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(54) **Entertainment machine**

(57) A coin-operated entertainment machine has a main display (12) which presents a card game, such as poker, or a dice game such as Poker Dice. Playing cards (26) are selected from a pack, or faces are selected from dice, and these can be changed on the display (12) using player controls (8). An award is made available if a winning card hand or dice face combination is obtained. Some winning combinations also result in transfer to an entry trail (14, 16). Play can progress from location to location (15) along the trail (14, 16) until a transfer location (17) is reached. Play can then transfer to a feature game which involves progression around a feature game trail (18, 19).

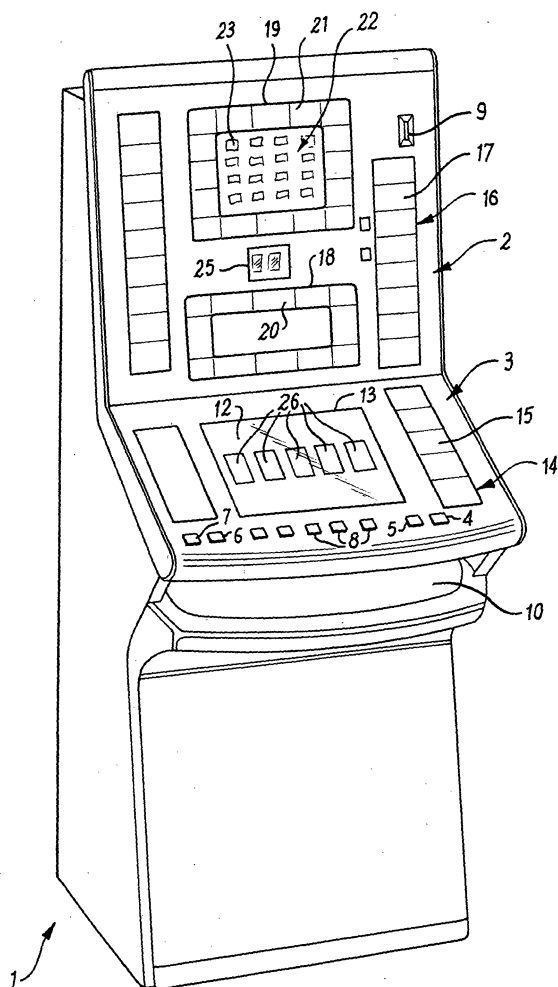


FIG. 1

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Description

[0001] This invention relates to coin-operated player-operable entertainment machines, which are amusement or gaming machines, of the kind having a main display device operable, when actuated by a stake value, for play of a main game resulting in display of selected symbols at respective display positions at a win zone. 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] With so called 'fruit' gaming machines the main display device may comprise multiple side-by-side actual or video-simulated reels which are rotatable about a common horizontal axis within a housing behind a window at the win zone. Each reel has symbols equally spaced around its periphery and the reels can be brought to rest with one or more symbols on each reel displayed at the respective display positions in the window.

[0003] If the displayed combination of symbols at a predetermined combination of the display positions e.g. one or more win lines, constitutes a predetermined winning combination an award may be made available to the player.

[0004] Additionally, such fruit machines may have a supplementary feature game to which play can transfer from the main game. The feature game typically involves progression along a trail, for example by movement around a closed loop from position to position in correspondence with progression steps selected with a number-bearing rotatable feature reel. Awards may be made available in the event that play has progressed to a winning trail position.

[0005] There are also so-called 'poker' machines with which the main display device is a video monitor on which five images of playing cards, selected from a pack of cards, are displayed and an award is made available in the event that the combination of displayed images represents a winning poker hand.

[0006] Entertainment value with poker machines is derived from player attempts at attaining a winning poker hand e.g. by changing selected displayed cards to try to improve an initially dealt hand.

[0007] With fruit machines much entertainment value can be derived from play variety introduced by the possibility of transfer to and subsequent playing of the feature game.

[0008] Accordingly, there is the problem that poker machines may be of little appeal to players of fruit machines and vice versa.

[0009] An object of the present invention is to overcome or at least reduce this problem by providing a machine which can be of appeal to players familiar with different kinds of machines, particularly poker and fruit machines.

[0010] According to the invention therefore there is provided a coin-operated player-operable entertain-

ment machine of the kind having a main display device operable, when actuated by a stake value, for play of a main game resulting in display of selected symbols at respective display positions at a win zone, the symbols comprising images of game play elements selected from a predetermined group thereof and an award being made available in the event that the displayed images represents a winning combination of the elements whereby the elements represent playing cards and/or dice faces, characterised by the provision of a supplementary display device operable on transfer from the main game for play of a supplementary feature game involving display of selected locations of a feature zone.

