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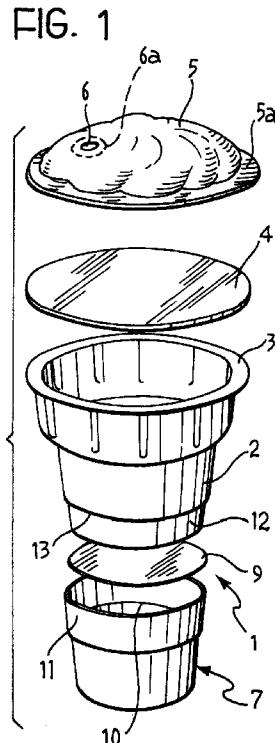
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(54) Cup-like sealed container for food products

(57) The container (1) comprises a cup-like body (2) closed at the top by a sealing foil (4). The foil (4) in question is protected by a cap portion (5) which may be capable of being perforated (6). A further cap portion (7) engaged on the base (12) of the cup-like body (2) forms a receptacle for holding accessories such as toys, explanatory sheets, or small utensils. Alternatively, the same function may be performed by the cap (5) covering the sealing foil (4).



Description

[0001] The present invention relates to containers and, in particular, relates to a container according to the preamble to Claim 1.

[0002] Containers of this type are known in the art and are used widely, for example, for the packaging of food products such as, for example, creamy substances and drinks. For example, use for the packaging of yoghurts or drinks such as tea may be mentioned by way of reference.

[0003] The present invention addresses the problem of improving the characteristics of a container of the type specified above from at least two points of view, that is:

- the protection of the sealing foil from the outside atmosphere before use, and
- the ability to associate with the container accessories such as, for example, a toy (a so-called "gift"), one or more sheets containing information and instructions relating to the product and/or to the toy, or a utensil usable for consuming the product such as, for example, a spatula or a small spoon.

[0004] According to the present invention, this object is achieved by means of a container having the specific characteristics recited in the following claims.

[0005] The invention will now be described, purely by way of non-limiting example, with reference to the appended drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a general, exploded, perspective view of a possible embodiment of a container according to the invention, and

Figure 2 is a diametral section through the same embodiment of the container, in the assembled condition.

[0006] In the appended drawings, a container generally usable, for example, for the packaging of food products such as, for example, creamy substances or drinks, is generally indicated 1. The invention may, in any case, be used in completely different fields, for example, for the packaging of pharmaceutical products.

[0007] The container 1 comprises, as a principal element, a beaker-like (or cup-like) body 2 made, for example, of moulded plastics material. In use, the body 2 is intended to hold a filling of a food product C (Figure 2) constituted, for example, by a creamy substance or a drink.

[0008] The cup-like body 2 has an upper mouth portion surrounded by a flanged rim 3 to which a sealing foil 4 is applied. The foil 4 has a periphery corresponding to the periphery of the mouth portion of the cup-like body 2 (circular in the embodiment shown) and may be made, for example, of aluminium foil, possibly covered with a

layer of polymeric material on the side which is to face the body 2. This is so as to form a material of the type generally known as a "combined" material. This solution facilitates the sealing of the periphery of the foil 4 to the flange 3, for example, by means of a heat-sealing or ultrasound welding operation.

[0009] In any case, the methods adopted for connecting the sealing foil 4 to the mouth portion of the cup-like body 2 may vary widely according to the specific requirements of construction and use. These methods are anyway widely known to experts in the art and do not need to be described in detail herein and, moreover, are not relevant per se for an understanding of the implementation of the invention.

[0010] The consumer may gain access to the product C inside the body 2 in various ways. For example, he may detach ("peel") the foil 4 from the periphery of the mouth portion of the body 2 or tear the foil 4 or - according to the preferred solution referred to below - he may perforate the foil 4 with a tool such as a straw T with a pointed end T1. As is known, the use of a straw T as a perforation tool has the further advantage that, after possibly being used to stir or mix the product C for consumption, the straw also enables the product to be sucked out.

