

INVENTION TITLE

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR IMPLEMENTING SOFT SWITCHING IN A CLASS D AMPLIFIER

DESCRIPTION

Heading

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

[Para 1] This application claims priority of U.S. Provisional Application No. 60/704,241 filed on July 28, 2005, entitled "Method and Apparatus for Implementing Soft Switching in a Class D Amplifier "; and a Continuation-In-Part of U.S. Application No. 10/908,063 filed on April 26, 2005, entitled "Method and Apparatus for Reducing Ripple in Class D Amplifiers", specifications of which are herein incorporated by reference.

Heading

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[Para 2] The present invention relates to Class D amplifiers. More specifically, it relates to reduction of switching losses in Class D amplifier circuits.

Heading

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[Para 3] High quality audio power amplifiers are traditionally large, heavy, and inefficient. Typically these equipments are capable of high power audio output with very low total harmonic distortion (THD). However, these equipments achieve only approximately 25% efficiency under normal audio operating conditions because they typically use inefficient linear or quasi-linear amplifiers (e.g. Class A, B, G, and H).

[Para 4] In recent years, the demand for more efficient audio power amplifiers has increased. Thus the shift from Class B to Class D amplifiers for sound reproduction.

[Para 5] Class D amplifiers provide high efficiency, but typically have limited bandwidths, resulting in high THD at high audio frequencies.

[Para 6] A Class D amplifier is basically a switch-mode power supply modified to operate in four quadrants at high frequencies (e.g. audio frequencies). A switch-mode power supply uses pulse-width modulation (PWM) to control the ON/OFF duty cycle of power switching transistor(s) that provide power to a load. The efficiency is high because the switches are not operated in their linear region.

[Para 7] Figure 1 is an illustration of a simplified Class D topology. As illustrated, a comparator circuit (not shown) inside the Pulse-Width Modulator 110 compares the amplitude of incoming analog audio signal 101 to the amplitude of a reference triangular waveform operating at an intended switching frequency. The comparator circuit switches its output high or low by comparing the incoming audio's amplitude against the amplitude of the triangular waveform. When audio signal 101 is above the amplitude of the triangular waveform, the comparator switches output D+ of the PWM 110 to the ON state. Output D+ remains ON for the duration of time while the input audio signal exceeds the amplitude of the triangular waveform. Conversely, while the input audio signal is below the amplitude of the triangular waveform, the output D+ of the PWM is at the OFF state. Output D- is the inverse, i.e., complementary of output D+.

[Para 8] The relationship between the input audio amplitude and the pulse-width modulator outputs D+, and D- is linear to a first order. The outputs D+ and D- of the comparator drive "totem-poled" transistor switches Q₁ and Q₂. Each transistor switch is a MOSFET device, with a diode device 131 coupled across its terminals to enable four quadrant switching. The topology shown in Figure 1 is an example embodiment of a class D amplifier where the same type MOSFETs is used for both switches. Alternate embodiments include using complementary transistors, e.g. one p-type and one n-type MOSFET. For this reason the MOSFET symbol used shows no polarity.

[Para 9] Output filter 140 is typically a second order low-pass, e.g., LC configuration filter. The output filter 140 is essential for low pass filtering, or integrating, the carrier's varying pulse width duty cycle for reproduction of the original audio content while attenuating the switching carrier frequency.

[Para 10] For high fidelity audio reproduction, the operating (i.e. switching) frequency of the Class D power amplifier must be significantly higher than the bandwidth of the audio being reproduced. Thus, to reproduce higher bandwidth audio with higher fidelity requires

relatively high switching frequency. However, the higher the switching frequency, the more the switching losses (i.e. reduced efficiency). Some causes of switching losses are discussed using the illustration in Figure 2.

[Para 11] Figure 2 is an illustration of a conventional Half Bridge Class D Amplifier with salient parasitic elements. As illustrated, voltage source V_{gsQ1} drives the gate of transistor Q_1 and voltage source V_{gsQ2} drives the gate of transistor Q_2 . The illustration is a standard half-bridge showing parasitic elements C_{Q1} , which is the intrinsic capacitance of transistor Q_1 ; and C_{Q2} , which is the intrinsic capacitance of transistor Q_2 . Element D_1 is either Q_1 's intrinsic diode or an external diode with lower drop; and element D_2 is either Q_2 's intrinsic diode or an external diode with lower drop. The currents and direction of flow (i.e. drain to source) are shown with the double arrows.

[Para 12] In this illustration, transistors Q_1 and Q_2 supply a quasi-square wave to the filter formed by output inductor L_1 and output capacitor C_1 . Node 201, shared commonly by transistors Q_1 , Q_2 , and inductor L_1 is referred herein as the switching node. During operation, the voltage at switching node 201 is a square wave represented by waveform 310, as shown in Figure 3. This voltage is low-pass filtered by the output LC filter comprised of inductor L_1 and capacitor C_1 to produce a relatively low frequency output voltage across capacitor C_1 .