[0011] With their arrangement, entertainment can be derived both from play of the main card/dice game and from the possibility of transfer to the supplementary feature game.

[0012] The machine can therefore be of appeal both to players who enjoy playing card/dice game machines and to players who enjoy feature game machines.

[0013] Most preferably, transfer from the main game to the feature game is subject to players control, e.g. by operation of a transfer press button or the like whereby the player has the option of rejecting, or not accepting, transfer. With this arrangement, players who are only or primarily interested in the card/dice game can decline the transfer and instead play repeated card/dice games, whereas players who are interested in the feature game can implement the transfer thereby to enjoy playing the feature game whilst at the same time deriving enjoyment from the card/dice game, possibly on a new and interesting playing experience.

[0014] Alternatively or additionally transfer may occur under control of the machine without giving the player the opportunity to reject or accept transfer.

[0015] Transfer opportunities may arise after some or all main games. Most preferably the arrangement is such that a transfer opportunity derives directly or indirectly only following predetermined event in, or outcome of, the main game, or following accumulated such events or outcomes for a plurality of such games.

[0016] Thus, for example, a transfer opportunity may arise following attainment of a predetermined winning combination such as a winning card hand, or a winning combination of at least a predetermined value or following attainment of multiple such combinations in subsequent games which collectively give rise to a transfer opportunity. This may give rise to a direct transfer opportunity, or an indirect opportunity in that a successful outcome of a further action is first required, such as a successful gamble action, before transfer can occur.

[0017] In a particularly preferred embodiment an entry trail made up of successive locations is provided whereby play can progress from the main game to a selected said location depending on the identity or value of an attained winning combination, and one or more said locations may be transfer locations which effect or permit transfer to the supplementary feature game.

[0018] These transfer locations are preferably at higher levels in the entry trail so that high value combinations are required for direct progression thereto. Alternatively such location may be reached from lower locations by progression with a gamble feature or by accumulation of successive progression steps e.g. by attainment of successive lower level winning combinations, or by bonuses or awarded steps or otherwise.

[0019] The gamble feature may be of any suitable kind and this may involve a selector which when actuated selects a forward or backwards progression, or a win or lose action, or it may involve repeated rapid up and down indication of location with the player having the opportunity of arresting such repeated indications, whereby the player seeks to attain progression at the risk of moving backwards or losing.

[0020] With regard to the main game this may be a poker card game whereby the main display device displays five cards some or all of which may be changed for different cards selected from the pack by operation of a player control or controls, such as press buttons.

[0021] Other kinds of card games involving display of any suitable number of cards are however also possible.

[0022] Alternatively or additionally the main game may be a dice game involving display of a plurality, say five, dice or dice faces selected from a range e.g. from the usual six different faces bearing spots or other numerical indicators having the values 1 to 6. Thus the dice game may be the game Poker Dice, although other dice games are also possible.

[0023] The main display device preferably comprises a video screen on which the card/dice images are generated electronically.

[0024] With regard to the supplementary feature game this may be of any suitable kind.

[0025] In a particularly preferred embodiment the supplementary feature device comprises a sequence of said display locations in the form of a trail, particularly a closed-loop or wrap-around trail, along which play progresses by successive indication of the locations, in correspondence with progression steps selected with a step selector device.

[0026] The step selector device may comprise an actual or video simulated rotatable number-bearing reel or the like.

[0027] If desired multiple supplementary feature games may be provided which may be of different kinds and/or which may be of the same or similar kinds differing in one or more parameters such as complexity, range of award values or the like.

[0028] Where multiple feature games are provided the arrangement may be such that play can transfer from one to the other e.g. by attaining a transfer outcome with one game.

[0029] The supplementary display device may comprise a video screen and/or a back-illuminated panel. Where locations are indicated this may be achieved by back illumination of such locations or by video simula-

tion of this or otherwise.

[0030] The said locations of the feature game may correspond to outcomes selected from winning outcomes such as awards or bonuses, losing outcomes such as reduction in or loss of previously attained awards or bonuses, game play termination and the like.

[0031] In addition to the display devices of the main game and the feature game or games, one or more ancillary display devices may be provided for indicating outcomes and/or for use in playing ancillary features. In one embodiment a coin matrix is provided comprising matrix of locations corresponding respectively to award values which when indicated on the consequence of game play, e.g. in the feature game, can make available the corresponding award value which may be the sum of value corresponding to multiple indicated matrix locations.