[0011] A first cap element, indicated 5, is usually made of plastics material which is shaped, possibly in a manner such as to give it a generally flake-like configuration, its peripheral portion 5a adopting the appearance of a flange which can be applied (directly or possibly with the interposition of a further sealing foil - not explicitly shown in the drawings) to the periphery of the foil 4 in the region of the flanged rim 3 surrounding the mouth portion of the body 2.

[0012] In these conditions, the cap 5 located on top of the container 1 covers the sealing foil 4, screening it from the outside atmosphere.

[0013] This is particularly advantageous since it protects the outer surface of the foil 4, in particular, from any environmental contamination.

[0014] At least in some possible applications such as, for example, the packaging of pharmaceutical products - the cap 5 may be applied so as to cover the foil 4 (in this case also by connection by means of heat-sealing, ultrasound welding, etc., in accordance with known criteria) in a sterile or inert packaging environment. The outer surface of the foil 4 can thus be kept in such conditions throughout subsequent handling up to the moment at which the container is opened in order for the product C contained therein to be used.

[0015] At this point, the foil 4 may be uncovered by the removal of the cap 5 or - as shown schematically in Figure 2 - the cap may be perforated with the use of the same tool T which is to be used to perforate the foil 4. In particular, the tool (straw) T may be made to penetrate the cap 5 through a hole 6 provided in the body of the cap 5. The hole 6 is initially kept closed by a seal 6a of laminar material such as, for example, aluminium, if

necessary, of the "combined" type. The seal 6a which is intended to be torn by the tool T is applied to the cap 5 in the region of the hole 6, preferably on its inner surface facing the foil 4.

[0016] At the same time, particularly if the cap 5 has a fairly marked concave shape, it defines (between the cap 5 and the foil 4 - or possibly another foil, not shown, which closes the cap 5 on its side facing the foil 4) a chamber in which an accessory of the container such as, for example, a toy, an instruction sheet, a small utensil, etc., can be disposed. This "accessory" may also be constituted by an additive to be added to the product C by being introduced into the body 2 through a hole or tears formed in the foil 4 by acting on the cap 5 in a manner such as to deform it towards the body 2 by squashing.

[0017] Naturally, the capability to protect the outer face of the foil 4, possibly in sterile conditions, also extends - if necessary - to the contents of the above-mentioned chamber.

[0018] In the embodiment shown - it is stressed, purely by way of non-limiting example - in the appended drawings, it is envisaged that the cap 5 will perform exclusively the function of protecting the foil 4. In other words, the insertion of an accessory in any chamber defined by the cap 5 relative to the foil 4 is not explicitly provided for.

[0019] In the embodiment shown, this object is in fact achieved by the association with the container 1 of another cap 7 which acts as a container for holding the accessory B. In the embodiment shown, the cap 7, which is located in a lower position, has a generally cup- or vase-like shape. It thus has a respective base portion defining a chamber 8 (figure 2) in which the accessory B is located. The chamber 8 is closed at the top by a lid-like laminar element 9 which, in the embodiment shown, is generally disk-shaped.

[0020] The lid-like element 9 is inserted in the cap 7 above the chamber 8 and is restrained therein, for example, owing to snap-engagement in an annular restraining element 10 formed on the internal surface of the element 7.

[0021] Above the chamber 8, the cap 7 has an upper rim or collar 11, which is preferably generally annular and slightly tapered and which enables the cap 7 to be engaged on the base portion of the cup-like body 2, this portion preferably being slightly narrower and defined at the top by a shoulder 13. The arrangement is such that, in order to engage the cap 7 on the base portion of the cup-like body 2, the collar 11 is slid onto the narrower base portion 12 until the end edge of the collar 11 is brought into abutment with the shoulder 13.

[0022] At this point, as shown schematically in Figure 2, the lower cap 7 can be fixed in position, coupled with the base portion of the cup-like body 2, for example, by means of a tape or band 14, for example, an adhesive tape or band, which covers the portion of the cup-shaped body 2 immediately above the shoulder 13 and

the portion of the collar 11 adjacent its end edge.

