

Read Head Protection Circuit and Method

TECHNICAL FIELD

This invention relates generally to the field of information storage, and more particularly to a circuit and method for protecting read heads of a hard-disk drive.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Hard-disk drives are mass storage devices that typically include a magnetic storage media, e.g. rotating disks or platters, a spindle motor, read/write heads, an actuator, a pre-amplifier, a read channel, a write channel, a servo circuit, and control circuitry to control the operation of hard-disk drive and to properly interface the hard-disk drive to a host system or bus. Figure 1 shows an example of a prior art disk drive mass storage system 10. Disk drive system 10 interfaces with and exchanges data with a host 32 during read and write operations. Disk drive system 10 includes a number of rotating platters 12 mounted on a rotatable base 14. The platters 12 are used to store data that is represented as magnetic transitions on the magnetic platters, with each platter 12 coupleable to the read/write heads 18/20 which transfers data to and from a preamplifier 26. The preamp 26 is coupled to a synchronously sampled data (SSD) channel 28 comprising a read channel and a write channel, and a control circuit 30. SSD channel 28 and control circuit 30 are used to process data being read from and

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written to platters 12, and to control the various operations of disk drive mass storage system 10. Host 32 exchanges digital data with control circuit 30.

Data is stored and retrieved from each side of the magnetic platter 12 by the read head 18 and a write head 20. The read head comprise of magneto-resistive heads, adapted to read data from or to platters 12, when current is passed through them. Read/write heads 18/20 are coupled to preamplifier 26 that serves as an interface between read/write heads 18/20 of disk/head assembly 10 and SSD channel 28. The preamp 26 provides amplification to the waveform data signals as needed. The platter 12 surfaces are partitioned and formatted into sections as shown, with data storage wedges or sections 22 comprising the majority of the platter surface area, and smaller servo wedges 24 positioned therebetween storing positional information. At specified time intervals during the normal operation of the hard-disk drive system 10, a sequence called a Servo Bank Write (SBW) sequence is performed during which the write heads 20 write positional data to all of the platter servo wedges 24 simultaneously.

A problem with prior art hard-disk drive designs is the extreme sensitivity of the read heads 18. When data is being written to platter(s) 12 with write head 20, a large amount of current, e.g. 40 mA is placed through the write head 20, which may be coupled back into the read head 18 proximate with write head 20, possibly damaging or blowing read head 18. To prevent damage during a write sequence, most prior art designs apply a bias to read head 18. The risk of read head 18 damage is particularly

high during a SBW sequence because all read heads 18 are on simultaneously and thus the bias current is divided equally between the read heads 18, resulting in the bias current applied to each read head 18 being dependent on the number of read heads 18 connected to the preamp 26. This relationship is characterized in Equation 1:

Eq. 1:
$$I_{b_{head}} = \frac{I_{b_{total}}}{N}$$

where $I_{b_{total}}$ is the total bias current applied from the preamplifier 26 to all heads 18/20, $I_{b_{head}}$ is the bias current on one read head 18, and N is the number of heads in the hard-disk drive system 10, with N being three in the system 10 shown in Figure 1.

Thus, in transitioning to SBW mode, the bias current on a read head 18 can potentially drop from $I_{b_{total}}$ in the read mode to $I_{b_{total}}/N$ in SBW mode. The decreased bias current may be insufficient to protect read head 18, resulting in damage to the head 18.

What is needed is a circuit and method for protecting read heads 18 during a hard-disk drive SBW sequence.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention achieves technical advantages as a circuit and method for protecting read heads of a disk drive during a SBW sequence. A feedback loop capacitor of a preamp is controllably coupled to a separate dummy head during a V_{bias} mode so the capacitor voltage is both predictable and lower than the voltage of the read head when returning to an I_{bias} mode.

The invention comprises a circuit for protecting a read head of a hard-disk drive, comprising a voltage bias circuit selectively coupleable to the read head, a capacitor selectively coupleable to the read head and a dummy head selectively coupleable to the capacitor. The dummy head may comprise an internal resistor. The capacitor is controllably and responsively coupled to the dummy head when the voltage bias circuit is coupled to the read head to prevent coupling a damaging level of current to the read head.

