

PLUG CONNECTOR AND CONSTRUCTION THEREFOR

Background Of The Invention

The present invention relates generally to cable connectors, and more particularly to cable connector that mate with circuit board connectors that have a structure which eliminates the need for a shielding cage or guide frame to be utilized with a mating circuit board connector.

5 It is a common practice in the electronic arts to connect cables to a circuit board by terminating the cables to a connector, typically a plug connector, and then mating the connector to a receptacle connector that is mounted on a circuit board. A well-known problem with connecting cables to circuit board-mounted connectors is the tendency for the cable's weight and movement to loosen the points of attachment of the receptacle connector to the circuit board,
10 thereby breaking signal pathways and causing the circuit board to fail.

This may be prevented by the use of a large guide frame that is mounted to the circuit board to enclose the receptacle connector and which defines an opening into which a plug or similar connector may be inserted. However, such guide frames are large and take up valuable space on the circuit board that could be used for additional circuits or terminations.

15 Additionally, such guide frames are typically die cast and are prone to breakage when dropped.

Problems also arise when mating such plug connectors to their associated receptacle connectors in that in small, confined spaces, it is difficult to orient the plug for proper mating and in small spaces debris and contaminants may easily come into contact with the receptacle connector terminals.

20 Connector receptacle strain is also a problem and may be caused by the weight, size and movement of the cable(s). Still further, a connector plug and its mating connector receptacle can sometimes be misaligned with respect to each other, needlessly complicating an assembly process and in high-speed connectors, portions of terminals are usually exposed to the exterior of the connector housing, where the terminals may become contaminated. Accordingly, a plug
25 connector which includes means integrated therewith for aligning itself to mate with an opposing connector without occupying much space on a circuit board is desirable.

Accordingly, the present invention is directed to a plug connector that overcomes the aforementioned disadvantages and also provides the aforementioned desired benefits.

Summary Of The Invention

Accordingly, it is a general object of the present invention to provide a plug connector that is guided into engagement with an opposing connector by way of a guide member.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a plug connector that mates to a surface mount receptacle connector, the receptacle connector including a recess disposed along a bottom face thereof and the plug connector having a projecting flange that assists in aligning the plug connector with the receptacle connector and which fits into the receptacle connector recess.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a plug connector that mates to a surface mount receptacle connector, the receptacle connector including a recess disposed along a bottom face thereof and the plug connector having at least one projecting flange that assists in aligning the plug connector with the receptacle connector and which fits into the receptacle connector recess.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a plug connector for mating with the aforementioned receptacle connector, the plug connector including means for engaging a guide member which aligns and guides the plug connector into mating engagement with the receptacle connector, the plug connector having a mating projection that takes the form of a circuit card and the plug connector further including a pair of protective flanges that are spaced apart from the circuit card and which extend outwardly above and below the circuit card, the plug connector flanges covering opposing surfaces of the receptacle connector and protecting portions of terminals of the receptacle connector which are exposed, from contact by exterior materials, such as contaminants.

A still further object of the present invention is to provide a connector for mating with a receptacle connector mounted to a circuit board, the receptacle connector including a widthwise slot disposed therein, the receptacle connector slot including a plurality of conductive terminals that are supported in place therein by way of exterior slots that receive the terminals, the terminals extending into the slot of the receptacle connector, the connector including an edge card projecting therefrom and received in the slot when the two connectors are mated together, the connector further including a body with at least one flange extending therefrom over the circuit card, the flange extending over portions of at least one set of the terminals of the receptacle connector, the flange including an angled lead-in configuration for guiding the connector into alignment with the receptacle connector.

Yet another object of the present invention is to provide a plug connector of the structure

described above, wherein the plug connector includes a frame member, the frame member defining the mating face of the plug connector and having one or two protective flanges that extend from the mating face forwardly thereof, the frame member having an internal guide portion into which a circuit card is inserted and guided to a position where mating edges of the circuit card project through and past the mating face of the frame member, the frame member further including two side wall members that extend rearwardly of the mating face and define a termination area of the frame member, for exposed wires to be terminated to corresponding pads on the circuit card, the termination area and the wires being filed with a molded material to form a unitary plug connector housing.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a plug connector with a connector body, a circuit card projecting from a forward face of the connector body, one or more protective flanges projecting from the forward face and flanking the circuit card, the connector body including a slot formed thereon and the slot receiving a latch member that includes a base plate and an actuating plate that is folded upon the base plate and which is received in the slot, the latch member having one or more projections which engage corresponding openings in a guide positioned near a receptacle connector.