Claims

5. 1. A container (1) comprising a cup-like body (2) having a mouth portion (3) closed by a sealing foil (4), characterized in that the container (1) bears at least one associated cap portion (5, 7) applied so as to cover a respective portion of the container (1).
10. 2. A container according to Claim 1, characterized in that it bears an associated cap portion (5) applied so as to cover the sealing foil (4).
15. 3. A container according to Claim 2, characterized in that the cap (5) applied so as to cover the sealing foil (4) is removable at least locally (6) to afford access to the sealing foil (4).
20. 4. A container according to Claim 3, characterized in that the cap (5) applied so as to cover the sealing foil (4) has a portion (6) which can be perforated locally.
25. 5. A container according to Claim 4, characterized in that the portion which can be perforated locally is defined by a hole (6) closed by a laminar seal (6a) which can be torn selectively.
30. 6. A container according to Claim 5, characterized in that the laminar seal is applied to the face of the cap (5) facing towards the sealing foil (4).
35. 7. A container according to Claim 2, characterized in that the cap applied to cover the sealing foil (4) is spaced from the sealing foil (4) at least locally so as to define, relative to the sealing foil (4), a housing space.
40. 8. A container according to Claim 1, characterized in that a lower cap portion (7) is associated with the container and can be engaged on the base portion of the cup-like body (2) so as to define, relative to the cup-shaped body (2), a chamber (8) for housing objects.
45. 9. A container according to Claim 8, characterized in that the lower cap portion (7) carries an associated lid-like closure element (9) for closing the housing chamber (8).
50. 10. A container according to Claim 9, characterized in that the lid-like element (9) is of a laminar structure and can be snap-engaged in a corresponding engagement element (10) provided on the inner wall of the lower cap portion (7).
55. 11. A container according to any one of Claims 8 to 10,

characterized in that the cup-like body (2) has a narrower base portion (12) for the engagement of the lower cap portion (7).

12. A container according to Claim 11, characterized in that the narrower base portion (12) is defined by a shoulder (13) forming a stop abutment for the lower cap portion (7) during its movement for engagement on the cup-like body (2).

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13. A container according to any one of Claims 8 to 12, characterized in that it also comprises a band-like element (14) connecting the cup-like body (2) and the lower cap portion (7) engaged on the cup-like body (2).

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14. A container according to Claim 2 and Claim 8 taken in combination.

