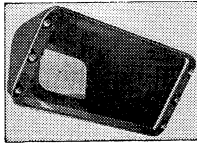


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INVENTION

Patents of the Week

Rockets may be able to land softly on the moon because of a new "electric eye" control system whose optical scanner can "see" the surface—By William McCann

➤ AN "ELECTRIC EYE" control system that may help future manned or unmanned space vehicles land softly on the moon was awarded a patent by the U.S. Patent Office.

The system uses a variable-thrust rocket motor and an optical scanner that can "see" the landing surface. The scanner, which is mounted above the lower end of the vehicle, measures the speed at which the vehicle is landing and its height above the landing surface. Then it uses a signal to automatically adjust the engine thrust so that the spacecraft makes a soft vertical landing.

The system also provides another pair of scanners placed opposite each other to steer the landing vehicle. If the vehicle leans to one side or another during descent, one of the scanners will automatically send out a signal to adjust its attitude.

The system, which earned patent 3,154,265, was invented by Charles E. Hendrix, Azusa, Calif., Paul C. Driver, China Lake, Calif., and Donald D. Stevenson, Anaheim, Calif. The inventors assigned patent rights to the U.S. Navy.

Shock-Absorbing Wheel

A shock-absorbing wheel that keeps hospitalized patients from getting bumped and jarred while they are being moved earned patent 3,154,127 for a hospital orderly.

The wheel contains five tube-shaped spokes with a spring inside each spoke to absorb any shock or bump. It can be attached to portable hospital beds, cots or wheelchairs, inventor John M. Felton, Philadelphia, Pa., reported in his patent.

In addition, the wheel provides increased safety to patients who are moved immediately after an operation. By minimizing jars and jolts, the shock absorbing wheel will keep stitches from being broken, Mr. Felton claims.

School Bus Safety Gate

A "stop and go" gate, that swings out from the bumper of a school bus to keep children from crossing in front of a bus until it is safe, was awarded a patent.

The safety gate is hinged to a special bumper and can be controlled by the driver from inside the bus. When the gate is in position, extended from the bumper of a stopped bus, the driver opens the door and the children stand on the curb behind the gate.

When it is safe for the children to cross the street, the driver pulls a lever that automatically closes the gate back against the bumper.

The gate, which earned patent 3,153,398, also has a warning signal with the word

"STOP." This signal is located at the end of the gate and rises automatically to face the children when the gate is being used.

Co-inventors of the safety gate are George La Verne Runkle and Gilbert S. Sheets, both of Lima, Ohio. They assigned patent rights to the Superior Coach Corporation, Lima.

Other Interesting Patents

A rockerless rocking chair that can be folded up and carried away received a patent. The rocker is lightweight and is similar in shape to a deck, garden or beach chair. It earned patent 3,154,344 for John Leslie Stableford, London.

A combined seat and sled assembly that can be carried around on the back of a camper or hunter earned patent 3,154,313 for Bernard M. Zurowski, Carnegie, Pa. The invention can be easily adapted for use as a collapsible sled to carry supplies, children or first aid equipment. It can also be tied to a tree for use as a seat in wet or snow-covered areas.

A device for launching a missile from the water earned patent 3,153,979 for Roy W. Villers, Ventura, Calif. Patent rights were assigned to the U.S. Navy.

• Science News Letter, 86:310 November 14, 1964

TECHNOLOGY

Appliance Will Pick Dinner, Pop It in Oven

➤ AN APPLIANCE that can be programmed to cook the entire week's meals automatically is one of the new pushbutton devices that will make housework easier in the future.

The main unit of the programmed cooker is a large freezer that contains a row of small compartments. The meat goes in one compartment, potatoes in another, vegetables in another and so on. Once the food is in the freezer, the housewife merely has to push the proper buttons.

About half an hour before dinner, the meat automatically slides from its compartment onto a conveyor belt, which carries it to an electronic oven for cooking. Twenty minutes later the potatoes go through the same motions, followed by the other vegetables and the pastries.

Thomas T. Woodson, University of California at Los Angeles, pointed out that the cooker and other new pushbutton appliances are either now on the drafting boards or in the testing stage.

Two additional household helpers for the future include a washer that launders by soundwaves and compact packages of dehydrated food that keep indefinitely, he said.

• Science News Letter, 86:310 November 14, 1964