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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a laundry appliance.

[0002] A cabinet for a laundry appliance, for example a washing machine, includes usually a housing with two side walls and a rear wall and a front panel. The front panel is directly fixed to the housing at the front side of the cabinet by screws or clinching or welding.

[0003] Document EP 1 806 447 A2 discloses a front-loading washing machine comprising a cabinet having two side walls, a bottom wall and a front panel; the side walls are connected with two frontal frames each of them being connected with said walls on their extremities, improving the stiffness of the cabinet; the front panel is connected to the cabinet by screws passing through holes provided on the laundry load frontal aperture frame, and connected to screwed holes provided on the brackets.

[0004] Document WO 02/22937 A1 discloses a front panel connected to an angular bracket provided in the front region of the machine cabinet.

[0005] Document WO 2010/049330 A1 discloses a washer / dryer comprising a cabinet having side walls, a front panel and an upper wall; the side walls are connected to an upper frame; the front panel is connected to the side walls and to a panel covering the space remaining from the front wall and the upper wall.

[0006] Document KR 2006 0114119 A discloses a cabinet of a washing machine having two frontal frames connected to the side walls, and a front panel connected to the lateral bents of the side walls and to one of the frontal frames.

[0007] It is an object of the present invention to provide a laundry appliance having a cabinet with two side walls and a front panel, which front panel can be easily fixed at the side walls in a predetermined position.

[0008] This object of the present invention is achieved by the features of claim 1.

[0009] A laundry appliance, for example a laundry washing machine, a laundry dryer or washer dryer, according to the present invention comprises a cabinet which includes at least two (opposing) side walls (or: side panels), a front panel (or: front wall) and a bracket element, wherein the front panel is fixed to the two side walls and wherein said bracket element substantially extends in between the two side walls and in end portions is fixed to said side walls. Each end portion of said bracket element and an upper or uppermost region of a corresponding side wall and a corresponding upper or uppermost region of the front panel are connected with each other.

[0010] In a preferred embodiment each end portion of said bracket element rests at least partially on and/or is mounted from above onto a corresponding resting surface of a corresponding side wall which resting surface faces upwardly.

[0011] Each resting surface is for example an upper surface of a connection bar. The resting surface or connection bar is preferably formed at the inner side of the

corresponding side wall at a depth downwards from the upper edge of the side wall and/or comprises fixing elements of a fixing device, for example fixing holes or recesses for inserting fixing elements, such as screw holes for screws.

[0012] In a further embodiment each end portion of said bracket element is displaced downwardly with respect to a middle part of the bracket element.

[0013] Furthermore, advantageously, each said end portion comprises fixing elements of a fixing device, for example fixing recesses, for example screw holes, for inserting fixing elements, for example screws, preferably when overlapping with a corresponding fixing element, for example screw, such as a fixing hole of the resting surface or connection bar.

[0014] In an advantageous embodiment an upper edge of the front panel is arranged vertically higher than the upper edges of the side walls and higher than the bracket element and/or hides front faces of the side walls as well as the bracket element from sight from the front in horizontal direction. Preferably the bracket element extends parallel to an upper edge of said front panel. Thus, the front panel is more rigid at its upper edge and a more precise fixation of the front panel is possible in this region.

[0015] The front panel can be a substantially flat or slightly concave or convex sheet part.

[0016] In a preferred embodiment said bracket element is formed integrally with said front panel. A bracket element integrally formed with the front panel provides additional rigidity for such a front panel. An integrally formed bracket element shall be understood in that the front panel and the bracket element are made from one part. No connection means between front panel and bracket element are necessary. In a further advantageous embodiment said front panel and said bracket element are made of the same material, for example made of sheet metal such as steel. Front panel and bracket element can be provided as a part of one single piece of the same material. Made of sheet metal, front panel and bracket element can be produced by a bending and/or deep-drawing process. The sheet material may have a thickness between 0.5 mm to 1.6 mm, preferably 0.7 mm.