The invention includes a preamplifier for a hard-disk drive storage system having a plurality of platters for storing data and a read head for each the platter for retrieving the data. The preamplifier comprises a read head protection circuit having a voltage bias circuit coupleable to the read head, a capacitor coupleable to the read head and a dummy head coupleable to the capacitor. The capacitor is controllably coupled to the dummy head when the voltage bias circuit is coupled to the read head.

A method of the invention includes protecting a read head of a hard-disk drive storage system, the system comprising a preamplifier circuit having a voltage bias circuit and a capacitor coupleable to the read head, and a dummy head selectively coupleable to the capacitor. The method protects the read head by controllably discharging the capacitor voltage through the dummy head when the voltage bias circuit is coupled to the read head to prevent coupling a damaging level of current to the read head.

Advantages of the invention include protecting read heads 18 of a hard-disk drive system during a servo bank write (SBW) sequence when all of the write heads 20 are in use. The protection circuit and method are an easily implementable and dependable solution protecting read heads from being damaged during the SBW sequence. Preferably, the dummy head resistor discharges the capacitor to a predetermined voltage, rather than leaving the capacitor floating as in the prior art. The voltage is predictable and allows the storage system to remain in the V_{bias} mode for a longer amount of time as compared to the prior art. In some circuits, the present invention only requires an additional switch coupling the capacitor to a dummy head of the V_{bias} circuit.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The above features of the present invention will be more clearly understood from consideration of the following descriptions in connection with accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 illustrates a configuration of a prior art disk drive mass storage system;

Figure 2 is a schematic representation of a typical prior art circuit used to bias a read head with a current I_{bias} ;

Figure 3 is a schematic representation of an alternative prior art method of biasing the read head alternately with a voltage V_{bias} circuit and an I_{bias} circuit;

Figure 4 is a schematic diagram illustrating a preferred embodiment of the present invention having a dummy head R_{dummy} that is selectively coupled to capacitor C_1 during the V_{bias} mode, when the read heads are not in use;

Figure 5 illustrates a timing diagram of the circuit shown in Figure 5;

Figure 6 is a flow chart of an algorithm of the present invention; and

Figure 7 shows a block diagram of the present invention implemented in a hard-disk drive system.

Corresponding numerals and symbols in the different figures refer to corresponding parts unless otherwise indicated.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 2 is a schematic diagram of a prior art control circuit 50, usually comprising part of the preamp 26 of Figure 1, having a current bias I_{bias} circuit 52 coupled via switch S_1 to the read head 18 of hard-disk drive system 10. Transistor Q_1 may comprise an NPN bipolar transistor coupled to voltage supply V_{ss} by a current limiting resistor R_1 . The transistor Q_1 controls a signal passed through gain stages A_1 and A_2 to provide an output voltage to SSD channel 28. During an I_{bias} mode, switch S_1 is closed, coupling I_{bias} circuit 52 to C_1 and also to read head 18, represented by resistor R_{head} via transistor Q_1 . Other read heads may be similarly configured in the circuit 50, not shown, for each platter 12 of the disk drive system 10. In the I_{bias} mode, a small amount of current is passed through resistor R_{head} to protect the read head 18 while the write heads 20 are in use.

Preamp 26 comprises a single current source (not shown) for supplying current to read heads 18 one at a time to prevent interference between the read heads, in a multiplexed fashion. However, during a SBW sequence in the I_{bias} mode, I_{bias} circuit 52 is coupled to all read heads 18 simultaneously rather than being coupled to only one read head 18 at a time, as in a normal operating mode. Therefore, during a SBW sequence, the I_{bias} circuit 52 single source current is shared among all read heads 18. The problem is exacerbated as the number of platters 12 increase in the hard-disk drive system 10. For example, for a two platter system, the I_{bias} current is halved for each read head 18. For a four platter system, the I_{bias} current is 25% for each read head 18 as

compared to a single head I_{bias} mode. A problem with the I_{bias} circuit of Figure 2 is that during the SBW sequence, for two or more platters 12, the I_{bias} circuit 52 current may not be sufficient to protect the read heads 18 from being damaged during the SBW sequence. For example, if I_{bias} circuit 52 is adapted to supply 5 mA, this current may be adequate to protect one read head 18, but splitting the 5 mA current during a SBW sequence for a two-platter system results in a 2.5 mA current flowing through each read head 18, which current may not be adequate protection. The protection circuit 50 is also disadvantageous because the amount of bias current is variable and dependant on the number of platters 12 in the disk drive system 10. Ideally, the bias current would be independent of number of heads 18 in the disk drive so that the bias current on a single head remains constant when transitioning going from the read mode to SBW mode, preventing damage read heads 18.

