

PARTS FEEDER CHUTE

The present invention relates to a chute adapted for use with a parts feeder of a type having a parts outlet and vibratable in circular back-and-forth movements. A combination of such a chute and parts feeder may for example be used for automatically feeding parts in succession to a machining apparatus or an assembling apparatus, for example.

Known vibratory parts feeders utilizing electromagnetic vibrations for feeding parts include a funnel-shaped bowl having a parts feeding track extending helically along an inner surface thereof. The vibratory parts feeder operates by imparting circular vibrations to the bowl to guide the parts stored in the bowl up the parts feeding track toward an upper edge of the bowl, from which they are automatically supplied down a chute to a machining apparatus or an assembling apparatus. To enable the parts to be fed along the chute to the end thereof remote from the parts feeder, the chute is inclined or a suitable pusher is incorporated for forcibly pushing the part successively down the chute. These prior arrangements however may fail to supply the parts stably. For example, Japanese Utility Model Publication No. 52-4692 discloses a parts feeder chute having one end pivotably supported on a parts discharge unit on a parts feeder bowl with the other free end fitted in a support for longitudinal movement. With the disclosed

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arrangement, the free end of the chute moves vertically and back and forth, but chute may fail to produce forward pushes required for positively feeding parts horizontally.

5 According to the present invention, there is provided a chute adapted for use with a parts feeder which includes a bowl having a parts outlet and vibratable in circular back-and-forth movements, the chute comprising:

10 (a) an elongate chute body having an inlet end adapted for connection to the parts outlet and to the vibratable bowl tangentially to the bowl, and an outlet end remote from said inlet end; and

15 (b) a leaf spring assembly adapted to be fixed to a stationary base and coupled to said elongate chute body adjacent to said outlet end, said leaf spring assembly being inclined at an angle with respect to said elongate chute body.

20 It is believed possible by means of the present invention, to provide a parts feeder chute having means for converting circular back-and-forth vibrations of a parts feeder bowl to rectilinear movement of the chute for delivering parts along the chute.

25 It is further believed possible, by means of the present invention, to provide a parts feeder chute which is prevented from being vibrated transversely while converting circular back-and-forth vibrations of a parts feeder bowl to rectilinear movement of the chute.

still another believed possibility of the present invention is to provide a parts feeder chute extending horizontally for pooling parts in a horizontal, relatively low position for increased safety and leeway in layout design.

The invention will be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:-

Figure 1 is a plan view of a parts feeder including a chute embodying the present invention;

Figure 2 is a side elevational view, partly broken away, of the parts feeder;

Figure 3 is a side elevational view of a chute supporting device according to another embodiment; and

Figures 4, 5, and 6 are diagrammatic views showing progressive steps of feeding a part along a chute.

The present invention is particularly useful when embodied in a chute combined

with a parts feeder, generally designated by the reference numeral 10, as illustrated in Figures 1 and 2.

As shown in Figures 1 and 2, the parts feeder 10 includes a bowl 11 made of light metal alloy, iron, or steel mounted on a support 12 having legs 14 placed on a base 13 such as a floor. The support 12 houses therein an electromagnetic vibrator 15 coupled to the bottom of the bowl 11 and electromagnetically energizable for vibrating the bowl 11 in circular back-and-forth movements of short strokes. The bowl 11 has therein a helical parts feeding track 16 made of wear-resistant metal such as steel and extending from the center O of an inner bottom of the bowl 11 helically up to a parts outlet 17 defined as an opening in an upper peripheral wall of the bowl 11. The helical parts feeding track 16 is in the form of a thin elongate web. The parts feeder 10 also includes a parts guiding track 18 having one end attached to the parts outlet 17 and disposed outside of the bowl 11. The parts guiding track 18 comprises a thin web of steel curved along the peripheral wall of the bowl 11. A parts collecting receptacle 19 is affixed to the peripheral wall of the bowl 11 and extends below the parts guiding track 18. The parts guiding track 18 has an opposite end 23 connected to a straight or substantially straight chute 20 having a horizontal

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chute body in the form of a thin web of steel.

