

REPLACED SHEETS		SG
☒	Description : paged ...1... to paged ...1...	
☒	Claim(s) : paged ...10... to paged ...12...	
☒	Drawing(s) : paged ...1/4... to paged ...1/4...	
☐	Abstract : paged to paged	
DATE OF RECEIPT		

1

IMPROVED PIN TUMBLERS AND CORRESPONDING KEYS FOR CYLINDER LOCKS

Field of the Invention

This invention relates to improvements in cylinder locks and particularly to the shapes of tumbler pin tips and the corresponding key biting surfaces.

5 Background and Prior Art

Yale type cylinder subassemblies have been well known since 1865. Typically, differences between cylinders have been developed by adjusting incrementally the lengths of the tumbler pins in the
10 cylinder and key differs are generated by varying the corresponding depths of the bittings on the key. Variations in the shape of the tip of the tumbler pins are not new. In the case of Taylor, U.S. Patent 557,759 (1891), these variations provide masterkeying
15 capabilities.

The positioning of tumbler pins by keys has been the subject of continuous improvement and much work in the lock art. The Spain et al. patent, U.S. Patent 3,499,302 (1970), disclosed tumbler pins with chisel-
20 shaped tips which were rotatable to predetermined positions by skew cut key bittings to operate in conjunction with a side bar mechanism. Another Spain et al. patent, U.S. Patent 3,722,240, is an improvement on the locking mechanism using unique rotating tumblers
25 for cooperation with another sidebar. These patents

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improved the state of the lock cylinder art by disclosing tumbler pins in cylinder mechanisms whereby the tumbler pins were adjusted rotationally in addition to the traditional elevational positioning. In a
5 six-pin cylinder, the ability to rotate each pin to the three positions Spain uses, increases the bitting and combination potential from 1,000,000 to 729,000,000 unique keys.

With the advent of elevational and rotational
10 positioning of a tumbler pin within a cylinder, the sides and shapes of the tumbler pin tip and the bitting surface became a significant factor in the operation of the cylinder. The introduction of the skew cut
15 bittings into the cylinder forced the tumbler pins to rotate to a precise position. Irregularly configured, or imprecise surfaces on either the tumbler pin tip or the corresponding key bitting surface would not
20 correctly position the tumbler pin and allow operation of the cylinder. A more recent patent to Oliver, U.S. Patent 4,635,455 (1987), discloses offsetting the tip of a chisel pointed tumbler. This increases the
25 theoretical bitting and combination possibilities of a six-pin tumbler cylinder to 46,656,000,000. Keys manufactured to operate with offset tumbler pin tips
are not interchangeable with keys for cylinders whose
pin tips are not offset. These slight variations are
significant to the art of cylinders with rotating pins.

The patent to Widen, U.S. Patent 4,765,177 (1988),
discloses a rotating tumbler pin with a rounded finger
30 projecting transversely outwardly from the body of the pin for cooperation with a configured side surface of a key blade.

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The patent to Falk, U.S. Patent 3,738,136 (1973) shows an arrangement of tumblers which are positioned parallel to the axis of a cylindrical key blade.

Other prior patents in the art have disclosed
5 tumblers operated with flat keys. Typically, the tumbler tip configurations are frustoconical, or chisel pointed. See, for example, U.S. Patents to Gretler 4,289,002 (1981), Keller 4,325,241 (1982), and Fann et al. 4,760,722 (1988). Tumbler pins are also known
10 which use offset arrangements to preclude rotation, e.g., U.S. Patents to Wolter, 3,731,507 (1973) and 4,098,104 (1978).

Increasing the number of key biting increment results in a higher number of unique key differs. This
15 greatly reduces the potential for any key operating a cylinder other than its own. Patents issued for the great majority of lock cylinders on the market have expired. Their keys can be copied on conventional machines of the type described in U.S. Patent to Segal
20 1,439,382 (1922). The keyblanks required are widely distributed beyond the control of the lock manufacturer. The development of skew cut bittings provided additional security to the key owner because conventional rotary machines would not duplicate these
25 angled cuts. As there have been machines developed to duplicate skew cut bittings, their security is reduced. Uniquely shaped bittings and controlled distribution of proprietary keyblanks reduces the odds that keys in the possession of dishonest employees can be copied at
30 hardware stores and the like.

Notwithstanding improvements in the well worked locking arts, there remains a continuous need for mechanisms which can provide an extraordinary numbers of unique keys which are not subject to unauthorized

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duplication. There is also a need for lock mechanisms which resist contemporary lockpicking techniques, including impressioning methods to obtain false keys. It is also desirable that the dimensions of the lock not exceed conventional cylinder size. It is equally important that the components can be economically mass produced.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention provides an extraordinarily large number of key differs using rotationally and possibly elevationally and/or axially movable locking tumblers which have high resistance to picking, do not exceed the limitations of industry standards, and are compatible for mass production.

