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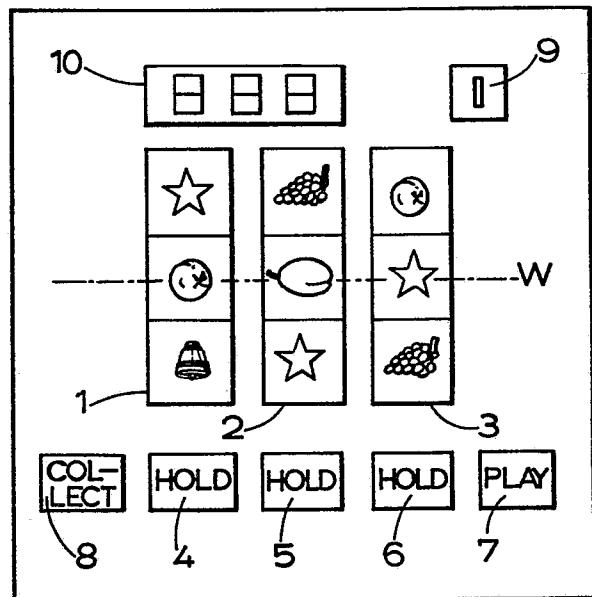
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(54) Gaming and amusement machines.

(57) In a fruit machine in which three or more reels (1, 2, 3) carrying symbols are rotated and randomly stopped and the player receives an award or credit if a combination of symbols designated as a winning combination appears on a given 'win' line (W), means (8, 9) are provided allowing the player to chose to use the credit awarded to play a special feature game on the reels in which there are a plurality of possible win lines. The plurality of win lines may be provided by the machine becoming a 'three-or five-liner' or win lines being of the Tic-Tac-Toe kind.



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GAMING AND AMUSEMENT MACHINES

This invention relates to gaming or amusement-with-prizes machines of the kind generally known as 'fruit machines', in which three, or sometimes more, reels carrying symbols are set in rotation and then stop in turn at random intervals and if the resulting combination of symbols on the three (or more) reels appearing on a given line in the display, i.e. the 'win line', is one which has been designated a winning combination, the player receives an award or a credit. Instead of actual reels, it is known to use other forms of display which simulate rotating reels to a greater or lesser degree, for example the Panascope, or a video screen on which images of the symbols appear. Such machines will hereinafter be referred to as of the kind set forth.

Generally there are several different kinds of symbols (usually, but by no means essentially fruit) and the designated winning combinations are represented by all three symbols on the 'win' line being identical. A different payout is awarded according to whether the matching symbols are, for example, plums, or another fruit, for example cherries. A win may also be awarded when the matching symbols appear on the win line of only two of the three reels, provided they are the right symbol, for example it is common to award a win for two cherries on the first and second reels regardless of what symbol is present on the third reel. It is also known to have special 'Tic-Tac-Toe' symbols on the reels and to award a prize when the three Tic-Tac-Toe symbols appear in any position in view of the player. Thus, in a machine with three reels and three symbol positions for each reel in the field of view of the player, there are 27 possible ways of achieving a win from the Tic-Tac-Toe symbols.

Fruit machines which have more than one win line are also known. The 'three-liner' fruit machine, for example, has three horizontal win lines and the 'five-liner' machine has three horizontal and two diagonal win lines. On such machines, the player can choose either to play a game with one win line for one coin, token or credit, or to play a game with, say, three win lines at a cost of three coins, tokens or credits.

According to the present invention there is provided a gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth in which, following a normal game on the reels when a winning combination appears on a single win line a credit or credits are awarded and means are provided whereby the player can choose either to collect a prize equivalent to the credit or credits awarded or to use the credit or credits awarded to play a special feature game or a series of special feature

games on the reels in which there are a plurality of possible win lines.

The fruit machines may, for example, change from a 'one-liner' machine in a normal game to a 'three- or five-liner' machine during the special feature game or games, giving the player an enhanced chance of winning. In a preferred embodiment, however, the plurality of win lines in the special feature game are of the 'Tic-Tac-Toe' kind in which identical symbols do not have to be in a straight line for a win to be awarded. In a three-reel fruit machine, 'Tic-Tac-Toe' win lines give 27 ways of producing a win for each symbol.

Prizes or credits awarded in a special feature game may be collected or they may be used to play further feature games. The player may be given the opportunity to continue playing special feature games until either a maximum permitted jackpot has been accumulated or all credits have been lost. Alternatively, there may be a limit on the number of special feature games which may be played following a win on a normal game.

A preferred embodiment of the present invention will now be described, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawing.

The display area of a conventional three-reel fruit machine is shown in the drawing and has a single set of reels 1, 2 and 3, control button 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8, a coin or token slot 9 and an alphanumeric display 10 for indicating prizes won and credits available.

Although three symbol positions on each of the reels 1, 2 and 3 are visible to the player, during a normal game there is only one win line W operable. When three identical symbols appear on the win line W at the end of a normal game the prize awarded is indicated on the alphanumeric display 10. The player then must choose either to collect his win by pressing the 'collect' button 8 or, by pressing the 'play' button 9, to use the prize awarded as credits for a special feature game. A greater number of credits may be needed to play a special feature game than the equivalent value of coins or tokens needed to play a normal game.

During a special feature game the machine is arranged to award wins when three identical symbols appear in any of the nine reel positions visible to the player. Thus there is an enhanced chance of winning owing to the 27 possible 'Tic-Tac-Toe' winning combinations. For example, as shown in the drawing, a prize would be awarded for three 'star' symbols appearing on the reels in the positions illustrated. The prize awarded for three identical symbols in the special feature game may be the same, or different from, the prize awarded for

those symbols in a normal game.

Preferably, the player may play as many special feature games as the credits won from the normal game will allow. Any prizes won from the special feature games may be accumulated in the alphanumeric display up to a maximum number of credits.

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Claims

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1. A gaming or amusement-with-prizes machine of the kind set forth in which following a normal game on the reels when a winning combination appears on a single win line (W) a credit or credits are awarded and means (8, 9) are provided whereby the player can choose either to collect a prize equivalent to the credit or credits awarded or to use the credit or credits awarded to play a special feature game or a series of special feature games on the reels in which there are a plurality of possible win lines.

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2. A machine according to claim 1 in which the plurality of win lines is provided by the machine changing to a 'three-liner' five-liner' machine during the special feature game or games.

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3. A machine according to claim 1 in which the plurality of win lines in the special feature game are of the 'Tic-Tac-Toe' kind in which identical symbols do not have to be in a straight line for a win to be awarded.

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4. A machine according to any preceding claim in which prizes or credit awarded in a special feature game may be collected or used to play further special feature games.

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5. A machine according to claim 4 in which the player is given the opportunity to continue playing special feature games until either a maximum permitted jackpot has been accumulated or all credits are lost.

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6. A machine according to claim 4 in which there is a limit on the number of special feature games which may be played following a win on a normal game.

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