edges (48) of each rib (46) are overmolded about the side edges (50) of a pair of terminal retention sections (42) between which the respective rib is disposed.