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DEVICE FOR IDENTIFYING AN INK RIBBON CARTRIDGE USED IN A PRINTER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to a printing apparatus in which an ink ribbon cartridge is detachably mounted, and more specifically to a device for identifying the ink ribbon cartridge used in the printing apparatus.

10 An ink ribbon cartridge for use in a thermal printer is well known in the art. The ink ribbon cartridge includes a casing and at least one spool having an ink ribbon thereon. There are provided various kinds of ink ribbons with different characteristics, which are
15 selectively used depending upon a printing operation mode such as multicolor or monochrome printing, a sort of a recording medium or else. Therefore, the ink ribbon cartridge now mounted is to be replaced with another one having a desired ink ribbon, if necessary. An
20 information mark indicating the characteristic of the ink ribbon mounted is detected by a sensor disposed within the printer so that the printing operation is controllably performed on the basis of the detected information mark. Conventionally, the information mark
25 is recorded on the casing of the ink ribbon cartridge in such a manner as embossing or optical marking. One of example of the ink ribbon cartridge with such an information mark is disclosed in Japanese Patent Application First Publication No. 63-254085.

30 However, many sensors must be provided for detecting many information marks and thereby the printer necessitates a relatively large space in which the sensors are accommodated. Japanese Patent Application First Publication No. 2-20368 discloses an ink ribbon cartridge including a spool with an information mark

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which indicates specific characteristic of the ink ribbon. The information mark is provided on a peripheral surface of the spool. The spool rotates to feed the ink ribbon wound thereon so that the information mark on the spool is detected by the sensors fixedly mounted in the printer. A printing operation starts subsequent to the detection of the information mark. In addition, Japanese Patent Application First Publication No. 1-85787 discloses an ink ribbon cartridge including a spool with a timing mark which serves for detecting the number of rotation of the spool. A remaining amount of the ink ribbon unused is ascertained on the basis of the detected number of rotation of the spool.

However, since the ink ribbon is derived from the spool for detection of the information mark prior to start of the printing operation, the derived ink ribbon is unavailable for the printing operation to thereby cause an undesirably wasted ink ribbon unless the ink ribbon is wound back on the spool. If many information marks on the spool should be detected, the number of rotation of the spool increases so that an amount of the wasted ink ribbon increases. In a case where a device for reversing the spool is provided for preventing the waste of the ink ribbon, the printer is complicated in the structure. Further, in such a case, the derived ink ribbon in unused state tends to be damaged during reversing operation.

An object of the present invention is to provide a device for identifying an ink ribbon cartridge without rotating a spool.

Another object of the present invention is to provide a printing apparatus capable of detecting information marks recorded on an ink ribbon cartridge without complicating its structure.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION



According to the present invention, there is provided a device for identifying an ink ribbon cartridge used in a printing apparatus, comprising:

a spool rotatably disposed in the ink ribbon
5 cartridge and having an ink ribbon wound thereabout;

a ring mounted on the spool so as to be rotatable relative thereto and having an information mark recorded thereon;

means for driving the ring on the spool; and
10 sensor means for detecting the information mark recorded on the ring, the sensor means being disposed in the printing apparatus in opposite relation to the ring.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a plan view, partially broken away,
15 of an ink ribbon cartridge of a preferred embodiment according to the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a fragmentary perspective view of the ink ribbon cartridge which includes a spool and a ring to be mounted on the spool;

20 Fig. 3 shows a plan view of the spool on the right hand and a longitudinal sectional view thereof on the left hand;

Fig. 4 is a side view of the spool shown in Fig. 3;

25 Fig. 5 is a schematic side view of the ink ribbon cartridge installed in a printing apparatus;

Fig. 6 is a schematic side view of the ink ribbon cartridge installed in the printing apparatus, which the ring is caused to rotate for detection of
30 information marks recorded thereon prior to a printing operation;

Fig. 7 is a schematic side view of the ink ribbon cartridge installed in the printing apparatus, which is in the printing operation; and

Fig. 8 is a fragmentary perspective view of an



ink ribbon cartridge of another embodiment according to the present invention, which employs a one-way clutch provided on the spool and ring.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

