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(54) **Entertainment machines**

(57) A coin-operated entertainment machine has a main display device, such as rotatable reels (9), with which a main game can be played involving selection and display of symbols, a prize being awarded if the symbols make up a winning combination. Supplementary play features can be implemented, such as a feature game played on a display (15), or a gamble feature or a mystery award or the like. After inserting coins to provide credit at least equal to a required stake value a press button (4) can be operated to initiate game play. Different start buttons (4) are provided, each relating to a different range of supplementary play features. The player can select the desired range of such features by operating the corresponding button (4), the correspondence between the buttons (4) and the ranges of the features being indicated on a display (18).

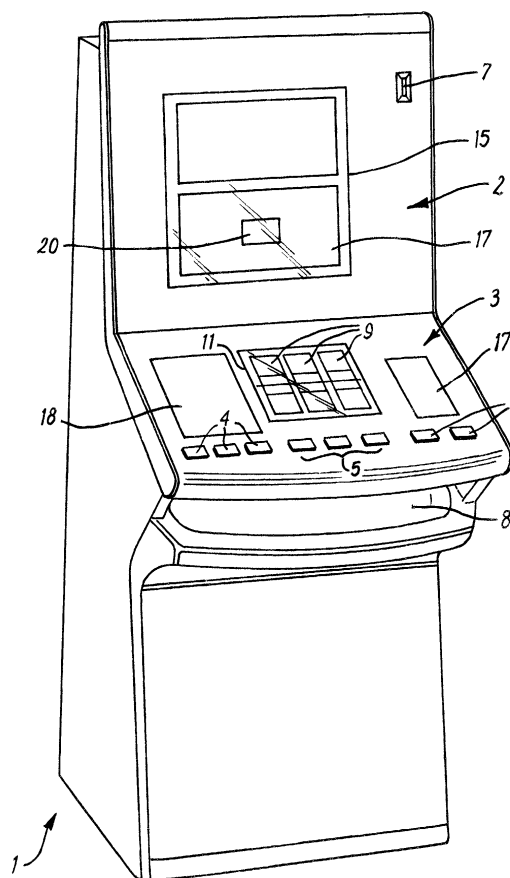


Fig. 1

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to player-operable entertainment machines, particularly coin-operated amusement with prizes (AWP) machines, such as "fruit" or "poker" machines, of the kind operable for playing a game having a main play feature involving selection and display at a win zone of a combination of symbols with a main display device. As used herein the term coin is intended also to cover tokens, charge or credit cards or any other means of supplying credit or monetary value.

[0002] The main display device of a fruit machine may comprise multiple side-by-side reels which are rotatable about a common horizontal axis within a housing behind a window at the win zone. Each reel has symbols at equally spaced positions around its periphery and the reels can be brought to rest with one symbol on each reel displayed through the window on a win line.

[0003] If the displayed combination of symbols constitutes a predetermined winning combination an award may be made available to the player.

[0004] It is well known to provide a supplementary play feature or features whereby the player can seek to influence the displayed symbol combination typically by operating 'nudge' or 'hold' controls which cause one or more reels to be nudged through one or more positions or to be held against subsequent rotation.

[0005] It is also well known to provide a supplementary play feature of the 'feature game' kind which can be used to enhance the entertainment value of the machine and provide additional or alternative opportunities for winning.

[0006] In particular, it is known to provide a panel having sections which can be selectively illuminated to represent movement from location to location along a trail, particularly along a wraparound trail, which may simulate the playing of a board game.

[0007] Play is transferred from the main reels to the trail of the feature game on a random or predetermined basis and illumination of the panel sections may then be effected by, or in correspondence with, a rotatable subsidiary feature reel, or otherwise, representing the spin of a reel or roll of a dice or other selection.

[0008] Awards or award possibilities may be made available to the player in dependence on the location on the trail to which play has progressed.

[0009] Other supplementary play features, which provide the player with a different or supplementary winning opportunity, or the possibility of increasing the value of an attained award, are also well known. In particular it is known to provide a gamble feature whereby for example the player operates a control to arrest movement up and down a 'ladder' as indicated by illumination of successive steps, so that an increased or decreased award is attained depending on the step finally selected.

[0010] Supplementary play features are also known which influence the course of play by changing the manner in which in existing feature or game play operation

functions, or by changing the range of events associated with an existing feature, or by introducing or changing the range of occasional events linked to benefits or awards. Thus, for example, the main display device may be operable with one win line, or a plurality of win lines; there may be different ways in which play can transfer from the main play feature to a supplementary feature game; the award structure associated with a feature game or other supplementary feature may be variable; different symbols may have different subsidiary functions (e.g. they may function as transfer symbols, for transfer to a feature game or other supplementary feature, or special award symbol); there may be different random or pseudo random or predetermined events such as mystery awards or benefits.