[Para 13] The inductor current (I_{L1}) at idle, that is, at zero output voltage, is represented by the triangular waveform 320 of Figure 3. Triangular waveform 320 is a ripple current which produces a quasi-sinusoidal ripple voltage, i.e. waveform 330 of Figure 3, on output capacitor C_1 . This output ripple voltage, i.e. 330, must be limited in magnitude or there can be problems with radiated emissions. For this reason the value of the output inductor L_1 is kept high enough to limit the ripple current to some small fraction of the full power output current, typically 20% as a rule of thumb. Figure 4 is an illustration of the relationship between ripple current and load current.

[Para 14] As illustrated in Figure 4, the current at idle is shown by waveform 410 while the current at 1/8 power is shown by waveform 420. As shown in both waveforms 410 and 420, the ripple characteristic causes a non-steady disturbance in the output current about the steady state value. At idle, the average current is zero and the ripple characteristic of the Class D results in the non-steady negative and positive current oscillations. Since the amplitude of the oscillation (i.e. ripple) is controlled by the size of inductor L_1 , similar ripple

amplitude exists at other load values. For instance, as illustrated in waveform 420, the steady state current at 1/8 power is represented by the current value I_{L1DC} and the ripple current superimposes thereon with ripple amplitude of approximately 20% peak to peak around the 1/8 power load current value I_{L1DC} .

[Para 15] Thus, although there are no intentionally dissipative elements in the circuit shown in Figure 2, the practical circuit will not be 100% efficient because of a variety of finite loss mechanisms therein. For instance, there are inherent losses in the output LC filter and in the switching transistors. Losses in the filter section are well understood and chosen as a cost tradeoff, but losses in the transistors (FETs) have more constraints. Firstly, FETs Q_1 and Q_2 will have a finite ON resistance, leading to conduction loss. Secondly, Q_1 and Q_2 will experience some loss at switching transitions, leading to switching losses. It is these switching losses that primarily limit the switching frequency. Thus, even though a higher switching frequency (audio bandwidth) would be generally beneficial to audio performance, it also results in lower efficiency; therefore, prior art systems tradeoff bandwidth for efficiency.

[Para 16] With the approximately 20% current ripple of the prior art conventional Class D amplifier, a lossy (or hard) switching transition exists when output current is high. This lossy switching transition of the conventional Class D amplifier is illustrated using the waveforms of Figure 14.

[Para 17] As illustrated, starting with Q_2 in the ON state (i.e. the gate supply voltage V_{gsQ2} 1402 is greater than the threshold value) and a large positive current, I_{L1} 1403, flowing through inductor L_1 . The inductor current I_{L1} 1403 flows through Q_2 's ON resistance from source to drain, which is a negative value represented by I_{dsQ2} 1404.

[Para 18] At time t_1 , Q_2 is turned OFF and the inductor current I_{L1} moves from Q_2 's ON resistance to D_2 , which is either Q_2 's intrinsic diode or an external diode with lower drop. The voltage across Q_2 , i.e. V_{dsQ2} 1406, cannot rise until time t_2 , when Q_1 turns ON, but this will cause a large reverse recovery current (I_{D2} 1405) to flow through D_2 and Q_1 , since D_2 has a finite turn off time represented by the period between t_2 and t_3 . Thus, the reverse recovery period lasts until time t_3 . Therefore, from t_2 to t_3 , transistor Q_1 sees high current (I_{D2} 1405) and high voltage (V_{dsQ2} 1406) simultaneously, the product of which will be high switching loss (i.e. dissipated power).

[Para 19] Thus, improvement in efficiency can be realized with reduction in switching losses. Alternately, the switching frequency could be raised to realize improved performance without reducing efficiency. But this could not be done in conventional Class D amplifiers without increasing high frequency ripple.

[Para 20] Although the high frequency ripple is generally inaudible to the human ear, its presence is still undesirable for several reasons: (1) it is an emissions problem, for instance, it appears as artifacts in the AM radio band and other places; (2) it influences audio measurements; (3) provides a limitation on how clean the output signal looks to the end user; and (4) puts unwanted artifacts on a feedback signal fed to the control circuit, limiting the performance. Thus, any solution to reduce switching losses must also address high frequency ripple.

[Para 21] As discussed above, waveform 330 clearly shows the ripple phenomenon. In practice the voltage ripple on a full bandwidth class D amplifier can be on the order of one volt peak-to-peak with a fundamental of several hundred kHz, making it extremely prone to interfering with other electronic equipment, especially AM radio receivers. Modulation schemes in which the switching frequency is variable are particularly troublesome.