The present invention accomplishes these and other objects and aspects by virtue of its structure, which in one principle aspect includes a plug connector with a housing that is insertable into a guide member associated with the receptacle connector and it directs and aligns the plug connector plug with the receptacle connector.

The receptacle connector utilized with the present invention will usually have a body, with a card-receiving slot that extends width-wise of the connector body and conductive terminals are inserted into the connector body and contact portions thereof extend into the slot. The plug connector of the present invention include a circuit card, in their preferred embodiments as a mating blade and the circuit card projects from a forward face of the plug connector in order to extend into the slot of the receptacle connector. The receptacle connector may include a recess disposed on its underside, between mounting legs thereof and beneath the card-receiving slot. The plug connector preferably includes a lower, or first flange that extends forwardly from the forward face. This flange is received within the recess and so serves as a guide for properly mating the plug connector to the receptacle connector. The lower flange also preferably has a length sufficient so that it extends at least partly over some of the terminals exposed along a bottom surface of the receptacle connector and serves to protect them from

debris an contamination accumulation. The lower flange also preferably has a width that is less than that of the circuit card so the lower flange will not encounter any interference when entering the lower recess defined between the receptacle connector and the circuit board.

In another principal aspect of the present invention, the plug connector includes a housing with a defined mating face from which the circuit card and the first flange project. A second flange may be provided, and this second flange is spaced apart from the first flange and the circuit card so that the two flanges flank the circuit card. In the usual application of the invention, this second flange will serve as a top flange to the plug connector while the first flange will serve as a lower, or bottom, flange of the plug connector. The second flange also extends forwardly of the mating face and preferably has a length and width sufficient to cover the circuit card. This second flange initially serves as a primary guide to guide the plug connector into mating alignment with the receptacle connector and as such it may include angled lead-in edges that may contact the receptacle connector guide. As the plug connector is pushed further forwardly and the circuit card begins to contact the receptacle connector card-receiving slot, the second flange will cover portions of the exposed terminals on the upper surface of the receptacle connector.

In yet another principal aspect of the present invention, the plug connector body may include one or more features for effecting a secondary alignment between the plug connector and the receptacle connector. These features may take the form of projections, or lugs that are disposed on the outer side surfaces of the plug connector body. In the preferred embodiment, these lugs have a T-shape with the leg of each such T extending lengthwise or parallel to a longitudinal axis of the plug connector body and the top of each T extending transverse to the longitudinal axis of the plug connector body. These T-shaped lugs engage corresponding slots formed in the leading edges of the receptacle connector guide member and also serve as stop members that limit the forward travel of the plug connector into the guide member and receptacle connector.

In still another principal aspect of the present invention, the plug connector has a unique construction that utilizes a frame member that has a general U-shape. The frame member is preformed and has a forward face and two rearwardly extending sidewalls or wing portions that are spaced apart from each other and which define a termination nest therebetween. The forward face is preferably formed as a flat face, but it may be curved or specially configured or the like. The frame member has a slot that receives the opposing edges of the circuit card and the circuit card

may be formed with angled edges so that it may be pushed into the frame for a predetermined length. An opening is formed in the forward face so that a mating edge of the circuit card can project through it and past the forward face. The forward face also include the first and second flanges, or if desired, only the first flange formed therewith.

5 The cable wires are then stripped and the exposed ends may be soldered or otherwise attached to the termination end of the circuit board which is held between the two side walls. Once these wires are attached, the termination area may be filled with a moldable material such as a plastic to create a finished plug connector that has a unitary construction, but simple assembly.

10 These and other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will be clearly understood through a consideration of the following detailed description.

Brief Description Of The Drawings

The invention, together with its objects and the advantage thereof, may be best understood by reference to the following description taken in conjunction with the
15 accompanying drawings, in which like reference numerals identify like elements in the figures and in which:

FIG. 1 is an exploded perspective view of an electronics assembly that utilizes a connector guide member in association with a circuit board mounted receptacle connector to align a first embodiment of a plug connector constructed in accordance with the principles of the
20 present invention to the receptacle connector;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view taken from the rear of the receptacle connector and guide member of FIG. 1, illustrating the environment in which the first embodiment of the invention is utilized;

FIG. 3 is the same view shown in FIG. 2, but with the first embodiment plug connector
25 inserted into the guide member and engaged with both the receptacle connector and guide member;

FIG. 4 is an enlarged perspective view taken from the front of the plug connector of FIG. 1 spaced apart from the guide member;

FIG. 5 is an enlarged perspective view taken from the rear of the plug connector of FIG.
30 4 after the plug connector has been inserted into the guide member;

FIG. 6 is a sectional view of FIG. 5 taken along lines 6-6 thereof;