[0011] These various supplementary play features can add considerably to the interest and entertainment value of the machine. However, the range of features available on a particular machine is usually predetermined and this may not be wholly to the liking of all players. This may be because, on the one hand, the range may include feature which are, or become, of reduced interest to experienced players, and on the other hand are perceived to be unduly complicated for inexperienced players.

[0012] An object of the present invention is to provide a machine having a range of supplementary play features which can be made available in such a manner as to enhance the interest and entertainment value for individual players.

[0013] According to the present invention -therefore there is provided a coin-operated entertainment machine operable for playing a game having a main play feature involving selection and display at a win zone, of a combination of symbols with a main display device, and a plurality of supplementary play features involving modification of the main play feature and/or operation of one or more supplementary display devices, said machine having a player-operable start control for starting the game, characterised in that the start control is operable in a plurality of modes each corresponding to play of the game with a different selection of said supplementary play features.

[0014] With this arrangement, by appropriate selection of the start control players can select different supplementary features for different games which gives added variety and also can enable a player to select features suited to his ability and interests. This enhances player interest and entertainment value.

[0015] Preferably, the multi-mode start control comprises a plurality of independently player-operable device such as separate push buttons. However, the invention is not restricted to this and other devices such as a multiposition switch, or touch screen controls may also be used.

[0016] Typically, there may be three start modes, although any other suitable number of modes may be used.

[0017] The multi-mode start selection may be available for all games or for only some games. In the latter case, availability may be determined on a predetermined, or random, or pseudo - random basis, or as the consequence of the outcome of some game play event.

[0018] Availability of the multi-mode selection may be signalled preferably visually to the player in any suitable manner e.g. by illumination of the aforesaid separate press buttons.

[0019] The (or each) supplementary feature corresponding to a selected said start mode may be made available to the player on any suitable basis. Thus, they may be made available such that they only come into play during the game in the event that a further condition is met, which further condition may be of a random or pseudo random nature or as a consequence of the outcome of some game play event. Alternatively they may be made available on a predictable or predetermined basis.

[0020] Prizes, such as monetary pay-outs, may be awarded to players in correspondence with winning outcomes of games, which outcomes may be determined on a random or pseudo-random basis. In this case, the odds for winning may be independent of the selected start mode (i.e. the same for each mode), or alternatively they may differ.

[0021] Also, the stake, i.e. the monetary value or credit taken for operation of a game and utilised in conjunction with winning odds for computation of awarded prize value, may be independent of the selected start mode (i.e. the same for each mode), or alternatively may differ.

[0022] Most preferably, the machine is of the fruit machine kind and the main display device comprises actual or simulated rotatable reels, or other device, operable to select and display a combination of symbols (say three or four) along one or more win lines or rows.

[0023] The supplementary features may be of any suitable kind. In the context of a machine of the above mentioned fruit machine kind, the features may comprise nudge or hold features used to influence selection of the symbols on the main display device, or feature games to which play can transfer from the main play feature, or a gamble feature, or the like.

[0024] The supplementary features may also comprise features which influence the course of play, or change events associated with another feature, or introduce or change occasional events as mentioned above. Thus as used herein, supplementary play features also refers to features which implement, facilitate, enhance, or modify other features.

[0025] The supplementary features may be applicable before, during or after the main play feature.

[0026] The different selections of supplementary features for the different start modes may be predetermined or may be selected on a random or pseudo random basis. Where predetermined, the selections may differ in complexity or type. The nature of the selections may be made known to the player in advance, or may be concealed from the player.

cealed from the player.

[0027] Where the selections are predetermined and made known in advance to the player, advantageously this enables the player to choose a level of complexity or other factor as desired by the player.

[0028] The level of complexity of the selections is made known to the player, e.g. visually particularly by back illumination of a printed panel, with qualitative information (e.g. "simple", "usual", "complex") or with detailed or quantitative information (e.g. listing the features made available).

[0029] Alternatively or additionally to the use of a back-illuminated display panel, other kinds of display devices of a static or changeable nature may be used.

Thus, there may be a rotating reel or disc or other movable member which may be presented to the player, e.g. through a window, and which carries indications of supplementary play feature selections. This movable member may move and then come to rest in correspondence with a player or machine generated selection so as to display when at rest on a portion of the member indications of the supplementary play feature or features corresponding to that selection. Alternatively, the member may move and then come to rest to display when at rest on a portion of the member a plurality of indications from which selections can then be made.