[Para 22] Prior art methods to reduce ripple includes using an LC series trap circuit across the output capacitor C_1 . This approach has several disadvantages. First, the Q (quality factor) of the LC trap must be extremely high in order to effectively shunt current away from C_1 , whose impedance at the switching frequency is already well below an Ohm. Second, the trap is only effective at a single frequency. The higher the Q, the less effective the trap will be if the switching frequency is variable. The trap is also not very effective at attenuating harmonics of the switching frequency; although these are usually 20dB down from the fundamental in relative terms, they can still present problems if their magnitude is too large in absolute terms.

[Para 23] Another prior art method of reducing ripple would be to add another second order filter to the output, creating a fourth order filter. Some of the disadvantages of this method include that the inductor must be sized to handle the full output current, and the filter may add distortion due to nonlinearity in the devices used, and the filtered output is outside of the control of any feedback loop.

[Para 24] Another prior art method to handling the ripple problem is to add a second LC low-pass filter in the output thus effectively increasing the order of the output filter from two to four. However, fourth order filters pose controllability and linearity problems. In addition, the higher order filter increases the total harmonic distortion (THD).

[Para 25] The present invention teaches reduction of switching losses while reducing the effect of ripple to acceptable levels.

Heading

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[Para 26] The invention is a method and apparatus for reducing switching losses in class D amplifiers. A Class D amplifier is basically a switch mode power supply driven by a high frequency modulator (e.g. a pulse width modulator). Thus, high frequency switching ripple (e.g. high frequency switching noise) is commonplace in conventional class D amplifiers. Because of the negative effects of high frequency ripple, including degradation in the audio reproduction, prior art Class D designs trade power loss (i.e. accept higher power loss) for reduced ripple by sizing the output inductor large enough to limit ripple to no more than 20% of the load current.

[Para 27] The high power loss (therefore reduced efficiency) is due to the transistors switching when the voltage and current are simultaneously at peak positive values resulting in power which must be dissipated. The high positive current is a product of the relatively large inductor value, which also limits the switching frequency bandwidth. Thus, embodiments of the present invention take advantage of the ripple at the switching transistors to significantly reduce the power loss thus allowing either an improvement in efficiency or increase in switching frequency, or both.

[Para 28] Furthermore, embodiments of the present invention apply coupled inductor methods to steer ripple away from the output of the class D amplifier thus eliminating any undesirable artifacts of the increased ripple in audio performance.

Heading

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[Para 29] Figure 1 is an illustration of a simplified Class D topology.

[Para 30] Figure 2 is an illustration of a typical half bridge class D amplifier configuration with salient parasitic elements.

[Para 31] Figure 3 is an illustration of the waveforms of a prior art class D amplifier showing output ripple.

[Para 32] Figure 4 is an illustration of the current waveforms at the output inductor of a typical class D amplifier configuration.

[Para 33] Figure 5 is an illustration of a coupled inductor circuit as an ideal transformer with lumped parasitic elements being shown with two AC voltage sources connected.

[Para 34] Figure 6 is an illustration of the coupled inductor circuit redrawn to reflect L_M to the secondary side for better visualization of the voltage divider.

[Para 35] Figure 7 is an illustration of the coupled inductor approach to ripple steering in the half-bridge configuration.

[Para 36] Figure 8 is an illustration of the full bridge configuration of the coupled inductor embodiment to ripple steering.

[Para 37] Figure 9 is an illustration of a zero ripple half bridge configuration using a tapped inductor approach.

[Para 38] Figure 10 is an illustration of the full bridge version of the tapped inductor embodiment to ripple steering.

[Para 39] Figure 11 is an illustration of a zero ripple half bridge class D amplifier using back-wound coupled inductor configuration.

[Para 40] Figure 12 is an illustration of the full bridge version of the alternate coupled inductor embodiment to ripple steering.

[Para 41] Figure 13 is an illustration of sample waveforms of a zero ripple class D amplifier in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention.

[Para 42] Figure 14 is an illustration of the lossy switching characteristics of the conventional class D amplifier.

[Para 43] Figure 15 is an illustration of the current waveforms at the output inductor of a class D amplifier of the present invention prior to ripple steering.

[Para 44] Figure 16 is an illustration of the soft switching characteristics of the class D amplifier of an embodiment of the present invention.

Heading

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[Para 45] The invention comprises a method and apparatus for reducing switching losses in Class D amplifiers. In the following description, numerous specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough description of the present invention. It will be apparent, however, to one skilled in the art, that the present invention may be practiced without these specific details. In other instances, well-known features have not been described in detail so as not to obscure the invention.