[0032] The invention will now be described further by way of example only and with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a diagrammatic front view of one form of a gaming machine according to the invention; and Figure 2 is a diagrammatic block circuit diagram of the machine.

[0033] Referring to Figure 1, this shows a gaming machine having a housing 1 with upper and lower front panels 2, 3 operating buttons 4-8, a coin slot 9 and a payout opening 10.

[0034] Within the housing 1 there is a vdu 11, such as a crt, with a screen 12 which can be seen through a window 13 in the lower front panel 3.

[0035] The vdu 11 is connected within the housing 1 to a microprocessor-based control 30, as also are a coin mechanism 31, a pay out mechanism 32 and the operating buttons 4-8.

[0036] Alongside the window 13 on the lower panel 3 there is printed a vertical entry trail of say 8 location 15.

[0037] On the upper panel 2 there is printed a vertical gamble ladder 16, aligned with the entry trail 14 and having say 14 locations 17 marked with award values, say from £1 increasing progressively upwards to £25.

[0038] The upper panel 2 is also printed with a lower first wrap-around trail 18, and an upper second wrap-around trail 19 each consisting of a closed loop of successive locations 20, 21.

[0039] The upper trail 19 encloses a matrix 22 of coin location 23 marked with coin values from say £0.10p to £2 in total adding up to say £25.

[0040] All locations 15, 17, 20, 21 on the entry trail 14, gamble ladder 16, the trails 19, 20 and the matrix 22 can be indicated by back-illumination with bulbs 24 connected to the control unit 30.

[0041] In the central region of the upper panel 2 there is a window through which can be seen the periphery of a rotatable number-bearing reel 25 which is driven by a stepper motor connected to the control unit 30.

[0042] The upper and lower panels 2, 3 may also be printed with other back-illuminated features, such as an award table, a feature ladder etc.

[0043] In use, to play a game, coins are inserted into the coin slot 9 to the value at least of a predetermined game stake value. The credit value is shown on a video-simulated digital display on the video screen 12.

[0044] A main game is then started on pressing a start button 4 whereupon the video display changes to simulate dealing of five cards 26 which are then shown face up side-by-side on the screen 12. The cards are selected in sequence from a usual 52 card pack, simulated by operation of the control unit 30. The pack is shuffled before selection commences.

[0045] The player now has the option of changing one or more of the cards 26 by pressing one or more buttons 8 beneath the displayed cards. For any such card 26 this is substituted by a further card 26 selected on the next card from the remaining cards of the pack.

[0046] The resulting combination of displayed cards is assessed and an award is made available if the cards represent a poker hand of a pair of jacks or better.

[0047] For a pair, a BOOST award is made available. For two pairs, a BONUS award, and for higher hands (three of a kind to Royal Flush) a monetary award from say £1 to £25 is made available.

[0048] Play can now transfer to the entry trail 14 or the gamble ladder 16.

[0049] For an attained monetary award (three of a kind or better) play transfers directly to the ladder location 17 corresponding to the award value. The ladder location 17 is back-illuminated to indicate this.

[0050] For a BOOST award, play enters and moves up the entry trail 14 by a number of locations (which may be predetermined or random). For a BONUS award, play can progress more rapidly up the entry trail 14.

[0051] Play may progress to a position on the gamble ladder 16 either due to an attained monetary award (three of a kind or better) or due to progression from the entry trail 14 by BOOST and BONUS awards, which may be supplemented by additional entry trail steps which may be awarded randomly or predictably in non-winning circumstances. In this case the player then has the option of pressing a collect button to obtain pay-out of the award value, or pressing a gamble button 7 whereby a higher location on the gamble ladder 16 can be attained at the risk of losing or moving down the ladder.

[0052] Operation of the gamble feature may involve arresting rapid back-illumination of the ladder location 17 up and down the ladder 16, or by arresting an indicator alternating between 'Hi' and 'Lo' or otherwise. The indicator may comprise a rotatable reel or back-illumination locations.

[0053] Some of the higher ladder locations 17 are accompanied by printed 'transfer' markings. When play has transferred to any such location 17 the player has the option of pressing a transfer button 5 whereupon

play then transfers to the lower trail 18.

[0054] If the player does not wish to transfer, the collect button 6 can be operated whereupon attained award value is paid out to the player and the game terminates.