Another prior art method and circuit for biasing read heads 18 when write heads 20 are in use is shown in the circuit 60 of Figure 3. A voltage bias V_{bias} circuit 62 is coupled to read heads 18 via switches S_2 and S_4 to protect the read heads 18 when the write heads 20 are in use. V_{bias} may be set by the system designer upon startup by a serial port register (not shown). V_{bias} circuit 62 provides the same amount of bias voltage to the read heads 18 regardless of the number of platters 12 in the system 10.

In typical system architectures the preamps 26 are designed to require a feedback loop adapted for I_{bias} circuitry. Before activating the V_{bias} circuit 62, the I_{bias}



circuit 52 must be turned off which is accomplished by opening switch S_1 . This presents a problem in circuit 60 because feedback loop capacitor C_1 is allowed to float during the V_{bias} mode, resulting in an unpredictable amount of voltage V_c on the capacitor C_1 . When switch S_1 is closed again, coupling voltage V_c on C_1 to read heads 18, voltage V_c may have drifted to a high voltage, damaging read heads 18. In particular, a SBW sequence can be lengthy, allowing ample time for leakage currents to build up an excessive charge on capacitor C_1 that can damage read heads 18.

Figure 4 is a schematic diagram of circuit 80 showing an exemplary embodiment of the best mode of the present invention. V_{bias} circuit 62 and I_{bias} circuit 52 are alternately coupled to read heads 18 of the hard-disk drive system. A dummy head, represented by resistor R_{dummy} , is controllably and responsively coupled to capacitor C_1 when the V_{bias} circuit 62 is not coupled to the read heads 18, ensuring that the capacitor voltage V_c is dissipated to a predetermined voltage being lower than the V_{bias} circuit 62. When read heads 18 are then switched over to the V_{bias} circuit 62 during the SBW sequence, for example, voltage V_c will not be sufficient to damage the heads 18 because dummy resistor R_{dummy} previously discharged the capacitor C_1 . Logic circuit 82 comprises a SBW protection algorithm 84, the logic 82 being coupled to and controlling switches S_1 , S_2 , S_3 , S_4 , S_5 and S_6 . According to the present invention, when the system is in a SBW sequence, switch S_6 is responsively closed, coupling dummy head R_{dummy} to capacitor C_1 via transistor Q_D and ensuring that voltage V_c is at a lower voltage level than the voltage on the read heads depicted as R_{head0} and R_{head1} (and other

heads for a system having more than two platters, not shown) when the system switches out of SBW sequence.

Preferably, dummy head R_{dummy} resides in a preamp circuit 102 (Figure 7), e.g. the preamp 102 may comprise a separate integrated circuit including dummy head R_{dummy} . Dummy head R_{dummy} preferably comprises a resistance equal to 10-30% of the lowest read head 18 resistance. For example, if the resistance of read heads 18 of the a disk drive system is 30 to 80 ohms, the dummy head preferably comprises a resistor R_{dummy} having a resistance value of 10 to 14 ohms. Because the resistance of resistor R_{dummy} is lower than the resistance of the read heads 18, coupling resistor R_{dummy} to capacitor C_1 via transistor Q_D ensures that voltage V_c is lower than the read head voltage, preventing damage to the head when the read head 18 is switched back to being coupled to capacitor C_1 via the respective transistor. V_{bias} circuit 62 may be coupled to read heads 18 alternatively with I_{bias} circuit 52 to bias the read heads 18 in various sequences or modes of the hard drive system. Capacitor C_1 is discharged through dummy resistor R_{dummy} during SBW sequences to prevent damage to read heads 18.