[Para 46] In general, embodiments of the present invention provide lossless switching class D amplifiers without the negative effects of ripple. Switching losses of prior art class D amplifiers (described with respect to Q_1 turning on against diode D_2) are only substantial due to the inductor current being positive at the time of transition (see waveform I_{L1} 1403 in Figure 14). Thus, if the inductor current were negative during this switching transition, Q_2 turn off would let the inductor current charge C_{Q1} and C_{Q2} causing the switching node voltage to resonantly increase until D_1 conducts. Thus, Q_1 would turn on without incurring reverse recovery loss, and without discharging the energy in C_{Q1} and C_{Q2} into Q_1 . As illustrated in Figure 4, negative current conditions for the conventional class D amplifiers only occur at, or very near, idle power conditions (i.e. waveform 410) and not during most load conditions (e.g. waveform 420).

[Para 47] The range of output load current over which soft switching, that is, nearly lossless switching, can be obtained, may be increased by reducing inductor L_1 thereby

increasing the inductor ripple current to a higher fraction of the load current, as illustrated in Figure 15.

[Para 48] Figure 15 is a waveform diagram illustrating a relationship between ripple and steady state current with reduced output inductance. The current at idle is represented by waveform 1510 while the current at full load is represented by waveform 1520. As illustrated, the ripple or peak-to-peak amplitude of the current oscillation is greater than the magnitude of the load current, which is represented by I_{L1DC} , resulting in instances of negative current at load. Thus, if switching occurs at instances of small negative inductor current, the dissipated power will be very minimal.

[Para 49] There is a significant difference in power dissipation between conventional class D amplifiers and embodiments of the present invention because of the characteristic of the present invention which forces switching to occur with a small negative inductor current thus resulting in what is termed herein as "soft" switching over an extended range of output current as compared to the conventional class D amplifier. In the conventional class D amplifier, the switching is "hard" when output current exceeds a small value because of the large positive inductor current which occurs coincidentally with a large positive voltage across the transistor thus resulting in large power that must be dissipated. The soft switching operation of embodiments of the present invention is further illustrated using the waveforms of Figure 16 and the class D configuration of Figure 2.

[Para 50] Just as in the hard switched case, this illustration starts with transistor Q_2 in the ON state. That is, similar voltage waveforms V_{gsQ2} 1402 and V_{gsQ1} 1401 are applied at the gates of transistors Q_2 and Q_1 , respectively, to illustrate the benefit of methods of the present invention over the prior art. As illustrated, the inductor current I_{L1} 1603 in embodiments of the present invention is now a small negative value compared to inductor current I_{L1} 1403 in the hard-switched case. This makes the drain to source current on transistor Q_2 , i.e. I_{dsQ2} 1604, a small positive current.

[Para 51] When transistor Q_2 is switched OFF at time t_1 , diode D_2 turns ON. Thus, the current is diverted to intrinsic capacitance C_{Q2} (and C_{Q1}) where it is in the proper direction to charge these capacitances positively until D_1 conducts at time t_2 . At time t_3 , transistor Q_1 is turned ON and current is diverted from D_1 to Q_1 . Thus, the interval of simultaneous high

current and voltage across transistor Q_1 shown in the prior art example (see Figure 5) does not exist. Therefore, switching loss is greatly reduced.

[Para 52] Thus, embodiments of the present invention provide a first order improvement in efficiency at the same switching frequency. Alternately, the switching frequency may be increased without an efficiency degradation using embodiments of the present invention.

[Para 53] However, increasing the ripple current by an order of magnitude results in corresponding increase in the ripple voltage on the output capacitor C_1 . Since this ripple is in the order of magnitude of one volt for a conventional class D design, an increase in ripple voltage using embodiments of the present invention which may be in the order of magnitude of ten volts may be unacceptable for a variety of reasons, including radiated emissions and performance in the audio system. Thus, embodiments of the present invention control the increased ripple using the ripple steering techniques discussed herein.

[Para 54] Zero ripple is essentially achieved by adding an auxiliary output to the conventional class D amplifier. It is not necessary that the auxiliary output serve any other useful function except to remove the ripple from the main output. The half-bridge class D configuration has one auxiliary output while the full bridge circuit may have two auxiliary outputs, which may be combined into one in some embodiments. In the full-bridge zero ripple configuration, the second auxiliary output may be configured as a floating output.

[Para 55] In one or more embodiments of the present invention, a coupled inductor circuit is used to steer ripple away from the main output of the class D amplifier. To visualize how a coupled inductor circuit steers ripple away from a primary output, the coupled inductor is represented as an ideal transformer as shown in Figure 5.

[Para 56] As illustrated, the principles of a coupled inductor 501 may be represented as an ideal transformer with turns ratio $N_P:N_S$. Where N_P is the number of turns on the primary side winding and N_S is the number of turns on the secondary side winding. The transformer has a finite magnetizing inductance L_M ; a finite uncoupled inductance L_P on the primary side 510; and a finite uncoupled inductance L_S on the secondary side 520.

