

Description

Background of the Invention

The present invention relates to an integrated control circuit for driving an inductive load and for dissipating stored energy in the inductive load. The invention is applicable to the safe dissipation of the energy stored in an inductive load of an automotive integrated circuit system to prevent damage to the system under certain conditions.

Automotive systems such as window control systems, fuel injector systems, fuel pumps, etc. are comprised of solenoids or relays for controlling the operation of the particular system. The relays or solenoids may be driven or energized by an integrated control module circuit comprising semiconductor devices. The integrated control module circuit may include a PNP transistor connected in a series pass configuration between a source of operating potential (a battery) and the inductive load (a relay or solenoid). The turn-on and turn-off of the PNP transistor is controlled by internal control circuitry of the control module. Thus, the PNP transistor functions as a current switch for energizing and de-energizing the inductive load. Generally, these inductive loads are located distant from the integrated control module circuit although both are connected to a common electrical ground reference which may be the automotive chassis.

During operation, the inductive loads are driven from the positive side of the battery via the PNP transistor switch. As the PNP transistor is turned off, the inductive load will attempt to maintain the current flow therethrough as is understood. This condition causes a large negative voltage transient to occur at the collector of the series pass PNP transistor. In at least one prior art system an external discrete power Zener diode is connected between the positive battery supply and the collector of the series pass transistor. The Zener is rendered conductive in response to the negative transient voltage to provide a current conduction path to the inductive load as the series pass transistor turns off so that the stored energy of the load is dissipated whereby the integrated control module circuit is protected since the Zener limits the negative voltage to a non-destructive maximum level.

A problem with the above dissipation method and system is that the Zener diode must supply relative large currents to the inductive load in combination with a large voltage drop thereacross which means that the Zener must be a high power device. Thus, a large external discrete device is required in order to be capable of handling the power that must be dissipated. Additionally, state of the art power Zeners are relatively costly to the automotive manufacturer.

Another problem with prior art automotive systems using the Zener diode protection described above relates to reverse battery conditions. For instance, if the battery of the automobile is connected in reverse, i.e., the negative and positive terminals being reversed, a negative potential is supplied to the control module and the zener. This condition causes the Zener to be forward biased to provide a direct current conduction path to the inductive load. If the inductive load is, for example, a relay it will be energized since most, if not all, relays are bilateral, i.e., they are energized by current flowing in any direction. This is a very undesirable condition as the relay may drive a fuel pump that would therefore be continuously operated as the battery is connected in reverse. This problem is sometimes solved in prior art systems by the addition of a diode in series with the Zener to block conduction during reverse battery conditions. This solution adds another component which is costly to the manufacturer.

In addition to the above described reverse battery condition, the automatic integrated control module must also withstand other abnormal conditions such as the loss of the positive battery connection or the loss of the ground connection during the time that the inductive load is energized. Some prior art protection means such as the Zener or Zener plus diode methods described above, do not provide a conduction path for the inductively stored energy for both of these abnormal conditions. Thus, the high negative voltage that develops across the inductive load can exceed the destructive level of the integrated circuitry within the control module.

Hence, there exists a need for an improved and inexpensive system for dissipating stored inductive energy in an inductive load coupled to an integrated circuit, especially when such integrated circuit is utilized in the automotive environment.

A control circuit in accordance with the prior art part of claim 1 is disclosed in US-A-4178619. Other such circuits are known from US-A-4167030 and O. KILGENSTEIN; "Formeln und Diagramme der Elektronik Diskrete Halbleiterbauelemente" 1st edition, 1981, Vögel-Verlag Würzburg, pages 241, 242.

Accordingly, the present invention seeks to provide an improved circuit for dissipating stored inductive energy and is suitable for dissipating stored inductive energy in an inductive load of an automotive system.