[0055] On reach the lower trail 18, the player can now play a trail feature game.

[0056] The start button 4 is pressed to cause the feature reel 25 to rotate and then come to rest displaying a number of progression steps. Play advances from location to location 20 around the trail 18 from an entry location 20.

[0057] Depending on the location 20 to which play finally progresses there is an outcome which may be of a winning or losing nature which may increase or decrease awarded value, or make available or increase bonus feature or the like.

[0058] Also, one or more locations 20 may correspond to transfer to the upper trail 19, or may award 'icons' which have to be accumulated to reach a predetermined level (say three icons) before play can transfer to the upper trail 19.

[0059] On reaching the upper trail 19 play progresses from location to location in the like manner to the lower trail 18, using the feature reel 25. Locations 21 of the upper trail 19 also include winning and losing outcomes. One or more of the winning outcomes may represent coin awards whereby one or more of the location 23 of the matrix 22 may be back-illuminated to indicate an attained award value corresponding to each such location 23.

[0060] The player can operate the collect button 6 to collect accumulated award value including any award value from the coin matrix 22.

[0061] Otherwise feature game play terminates when a game terminating losing outcome is attained on a losing location 20, 21 of the upper or lower trail 18, 19.

[0062] With this arrangement there is the possibility of playing a poker game and also a trail-type feature game.

[0063] The player can enjoy both types of game, or can focus on only one type.

[0064] Thus, if the player is interested only in the poker game, it is possible to reject transfer opportunities on some or all occasions.

[0065] If the player is particularly interested in the feature games transfer opportunities can be accepted in many or all occasions.

[0066] 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.

[0067] Thus, for example, instead of a five card poker game, the main game may be a different card game, or a Poker Dice game or another dice game, or there may be the option of selectively playing either, or even both, of a card game and a dice game.

Claims

1. A coin-operated player-operable entertainment machine of the kind having a main display device operable, when actuated by a stake value, for play of a main game resulting in display of selected symbols at respective display positions at a win zone, the symbols comprising images of game play elements selected from a predetermined group thereof and an award being made available in the event that the displayed images represents a winning combination of the elements whereby the elements represent playing cards and/or dice faces, **characterised by** the provision of a supplementary display device operable on transfer from the main game for play of a supplementary feature game involving display of selected locations of a feature zone. 5
2. A machine according to claim 1 wherein said transfer is subject to player control. 10
3. A machine according to claim 1 or 2 wherein an opportunity for said transfer occurs only following a predetermined event in, or outcome of, the main game. 15
4. A machine according to claim 3 wherein an entry trail made up of successive locations is provided whereby play can progress from the main game to a selected said location depending on the identity or value of an attained winning combination and one or more said locations are transfer locations which effect or permit said transfer. 20
5. A machine according to claim 4 wherein a gamble feature is provided for progression from lower said locations to said transfer locations. 25
6. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the main game is a poker card game whereby the main display device displays five cards of a pack of cards some or all of which are changeable for different cards selected from the pack by operation of a player control or controls. 30
7. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 5 wherein the main game is a Poker Dice game whereby the main display device displays faces of five six-faced dice some or all of which are changeable for different faces selected from the six faces thereof by operation of a player control or controls. 35
8. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the supplementary feature game comprises a sequence of said display locations in the form of a trail along which play progresses by successive indication of the locations in correspondence with progression steps selected with a step selector device. 40
9. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 8 wherein multiple supplementary feature games are provided. 45
10. A machine according to claim 9 wherein play is transferable from one to the other of said supplementary feature games. 50
11. A machine according to any one of claims 1 to 10 further including one or more ancillary display devices for use in playing ancillary features. 55
12. A machine according to claim 11 wherein as said ancillary display device a coin matrix is provided comprising a matrix of locations corresponding respectively to award values.
13. A machine according to claim 1 substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in the accompanying drawings.