[Para 57] In practice, uncoupled inductance L_S may be characterized as the combination of the coupled inductor leakage inductance and a larger discrete inductor. The two sides of

the coupled inductor are driven with AC voltage sources, V_P and V_S , where V_S may be constrained to be a scalar multiple ("a") of V_P , e.g., $V_S = aV_P$. No other constraints need be imposed on V_S and V_P , thus they may have any waveform and spectrum. These voltage sources create currents, I_P and I_S , that flow into the coupled inductor 501. When the voltage across winding N_P is equal to the primary source voltage V_P , then there is no voltage drop across uncoupled inductance L_P , and the primary side current I_P is therefore equal zero.

[Para 58] When the secondary voltage source V_S is scaled down by the voltage divider created by uncoupled inductance L_S and the reflected magnetizing inductance L_M , then scaled up by the turns ratio $N_P:N_S$, it imposes a voltage on the primary winding N_P that can be made equal to V_P , thus satisfying the zero ripple condition. Figure 6 is an illustration of the coupled inductor circuit redrawn to reflect the magnetizing inductance L_M to the secondary side 520 for better visualization of the voltage divider. Zero ripple condition will exist on the primary windings when the primary side voltage V_P and secondary side voltage V_S are equal so long as there is no voltage drop across the primary windings N_P , i.e., voltage on N_P equals to primary side voltage V_P . The zero ripple condition is further illustrated below.

[Para 59] As shown in Figure 6, the magnetizing inductance may be reflected to the secondary side 520 by a transformation equaling the square of the turns ratio. The voltage on the secondary winding N_S , denoted V_{Ns} , may be calculated with the resulting voltage divider as:

$$V_{Ns} = aV_P \frac{L_M \left(\frac{N_S}{N_P} \right)^2}{L_S + L_M \left(\frac{N_S}{N_P} \right)^2}$$

[Para 60] The voltage across the primary winding N_P , denoted V_{Np} , is calculated by transforming V_{Ns} by the turns ratio.

$$V_{Np} = \left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} \right) aV_P \frac{L_M \left(\frac{N_S}{N_P} \right)^2}{L_S + L_M \left(\frac{N_S}{N_P} \right)^2}$$

[Para 61] Since the voltage across N_P must equal V_P for zero ripple, setting V_{Np} to V_P and simplifying terms gives:

$$V_P = \left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} \right) a V_P \left(\frac{L_m}{L_S \left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} \right)^2 + L_m} \right)$$

[Para 62] Further simplifying and rearranging:

$$\left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} \right) a L_m = \left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} \right)^2 L_S + L_m$$

[Para 63] And solving for L_S :

$$L_S = L_m \frac{\left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} a - 1 \right)}{\left(\frac{N_P}{N_S} \right)^2}$$

[Para 64] Finally, solving for the case when $a = 1$, that is, $V_S = V_P$:

$$L_S = L_m \left(\frac{N_S}{N_P} - \left(\frac{N_S}{N_P} \right)^2 \right)$$

[Para 65] Under these conditions, zero ripple occurs at the primary winding. Thus, the coupled inductor approach is one way of solving the ripple problem with class D amplifiers. It would be obvious to those of ordinary skill in the arts that other magnetically equivalent methodologies and circuits may also be employed.

[Para 66] As is illustrated herein, one or more embodiments of the present invention employ the coupled inductor approach to eliminate ripple artifacts in class D amplifiers. Figure 7 is an illustration of the coupled inductor approach to ripple steering in the half-bridge class D amplifier configuration. As illustrated, the main inductor 710 comprises a primary winding L_{1A} and a coupled secondary winding L_{1C} in parallel. A first end of both windings L_{1A} and L_{1C} , i.e., shown as the end without the dot in Figure 7, is coupled to switching node 201 (i.e., the connection of MOSFET switches Q_1 and Q_2). The second end of winding L_{1A} is coupled to capacitor C_1 , which is then coupled to ground. Thus, winding L_{1A} and capacitor C_1 remain configured as the equivalent of the low-pass filter of the prior art (See Figure 2) with an addition of an auxiliary output using secondary winding L_{1C} .

[Para 67] The secondary winding L_{1C} of the coupled inductor 710 forms the basis of the auxiliary output comprising capacitor C_2 , and inductor L_2 in which output capacitor C_2 is used primarily for diverting ripple away from the main amplifier (i.e. primary) output, at capacitor C_1 . As illustrated, the second end of winding L_{1C} is coupled to one end of inductor L_2 , which is coupled to capacitor C_2 . Finally, capacitor C_2 may be coupled to ground. Thus, capacitor C_2 steers ripple away from the primary output.

[Para 68] In this illustration, the low frequency voltages on the main output capacitor C_1 and the second output capacitor C_2 are identical, because both outputs track the DC value of the switching node 201. Assuming no substantial AC voltage is present on either output capacitor, the AC voltage at switching node 201 is analogous to both V_P and V_S as discussed with the illustration of Figures 5 and 6. Thus, this embodiment corresponds to the zero ripple condition on the primary windings since the primary side voltage V_P and the reflected secondary side voltage across N_p are equal.