FIG. 7 is a perspective view of an alternate embodiment of a vertical guide member that is used in conjunction with a vertical, surface-mounted receptacle connector;

FIG. 8 is the same view as FIG. 7, but taken from the opposite side thereof;

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of a receptacle connector and associated shroud, or guide member with a second embodiment of a plug connector constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention spaced apart from and in alignment with the receptacle connector:

FIG. 10 is the same view as FIG. 9, but with the plug connector partially inserted into the shroud;

FIG. 11 is the same view as FIG. 10, but with the plug connector fully engaged in the shroud and in mating engagement with the receptacle connector;

FIG. 12 is a perspective view of the plug connector of FIG. 9, taken from the front thereof;

FIG. 13 is a sectional view of FIG. 9, taken generally along lines 13-13 thereof, but with the plug connector in place within the shroud and mated to the circuit board connector

FIG. 14 is a perspective view of a third embodiment of a plug connector constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 15 is a side view of the left side of the plug connector of FIG. 14;

FIG. 16 is a sectional view of the plug connector of FIG. 14, taken along lines 16-16 thereof;

FIG. 17 is the same view as FIG. 14, but with the cables removed for clarity and with the latch member shown removed and spaced away from its retaining frame on the plug connector housing;

FIG. 18 is a front elevational view of the plug connector of FIG. 14;

FIG. 19 is the same view as FIG. 16, but with the latch member removed for clarity; and,

FIG. 20 is a rear elevational view of the plug connector of FIG. 14.

FIG. 21 is an exploded view of the components that are used in one manner of making the plug connectors of the present invention;

FIG. 22 is an angled view of a premolded frame to make the plug connector of FIG. 21;

FIG. 23 is the same view as FIG. 22 illustrating the circuit card in place within the premolded frame and further illustrating the termination nest formed between the sidewalls of the frame.

Detailed Description Of The Preferred Embodiments

FIG. 1 illustrates an exploded view of an electronic assembly 2 used to exchange electrical signals between conductive traces 6 of a circuit board, or other substrate, 4 and electrical conductors in a cable 101. In FIG. 1, the electronic assembly 2 shown includes a circuit board 4 to which electronic components such as integrated circuits, resistors, capacitors inductors and the like can be mounted. As is well-known, electronic components mounted to circuit boards are interconnected by one or more electrically conductive traces 6, at least some of which are located on at least a surface of the substrate 4. Electrical signals may be transmitted through the conductive traces 6 by way of a receptacle connector 8 that is mounted to the substrate 4 and which mates with an opposing cable connector.

FIG. 1 shows the receptacle connector 8 attached to the circuit board 4 using either mounting posts, screws or soldered into place as shown, all of which are well-known in the art. The receptacle connector 8 has two opposing sides 10 and 12, a top 14, a bottom 15, a front 16 and a back 18. The receptacle connector 8 is constructed and arranged to maintain the spacing of several electrical front-side accessible contacts 20, each of which is electrically coupled to a corresponding conductive trace 6 on the circuit board 4.

Electrical and mechanical connection to the front-side 16 accessible contacts 20 in the receptacle connector 8 is made by extending a mating connector of the plug type 100 into contact with the receptacle connector 8. The plug connector 100 has its own set of conductive contacts that are preferably arranged along a mating blade and these contacts mate with the receptacle connector contacts 20. In such an assembly shown in FIGS. 1-6, the plug connector is at least partially guided into place by way of a guide member 24 associated with the receptacle connector 8, and this guide member 24 is preferably mounted to the circuit board 4 in a location that is forward of and spaced apart from the receptacle connector 8. In a preferred embodiment, the guide member 24 is has a general inverted U-shape and is formed as a hood or shield, that is attached to the circuit board 4 by suitable means, such as soldering. The guide member 24 defines a hollow channel 80 through which the plug connector 100 can extend and engage the mating receptacle connector 8.

As shown in FIGS. 1-3, the connector guide member 24 preferably includes at least two planar sides 26 and 28. One planar side 26 has a top edge 30 and a bottom edge 32 and the second side 28 also has a top edge 34 and a bottom edge 36. Each planar side 26 and 28 further includes a front edge and a back edge. The first side 26 has a front edge 38 and a back edge 42.

The second side 28 has a front edge 40 and a back edge 44. Two mounting posts 70 (FIG. 4) are preferably formed in the guide member along the bottoms of the sides and these posts may be cylindrical or may be stamped as part of the guide member itself. No matter what their structure, the posts 70 extend downwardly from the sides 26 and 28 and are received in mounting holes 25
5 formed in the circuit board 4. They may be used to solder the guide member in place on the circuit board 4.