[0030] Other static or changeable display devices may also be used.

[0031] The invention will now be described by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:-

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic perspective view of one form of an entertainment machine according to the invention; and

Figure 2 is a block circuit diagram of the machine.

[0032] Referring to the drawings, Figure 1 shows a fruit machine having a floor-standing box shaped housing 1 having a front wall which includes upper and lower glass panels 2, 3, a number of operating buttons 4, 5, 6, a coin slot 7 and a payout opening 8.

[0033] Within the housing 1 there are three axially aligned reels 9 having say 20 symbols at regularly spaced positions around their peripheries. The reels 9 are axially rotatable and are drivably connected to respective stepper motors 10. The reels 9 are arranged behind a window 11 defined by a printed region of the lower glass panel 3. Each reel 9 can be arrested by the respective stepper motor 10 in any of 20 stopping positions in which one symbol is in precise registration with a horizontal win line in the centre of the window 11 and two further symbols are visible above and below the win line.

[0034] The stepper motors 10 are connected to a microprocessor-based control unit 12. This unit is also connected to a coin-mechanism 13, a pay-out mechanism 14 and the buttons 4, 5, 6.

[0035] In use, the player inserts coins into the coin mechanism 13 through the slot 7 sufficient to generate credit for one or more games. The amount of credit is shown on an LED or LCD display (not shown) and the machine is actuated so that a main game can now be played. The main game commences after a start button 4 has been pressed and the reels 9 spin and then come to rest so as to select a combination of symbols displayed on the win line. The displayed symbol combination is assessed by the control unit 12 and a win indication- is given in the event that the combination is of a predetermined winning nature.

[0036] The control buttons 5 can be used to perform 'hold' or 'nudge' functions, when made available to the player, so that the player can seek to influence the outcome of a game, in conventional manner.

[0037] The upper panel 2 is a transparent glass panel and within this there is a printed display region 15, which can be back-illuminated with a bank of lamps 16, and which provides a conventional supplementary feature game e.g. having a track around which play can progress in conjunction with 'moves' indicated on a feature reel 20.

[0038] Play transfers to the feature game from the main game in the usual way on a random or predetermined basis, e.g. when predetermined transfer symbols on the main reels 9 are selected on the win line or otherwise.

[0039] In the event that the main game results in a winning combination of symbols on the win line and/or the feature game results in selection of a win, an award may be made available to the player and on a random or pseudo random basis the player may be given an opportunity of gambling the award.

[0040] As shown there is a gamble ladder 17 having steps corresponding to successively increasing values starting with zero or a low value. The steps are rapidly back illuminated in sequence when the gamble feature is actuated and a gamble button 6 can then be pressed to arrest the sequential illumination on one of the steps-. The gambled award is then increased (or decreased) to the value corresponding to the illuminated step.

[0041] As shown in Figure 1, there are three start buttons 4 beneath a display 18 which is back illuminated (with lamps 19).

[0042] After introduction of predetermined credit value sufficient for play of a game, the player may be given the opportunity of starting the game by pressing any one of the three buttons 4, as signalled by illumination of all buttons 4.

[0043] This option may be made available to the player for all games, or alternatively for only some games as selected by the control system on a random, pseudo random or other basis.

[0044] The three buttons 4 relate respectively to different ranges of supplementary play features, and this is indicated to the player in the display 18.

[0045] The indication may be of a qualitative nature

e.g. simple, usual, complex. Alternatively, the indication may provide details as to the nature of the features for each selection such as "Gamble features available", "Mystery Awards", "Multiple win line", "Transfer to feature game using transfer symbols", etc.

With a simple selection, the player may be presented with, say, only simple, straightforward supplementary playing features, such as, say, a single win line for the reels, transfer to the feature game solely when transfer symbols appear on the win line, and no gamble feature.

[0046] With a complex selection, the player may be presented with, say, multiple win lines, multiple routes for transfer to the feature game, gamble feature, mystery awards, accumulation of awarded nudge steps arising from special features on the feature game, etc.

[0047] Whichever combination is selected, the machine may operate in the same way with regard to payout percentage and stake value. That is, in each case, the same amount of monetary value is utilised to initiate a game and the overall odds are computed with the aim of returning by way of pay out the same overall proportion of game play credit.

[0048] With the arrangement described above, the player is provided with enhanced entertainment, since the player can select supplementary play features in accordance with his own interests and abilities.

[0049] It is of course to be understood that the invention is not intended to be restricted to the details of the above embodiment which are described by way of example only.