The novel circuit 80 advantageously provides predictability of the voltage V_c across capacitor C_1 so the circuit can be optimized for recovery of voltage V_c after a SBW sequence. For example, if a dummy resistor R_{dummy} is used that will produce a voltage V_c of 0.3 V during SBW, and the read head 18 voltage is 0.5 V, the voltage

recovery required is 0.2 V. This recovery voltage is useful to determine recovery time information useful in the design of the hard-disk drive system 100 (Figure 7).

Figure 5 shows a timing diagram for a first head R_{head0} (Figure 4) of the hard-disk drive system 100 (Figure 7) having four heads. A serial port head select signal SPT_HS indicates the head selected, e.g. binary 000 selects the first head, and binary 101 selects all four heads. Initially, the disk drive system 100 is in a regular read mode at time t_0 . Signal RDZ_WRT indicates the read mode when a logic low, and the write mode when logic high. The servo signal SRV_SEQZ is switched low at time t_1 to indicate that a servo bank write (SBW) sequence will be started. Signals I_{bias} and V_{bias} select the I_{bias} and V_{bias} mode, respectively, for the first head R_{head0} of Figure 4 via switches S1, S2 and S3, for example.

At time t_1 the V_{bias} mode is activated for read head R_{head0} with signal V_{bias} going high, and the dummy resistor R_{dummy} is coupled to capacitor C_1 , indicated by signal DMZ, which controls the dummy head resistor R_{dummy} . In response, internal head select signal INT_HS registers an invalid head state of binary 101 at time t_1 . Signal INT_HS corresponds to the serial port head select signal SPT_HS and changes state at time t_2 . The circuit has determined internally that it is now in the SBW mode. In prior art circuits, capacitor C_1 would be floating at time t_1 . However, in accordance with the present invention the serial port register signal SPT_HS is decoded to prevent the capacitor C_1 from floating by being coupled via switch S_6 and transistor Q_D to the

dummy head R_{dummy} . When signal SPT_HS reverses at time t_3 , signal INT_HS responds. The dummy head R_{dummy} is disconnected from capacitor C_1 shown at signal DMZ at time t_4 when the SRV_SEQZ goes high signaling the end of the SBW mode and the switching off of V_{bias} .

Figure 6 shows an algorithm 84 in accordance with the present invention. When a SBW sequence is begun (step 86), the V_{bias} mode is selected (step 88). Capacitor C_1 is coupled to dummy head R_{dummy} (step 90) until the circuit exits the SBW mode and returns to the I_{bias} mode, at which time capacitor C_1 is decoupled from the dummy head R_{dummy} (step 92) and coupled to the selected read head 18.

Figure 7 illustrates a hard-disk drive system 100 comprising the preamp 102 of the present invention including protection circuitry 80 that functions in accordance with algorithm 84. The preamp 102 preferably comprises a single integrated circuit chip, and may be positioned on one or more arms 16 of the disk drive system 100.

The novel protection circuit and method of the present invention achieves technical advantages by protecting read heads 18 of a hard-disk drive system during a servo bank write (SBW) sequence when all of the write heads 20 are in use. The protection circuit and method described herein provides an easily implementable and dependable method of protecting read heads 18 from being damaged during the SBW sequence. The dummy head resistor R_{dummy} controls the voltage V_c to which capacitor

C_1 is discharged, rather than leaving the capacitor C_1 floating as in the prior art. The voltage V_c is predictable and established to allow the V_{bias} to be applied for a longer amount of time as compared to the prior art.

While the invention has been described with reference to illustrative embodiments, this description is not intended to be construed in a limiting sense. Various modifications in combinations of the illustrative embodiments, as well as other embodiments of the invention, will be apparent to persons skilled in the art upon reference to the description. It is therefore intended that the appended claims encompass any such modifications or embodiments.