As seen in FIGS. 3 & 4, the opposing first and second sides 26 and 28 of the guide member preferably have substantially equal heights 46 between the top and bottom edges and a substantially equal width 48 between the front and back edges of each side. As seen in FIG. 1,
10 the sides 26 and 28 are substantially upright and extend at generally right angles to the planar top 52. Although the preferred embodiment of the guide member 24 is stamped from a single piece of sheet metal, for purposes of this disclosure, the top 52 and the two sides 26 and 28 may also be joined to each other at common edges. The top 52 has a first side edge 54 shown at its right when viewed from the front as in FIG. 1 and a second side edge 56 shown at its left. The top 52
15 also has a front edge 58 and a rear edge 60.

Typically, the guide member 24 will be stamped and formed from a metal blank by which there is formed an extension of the guide member which takes the form of a tab or spring arm 64 that extends rearwardly. In the drawings, it is shown as extending in a cantilevered fashion, and, it is preferably formed at a slight downward angle that creates a bias or preload in
20 the arm 64. This bias forces a plug engagement portion, shown as ridge or catch 62, located near the distal end of the spring arm 64, into engagement with a corresponding slot or recess 102 that is formed in a corresponding portion of the plug connector.

FIG. 2 is a rear perspective view of the connector receptacle 8 and the relative position of the guide member 24, with respect to the connector plug 8. As shown in FIG. 2, the guide
25 member 24 is mounted to the circuit board 4 so that the guide member 24 is located in a spaced apart fashion from the connector receptacle, i.e., not in contact with it, and in front of the mating face 16 of the receptacle connector 8. FIG. 2 also shows the connective traces 6 on the circuit board 4 and their connection to the electrical contacts 20 of the receptacle connector 8. FIG. 2 also illustrates shows side locking latch or engagement tabs 53 that are formed in the side plates
30 28 by stamping. These engagement tabs 53 extend inwardly, i.e. into the interior of the channel 80 of the guide member 24 they are sized, shaped and arranged to frictionally contact the sidewalls 110 of the plug connector 100 when the plug 100 is inserted into the guide member 24

and engaged with the receptacle connector 8. As shown in FIG. 1, the plug connector may be provided with openings 57 in its sidewalls into which the guide member engagement tabs 55 catch.

FIG. 3 illustrates a rear perspective view of the electronic assembly of FIG. 1 and showing the circuit board 4, the rear 18 of the receptacle connector 8, the contacts 20 of which establish electrical connections between the board traces 6 and the plug connector wires 101 by way of the plug connector 100 that is installed and latched into place. In FIG. 3, the plug connector 100 of the present invention is shown extending through the guide member 24 until the spring arm catch 62 engages the slot 102 in the top of the plug connector 100. As shown in FIG. 3, this catch is located near the distal end, i.e. the end furthest from the point where the spring arm 64 extends away from the rear edge 60 of the top 52 of the guide member 24. This catch-slot engagement arrangement provides not only an audible engagement "click", but also a tactile click that an assembler can hear and feel when mating the plug connector 100 to the receptacle connector 8.

FIG. 4 shows a front perspective view of the guide member 24 and the relative location of a connector 100 prior to its insertion into the guide member 24. FIG. 4 omits the depiction of the circuit board 4 for clarity. The plug connector 100 is clearly shown to have a connector latch slot 102, cut, molded or otherwise formed in the body of the connector 100 and positioned to accept the catch 62 when the connector 100 is fully engaged with the receptacle connector. It can be seen that the plug connector includes a mating portion, which preferably takes the form of an edge card 120 with a leading edge that extends out from a forward mating face 121 of the plug connector 100.

The edge card 120 has a plurality of conductive traces 125 disposed along its leading edge which are intended to mate with the contacts 20 of the receptacle connector when the plug connector 100 is inserted into the receptacle connector 8. The plug connector housing may also include an extension portion 130 that extends forward from the mating face 121 and over the edge card 120. This extension portion 130 is illustrated as a first flange that also extends widthwise for at least the full width of the edge card 120, and preferably has a width greater than that of the edge card 120. This first flange serves to firstly protect the edge card 120 from stubbing and extends over a portion of the top of the receptacle connector 8 to cover portions of the exposed terminals supported therein. It also provides a support for the recess 102.

It can also be seen best in FIG. 4, that the plug connector flange has angled sides 131

which provide lead in surfaces so that the plug connector 100 may be easily guided into alignment with the receptacle connector by the guide member. The first flange has a length that preferably extends forwardly of the mating face 121 which is greater than the length which the edge card 120 projects from the mating face 121 in order to prevent the contacts on the edge card 120 from contacting the guide member 24 or anything other than the receptacle connector 8.