The chute 20 has an inlet end 22 coupled to the parts guiding track 18 and screwed, riveted, or otherwise fastened rigidly to one end of an L-shaped support arm 21 having its opposite end secured to the peripheral wall of the bowl 11 at a point M thereon. The support arm 21 is made of cast metal and has its longitudinal central axis aligned with a line passing through the center O of the bowl 11 and the point M on the peripheral wall of the bowl 11. The chute 20 has a longitudinal central axis X parallel to a line L tangential to the circumferential surface of the bowl 11 at the point M.

A leaf spring assembly 25 is disposed below and across the chute 20 adjacent to an outlet end 26 thereof remote from the inlet end 22. As shown in Figure 2, the leaf spring assembly 25 is mounted by a base plate 27 on a support 28 fixedly placed on the body of a machining apparatus or an assembling apparatus (not shown) with which the parts feeder 10 is associated. The leaf spring assembly 25 comprises a pair of parallel leaf springs 30, 31 spaced from each other and both inclined at an acute angle α to the base plate 27. The leaf springs 30, 31 have upper ends 32, 33, respectively, fixed to an upper horizontal bar 34 attached by a connector 35 to the lower edge of the chute 20, and lower ends 36, 37, respectively, fixed to

a lower horizontal bar 38 attached to the base plate 27. The upper ends 32, 33 of the leaf springs 30, 31 are located more closely than the lower ends 36, 36 thereof to the inlet end 22 of the chute 20. The leaf
5 springs 30, 31 are relatively wide in a direction perpendicular to the axis X of the chute 20. The leaf spring assembly 25 is in the form of a parallelogram when viewed in side elevation as illustrated in Figure 2.

10 Figure 3 shows a leaf spring assembly 40 according to another embodiment of the present invention. The leaf spring assembly 40 has a single leaf spring 41 inclined at an acute angle α to the base plate 27. The leaf spring 41 has an upper end 42
15 secured to the connector 35 and a lower end 43 secured to the base plate 27. The upper end 42 of the leaf spring 41 is disposed more closely than the lower end 43 to the inlet end of the chute 20.

While the chute 20 is shown as being straight,
20 it may be curved in its portion 44 (Figure 2) between the inlet end 22 and the leaf spring assembly 25 to meet design requirements in the layout of the parts feeder 10 with respect to the machining or assembling apparatus coupled therewith.

25 The parts feeder 10 and the chute 20 operate as follows: When the electromagnetic vibrator 16 is

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energized, the bowl 1 is actuated in angular back-and-forth vibrations to cause the parts therein to be transported from the central bottom of the bowl 11 successively one by one up the helical track 16 due to inertia under centrifugal forces produced by the vibratory motion of the bowl 11. The parts reach the outlet 17, from which they move in succession along the parts guiding track 18. Any parts which fail to ride on the parts guiding track 18 drop into the receptacle 19, from which the parts return into the bowl 11 through the bottom thereof.

The parts moving down the track 18 now reach the inlet end 22 of the chute 20, which is vibrating back and forth along the longitudinal axis X thereof due to the circular back-and-forth vibrations of the bowl 11 at the point M. The parts are then fed along the chute 20 while the latter makes straight back-and-forth vibrations in the longitudinal direction. The rectilinear back-and-forth vibratory movement of the chute 20 for feeding the parts will now be analyzed in detail with reference to Figures 4 to 6. It is assumed that a part H is initially disposed in a position a on the chute 20 aligned with the connector 35. When the chute 20 is moved back during one cycle of back-and-forth movement thereof, the chute 20 moves from an upper vertical position Y (Figure 4) down to a lower vertical position Z (Figure 5) since the leaf