In accordance with the invention, there is provided an integrated control circuit for driving a inductive load to be coupled thereto, the integrated control circuit including a series pass transistor (20) adapted to be coupled between an external source of operating potential and an output (16) of the integrated control circuit for sourcing current to the

inductive load to be coupled between output (16) and ground potential, first and second power supply conductors (26, 28), said first power supply conductor being adapted to receive the operating potential, said second power supply conductor being adapted to receive said ground potential; and including circuitry (30, 32, 34, 40) coupled between said second power supply conductor and the output of the integrated control circuit for providing both a direct current conduction path to the inductive load whenever said circuitry is rendered operative in response to the transistor being turned off by the operating potential being disconnected from said first power supply conductor while the series pass transistor is driving the inductive load and inhibiting said direct current conduction path during normal circuit operating conditions, characterized by said circuitry further including:

a silicon controlled rectifier circuit (30) having first and second electrodes coupled between said second power supply conductor (28) and the output (16) of the integrated control circuit, and a control electrode (G) the silicon controlled rectifier comprising a first transistor (36) formed in the integrated control circuit having first, second and control electrodes, said first electrode being connected to the output (16), a second transistor (38) formed in the integrated control circuit having first, second and control electrodes, said first and second electrodes being coupled to said second power supply conductor (28) and said control electrodes of said first transistor respectively, said control electrode being connected to said second electrode of said first transistor; and

a zener diode (32) coupled between said second power supply conductor and said control electrode of said silicon controlled rectifier, said Zener diode (32) being connected between said control electrode of said second transistor and said control electrode of said first transistor.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a partial block and schematic diagram illustrating a control circuit in accordance with the present invention; and

FIG. 2 is a schematic representation of the integrated silicon controlled rectifier of the circuit of FIG. 1.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

Turning to the FIGURES, there is shown a common type control module within dashed outline 10 including circuitry of the present invention for dissipating stored inductive energy. Control module 10 may be manufactured in monolithic integrated circuit form and includes external pins 12, 14 and

16. If used in a automotive system, integrated control module circuit 10 would be connected through pins 12 and 14 to the battery positive terminal and chassis ground respectively of the automobile. Control module 10 is coupled at output pin 16 to an external inductive load 18 (symbolized by the inductor) that is driven from the high side (positive) of the automobile battery through PNP transistor 20. Inductive load 18 may be, for example, a relay or solenoid in the automotive system that is energized by control module 10. PNP transistor 20 is generally a high breakdown device that has its emitter-collector path coupled via power supply conductor 26 between the battery which provides a source of operating potential VCC and output 16 to inductive load 18. The conductivity of transistor 20 is controlled by control circuit 22 connected between VCC and ground by connection between power supply conductors 26 and 28. Other integrated circuitry may be included in control module 10 as represented by integrated circuit 24 shown coupled between power supply conductors 26 and 28.

When series pass transistor 20 is rendered conductive by control circuit 22, current is sourced to output terminal 16 which causes inductive load 18 to be energized to operate the particular automotive system. When transistor 20 is rendered nonconductive the energy stored in inductive load 18 must be dissipated. As understood, when transistor 20 is turned off, inductive load 18 attempts to maintain the current flowing therethrough. This results in a large negative voltage appearing at the top of inductive load 18 that is applied to the collector of transistor 20. If a current conduction path is not provided to dissipate the stored inductive energy, this negative voltage can damage or destroy the integrated circuitry comprising control module 10. As previously mentioned, a discrete power Zener has been used in the prior art which is connected between VCC and pin 16 in a manner such that the Zener is rendered conductive in response to the negative voltage appearing at pin 16 to provide a current conduction path from VCC through conductive load 18.

However, the use of the Zener diode mentioned above is undesirable for several reasons. Besides being relatively expensive, a forward conduction path is provided through the Zener that will energize inductive load 18 if VCC should go negative by, for example, the battery terminals being connected backwards between power supply conductors 26 and 28. Also, if VCC is disconnected while inductive load 18 is energized by, for example, the battery line being disconnected there is no conduction path to dissipate the stored energy in inductive load 18 as it is subsequently turned off by transistor 20 being rendered non-conductive.