5 Referring now to the drawings, there is shown an ink ribbon cartridge of a preferred embodiment according to the present invention, which is detachably mounted in a printing apparatus. As shown in Fig. 1, the ink ribbon cartridge 1 includes upper and lower casings 3
10 and 4 which are made of synthetic resin. The lower and upper casings 3 and 4 are assembled to form a unitary casing 2 which is of a substantially dumbbell shape in section as shown in Fig. 5. The casing 2 accommodates a supply spool 20 and a take-up spool 40 which are made of
15 synthetic resin. The supply and take-up spools 20 and 40 are disposed in parallel and rotatably supported in the casing 2. As best seen in Figs. 2 and 3, the supply spool 20 has a cylindrical body 21 which is formed at one end thereof with a flange 22. The flange 22 has a larger
20 outer diameter than that of the cylindrical body 21 and is provided with an annular ridge 22a. At the other end of the cylindrical body 21, there are formed a small diameter portion 23 and a nipple 24 projected outwardly from a center of an outer end face of the small diameter
25 portion 23. The supply spool 20 is rotatably supported at the nipple 24 and the flange 22 on bearing portions 5, 5 which are formed at opposite ends of the casing 2, as seen in Fig. 1. The supply spool 20 is urged against one of the bearing portion 5 by a compression spring 7 which
30 is mounted around the nipple 24 at the other bearing portion 5. The take-up spool 40 is of substantially same configuration as the supply spool 20 and has a cylindrical body which is formed with a flange 42 and a nipple 44 with or without a small diameter portion. The take-up spool 40 is rotatably supported at the flange 42





and the nipple 44 on bearing portions 6, 6 which are formed at opposite ends of the casing 2, as seen in Fig. 1. The take-up spool 40 is urged against one of the bearing portion 6 by a compression spring 8 which is
5 mounted around the nipple 44 at the other bearing portion 6. An ink ribbon 11 is wound about the supply spool 20 and connected with the take-up spool 40 at one end thereof. The ink ribbon 11 includes a substrate and a color layer applied onto the substrate. The color layer
10 includes thermal-sublimatable colors, for instance, yellow, magenta and cyan colors, which are arranged in a predetermined sequence (not shown). As seen in Fig. 1, the color layer of the ink ribbon 11 is exposed through a rectangular opening formed on a middle portion of the
15 upper casing 4.

As best shown in Fig. 2, rotatably fitted onto the small diameter portion 23 is a ring 30 of synthetic resin which has an outer diameter substantially same as that of the cylindrical body 21 of the spool 20. The
20 ring 30 includes an annular body 31 and a disc-shaped gear 32 formed integrally with the annular body 31. A portion of the annular body 31 and the disc-shaped gear 32 is exposed through an aperture 9 which is formed on a right circular portion of the casing 2 as viewed in Fig.
25 5. The disc-shaped gear 32 has a center hole and a pair of lugs 33, 33 projecting inwardly from a peripheral portion around the center hole in opposed relation to each other so as to form the center hole of an approximate "Z" shape as best shown in Fig. 4. The ring
30 30 is mounted on the supply spool 20 in such a manner that the center hole of the disc-shaped gear 32 is fitted into an annular groove 25 formed on the inner side of the nipple 24 of the supply spool 21. As seen in Figs. 3 and 4, the lugs 33, 33 are designed so as to elastically deform sufficiently to engage the annular groove 25 of



the nipple 24. The ring 30 is allowed to rotate together with the supply spool 20 due to the engagement of the lugs 33, 33 with the annular groove 25 of the nipple 24, unless any external force is exerted thereon.

5 As best seen in Fig. 2, the annular body 31 of the ring 30 has information marks 34 and 35 which are recorded on a circumferential outer surface of the annular body 31 in the form of bar code. The information marks 34 and 35 indicate a variety of informations such
10 as the number of rotation of the ring 30 and characteristics of the ink ribbon 11, for example, sort, size and sensitivity of the ink ribbon 11. A film with the information marks 34 and 35 may be applied onto the annular body 31 of the ring 30.