FIG. 4 also shows a side locking latch 55 formed in one side 28 of the guide member 24. In this embodiment, the side locking latch 55 is formed simply by stamping the metal from which the guide member 24 is formed such that a small tab is formed in the side that extends toward the opposite side 26 and which engages a corresponding side detent 57 formed into a corresponding side of the plug connector 100. When the plug connector 100 is fully engaged with the opposing receptacle connector, the side locking latch 55 (which preferably is formed on both sides 26, 28 of the guide member 24), will engage corresponding detents 57 and "latch" the plug connector 100 in engagement with the receptacle connector 8. The latching in this embodiment is accomplished by the guide member 24 and not the receptacle connector 8 so that strain on the assembly induced by the wires 101 is absorbed by the guide member 24 and not by the receptacle connector 8. In addition, any misalignment of the contacts in the plug connector 100 and the receptacle connector 8 is minimized by the plug-to-receptacle alignment function performed by this aspect of the guide member 24.

FIG. 5 is a rear perspective view of the connector 100, fully inserted into the guide member 24. In this figure, the guide member catch 62 is in interlocking engagement with the slot 102 in the connector 100. A deflection or "bias" in the spring arm 64 urges the catch 62 into the engagement slot 102 when the plug connector 100 is fully inserted into the guide member 24. Similarly, the side locking latch 55 (one shown on one side) because it is bent inwardly, may extend into the plug connector recesses 57 to preventing the plug connector 100 from being removed without any significant pull out force. When the plug connector 100 is so connected to the receptacle connector 8, the guide member also provides strain relief and conductor alignment.

FIG. 6 is a partial cutaway view of the connector 100 when installed into the connector alignment guide 24. In this figure, the interlocking engagement of the plug engagement latch 62 is clearly shown on the right-hand side of the drawing. It can be seen that the engagement latch 62, which is biased downwardly and into the connector slot 102, acts to keep the connector 100 within the alignment guide 24. Also shown in this figure are two mounting posts 70 that are

connected to the bottom edges 32 of the connector guide sides 26 and 28 and which are used to electrically and mechanically mount the alignment guide 24 to a circuit board or other substrate 4.

Although illustrated in FIGS. 1-6 as being disposed on the top of the plug connector 100, the flange 130 may also be oriented on the bottom of the plug connector mating face 121. In this orientation, the flange will still serve a protective function against stubbing and will also provide an alignment feature in that it will be received within the recess that is formed along the bottom of the receptacle connector 8 beneath the edge card-receiving slot of the receptacle connector 8.

FIGS. 7 & 8 illustrate another embodiment 200 of a plug connector constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention and which is intended for a vertical use on a circuit board. As shown in the Figures, the receptacle connector 201 is one that is surface-mounted in a vertical format to a circuit board 202. The connector 201 has an insulative housing 204 and supports a plurality of conductive terminals 206. The terminals 206 have tail portions 208 that are soldered to pads or traces on the surface of the circuit board 202. A conductive guide member 210 is provided for use with the connector 202 and it can be seen that the guide member 210 may have a general U-shape with a top plate 212 that has two side plates 213 that extend therefrom transversely. These three plates cooperatively define a channel 215 which extends partially around and above the receptacle connector 201. The top plate 212 of the guide member is slotted and has a recess 218 into which a catch member 220 extends. This catch member has a bend 221 formed in it that preferably engages a slot (not shown) on the plug connector housing 250 in the same manner as shown for the first embodiment.

In this embodiment, the plug connector 240 is for the most part merely oriented in a vertical direction and has an insulative housing 250 from which an edge card and a first flange extend. The first flange extends partially over the exposed terminals of the receptacle connector 201 and it has a slot that is intended to engage the catch member 220 of the vertical guide member.

FIG. 9 illustrates another electronic assembly in which another embodiment of a plug connector constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention the invention is illustrated. In this assembly a shroud (or guide member) 1100 is shown as having a top wall 1102 that interconnects two spaced-apart sidewalls 1104, 1105. The shroud 1100 has a general inverted U-shape, when viewed from an end, and is placed on a circuit board 1110 spaced apart from a receptacle connector 1150 that is mounted to the circuit board 1110. The receptacle

connector 1105 is similar in shape and form to the receptacle connector 8 described and shown in FIGS. 1-6 above and includes an opening or recess along its bottom face underneath its card-receiving slot and beneath the bottom surface of the receptacle connector 1105. The slot receives the leading edge of the circuit card that is used in the plug connector 1200 as the blade portion thereof. The shroud 1100 provides a hollow channel 1106 that may guide the plug connector 1200 into engagement with the circuit board connector 1150.