To overcome the aforementioned problems, stored inductive energy dissipating circuitry is provided in accordance with the present invention within control module 10 which includes a silicon controlled rectifier (SCR) 30 shown having its cathode and anode coupled between output pin 16 and power supply conductor 28, respectively, and its gate coupled to the anode of Zener diode 32, the cathode of which is coupled to power supply conductor 28 through the base-emitter connection of transistor 38. In addition, a second Zener diode 34 is coupled between the base or control electrode of transistor 20 and output pin 16. SCR 30 is shown schematically as comprising NPN and PNP transistors 36 and 38 as is well known. A pre-charging resistor 40 is connected between power supply conductor 26 and the interconnected base and collector electrodes of PNP transistor 38 and NPN transistor 36 respectively. Resistor 40 is used to pre-charge junction capacitor 44 which is formed by the parasitic capacitance between the epitaxial layer and the substrate of integrated control module circuit 10. By pre-charging capacitance 44 false triggering of SCR 30 is inhibited under certain conditions as will be explained hereinafter. Resistor 42 sets the minimum holding current of SCR 30 and reduces the sensitivity of SCR 30 to rapid changes in the voltage across load 18 as is understood.

In normal operation, when transistor 20 is turned off to inhibit drive to the load, the voltage on inductive load 18 goes negative with respect to the voltage that was developed thereacross when it was energized. As the magnitude of this negative going voltage reaches a value equal to VCC minus the breakdown voltage of Zener diode 34 plus one V_{BE} (where V_{BE} is the base emitter voltage of transistor 20) Zener 34 is forward biased which turns on transistor 20 whereby the stored energy is dissipated in inductive load 18 as a direct current conduction path is provided. Thus, as long as the breakdown voltage of Zener 34 is made equal to or less than the breakdown voltage of Zener 32 by a predetermined value, and as long as an operating potential VCC is supplied to control module 10, during normal operation, Zener 32 and SCR 30 will never conduct.

However, if inductive load 18 is energized, via transistor 20, and if VCC is disconnected, control module 10 could be otherwise damaged since there would then be no direct current conduction path to dissipate the stored energy in the inductive load. If this condition should occur, Zener 32 is rendered conductive when the voltage across inductive load 18 decreases in a negative sense until a voltage equal to the breakdown voltage of Zener 32 plus the base-emitter voltage of transistor 36 is reached. At this value, SCR 30 is fired and a direct

current path is provided from ground, through the SCR to output 16 and the load to dissipate the stored energy. Once SCR 30 fires the voltage across it drops to a low value as is understood reducing the SCR power requirements. Hence, under normal operating conditions, a current conduction path via Zener 34 and transistor 20 is provided to dissipate the stored inductive energy in inductive load 18 whenever transistor 20 is rendered non-conductive. Moreover, a direct current conduction path is provided via SCR 30 to dissipate the load energy if VCC is lost or disconnected while load 18 is energized. In addition, no path for current conduction to inductive load 18 is available if the battery terminals should be reversed. Hence, control module 10 of the present invention prevents inductive load 18 from being energized if a minus voltage is applied at pin 12. Further, the reduced power requirements for SCR 30 permits minimal die area to be used for integrating SCR 30 on the integrated circuit. Furthermore, Zener diodes 32 and 34 are low power devices having minimal space requirements.

Pre-charging resistor 40 prevents SCR 30 from false triggering during conditions where ground reference is lost at pin 14 or where a very high rate of negative voltage change (dv/dt) occurs at output 16. If ground is lost for some reason during normal operation, parasitic capacitance 44 could otherwise provide current flow as power supply conductor 28 becomes positive as current is conducted through the integrated circuitry of the control module such that this power supply conductor begins to approach the voltage VCC. This could cause SCR 30 to fire absent pre-charging of capacitor 44 to VCC by resistor 40. Thus, by biasing capacitor 44 to VCC, SCR 30 cannot fire until ground potential goes above VCC which is not possible during loss of ground. Resistor 40 also greatly desensitizes SCR30 to false triggering due to high dv/dt at output 16 by causing the magnitude of dv/dt induced current in capacitor 44 to exceed V_{CC}/R_{40} before PNP38 could be rendered conductive and firing SCR 30.