[Para 69] Figure 8 is an illustration of the full bridge configuration of the coupled inductor embodiment to ripple steering. As illustrated, the full bridge configuration involves mirroring the half-bridge architecture of Figure 7 and combining the two sides. However, when two half bridge configurations are coupled together, the resulting circuit will have two L_2 inductors and two C_2 capacitors. In one or more embodiments of the present invention, the two resulting inductors L_2 are consolidated to create one inductor L_3 and the two resulting C_2 capacitors are consolidated into one capacitor C_3 as shown in Figure 8.

[Para 70] As illustrated in Figure 8, a first coupled inductor 710 comprising L_{1A} and L_{1C} is coupled at a first end to switching node 201. That is, the first end of winding L_{1A} may be coupled together with the first end of winding L_{1C} and then to switching node 201. A second coupled inductor 820 comprising L_{1B} and L_{1D} is coupled at a first end to switching node 401. Switching node 401 is the coupling point of MOSFET switches Q_3 and Q_4 . The dot-orientation of both coupled inductors 710 and 820 are in the same direction and as shown in the illustration.

[Para 71] The second end of winding L_{1A} of coupled inductor 710 is coupled to one end of capacitor C_1 . The other end of capacitor C_1 is coupled to ground. In like manner, the second end of winding L_{1B} of coupled inductor 820 is coupled to the other end of capacitor C_1 , which is coupled to ground.

[Para 72] For the auxiliary outputs, the second end of winding L_{1C} of coupled inductor 710 is coupled to one end of inductor L_3 , which is coupled to one end of auxiliary output capacitor C_3 . Finally, the other end of auxiliary output capacitor C_3 is coupled to the second end of winding L_{1D} of coupled inductor 820.

[Para 73] Those of skill in the arts would recognize that the coupled inductor windings L_{1A} , L_{1B} , L_{1C} and L_{1D} may all exist on the same core as a single integrated magnetic structure, and only a single uncoupled inductor L_3 and secondary output capacitor C_3 are needed. Other embodiments may use two coupled inductors, for instance, L_{1A} - L_{1C} and L_{1B} - L_{1D} .

[Para 74] Those of skill in the arts would recognize that there are other configurations that may be magnetically equivalent to those discussed with respect to the embodiments of Figures 7 and 8. That is, there may be magnetically other ways to achieve the same behavior discussed with respect to Figure 7. For instance, since one side of both windings of the coupled inductor is coupled together at the same node, the voltage on the output side of the secondary inductor will be determined by the turns ratio. This voltage ratio may also be realized by the addition of a simple tap on the main inductor winding, as illustrated in Figures 9 and 10. This configuration may be an easier winding to manufacture than that discussed with respect to Figure 7.

[Para 75] Figure 9 is an illustration of a zero ripple half bridge configuration using a tapped inductor approach. As illustrated, the tapped inductor embodiment involves combining the number of turns that are equivalent between the primary and secondary windings. Thus, as illustrated, the embodiment comprises one inductor L_{1E} with three pins 910, 902, and 903. Pin 903 at the first end of the inductor L_{1E} is coupled to switching node 201. Pin 901 at the other end of inductor L_{1E} is coupled to one end of main output capacitor C_1 . The auxiliary output is tapped from pin 902 and coupled to inductor L_2 and auxiliary output capacitor C_2 .

[Para 76] The principle of the tapped inductor configuration may be explained using the coupled inductor embodiment of Figure 7. For example, if the number of turns in the primary windings (e.g. N_p) of the coupled inductor 710 is thirty and the number of turns in the secondary windings is twenty four (e.g. N_s), then the number of equivalent turns is twenty four. Using the above example, in embodiments that employ the tapped inductor configuration, the main inductor L_{1E} (referring to Figure 9) will have thirty turns between

pins 901 and 903. A secondary tap is included at pin 902, which is located between pins 901 and 903 to represent the number of turns of the secondary winding of L_{1C} . In the current example, the tap at pin 902 is located such that there is twenty four turns between pins 902 and 903. Thus, instead of the two windings of the embodiment illustrated in Figure 7, only one tapped winding may be utilized to magnetically achieve the same result.

[Para 77] Figure 10 is an illustration of the full bridge version of the tapped inductor embodiment to ripple steering. As illustrated, the full bridge version involves mirroring the half-bridge architecture of Figure 9 and combining the two sides. However, when two half bridge configurations are coupled together, the resulting circuit will have two L_2 inductors and two C_2 capacitors. In one or more embodiments of the present invention, the two resulting L_2 inductors are consolidated to create one inductor L_3 and the two resulting C_2 capacitors into one capacitor C_3 as shown in Figure 10. Tapped inductor L_{1F} has a plurality of pins, e.g., 904, 905, and 906. For instance, following the same example discussed above, the number of turns between pins 904 and 906 will be thirty and the number of turns between pins 905 and 906 will be twenty four.