The shroud 1100 also serves to retain the plug connector 1200 in place after mating. In this regard, the shroud 1100 includes an elongated extension 1117 that extends forwardly of the top wall 1102 of the shroud and it may further preferably include one or more alignment slots 1135 that are disposed in the sidewalls 1104, 1105 of the shroud 1100 and which extend longitudinally forwardly, the purpose of which shall be explained in more detail below. Additional means 1119 for guiding the plug connector 1200 may also be provided on the shroud 1100, and may take the form of tabs 1118 that are bent inwardly and extend for a predetermined distance from the sidewalls 1104, 1105.

The plug connector 1200, as best illustrated in FIGS. 1, 3 & 5, has a generally polygonal structure, and is shown in the drawings as generally a solid rectangle with a top surface 1202, two side walls 1204, 1205, a bottom surface 1206 and a rear surface 1208. Cables will usually exit from the rear surface 1208, but they have been omitted from the drawings for clarity. The front end 1210 of the connector defines a mating end of the plug connector 1200 and in applications such as shown in FIGS. 9-13, the plug connector 1200 preferably includes a forward mating face 1211 includes a forwardly projecting mating blade 1212, typically in the form of a leading edge of a circuit card 1214. The top surface 1202 (and in the drawings, bottom surface 1206) may have an extension 1215 in the form of a first flange that extends forwardly from the forward face 1211, and which is located above and spaced apart from the circuit card 1212. Another extension is also preferably present in this embodiment, and as shown best in FIGS. 12 & 13, this extension takes the form of a second flange 1216 that likewise extends forwardly from the forward face 1211 and which is located below and spaced apart from the circuit card 1214 and the first flange 1215. In this type of arrangement, the two flanges 1215, 1216 may be considered as "flanking" the circuit card 1212.

The shroud press tab 1117 is bent downwardly to impart a slight bias to it so that it will slidably or abuttingly contact the top surface 1202 of the mating connector 1200, and in particular, the top extension 1215 thereof. This type of engagement is shown best in FIG. 13,

and the top flange 1214 may be provided with a transverse slot or recess 1214, that is spaced a specific distance from the leading end of the top flange 1215 so that it will engage the detent portion of the shroud press tab 1117. This engagement serves to assist in retention of the plug connector 1200 in mating engagement with the receptacle connector 1150 and also assist the operator in knowing the engagement between the two connectors 1200, 1150 is complete. The press tab 1117 with its downward bias will "click" into the recess 1214 in both an audible and tactile manner so the operator will not only feel the engagement, but also "hear" the engagement.

The shroud 100 may further include one or more slots or recesses 1130 disposed in its top wall 102 that are engaged by means such as lugs, 1220 that are preferably formed on the plug connector 200 as part of a latching mechanism. These lugs 220 may be moved in and out of engagement with the slots 1130 by means of a push-type button 1225, shown as formed from an extent of sheet metal that is bent upon itself along a line to form distinct base or anchor and actuating portions, as explained in greater detail below..

As mentioned above, the shroud 1100 may also include a pair of alignment slots 1135 that are formed in the shroud sidewalls 1104, 1105 and preferably along the outwardly facing edges thereof. These notches 1135 engage corresponding structure, shown as lugs 1226 that are formed on the exterior of the plug connector housing 1200. These lugs 1226 have an overall T-shape when viewed from the side, with a center leg 1227 that is received within the corresponding shroud alignment slot 1135 and two other legs that form a base 1228 that is perpendicular to the center leg 1227. The base 1228 serves as a stop when it abuts the edge of the sidewalls 1104, 1105. With the present invention, the tabs 1118 of the shroud 100 are received in notches 1207 that extend lengthwise along the plug connector exterior and these tabs 1118 and notches 1207 serve to first orient and position the plug connector 1200 in the interior of the shroud 1100, and the notches 1135 and lugs 1226 cooperate to secondly orient the circuit card 1212 of the plug connector 1200 in opposition to card-receiving slot of the receptacle connector 1150.

FIGS. 14-19 illustrate another embodiment of a plug connector 300 constructed in accordance with the principles of the present invention. In FIG. 14, the plug connector 300 includes an insulative housing 301 with a forward mating face 302 from which a projecting mating blade 304 extends and which is shown in this and the other embodiments as a circuit card 305. The circuit card has a forward leading edge 306 which may be angled or chamfered as shown to facilitate its entry into a corresponding slot of an opposing receptacle connector of the

type described and shown at reference numerals 8 and 1150 above. The plug connector 300 includes first and second (or top and bottom) flanges 310, 312 that extend forwardly from the plug connector body portion 309 and specifically from the forward face 302.