The SCR technique does not protect the other integrated circuits such as integrated circuit 24 if the load is turned off during a loss of ground. If inductive load 18 is turned off while there is a loss of ground, protection is provided control module 10 by Zener diode 34. The use of Zener diode 34 connected between base and collector electrodes of transistor 20 is much improved over utilization of a discrete power Zener connected between VCC and pin 16 in that only the small base current of transistor 20 is utilized which is conducted through Zener diode 34 as it is rendered conductive by the resulting negative voltage appearing at pin 16.

Hence, what has been described above, is a

novel combination of a series pass power transistor, Zener diodes, a resistor and an SCR to dissipate stored inductive energy in an automotive system. Additionally, the disclosed circuit for dissipating the stored inductive energy does not allow the inductive load coupled to the system to be energized during loss of ground or reverse battery conditions. Further, the control module driving the inductive load is protected if either positive battery or ground connections or opened during the operation of the automotive system.

Claims

1. An integrated control circuit for driving an inductive load to be coupled thereto, the integrated control circuit including a series pass transistor (20) adapted to be coupled between an external source of operating potential and an output (16) of the integrated control circuit for sourcing current to the inductive load to be coupled between output (16) and ground potential, first and second power supply conductors (26, 28), said first power supply conductor being adapted to receive the operating potential, said second power supply conductor being adapted to receive said ground potential; and including circuitry (30, 32, 34, 40) coupled between said second power supply conductor and the output of the integrated control circuit for providing both a direct current conduction path to the inductive load whenever said circuitry is rendered operative in response to the transistor being turned off by the operating potential being disconnected from said first power supply conductor while the series pass transistor is driving the inductive load and inhibiting said direct current conduction path during normal circuit operating conditions, characterized by said circuitry further including:

a silicon controlled rectifier circuit (30) having first and second electrodes coupled between said second power supply conductor (28) and the output (16) of the integrated control circuit, and a control electrode (G) the silicon controlled rectifier comprising a first transistor (36) formed in the integrated control circuit having first, second and control electrodes, said first electrode being connected to the output (16), a second transistor (38) formed in the integrated control circuit having first, second and control electrodes, said first and second electrodes being coupled to said second power supply conductor (28) and said control electrode of said first transistor respectively, said control electrode being connected to said second electrode of said first transistor;

and

a zener diode (32) coupled between said second power supply conductor and said control electrode of said silicon controlled rectifier, said Zener diode (32) being connected between said control electrode of said second transistor and said control electrode of said first transistor.

2. The integrated control circuit of claim 1 including an additional diode (34) connected between a control electrode of the series pass transistor (20) and the output (16) of the control circuit.
3. The integrated control circuit of claim 1 or 2 including a resistor (40) coupled between the first power supply conductor (26) and said control electrode of said second transistor.
4. The integrated control circuit of claim 2 wherein said additional diode (34) is a Zener diode.

Patentansprüche

1. Integrierter Steuerschaltkreis zum Betreiben einer daran gekoppelten induktiven Last. Der integrierte Steuerschaltkreis bestehend aus einem Reihentransistor (20), eingerichtet, um zwischen einer externen Quelle des Betriebspotentials und einem Ausgang (16) des integrierten Steuerschaltkreises als Stromquelle für die induktive Last, die zwischen Ausgang (16) und Massepotential gekoppelt ist, gekoppelt zu werden, erstem und zweitem Stromversorgungsleiter (26, 28), der erste Stromversorgungsleiter eingerichtet zum Empfang des Betriebspotentials, der zweite Stromversorgungsleiter eingerichtet zum Empfang des Massepotentials; einschließlich den Schaltelementen (30, 32, 34, 40), die zwischen den zweiten Stromversorgungsleiter und den Ausgang der integrierten Steuerschaltung gekoppelt sind, zur Bereitstellung sowohl eines direkten Stromleitungspfades zu der induktiven Last wann immer die Schaltung wirksam wird infolge des Abschaltens des Transistors durch Unterbrechen des Betriebspotentials von dem ersten Stromversorgungsleiter während der Reihen- transistor die induktive Last antreibt, als auch der Verhinderung des direkten Stromleitungspfades während normaler Betriebsbedingungen der Schaltung, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Schaltung weiterhin enthält:

einen gesteuerten Siliziumgleichrichter- kreis (30), dessen erste und zweite Elektroden zwischen den zweiten Stromversorgungsleiter (28)



novel combination of a series pass power transistor, Zener diodes, a resistor and an SCR to dissipate stored inductive energy in an automotive system. Additionally, the disclosed circuit for dissipating the stored inductive energy does not allow the inductive load coupled to the system to be energized during loss of ground or reverse battery conditions. Further, the control module driving the inductive load is protected if either positive battery or ground connections or opened during the operation of the automotive system.