Claims

1. A coin-operated entertainment machine operable for playing a game having a main play feature involving selection and display at a win zone (11), of a combination of symbols with a main display device (9), and a plurality of supplementary play features involving modification of the main play feature and/or operation of one or more supplementary display devices (15), said machine having a player-operable start control (4) for starting the game, **characterised in that** the start control (4) is operable in a plurality of modes each corresponding to play of the game with a different selection of said supplementary play features.
2. A machine according to claim 1 **characterised in that** the start control (4) comprises a plurality of independently player-operable devices.
3. A machine according to claim 1 **characterised in that** the independently player-operable devices (4) are push buttons.
4. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 3 **characterised in that** there are three said modes.

5. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 4 **characterised in that** availability of multi-mode operation of the start control (4) is signalled visually to the player. 5
6. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein prizes are awarded in correspondence with winning outcomes of games **characterised in that** winning odds are different for different said modes. 10
7. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein prizes are awarded in correspondence with winning outcomes of games in dependence on stake value required for operation of a game, **characterised in that** the stake values are different for different said modes. 15
8. A machine according to any one claims 1 to 7 **characterised in that** the main display device (9) comprises actual or simulated rotatable reels operable to display a selected combination of symbols along one or more win lines or rows. 20
9. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 8 **characterised in that** the different selections of supplementary features differ in complexity. 25
10. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 9 **characterised in that** the different selections are made known to the player on a visual selections display (18). 30
11. A machine according to claim 10 **characterised in that** the visual selections display comprises a back illuminated display panel. 35
12. A coin-operated entertainment machine substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings. 40

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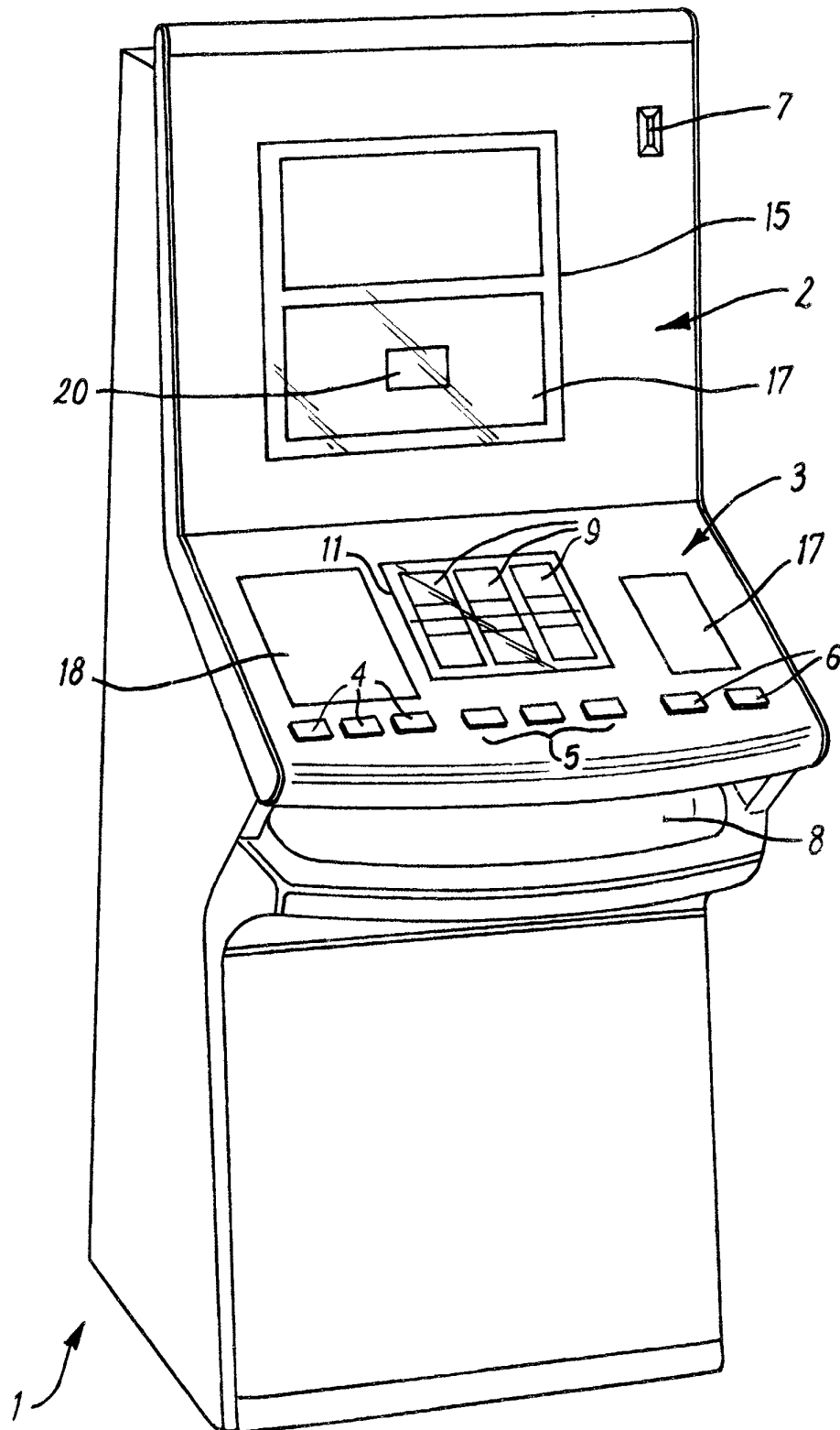