As shown in FIG. 15, the top and bottom flanges 310, 312, each preferably extend past the leading edge 306 of the circuit card 305, a preselected distance **D** so as to provide protection to the circuit card leading edge 306 against stubbing and accidental shorting. The top flange 310 is preferably angled along its side edges 316 and these angled edges provide a measure of “lead-in” to the flange 310 and the plug connector 300 when inserted into either a guide member, receptacle connector or both. As shown best in FIG. 18, the top flange 310 preferably has a width that is greater than the width of the circuit card 305, but that the bottom flange 312 has a width that is preferably less than the width of the circuit card 305. This is so the bottom flange 310 may easily fit into the receiving space that is along the bottom surface of the receptacle connectors intended for use with the plug connectors of the present invention. With this distance differential, it is less likely that the bottom flange 310 will collide with the legs of the opposing receptacle connector. The circuit card 305 is disposed between these two flanges 310, 312 and each flange shall provide a measure of protection to the circuit card 305 whether it is oriented horizontally or vertically.

This embodiment 300 also includes a latch mechanism 325 that includes a frame member 326 that is preferably formed as part of the connector body portion 309. This frame member 326 defines a slot 327 which receives a latch member 328. The latch member 328 is best shown in FIGS. 16 & 17 and may be formed from a single piece of metal that is folded upon itself along a forward edge 329 thereof. This folding divides the piece into two portions, the first being a generally planar base, or anchor portion 330, and a contoured actuating portion 331. The base portions has one or more interference projections 332 that are formed along the side edges 333 and which embed themselves or “skive” into the interior sidewalls 340 of the frame member slot 327 in order to primarily retain the latch member 328 in place on the plug connector 300.

One or more upturned latch tabs 346 are formed in the latch member 328 and these tabs 346 engage corresponding openings or recesses formed in the guide member as shown best in FIG. 11. The actuating portion 331 is bent at a slight upward angle so that it may flex within the constraints of the frame member 326. In this regard, the slot 327 includes, as shown best in FIG. 19, interior grooves, or channels 340 that receives the side edges 333 and skiving projections 332 of the latch member 328. The base portion 330 is slightly larger than the actuating portion

331 so that it will create an interference fit within the frame member and so the actuating portion will easily flex up or down in place within the frame member 326. In order to capture the actuating portion 331, the rear end 335 thereof may include one or more tabs 336 that project out to the side and these tabs are captured in their possible vertical movement (up and down) by shoulders 329 that are formed along the interior surfaces 340 of the slot 327. The area beneath the shoulders 329 is recessed as at 341 to permit the tabs 336 to fit and deflect when the button portion 326 of the actuating portions 331 is pressed down.

The forward end 345 of the frame member 326 may be formed as a solid abutment on the top surface of the plug connector body portion and it may also have angled side edges 346. This forward end 345 can thus serve as another keying feature in addition to the body portions notches 1207 and the top and bottom flanges previously described. In order to effect such a keying function, the guide member may include a channel that will guide and accommodate the frame member forward end 345. The top flange 310 may also be provided with a transverse recess 311 that is spaced away from the front edge of the top flange 310. This recess receives the corresponding detent of a guide member press tab as described earlier.

In this embodiment, the circuit card alignment means 350 takes a slightly different form. This alignment means includes the projecting lugs 351 that extend outwardly from the side surfaces of the plug connector body portion 309, but instead of the lugs being single projections, the rear portion of the connector body portion 309a has an increased width so that two stop surfaces 352 are defined on each side of the lug 351. The overall T-shape remains the same, but the lugs/stop are made stronger against shearing forces in that the stop surfaces are cut into the plug connector. In this regard, the area forward of the lugs 351 may be considered as being recesses with respect to the enlarged rear 209a of the connector body portion.

FIGS. 21-23 illustrate one manner of making the plug connectors of the present invention. As illustrated in FIG. 21, the plug connector 400 utilizes a pre-molded frame 402 that includes a forward wall 403, two side walls 404, 405 and the top and bottom flanges 406, 407. The forward wall 403 has a transverse slot 408 formed in it, and this transverse slot 408 may communicate with two other slots, or channels 409, 410, each of which are formed in the sidewalls 404, 405 of the frame 402. These channels 409, 410 may be tapered in their extent along the sidewalls 404, 405 and through the forward wall 403, or they may also include an interior shoulder 412 (FIG. 22) that serves as a stop for the circuit card 450. The circuit card 450 has a leading edge 451 and a trailing edge 452 and a plurality of conductive element, such as

contact pads, or traces 453, disposed on the top and bottom surfaces 455, 456 thereof. The sides of the circuit card 450 are also preferably tapered and may include exterior shoulders 459 that will engage the interior shoulders 412 of the frame 402. These shoulders serve as stops for the introduction of the circuit card 450 into the frame 402.