Claims

1. An integrated control circuit for driving an inductive load to be coupled thereto, the integrated control circuit including a series pass transistor (20) adapted to be coupled between an external source of operating potential and an output (16) of the integrated control circuit for sourcing current to the inductive load to be coupled between output (16) and ground potential, first and second power supply conductors (26, 28), said first power supply conductor being adapted to receive the operating potential, said second power supply conductor being adapted to receive said ground potential; and including circuitry (30, 32, 34, 40) coupled between said second power supply conductor and the output of the integrated control circuit for providing both a direct current conduction path to the inductive load whenever said circuitry is rendered operative in response to the transistor being turned off by the operating potential being disconnected from said first power supply conductor while the series pass transistor is driving the inductive load and inhibiting said direct current conduction path during normal circuit operating conditions, characterized by said circuitry further including:

a silicon controlled rectifier circuit (30) having first and second electrodes coupled between said second power supply conductor (28) and the output (16) of the integrated control circuit, and a control electrode (G) the silicon controlled rectifier comprising a first transistor (36) formed in the integrated control circuit having first, second and control electrodes, said first electrode being connected to the output (16), a second transistor (38) formed in the integrated control circuit having first, second and control electrodes, said first and second electrodes being coupled to said second power supply conductor (28) and said control electrode of said first transistor respectively, said control electrode being connected to said second electrode of said first transistor;

and

a zener diode (32) coupled between said second power supply conductor and said control electrode of said silicon controlled rectifier, said Zener diode (32) being connected between said control electrode of said second transistor and said control electrode of said first transistor.

2. The integrated control circuit of claim 1 including an additional diode (34) connected between a control electrode of the series pass transistor (20) and the output (16) of the control circuit.
3. The integrated control circuit of claim 1 or 2 including a resistor (40) coupled between the first power supply conductor (26) and said control electrode of said second transistor.
4. The integrated control circuit of claim 2 wherein said additional diode (34) is a Zener diode.

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1. Integrierter Steuerschaltkreis zum Betreiben einer daran gekoppelten induktiven Last. Der integrierte Steuerschaltkreis bestehend aus einem Reihentransistor (20), eingerichtet, um zwischen eine externe Quelle des Betriebspotentials und einen Ausgang (16) des integrierten Steuerschaltkreises als Stromquelle für die induktive Last, die zwischen Ausgang (16) und Massepotential gekoppelt ist, gekoppelt zu werden, erstem und zweitem Stromversorgungsleiter (26, 28), der erste Stromversorgungsleiter eingerichtet zum Empfang des Betriebspotentials, der zweite Stromversorgungsleiter eingerichtet zum Empfang des Massepotentials; einschließlich den Schaltelementen (30, 32, 34, 40), die zwischen den zweiten Stromversorgungsleiter und den Ausgang der integrierten Steuerschaltung gekoppelt sind, zur Bereitstellung sowohl eines direkten Stromleitungspfades zu der induktiven Last wann immer die Schaltung wirksam wird infolge des Abschaltens des Transistors durch Unterbrechen des Betriebspotentials von dem ersten Stromversorgungsleiter während der Reihen- transistor die induktive Last antreibt, als auch der Verhinderung des direkten Stromleitungspfades während normaler Betriebsbedingungen der Schaltung, dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß die Schaltung weiterhin enthält:

einen gesteuerten Siliziumgleichrichter- kreis (30), dessen erste und zweite Elektroden zwischen den zweiten Stromversorgungsleiter (28)