CLAIMS

1. A circuit for protecting a read head of a hard-disk drive, comprising:
a voltage bias circuit coupleable to the read head;
a capacitor coupleable to the read head; and
a dummy head coupleable to said capacitor, wherein said capacitor is coupled to said dummy head when said voltage bias circuit is coupled to the read head.
2. The circuit according to claim 1 wherein said dummy head lowers a voltage across said capacitor.
3. The circuit according to claim 1 or 2 wherein said dummy head comprises a resistor having a resistance value less than a resistance of said read head.
4. The circuit according to claim 3 wherein said dummy head resistance value is 10-30% less than said read head resistance value.
5. The circuit according to any one of the preceding claims further comprising:
a current bias circuit coupleable to the read head and said capacitor.
6. The circuit according to any one of the preceding claims further comprising:
logic circuitry controllably coupling said dummy head to said capacitor; and
an algorithm controlling said logic circuitry.



7. The circuit according to any one of the preceding claims wherein the hard-disk drive comprises a write head, the write head and the read head being alternately selectable, wherein said dummy head lowers the voltage across said capacitor to a voltage lower than a voltage of the read head when the write head is selected.

8. The circuit according to any one of claims 1 to 6, wherein the hard-disk drive comprises a plurality of read and write heads adapted to read and write to/from a storage medium, wherein during a servo bank write (SBW) sequence, all the write heads write to said storage medium simultaneously, wherein said dummy head is coupled to said capacitor during said SBW sequence.

9. A preamplifier for a hard-disk drive storage system having a plurality of platters for storing data and a read head for each said platter for retrieving said data, said preamplifier comprising:

a read head protection circuit, said read head protection circuit including a voltage bias circuit coupleable to the read head, a capacitor coupleable to the read head and a dummy head coupleable to said capacitor, wherein said capacitor is coupled to said dummy head when when said voltage bias circuit is coupled to the read head.

10. The preamplifier according to claim 9 wherein said dummy head lowers a voltage across said capacitor.

11. The preamplifier according to claims 9 or 10 wherein said dummy head



comprises a resistor having a resistance value less than a resistance of said read head.

12. The preamplifier according to claims 11 wherein said dummy head resistance value is 10-30% less than said read head resistance value.

13. The preamplifier according to any one of claims 9 to 12 wherein said read head protection circuit further comprises:

a current bias circuit coupleable to the read head and said capacitor.

14. The preamplifier according to any one of claims 9 to 13 wherein said read head protection circuit further comprises:

logic circuitry controlling the coupling of said dummy head to said capacitor; and
an algorithm controlling said logic circuitry.

15. The preamplifier according to any one of claims 9 to 14 wherein the hard-disk drive comprises a write head, the write head and the read head being alternately selectable, wherein said dummy head lowers the voltage across said capacitor to a voltage lower than a voltage of the read head when the write head is selected.

16. The preamplifier according to any one of claims 9 to 14 wherein the hard-disk drive comprises a plurality of write heads adapted to write data to/from said platters, wherein during a servo bank write (SBW) sequence, all the write heads write to said platters simultaneously, wherein said preamplifier dummy head is coupled to said capacitor during said SBW sequence.



17. A method of protecting a read head of a hard-disk drive storage system, said system comprising a preamplifier circuit having a voltage bias circuit and a capacitor coupleable to said read head, and a dummy head coupleable to said capacitor, said method comprising the step of:

discharging said capacitor through said dummy head when said voltage bias circuit is coupled to said read head.

18. The method according to claim 17 wherein said discharging step comprises discharging said capacitor through a resistor having a resistance value less than a resistance value of said read head.

19. The method according to claim 17 or 18 wherein said hard-disk drive comprises a write head, said write head and said read head being alternately selectable, further comprising the step of:

when said write head is selected, discharging said capacitor so the capacitor voltage is lower than the voltage of said read head.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein said disk drive system comprises a plurality of said read and write heads, wherein all said write heads are adapted to write to a plurality of platters simultaneously during a Servo Bank Write (SBW) sequence, wherein said discharging step is performed during a said SBW sequence



21. A hard disk drive including the circuit or a preamplifier in accordance with any one of claims 1 to 16.

22. A hard disk drive operable in accordance with the method of any one of claims 17 to 20.

23. A circuit or a preamplifier of any one of claims 1 to 16 operable in accordance with the method of any one of claims 17 to 20.