5 The circuit card 450 is inserted into the channels 409, 410 and pushed through the forward wall slot 408 until the two opposing shoulders 412, 459 contact each other and the circuit card reaches its preferred extent as shown in FIG. 23. The open area above and below the circuit card 450 and between the sidewalls 409, 410 define a pair of open, interior termination nests 460, 461. In this area, exposed ends of the cable wires 101 are terminated to the rearmost
10 contact pads 453 that are present in the termination nests 460, 461.

 Subsequent to the termination, the open area of nests 460, 461 between the sidewalls 404, 405 of the frame 402 may be completed. This may be done by pre-forming a body portion 470 that slides onto the frame 402 and is subsequently permanently attached such as by heat or ultrasonic welding. Or in the preferred embodiment, the body portion 470 is formed by molding
15 it in place by the “overmolding” process, wherein the assembly of the frame member 402, circuit card 450 and terminated wires 101 are placed in a mold cavity and the body portion 470 is formed by a thermoplastic or the like material under pressure. The body portion 470 may have a width that equals that of the frame member 402 so that the T-shaped alignment lug 480 is formed as a projection, as shown in FIGS. 9-13. Likewise, the body portion 470 may have a
20 width that is greater than the frame member 402 so that the alignment lug 480 takes the form of the style shown in FIGS. 14-19. The latch member 328 is inserted after the body portion is assembled or formed.

CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A plug connector for connecting wires to a mating connector, comprising: a connector housing, the connector housing including an insulative body portion, the connector housing body portion including a forward face;
a circuit card, the circuit card including a leading edge with contacts for mating
5 with the mating connector and a trailing edge with contacts for termination to a plurality of wires, said circuit card being disposed in said connector housing such that the circuit card leading edge extends forwardly of the connector body portion forward face for a preselected length and the circuit card trailing edge being disposed within said connector housing;
10 a plurality of wires terminated to the circuit card trailing edge contacts;
said connector housing body portion including a first flange extending a first preselected distance from said connector housing body portion and spaced apart from said circuit card, and a second flange extending a second preselected distance from said connector housing body portion and spaced apart from said circuit card; and,
15 said connector housing body portion including a front wall and two side walls, the front wall defining said connector housing body portion forward face and the two side walls defining a hollow termination nest between themselves and rearwardly of said front wall, said circuit card trailing edge being disposed in the termination nest and said wires being terminated to said circuit card trailing edge contacts in said termination
20 nest.
2. The plug connector of claim 1, wherein said connector housing body portion is partially overmolded to fill said termination nest with a moldable insulative material and enclose said wire terminations in the moldable material.
3. The plug connector of claim 1, wherein said connector housing body portion includes a longitudinal slot that receives at least one side edge of said circuit card and said connector housing body portion includes a transverse slot through which said circuit card extends to expose said circuit card leading edge forwardly of said connector housing

- 5 body portion forward face.
4. The plug connector of claim 1, wherein said second flange extends a second preselected distance from said connector housing body portion forward face and is spaced apart from said the first flange, said first and second flanges flanking said circuit card.
 5. The plug connector of claim 4, wherein said first flange first preselected distance is greater than said second flange second preselected distance.
 6. The plug connector of claim 1, wherein said circuit card leading edge and first and second flanges all have respective widths, the width of said circuit card leading edge being less than the width of said first flange but greater than the width of said second flange.
 7. The plug connector of claim 1, wherein said first flange includes an angled lead-in configuration along side edges thereof.
 8. The plug connector of claim 1, wherein said connector housing body portion includes means for registering it with an guide member associated with a mating connector, the registration means including a T-shaped projection.
 9. The plug connector of claim 8, wherein each of said connector housing body portion two sidewalls includes a T-shaped projection disposed on an outer surface thereof.
 10. The plug connector of claim 3, wherein said connector housing body portion includes at least one stop member and said circuit card includes at least one card-locating shoulder formed therein, the stop member contacting the circuit card to locate said circuit card in place within said connector housing.
 11. The plug connector of claim 10, wherein said connector housing body portion includes a pair of stop members and said circuit card includes a pair of card-locating shoulders, the card-locating shoulders being disposed along two opposing side edges of said circuit card, said stop members limiting the distance said circuit card projects through said

- 5 transverse slot.
12. The plug connector of claim 2, wherein said circuit card has a notch formed therein that permits the flow on moldable material to areas of said termination nest on opposite sides of said circuit card.
13. The plug connector of claim 1, further including a pre-formed cover portion that fits over and closes off said termination nest.