

SHOCK ABSORBER FOR THE OSCILLATING WEIGHT OF A TIMEPIECE

The present invention relates to an oscillating weight for the automatic winding mechanism of a timepiece movement, the weight pivoting off-centre relative to the centre of the movement and being made of a single heavy material.

5 For a conventional, automatically wound watch, winding is achieved by the rotation of an oscillating weight whose radius is approximately equal to that of the movement and which pivots at the centre of and above said movement. In such case, the oscillating weight is normally formed of two distinct parts: the weight support and the heavy sector. The weight support
10 carries the heavy sector on the periphery thereof and, at the centre thereof, pivots on an arbour that forms the suspension of the entire oscillating weight. This support is generally made of brass or German silver and is deliberately made to be flexible to avoid damaging the oscillating weight suspension in the event of a shock. Here the weight support plays the part
15 of a shock absorber.

One method of making the weight support flexible is disclosed in CH Patent No. 279 001. Here the heavy sector is carried by at least two resilient arms, which pivot on the same point of the frame, so that any axial shocks to the weight are absorbed by the resilience of the arms.

20 The heavy sector of a conventional large radius system is the external part of the oscillating weight and it is integral with the weight support to which it is screwed, riveted or crimped. It is formed of a sintered alloy or of precious metal with a large volumic weight.

When there is a low intensity shock, the resilience of the weight
25 support is sufficient to protect the system from the impact. In the event of a

high intensity shock, the movement of the oscillating weight is limited by the heavy sector pressing on the plate in one direction and on the back cover of the case in the other direction. The weight support, which is often decorated, is thus not liable to be scratched.

5 It has, however, already been proposed to limit the shake of the weight by stop members that are fitted in the oscillating weight and have rounded, polished parts, which project relative to the surface of said weight, so that, in the event of hard shocks, the weight does not touch the back cover of the case or the top of the plate. This embodiment is described in
10 CH Patent No. 331 275.

 Since the present invention concerns an oscillating weight that is off-centre relative to the centre of the movement, as disclosed, for example, in CH Patent Application No. 9,431/66, the solutions described for overcoming the detrimental effects of shocks applied to the timepiece are not suitable,
15 since the radius of the oscillating weight is greatly reduced relative to that of a conventional oscillating weight to form what is called a micro-rotor. This micro-rotor is integrated in the movement and consequently does not hang over said movement, which in most cases leads to a reduction in the thickness of the timepiece.

20 Given that the moment of inertia of an oscillating weight depends upon its radius, its thickness and the material of which it is made, any loss generated by the reduction in radius observed across the micro-rotor has to be compensated for by an increase in thickness. Consequently, the micro-rotor will be very thick and made in a single piece of a single heavy material,
25 thereby doing away with the resilient weight support mentioned above. As the system no longer has the required resilience, the suspension around which the micro-rotor is hinged sustains the entire stress caused by a shock applied to the oscillating weight and is liable to be damaged.

 Part of the shock in question could be compensated for by increasing
30 the axial play of the rotor on its shaft, but the surface of the rotor opposite the back cover of the timepiece could then come into contact with the back

cover and be damaged, as could any decoration that may be affixed thereto.

In order to overcome the aforecited drawbacks, in addition to satisfying the preliminary description given in the first paragraph of this description, the present invention is characterized in that the oscillating
5 weight is carried by a shock absorber that takes the form of a plate, one end of which is secured to the weight, and the other end of which is secured to a tube, which is arranged to rotate around an arbour forming the rotational axis of said weight.