[Para 78] Those of skill in the arts would recognize that the tapped inductor windings L_{1E} , and L_{1F} may all exist on the same core as a single integrated magnetic structure, and only a single uncoupled inductor L_3 and a single auxiliary output capacitor C_3 are needed. Other embodiments may use two tapped inductors in separate cores, for instance, L_{1E} and L_{1F} .

[Para 79] As further illustrated in Figure 10, a first tapped inductor L_{1E} is coupled at pin 903 to switching node 201. A second tapped inductor L_{1F} is coupled at pin 906 to switching node 401. The dot-orientation of both tapped inductors L_{1E} and L_{1F} are in the same direction and as shown in the illustration.

[Para 80] Pin 901 of tapped inductor L_{1E} is coupled to one end of capacitor C_1 . The other end of capacitor C_1 is coupled to ground. In like manner, pin 904 of tapped inductor L_{1F} is coupled to the other end of capacitor C_1 , which is coupled to ground.

[Para 81] For the auxiliary outputs, pin 902 of tapped inductor L_{1E} is coupled to one end of inductor L_3 , which is coupled to one end of auxiliary output capacitor C_3 . Finally, the other end of auxiliary output capacitor C_3 is coupled to pin 905 of tapped inductor L_{1F} .

[Para 82] In another embodiment, a magnetically equivalent circuit involves coupling a winding for the auxiliary output to the output side of the main inductor, and winding backwards in a bucking fashion as shown in Figures 11 and 12. Figure 11 is an illustration of a zero ripple half bridge class D amplifier using back-wound coupled inductor configuration. As illustrated, the main inductor 1110 has a primary winding L_{1A} coupled as a normal class D circuit. That is, a first end of winding L_{1A} , i.e., shown as the end without the dot, is coupled to switching node 201 (i.e., the connection of MOSFET switches Q_1 and Q_2). The second end or output end of winding L_{1A} is coupled to capacitor C_1 , which is then coupled to ground. Thus, winding L_{1A} and capacitor C_1 remain configured as the low-pass filter of the prior art (See Figure 2).

[Para 83] The secondary winding L_{1G} forms the basis of the auxiliary output comprising capacitor C_2 , and inductor L_2 in which output capacitor C_2 is used primarily for diverting ripple away from the main amplifier output, at capacitor C_1 . As illustrated, the second end of secondary winding L_{1G} (the end with the dot) is coupled to the output end of inductor L_{1A} (i.e. node 1101), and back-wound in the same core with winding L_{1A} to the first end. The first end of winding L_{1G} is coupled to one end of inductor L_2 , which is coupled to capacitor C_2 . Finally, capacitor C_2 may be coupled to ground. Thus, capacitor C_2 steers ripple away from the primary output.

[Para 84] Using the same example as before with the primary side inductor having thirty turns, the secondary side inductor L_{1G} is back-wound six turns thus resulting in effectively twenty four turns. This configuration produces nearly the same effect as if twenty four turns of the secondary inductor were coupled to the switching node (see configuration of Figure 7).

[Para 85] The embodiment illustrated in Figures 11 and 12 also produces the same voltage ratio, but with far fewer turns added, these turns optionally being of a much smaller ampacity with respect to the main winding. In addition, the back-wound method may be better for external leakage field reduction on the coupled inductor if a toroidal core is used. This is because the smaller bucking winding can occupy a smaller portion of the toroid circumference, such that each winding, L_{1A} and L_{1G} , both have almost the ideal 360 degree winding coverage, which will reduce leakage flux.

[Para 86] Figure 12 is an illustration of the full bridge version of the alternate coupled inductor embodiment to ripple steering. As in other embodiments discussed herein, the full

bridge version involves mirroring the half-bridge architecture of Figure 11 and combining the two sides. The secondary windings are coupled from the output nodes 1101 and 1201 instead of the switching nodes 201 and 401. When two half bridges are coupled together, the resulting circuit will have two inductors L_2 and two capacitors C_2 . However, one or more embodiments of the present invention consolidates the two resulting L_2 inductors into one inductor L_3 and the two resulting C_2 capacitors into one capacitor C_3 as shown in Figure 12. Those of skill in the arts would recognize that the coupled inductor windings L_{1A} , L_{1B} , L_{1G} and L_{1H} may all exist on the same core as a single integrated magnetic structure, and only a single uncoupled inductor L_3 and secondary output capacitor C_3 are needed. Other embodiments may use two coupled inductors, for instance, L_{1A} - L_{1G} and L_{1B} - L_{1H} .