und den Ausgang (16) des integrierten Steuerschaltkreises gekoppelt sind, und eine Steuerelektrode (G) des gesteuerten Siliziumgleichrichters, umfassend einen ersten Transistor (36), Bestandteil des integrierten Steuerschaltkreises, mit erster, zweiter und Steuerelektrode, die erste Elektrode angeschlossen an den Ausgang (16), einen zweiten Transistor (38), Bestandteil des integrierten Steuerschaltkreises, mit erster, zweiter und Steuerelektrode, die erste und zweite Elektrode angeschlossen an den zweiten Stromversorgungsleiter (28) bzw. an die Steuerelektrode des ersten Transistors, die Steuerelektrode angeschlossen an die zweite Elektrode des ersten Transistors, und

eine Zenerdiode (32) angeschlossen zwischen dem ersten Stromversorgungsleiter und der Steuerelektrode des gesteuerten Siliziumgleichrichters, die Zenerdiode (32) angeschlossen zwischen der Steuerelektrode des zweiten Transistors und der Steuerelektrode des ersten Transistors.

2. Integrierter Steuerschaltkreis nach Anspruch 1 mit einer zusätzlichen Diode (34), die zwischen eine Steuerelektrode des Reihentransistors (20) und den Ausgang (16) des Steuerschaltkreises geschaltet ist.
3. Integrierter Steuerschaltkreis nach Anspruch 1 oder 2 mit einem Widerstand (40) gekoppelt zwischen den ersten Stromversorgungsleiter (26) und der Steuerelektrode des zweiten Transistors.
4. Integrierter Steuerschaltkreis nach Anspruch 2, worin die zusätzliche Diode (34) eine Zenerdiode ist.

Revendications

1. Circuit de commande intégré pour exciter une charge inductive à coupler à celui-ci, le circuit de commande intégré incluant un transistor de passage en série (20) agencé pour être couplé entre une source externe de potentiel de fonctionnement et une sortie (16) du circuit de commande intégré pour fournir un courant à la charge inductive à coupler entre la sortie (16) et la source de potentiel de masse, des premier et second conducteurs de source de tension d'alimentation (26,28), ledit premier conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation étant adapté pour recevoir le potentiel de fonctionnement, ledit second conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation étant adapté

pour recevoir ledit potentiel de masse; et incluant des circuits (30,32,34,40) couplés entre ledit second conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation et la sortie du circuit de commande intégré pour fournir à la fois une voie de conduction de courant en direct jusqu'à la charge inductive chaque fois que lesdits circuits sont rendus actifs en réponse à la mise à l'état bloqué du transistor par le potentiel de fonctionnement déconnecté dudit premier conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation alors que le transistor de passage en série excite la charge inductive et interdit ladite voie de conduction de courant en direct pendant des conditions normales de fonctionnement des circuits, lesdits circuits étant caractérisés en outre en ce qu'ils incluent:

un circuit redresseur au silicium (30) ayant des première et seconde électrodes couplées entre ledit second conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation (28) et la sortie (16) du circuit de commande intégré, et une électrode de commande (G), le redresseur au silicium comprenant un premier transistor (36) formé dans le circuit de commande intégré comportant les première et seconde électrodes et l'électrode de commande, ladite première électrode étant connectée à la sortie (16), un second transistor (38) formé dans le circuit de commande intégré comportant les première et seconde électrodes et l'électrode de commande, lesdites première et seconde électrodes étant couplées audit second conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation (28) et à ladite électrode de commande dudit premier transistor respectivement, ladite électrode de commande étant connectée à ladite seconde électrode dudit premier transistor; et

une diode de Zener (32) couplée entre ledit second conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation et ladite électrode de commande dudit redresseur au silicium, ladite diode de Zener (32) étant connectée entre ladite électrode de commande dudit second transistor et ladite électrode de commande dudit premier transistor.

2. Circuit de commande intégré selon la revendication 1, incluant une diode supplémentaire (34) connectée entre une électrode de commande du transistor de passage en série (20) et la sortie (16) du circuit de commande.
3. Circuit de commande intégré selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 et 2, incluant une résistance (40) couplée entre le premier conducteur de source de tension d'alimentation (26) et ladite électrode de commande du



dit second transistor.

4. Circuit de commande intégré selon la revendication 2, dans lequel ladite diode supplémentaire (34) est une diode de Zener.

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