10 The invention will now be explained in detail below with reference both to the functional drawings, and to drawings that illustrate a particular embodiment. The embodiment is given by way of non-limiting example and in the drawings:

- Figure 1 is schematic, simplified cross-section showing the shock
15 absorber according to the invention and the operation thereof when an axial shock is applied to the oscillating weight in one direction, illustrated by arrow A;

- Figure 2 is a schematic, simplified cross-section showing the shock
20 absorber according to the invention and the operation thereof when an axial shock is applied to the oscillating weight in one direction, illustrated by arrow B;

- Figure 3 is a schematic, simplified plan view of the oscillating weight fitted with the shock absorber according to the invention, said weight having stop means for limiting its shake in the event of any shock;

25 - Figure 4 is a cross-section along the line IV-IV of Figure 3;

- Figure 5 is a plan view of a particular embodiment of the invention showing one part of the timepiece in which the oscillating weight and its shock absorber are integrated;

- Figure 6 is a large-scale cross-section along the line VI-VI of Figure 5;

- Figure 7 is an exploded perspective view of the oscillating weight and shock absorber shown in Figure 5;

5 - Figure 8 is a plan view of an embodiment of the shock absorber shown in Figure 7, and

- Figure 9 is a plan view of another embodiment of the shock absorber.

Figures 1 and 2 are simplified cross-sections showing the principle of
10 the invention. They show an oscillating weight 2 for automatically winding a timepiece movement 3, which is briefly outlined in Figure 5. The weight 2 pivots off-centre relative to the centre of the movement, is integrated therein and is made of a single heavy material. As Figures 1 and 2 show clearly, and in accordance with an important feature of the invention, weight 2 is
15 carried by a shock absorber 1, which takes the form of a plate 4, one end of which is secured to the plate (at the place marked by a X) and the other end of which is fixed to or integral with a tube 5, which is arranged to rotate around an arbour 6 forming the axis 7 of rotation of said weight.

Thus, any shock is mostly absorbed by shock absorber 1, which thus
20 maintains the integrity of arbour 6 around which weight 2 rotates. The weight suspension no longer sustains the entire stress caused by the shock and is no longer liable to be damaged.

The left part of Figure 1 shows oscillating weight 2 in its normal situation, i.e. when the timepiece is not affected by any shock. The right
25 part of Figure 1 shows the situation of oscillating weight 2 when the timepiece sustains an axially directed shock in the direction of arrow A. Weight 2 sinks by a distance -h relative to its normal position, causing plate 4 to bend and to play its parts as shock absorber 1 as shown in Figure 1.

The left part of Figure 2 shows the same oscillating weight 2 in a
30 normal situation, with the timepiece unaffected by any shock. The right part

of Figure 2 shows the situation of weight 2 when the timepiece sustains an axially directed shock in the direction of arrow B, opposite to the direction of arrow A. Weight 2 is lifted up by a distance $+h$ relative to its normal position, causing plate 4 to bend and again play its part as shock absorber 1, as shown in Figure 2.

In both cases, it will be noted that tube 5 does not undergo any axial movement during shocks, since it is retained by design and as will be seen with reference to Figure 6.

As will also be seen in Figure 6, plate 4, acting as shock absorber 1, is preferably arranged between oscillating weight 2 and plate 8 of movement 3. This arrangement means that surface 23 of weight 2, which is opposite the surface to which plate 4 is fixed, is directly on the back cover of the timepiece. This surface 23 may be provided with a decoration, which can be made visible if the back cover is a sapphire glass, for example. If weight 2 is not provided with stop means for limiting its axial shake in the event of a shock, the decorated surface can come into contact with the back cover and thus be damaged.

A possible embodiment for limiting the shake concerned is shown in Figures 3 and 4, which are simplified diagrams of a principle, taken by way of example. Figure 3 is a plan view of this embodiment and Figure 4 is an enlarged cross-section along the line IV-IV of Figure 3. In these Figures, the stop means consist of a groove 15, made in oscillating weight 3. A retaining tongue 16, which may form the end of a banking bridge 17, penetrates this groove 15 with some play, as is clear in Figure 6. The plays are calculated such that weight 2 never touches the back cover or the timepiece plate in the event of a shock.

Figure 5 is a plan view and Figure 6 is an enlarged cross-section along the line VI-VI of Figure 5, of a particular practical embodiment of the present invention. Figure 5 is a partial view, on the back cover side of the timepiece, which shows oscillating weight 2 integrated in movement 3. Surface 23 of weight 2 may be provided with a decoration and appear

through a transparent back cover. Figure 7 is an exploded perspective view of the mechanism forming the subject of the present invention and aids comprehension of the respective view and cross-section of Figures 5 and 6.