These objectives are accomplished in part by a lock mechanism which uses at least one rotatable tumbler pin of the general type known in the prior art provided with a tapered tip which generally slopes from one side edge of the tumbler to the other. This tapered tip may be flat, rounded (convex or concave), or partially flat or partially rounded. The tumbler tip surface is adapted to engage with a configured key blade surface which is formed in a substantially complementary shape with a sloping surface so that when the two sloping surfaces contact, the tumbler pin under axial bias will seek to accommodate the sloping surface of the key and will rotate until the surfaces of the key and tumbler pin tip match, thus aligning the tumbler pin at a position predetermined by the key bitting.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIGS. 1a-1g are side elevational views illustrating the surfaces of a tumbler pin tip and

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complementary configured key surface which constitute this invention.

FIG. 2 is a perspective view illustrating a conventional, generally rectangular, grooved key blade having the complementary configured portions formed in a top edge surface thereof.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a key blade of the type shown in the Widen patent with the complementary surfaces in a side face of a generally rectangular key blade.

FIG. 3A is a perspective view of a generally rectangular key blade with a complementary surface shown in a side face.

FIG. 4 is a partial perspective view of a flat key having complementary surfaces formed in either face or side edge thereof, and also illustrating bittings at offset locations.

FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a portion of a key for an axial tumbler lock showing a possibility of biting surfaces.

DETAILED DESCRIPTIONS OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

With reference to FIGS. 1a through 1g, each set of elements represents a rotatable tumbler pin 10 and a corresponding key biting surface configuration 16. The tumbler pin 10 would be retained in a tumbler pin bore as disclosed in the patents discussed above. The key configuration 12 is only a representative portion of the key at the tumbler pin contact area for illustrative purposes, the actual key would be along the lines shown in FIGS. 2-5.

The tumbler pin body 10 is generally cylindrical and operates in a bore and typically would be biased towards the key as is known in the art. This invention

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resides primarily in the contact surface configuration of the tumbler pin tip 14 and a cooperating contact surface 16 of the mating key 12. In general, the cooperating contact surfaces are complementary in shape. As shown in FIG. 1a, the tumbler pin 10 and key portion 12 are designated by the letter "A" which indicates that their surfaces are identical, the tumbler pin tip surface 14 has a flat sloping surface 18 which surface slopes from one side 20 to the other side 22. This flat sloping surface is identical to the cooperating key contact surface 16. When the key surface 16 contacts a tumbler pin tip surface 18 and they are both of the configuration A-A shown in FIG. 1a, the tumbler, confined in its bore, will rotate about its axis under spring bias applied to the tumbler pins or weight or other bias in order that the complementary surfaces 14 and 16 mate. The alignment of the biting surface 16 on the key thus determines the rotational position of the tumbler pin 10.

FIG. 1b and 1c show tumbler B and key portion C and tumbler C and key portion B, respectively. In these figures, the tumbler 10 has its tip 14 in a curved convex form from edge 20 to opposite edge 22'. By providing a convex form, there is a point at edge 22'. The mating element of the key portion C is surface 16' which is complementarily concave from side edge to side edge of the key surface configuration. Again, the operation is the same, namely, at contact with the key biting area the tumbler pin tip seeks a full mating position and will rotate to achieve this match. Thus the position of the biting surface 16' on the key determines the position of the tumbler pin 10.

In FIG. 1c, the tumbler pin C is concave and the key portion B is convex. The tip 14 of the tumbler pin

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C is concave from side 22 to opposite side 20' which has a small depression complementary to the point on the key configuration. The interaction of the key biting surface and the tumbler pin is the same as described above.

FIGS. 1d and 1e illustrate two other possibilities using convex tumbler pin denoted B with a key configuration indicated D, and vice versa. The convex tumbler pin tip 14 of tumbler B mates with a shape of surface 16" of key portion D. As shown in FIG. 1e, part D includes a portion 24 which is concave to mate with the convex surface of B, while having a small convex portion 26 on both sides and surrounded by a small grooved portion 28 which cooperates with a tip 30 on the mating surface. Again, the operation is the same as discussed above, the tumbler pin being restrained within a bore and biased towards the key, will continue to mate with the complementary portion of the biting surface on the key and will rotate around with point 30 riding in groove 26 until the full mating is accomplished with the convex surface resting in concave surface 24.

FIGS. 1f and 1g are again illustrative of complementary mating elements utilizing a tumbler pin or key biting elements A and a key biting or tumbler pin designated E. In these embodiments, the pin tumbler tip 14 (or key surface 16''') has a flat area 32 surrounded on both sides with tapered areas 34. Again, the operation is as described above, with the insertion of the key into the cylinder, the tumbler pin tip will come into contact with the key biting surface, the tumbler pin being free to rotate, will rotate until the flat surface 32 contacts the

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corresponding flat surface on the mating member, the side surfaces 34 assisting in the rotation.

FIG. 2 is one illustration of a key for a lock utilizing these unique tumbler pins. One or more
5 bitting areas 36 are positioned along the top edge of the key blade and are shaped, cut, or bitted according to the configurations in the bottom row of FIGS. 1a-1g to meet with the tumbler pins in the top row of FIGS. 1a-1g and to operate as described.