15 Referring to Figs. 5 to 7, there is shown the aforementioned ink ribbon cartridge 1 installed in a thermal printing apparatus. The printing apparatus includes a housing (not shown) and a head support arm 51 disposed in the housing as seen in the drawings. The
20 head support arm 51 is fixedly supported on a rotational axis 52 and provided with a thermal head 50 at one end thereof remote from the other end connected with the axis 52. A sectorial gear 53 is also fixedly supported on the axis 52 to thereby be rotatable together with the head
25 support arm 51 in same direction as that of rotation of the head support arm 51, when the axis 52 is rotated. Upon rotation, the sectorial gear 53 meshes with the disc-shaped gear 32 of the ring 30 mounted on the supply spool 20. The meshing of the sectorial gear 53 with the
30 disc-shaped gear 32 allows the ring 30 to rotate on the annular groove 25 of the nipple 24 of the supply spool 20.

As shown in Figs. 5 to 7, the thermal printing apparatus includes a platen roller 54 adjacent which the ink ribbon cartridge 1 is located. Disposed on the right



side of the ink ribbon cartridge 1 as viewed in the drawings, are a pair of photo-sensors 55 one of which is shown in the drawings. The photo-sensors 55 are opposed to the information marks 34 and 35 on the ring 30 through the aperture 9 of the casing 2. The photo-sensors 55 detect the information marks 34 and 35 while the ring 30 is allowed to rotate by meshing with the disc-shaped gear 32.

When the supply spool 20 and the take-up spool 40 are not operated prior to start of a printing operation of the thermal printing apparatus, the head support arm 51 is located in a substantially upright position where the thermal head 50 is remote from the ink ribbon cartridge 1 as shown in Fig. 5. The head support arm 51 rotates in association with the rotation of the axis 52, in the counterclockwise direction as indicated by the arrow A in Fig. 6. At that time, the thermal head 50 advances toward the ink ribbon cartridge 1 immediately before it contacts the ink ribbon 11. Associated with the counterclockwise rotation of the head support arm 51, the sectorial gear 53 is caused to rotate in the counterclockwise direction as indicated by the arrow B in Fig. 6, while meshing with the disc-shaped gear 32 of the ring 30. Owing to the meshing of the sectorial gear 53 with the disc-shaped gear 32, the ring 30 is forced to rotate about the nipple 24 of the supply spool 20 in the clockwise direction as indicated by the arrow C in Fig. 6. The clockwise rotation force applied to the ring 30 through the disc-shaped gear 32 is sufficiently large rather than the engaging force of the lugs 33, 33 of the ring 30 with the nipple 24. During the clockwise rotation of the ring 30, the information marks 34 and 35 on the ring 30 are detected by the photo-sensors 55, respectively.

Subsequently, the head support arm 51 further



rotates in the counterclockwise direction to urge the thermal head 50 against the platen roller 54 through the color layer of the ink ribbon 11. The arcuate gear 53 further rotates in the counterclockwise direction together with the head support arm 51 and disengages from the disc-shaped gear 32 of the ring 30. Simultaneously, the supply spool 20 and the take-up spool 40 are operated to rotate in the counterclockwise direction as shown in Fig. 7. The ink ribbon 11 is transported from the supply spool 20 to the take-up spool 40 in a direction as indicated by the arrow D in Fig. 7. Since the disc-shaped gear 32 is disengaged from the sectorial gear 53, the ring 30 is again allowed to rotate on the groove 25 of the nipple 24 together with the supply spool 20 in the counterclockwise direction as indicated by the arrow E.

Referring to Fig. 8, there is shown another preferred embodiment of the ink ribbon cartridge according to the present invention. In the drawing, like numerals indicate like parts of the ink ribbon cartridge of the above described first embodiment and therefore detailed explanations thereof are omitted hereinafter. This embodiment is substantially same as the first embodiment except that the supply spool 20 has a clutch gear 100 while the ring 30 rotatably mounted on the supply spool 20 has a pawl 106 engageable with the clutch gear 100. The clutch gear 100 is integrally formed on the cylindrical body 21 adjacent the small diameter portion 23 of the supply spool 20. The pawl 106 is integrally formed on a peripheral inner end of the annular body 31 of the ring 30 so as to extend radially inwardly therefrom. A counterclockwise rotation of the ring 30 relative to the supply spool 20 is restricted due to meshing of the pawl 106 with the clutch gear 100 while a clockwise rotation of the ring 30 relative thereto is allowed. Thus, the clutch gear 100 and the pawl 106

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cooperate with each other to act as a one-way clutch or ratchet gear which restricts reverse rotation of the ring 30.