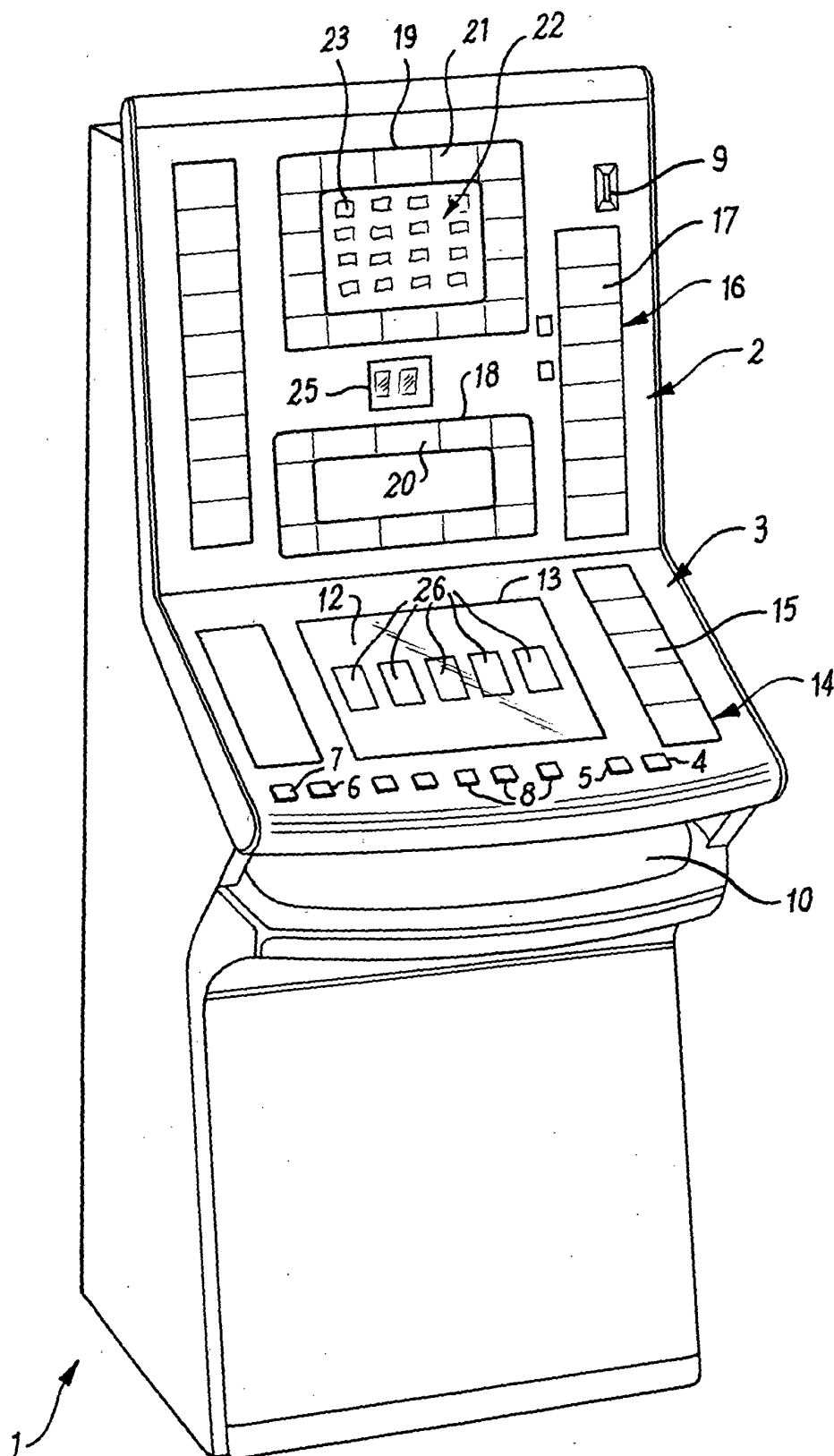


FIG. 1

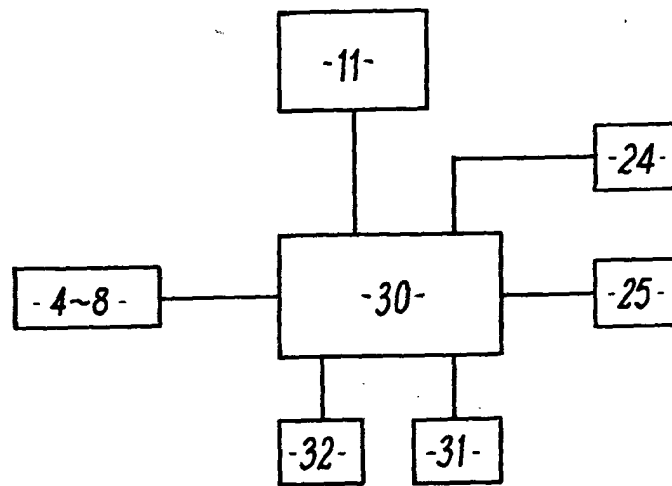


Fig 2