10 FIG. 3 is another variation of a key. The blade has conventional bittings 38 on its top edge and additional bittings 40 are positioned along one or more of its lower sides. These secondary bittings are configured with the sloping surfaces as illustrated in
15 FIGS. 1a-1g.

FIG. 3A is another variation of a key with secondary bittings on a side surface. The blade has conventional bittings 38' on its top edge and an
20 additional bitting 40' is positioned on at least one of the side surfaces. The secondary bitting is configured with the sloping surfaces as illustrated in FIGS. 1a-1g.

FIG. 4 is a portion of a key 42 for a lock of the type in which a tumbler pin is positioned by a flat
25 key. For example, see U.S. Patent 4,289,002. In this case, the bitting holes 43 in the surface of the key, or the bitting hole 44 in the side of the key, tapers from one edge to the other as described above. Additionally, rotational positioning of an offset tip
30 tumbler pin can be effected by positioning a conical bitting hole 46 so that its apex is offset from the axis of the tumbler pin bore. Also bitting hole 46 is offset from a line through the centers of bitting holes 43.

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FIG. 5 is a perspective view of a portion of a key 48 for operating an axial pin tumbler lock, see, e.g., U.S. Patent 3,738,136. In this improvement, the tapered biting surface could be in the fore end of the cylinder shown at 52 or in a side surface as at 54.

If desired, a tumbler pin rotational constraint device such as grooves cooperating with a projection (not shown), may be used to limit the rotation of the tumbler pin and to prevent the high edge of the tumbler pin tip from contacting the high edge of the key surface.

As can be seen, this invention solves a number of problems in making an easily manufacturable tumbler pin with complementary key surface in which the surface of the tumbler pin slopes from one side edge to the other so that it can be precisely positioned within a lock cylinder by a complementary mating surface on the key.

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I Claim:

1. A tumbler pin and key for a cylinder lock, having improvements comprising; a tumbler pin tip surface shaped to slope from adjacent one side surface of the tumbler pin to adjacent an opposite side surface of the tumbler pin, and a key blade surface formed substantially complementary to the tumbler pin tip so that when the key blade surface and tumbler pin tip are in initial partial contact, the bitted key surface will cause the tumbler pin tip surface to move into contact along the complementary surfaces, thereby causing the tumbler pin to rotate about its axis and be positioned to a proper unlocking position.

2. A tumbler pin and key for a cylinder lock as defined in claim 1 wherein the tumbler pin tip surface and key blade surface are flat sloping surfaces throughout their contact area.

3. A tumbler pin and key for a cylinder lock as defined in claim 1 wherein at least one of the surfaces is a curved convex surface and the other of the surfaces is a curved concave surface.

4. A tumbler pin and a key for a cylinder lock as defined in claim 1 wherein at least one of the sloping tumbler pin tips and cooperating key blade surfaces is a curved convex surface, and the other is partially concave in the central portion of the surface and is surrounded on both sides by a partially convex portion.

5. A tumbler pin and key for a cylinder lock as defined in claim 1 wherein at least one of the sloping tumbler pin tips and cooperating key blade surfaces is a flat sloping surface and the other surface has a flat central portion in the sloping center extending from one surface to an opposite surface with convex shaped

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surfaces adjoining both edges of the flat central portion.

5 6. A tumbler pin and key for a cylinder lock as defined in claim 4 wherein the curved convex surface portion extends just short of an edge surface of the tumbler pin side and the partially concave surface is surrounded by a raised rim extending around the edge of the tumbler pin body for cooperation with a pointed area at the edge of the other convex surface.

7. A key as defined in claim 1 wherein the key blade is of a generally rectangular shape with the complementary biting areas formed in at least the top edge.

8. A key as defined in claim 1 wherein the key blade is of a generally rectangular shape with the complementary biting areas formed in at least a side face.

9. A key as defined in claim 1 wherein the key blade is of a generally flat shape with the complementary biting areas formed in at least a side face.

5 10. A key as defined in claim 9 wherein the biting areas are produced by forming substantially conical holes in the key blade, the apex of the holes being offset from the location of the axis of the tumbler pin bores.

11. A key as defined in claim 1 wherein the key blade is of a generally flat shape with at least some of the complementary biting areas formed in the edges.

12. A key as defined in claim 1 wherein the key blade is of a generally cylindrical shape with at least some complementary biting surfaces formed in the fore end.

This Sheet Has Been Replaced





13. A key as defined in claim 1 wherein the key blade is of a generally cylindrical shape with at least some complementary biting areas formed in the side.

14. A key with a blank unconfigured blade to produce the bitted keys of claim 1.

5 15. A method of rotating tumbler pins in tumbler pin bores of a cylinder lock by means of a configured key, the method comprising; providing a surface on a tip portion of a tumbler pin to slope generally from
10 one side edge to the other side edge of the tumbler pin, forming a surface on the key which is generally complementary to the surface on the tip of the tumbler portion, contacting the surfaces by inserting the key in the lock and biasing one of the surfaces against the other so that the tumbler pin rotates until the complementary surfaces are in full contact with each other.

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