spring assembly 25 collapses resiliently. The part H however tends to remain due to inertia at the position a, and only the chute 20 moves back to cause the connector 35 to be retracted through a distance ℓ_1 to a position b as shown in Figure 5. Then, the force tending to move the chute 22 back disappears, whereupon the chute 22 moves forward and upwardly to the vertical position Y. The part H is now advanced from the position a. When the chute 22 is then subjected to a forward push from the bowl 11, the chute 22 moves forward until it is checked by the leaf spring assembly 25. With the chute 22 stopped suddenly, the part H is pushed forward due to inertia through a distance ℓ_2 , and then only the chute 20 is moved back to the position shown in Figure 6. Accordingly, the net result is that the part H is moved forward through the distance $\ell_1 + \ell_2$ to a position c along the chute 20 while the latter makes one cycle of reciprocatory movement along the longitudinal axis thereof.

An experiment conducted on the basis of the structure shown in Figures 1 and 2 indicated that parts could effectively be fed along by a straight chute 20 having a length of 1 m. A longer chute of the illustrated construction can be employed as a parts pool while the parts feeder is in or out of operation.

With the arrangement as described and illustrated, no linear vibrator is required and the electromagnetic

vibrator 15 in the parts feeder 10 may remain relatively small in size. Since the horizontal chute 20 can be used as a parts pool, any vertical chute which would otherwise be required as a parts pool can be dispensed with. Accordingly, the parts feeder 10 need not be positioned at an increased height but instead may be placed in a low position with greater leeway in parts feeder attachment design. The parts feeder 10 installed in a low position increases parts feeding efficiency and safety, and may be larger in size. With the low installation level of the parts feeder 10, in addition, the parts outlet 17 and the chute support 21 may be relatively simple in construction and no precision gap and no steep surfaces are necessary. Consequently, the parts feeder 10 and the chute 20 are durable in operation, can be serviced easily and are less costly.

Although various minor modifications may be suggested by those versed in the art, it should be understood that we wish to embody within the scope of the patent warranted hereon, all such embodiments as reasonably and properly come within the scope of the appended claims.



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Claims:

1. A chute adapted for use with a parts feeder which includes a bowl having a parts outlet and vibratable in circular back-and-forth movements, the chute comprising:

5 (a) an elongate chute body having an inlet end adapted for connection to the parts outlet and to the vibratable bowl tangentially to the bowl, and an outlet end remote from said inlet end; and

10 (b) a leaf spring assembly adapted to be fixed to a stationary base and coupled to said elongate chute body adjacent to said outlet end, said leaf spring assembly being inclined at an angle with respect to said elongate chute body.

15 2. A chute according to claim 1, said leaf spring assembly being disposed below said elongate chute body and comprising an upper bar connected to said elongate chute body, a base plate adapted for attachment to the stationary base, a lower bar spaced from said upper bar and mounted on said base plate, a
20 pair of parallel spaced leaf springs having a pair of upper ends connected to said upper bar and a pair of lower ends connected to said lower bar, said upper ends being located more closely than said lower ends to said inlet end of said elongate chute body.

25 3. A chute according to claim 1 or 2, said elongate chute body being substantially straight.

4. A chute according to claim 2, said elongate chute body, and said upper and lower bars extending substantially



horizontally.

5. A chute according to claim 1, said leaf spring assembly being disposed below said elongate chute body and comprising a base plate adapted for attachment to a stationary base, a sole leaf spring having an upper end connected to said elongate chute body and a lower end connected to said base plate, said upper end being located more closely than said lower end to said inlet end of said elongate chute body.

10 . 6. A chute according to any preceding claim wherein said leaf spring assembly is disposed across said elongate chute body.

7. A chute according to any preceding claim in combination with said parts feeder, the inlet end of the chute body being connected to the parts outlet and to the bowl tangentially to the bowl, the leaf spring being fixed to said stationary base.

8. A combination according to claim 7, the chute being according to claim 2 or 5, wherein the base plate is attached to the stationary base.