[Para 87] Figure 13 is an illustration of sample waveforms of a zero ripple class D amplifier in accordance with an embodiment of the present invention. The waveforms are from a full bridge zero ripple embodiment (see Figure 8) running at 130kHz from a 100-200VDC supply. The class D circuit is optimized for high power and low audio bandwidth and is similar to the circuit used for generation of the waveforms illustrated in Figure 3 for the prior art. The main class D output filter is comprised of a 200uH inductor L_1 and a 5uF film capacitor C_1 . The zero ripple winding comprises $N_P = 30$, $N_S = 24$, $L_M = 200uH$, resulting in a secondary side uncoupled inductance $L_S = 32uH$. The secondary side uncoupled inductance L_S comprises approximately 7uH leakage inductance and 25uH discrete inductance, e.g., L_3 . Auxiliary output capacitor C_3 may be varied within a wide range (e.g. from 5uF to 1uF) with no impact on the operation of the zero ripple class D amplifier.

[Para 88] As illustrated, a square wave voltage 1310 is generated across inductor L_{1A} as a result of the modulator 110 driving the gates of transistors (MOSFETs) Q_1 and Q_2 . The current at the output of inductor L_{1A} is shown as waveform 1320. And finally, the voltage output at capacitor C_1 is shown as waveform 1330. In contrast to waveform 330 of Figure 3 (prior art class D), the ripple characteristic is all but eliminated from waveform 1330. The plots in both Figure 3 and Figure 13 are of the same scale.

[Para 89] Note that the values of inductance and capacitance used herein are for illustrative purposes only. Specifically, the circuit used to generate the waveforms of Figure 13 was optimized for high power and low bandwidth, and thus has a relatively low switching frequency of 130 kHz. And the values of inductance and capacitance reflect this low

switching frequency. These values may be much larger than low power full bandwidth circuits applications.

[Para 90] In addition, an additional resonance may exist in the open loop transfer function of the zero ripple Class D amplifier implementation. This additional resonance may be due to the additional inductor and capacitor in the auxiliary output path. This additional resonance may cause a problem when trying to control the system with feedback. Thus, it may be desirable to move the resonance as close to the switching frequency as possible, i.e., out of the way of the closed loop system.

[Para 91] Referring to the half-bridge class D embodiments, the value of the auxiliary output capacitor C_2 (e.g. C_3 for the full-bridge) is at its lower limit when the switching voltage ripple on C_2 interferes with zero ripple operation. Thus simply adjusting C_2 may not be adequate to shift the additional resonance to a desirable frequency (e.g. the switching frequency). However, the resonance can also be moved by simultaneously moving the number of turns in the secondary winding N_s very close to the number of turns in the primary winding N_p and decreasing the resonant inductor value. In this manner the resonance may be moved to a much higher frequency with little effect on zero ripple Class D amplifier operation.

[Para 92] Application of the zero ripple technique herein allows use of the much higher ripple current amplitude which is necessary to achieve soft switching without increasing the output voltage ripple to an unacceptable level.

[Para 93] It will be understood that the above described arrangements of apparatus and the method therefrom are merely illustrative of applications of the principles of this invention and many other embodiments and modifications may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as defined in the claims.

What is claimed is:

- [Claim 1]** A class D amplifier comprising:
a first set of switches coupled together to form a first switching node;
an output inductor circuit coupled to said first switching node, wherein said output inductor is sized to provide a ripple current amplitude resulting in instances of negative current at non-idle power conditions;
an output filter comprising an output capacitor and said output inductor; and
a ripple steering circuit to steer said ripple current away from said output capacitor.
- [Claim 2]** The class D amplifier of claim 1, wherein each of said first set of switches comprises a transistor.
- [Claim 3]** The class D amplifier of claim 1, wherein said first set of switches is driven by a modulator.
- [Claim 4]** The class D amplifier of claim 1, wherein said ripple current amplitude provides soft switching up to a desired steady state power condition for a fixed load.
- [Claim 5]** The class D amplifier of claim 4, wherein said fixed load 1/8 power condition.
- [Claim 6]** A method for reducing switching losses in class D amplifiers comprising:
coupling a first set of switches together to form a first switching node;
coupling an output inductor circuit to said first switching node, wherein said output inductor is sized to provide a ripple current amplitude resulting in instances of negative current at non-idle power conditions;
coupling an output capacitor to said output inductor and to ground; and
coupling a ripple steering circuit to said output inductor circuit to steer said ripple current away from said output capacitor.

[Claim 7] The method of claim 6, wherein each of said first set of switches comprises a transistor.

[Claim 8] The method of claim 6, wherein said first set of switches is driven by a modulator.

[Claim 9] The method of claim 6, wherein said ripple current amplitude results in soft switching up to a desired steady state power condition for a fixed load.

[Claim 10] The method of claim 9, wherein said fixed load 1/8 power condition.