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FIG. 1

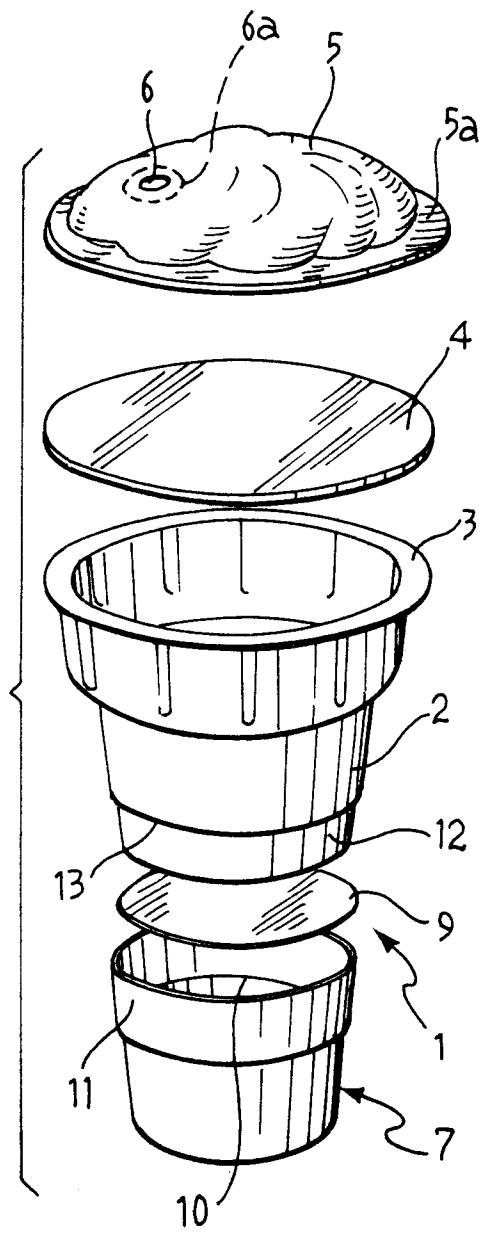
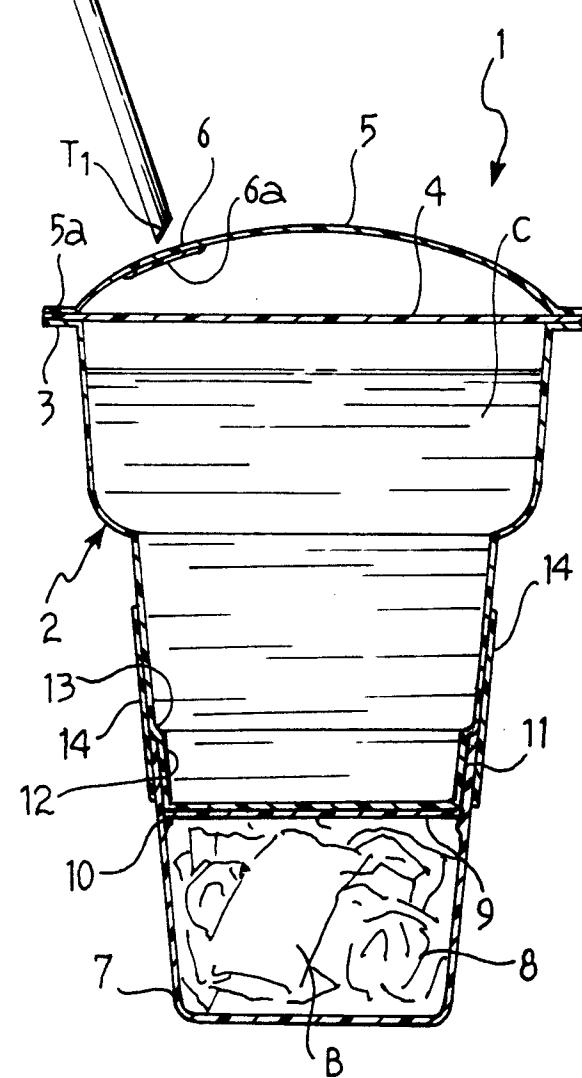


FIG. 2





DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	
X	WO 96 39911 A (JOHNSON JIMMIE L) 19 December 1996 * page 6, line 26 - page 11, line 9 * * figures 1-4 *	1-3,7	B65D77/20 B65D51/20 B65D81/32
Y	---	4-6,8-14	
Y	US 5 303 838 A (LUCH DANIEL ET AL) 19 April 1994 * column 1, line 34 - column 1, line 52 * * figures 1-4 *	4-6	
A	GB 1 414 809 A (NYFFELER CORTI AG) 19 November 1975 * page 1, left-hand column, line 34 - page 1, right-hand column, line 70 * * figure 1 *	4-6	
Y	---	8-10,14	
Y	US 3 662 913 A (MASCIA CARMEN T) 16 May 1972 * column 2, line 2 - column 4, line 11 * * figures 1-4 *	8-10,14	TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
Y	WO 96 07604 A (DEELEY STEPHANIE TAMSIN ;ABOUAV DAVID M (AU)) 14 March 1996 * page 7, line 13 - page 7, line 20 * * figure 20 *	8,11-14	B65D
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	
THE HAGUE	28 May 1998	Farizon, P	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS		T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document	
X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document			

**CLAIMS INCURRING FEES**

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims.

Only part of the claims have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claim(s):

No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

see sheet B

All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.

Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:

None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:



The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirements of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims: 1-7

Container provided with a cap covering the sealing foil.

2. Claims: 8-14

Container provided with an auxiliary container connected to the base of it.