As is apparent from the above description, upon
5 detecting the information marks on the ring mounted on the supply spool, the ink ribbon is prevented from undesirable waste caused due to derivation from the supply spool prior to start of the printing operation.

The ink ribbon cartridge may be of a single
10 spool type which includes one spool used as not a take-up spool but a supply spool. Further, the disc-shaped gear of the ring may be replaced with a pulley made of frictional material such as rubber.



WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A device for identifying an ink ribbon cartridge (1) used in a printing apparatus, comprising:

5 a spool (20) rotatably disposed in the ink
05 ribbon cartridge (1) and having an ink ribbon (11) wound thereabout;

a ring (30) mounted on said spool so as to be rotatable relative thereto and having an information mark (34, 35) recorded thereon;

10 means (52,53) for driving said ring on said spool; and

sensor means (55) for detecting said information mark recorded on said ring, said sensor means being disposed in the printing apparatus in opposite relation
15 to said ring.

2. The device as claimed in claim 1, wherein said information mark (34, 35) indicates information about characteristics of said ink ribbon (11).

3. The device as claimed in claim 1, wherein said
20 information mark (34, 35) indicates information about rotation number of said ring (30).

4. The device as claimed in claim 1, wherein said ring (30) and said ring driving means include gears (32, 53) which are meshed with each other.

5. A detecting device as claimed in claim 1,
25 wherein said ring (30) and said ring driving means include friction members which are contacted with each other.

6. A detecting device as claimed in claim 1,
30 wherein said ring (30) is disposed in a concentrical relation to said spool (20) and has an outer diameter substantially same as that of said spool.

7. A detecting device as claimed in claim 1,
35 further comprising one-way clutch means (100, 106) for permitting said ring (30) to rotate in one direction but





preventing said ring from rotating in the reverse direction, said one-way clutch means including engaging members disposed on said spool and said ring, respectively.

05 8. A detecting device as claimed in claim 1, wherein said information mark (34, 35) is represented in the form of bar code.

9. A printing apparatus comprising:

a housing;

10 a printing head (50) disposed in said housing;

a platen roller (54) opposed to said printing head;

an ink ribbon cartridge (1) installed in said housing, said ink ribbon cartridge comprising:

15 a casing (3, 4);

a supply spool (20) rotatably disposed within said casing;

20 an ink ribbon (11) wound on said supply spool and urged by said printing head against a recording medium placed on said platen roller, said ink ribbon including a substrate film and a color layer formed thereon, and

25 a ring (130) rotatably mounted on said supply spool (20) so as to be rotatable relative thereto and having an information mark (34, 35) recorded thereon;

means (52, 53) for driving said printing head, said head driving means being rotatably disposed in said housing;

30 means (32) for driving said ring of said ink ribbon cartridge, said ring driving means being operatively connected with said head driving means to rotate in same direction together therewith; and

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sensor means (55) for detecting said information mark on said ring, said sensor means being disposed in said housing.

10. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
05 wherein said information mark (34, 35) indicates information about characteristics of said ink ribbon (11).

11. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
10 wherein said information mark (34, 35) indicates information about rotation number of said ring (30).

12. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
wherein said ring (30) and said ring driving means (32, 53) include gears which are meshed with each other.

13. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
15 wherein said ring (30) and said ring driving means include friction members which are contacted with each other.

14. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
20 wherein said ring (30) is disposed in a concentrical relation to said supply spool (20) and has an outer diameter substantially same as that of said supply spool.

15. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9,
25 further comprising one-way clutch means (100, 106) for permitting said ring (30) to rotate in one direction but preventing said ring from rotating in the reverse direction, said one-way clutch means including engaging members disposed on said supply spool and said ring, respectively.

30 16. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9, wherein said information mark (34, 35) is represented in the form of bar code.





17. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9, further comprising a take-up spool (40) for taking up said ink ribbon (11) which is derived from said supply spool (20).

- 05 18. A printing apparatus as claimed in claim 9, wherein said casing (3, 4) of said ink ribbon cartridge (1) is formed with an opening (9) through which said information mark is detected.