FIG. 1

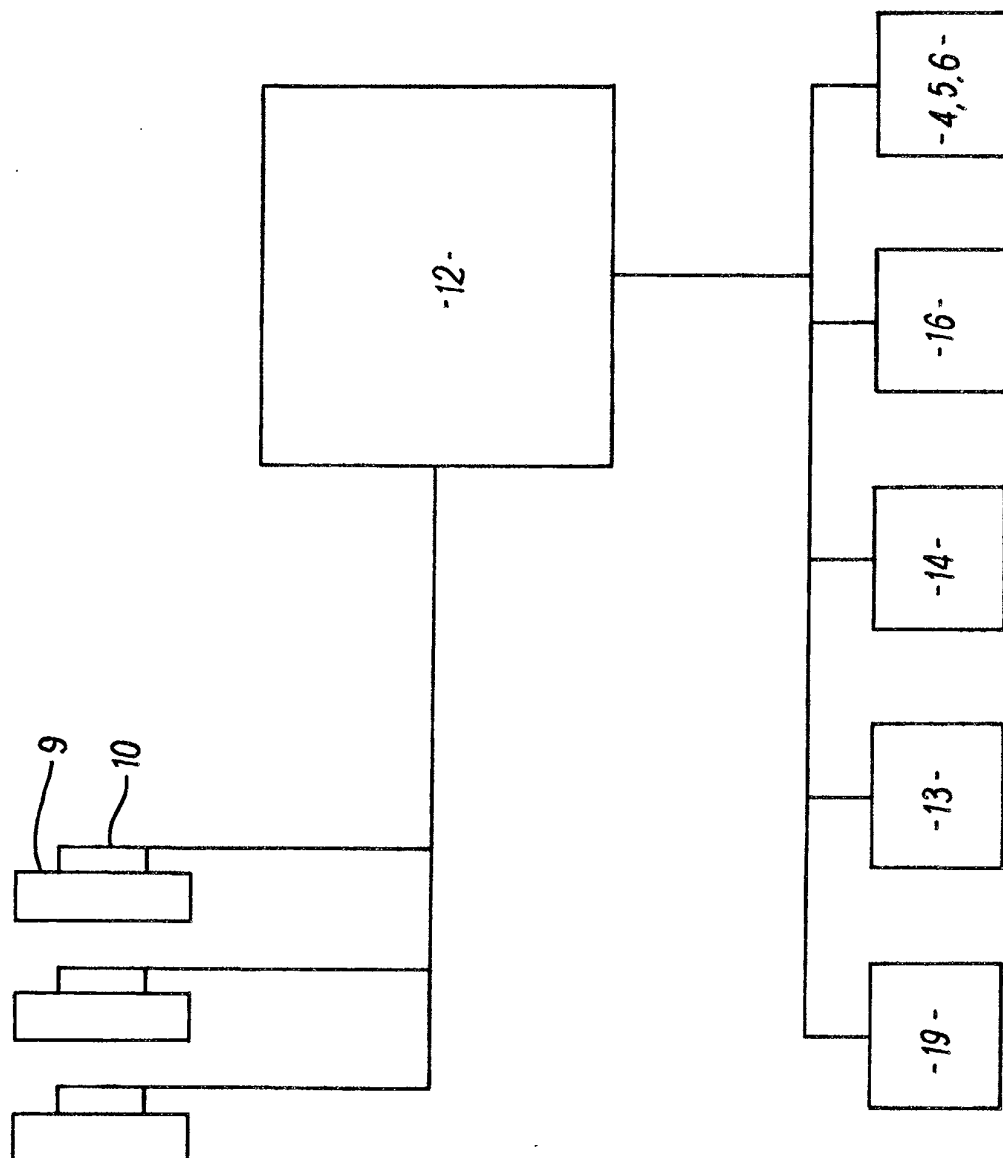


Fig. 2