In this particular embodiment, plate 4, which plays the part of shock
5 absorber 1 and is defined above, has the shape of an approximately semi-circular sector 9. This sector 9 is secured, in the peripheral zone thereof, to oscillating weight 2 and in the central zone 11 thereof, to tube 5. The intermediate zone 12 situated between said peripheral and central zones has a resilient middle that can bend in the event of any shock applied to
10 oscillating weight 2.

One method of making intermediate zone 12 of sector 9 resilient is to provide spaces that leave arms connecting central zone 11 to peripheral zone 10, as is explained clearly in the aforecited CH Patent No 279 001. If the thickness of sector 9 is sufficiently thin, the arms will have the desired
15 flexibility.

Figure 8 is a plan view of one embodiment of sector 9, shown in perspective in Figure 7. It is clear that intermediate zone 12 includes three resilient arms 18, 19 and 20 that start in peripheral zone 10 and are directed towards central zone 11, which surrounds the rotational axis 7 of
20 oscillating weight 2.

Figure 9 is a plan view of another embodiment of sector 9, which forms the shock absorber of the present invention. Here, intermediate zone 12 has only two resilient arms 13 and 14 connecting peripheral zone 10 and central zone 11 of sector 9.

25 To finish this description, we will return to the cross-section of Figure 6, which we will associate with the perspective view of Figure 7.

Arbour 6 and its axis 7 about which oscillating weight 2 rotates, is secured to plate 8 of the movement 3 outlined in Figure 5. Weight 2 is carried by semi-circular sector 9. Peripheral zone 10 of this sector 9 is
30 secured to weight 2 by means of screws 21. The central zone 11 of this

sector 9 is secured to tube 5 by means of screws 22. Tube 5 rotates freely about arbour 6. A ball bearing 25 is arranged between arbour 6 and tube 5. The crown 26 of bearing 25 is driven inside tube 5 and the central part 27 of the same bearing 25 is fitted onto arbour 6 and held there axially between a
5 shoulder 28 made on arbour 6 and a key 29. Tube 5 drives a wheel 30, which is secured to tube 5 by the same screws 22 used to secure sector 9 to said tube 5. Figure 6 shows that sector 9 is sandwiched between tube 5 and wheel 30. The same Figure also shows that wheel 30 drives a first intermediate wheel set 31, which starts a chain leading to a winding ratchet.
10 Arbour 32 of this first wheel set pivots between plate 8 and a bridge 17, which is extended by tongue 16 that limits the axial shake of weight 2, said tongue being introduced into the aforecited groove 15.

CLAIMS

1. Oscillating weight (2) for automatically winding a timepiece movement (3), the weight pivoting off-centre relative to the centre of the movement and made of a single heavy material, characterized in that it is carried by a shock absorber (1) that takes the form of a plate (4) one end of which is secured to said weight, and the other end of which is fixed to a tube (5) arranged to rotate about an arbour (6) forming the axis of rotation (7) of said oscillating weight.

2. Oscillating weight according to claim 1, characterized in that stop means are implemented to limit the axial shake of said weight (2) in the event of any shock.

3. Oscillating weight according to claim 2, characterized in that the stop means consist of a groove (15), which is made in said weight (2), and which is penetrated by a retaining tongue (16) that forms the end of a banking bridge (17).

4. Oscillating weight according to claim 1, characterized in that the plate (4) is arranged between said weight (2) and the plate (8) of the movement.

5. Oscillating weight according to claim 1, characterized in that the plate (4) takes the form of an approximately semi-circular sector (9), the peripheral zone (10) of which is secured to the oscillating weight (2) and the central zone (11) of which is secured to the tube (5), the intermediate zone (12) located between said peripheral and central zones having a resilient middle that can bend in the event of any shock applied to the oscillating weight (2).

6. Oscillating weight according to claim 5, characterized in that the intermediate zone (12) has at least two resilient arms (13, 14) directed towards the axis of rotation (7) of the oscillating weight (2).