[0017] In an alternative also advantageous embodiment said bracket element is formed as a separate part from said front panel.

[0018] Preferably a corresponding connecting part, for example connecting flap, extending from the rear side of the front panel is jointly fixed with a corresponding end portion of said bracket element to a corresponding side wall, for example resting surface, preferably by means of the same fixing element, for example fixing screw, wherein preferably the connecting part, for example connecting flap, has a fixing element, for example a fixing recess or hole, such as a screw hole, which is preferably arranged to overlap one of, for example a front fixing hole, for example screw hole, of the resting surface and at least one of, for example a front fixing hole, for example

screw hole of the end portion of the bracket element.

[0019] It is advantageous to arrange the corresponding connecting part, for example connecting flap, in between a front portion of the end portion of said bracket element and the resting surface of the side wall, while preferably to arrange a further backward portion of the end portion of said bracket element directly on the resting surface of the side wall, wherein preferably a step is provided between the front portion and the further backward portion of the end portion to compensate for the difference in height or thickness.

[0020] In a special embodiment a hook is provided at or near each end portion of the bracket element to be arranged in a receiving section of the front panel to pre-position and/or hold the bracket element in relation to the front panel.

[0021] Furthermore, for a more stable construction a supporting surface is provided at the middle part of the bracket element supporting a, preferably horizontal, connecting flange of the front panel, wherein preferably overlapping screw holes are provided in the supporting surface and the connecting flange to fix the same to each other by means of inserted screws.

[0022] In a preferred embodiment at least a part of and preferably all of said fixing elements or screws are fixed and from above in a vertical fixing direction.

[0023] In a further embodiment at least one fixing device for fixing said front panel by applying a fixing force in a fixing direction is provided. In an advantageous embodiment the or each fixing device comprises at least two fixing elements being, at least partly under the influence of or during applying of the fixing force, movable or moved in a fixing movement in a fixing direction relative to or towards or into each other. At least one first fixing element is coupled to or being part of the front panel and at least one second fixing element is coupled to or is a part of the housing. The fixing elements are preferably a screw and a corresponding screw hole or counter-thread.

[0024] In another embodiment at least one pulling device for exerting a pulling force in a pulling direction onto the front panel pulling the front panel against at least one front face of the housing or the side walls is provided. The fixing direction of the fixing force is different to the pulling direction of the pulling force. In other words, the fixing device has a different fixing direction or works in a different direction than the pulling direction of the pulling device which is the direction for pulling the front panel towards the front face(s). The pulling device is a separate device separate from the fixing device and comprises different components and/or is arranged at a distance from the fixing device. Furthermore, the fixing device is coupled to the pulling device in such a way that the fixing force generates the pulling force or is partly transformed into the pulling force.

[0025] Being "coupled to" means a mechanical coupling whereby forces are conducted or transferred, i.e. a force-conducting connection. Thus, by this mechanical coupling, the fixing device supplies the separate pulling

device with the force necessary to achieve the pulling of the front panel, so that although fixing direction and pulling direction differ, the pulling can be achieved during or by the fixing movement.

[0026] In a preferred embodiment the or each pulling device comprises at least two pulling elements, a first pulling element which is or can be coupled to the front panel and a second pulling element which is or can be coupled to the fixing device, wherein the first pulling element is, by the fixing force, displaced relative to the second pulling element by a pulling displacement in a displacement movement in the pulling direction or having at least a component in the pulling direction. Thereby the pulling force onto the front panel is generated or transformed from the fixing force. Usually the pulling force is larger if the pulling displacement is larger.

[0027] Preferably one pulling element is a protruding element and the other pulling element is a pulling recess or opening or slot, and the protruding pulling element is forced by the fixing force into the pulling recess sliding with a sliding edge or surface on a surface adjacent or neighbored to the pulling recess until a rear edge or surface of the protruding pulling element bears against an inner rear wall of the pulling recess resulting in the displacement in the pulling direction of the two pulling elements. "Rear" means as seen in the pulling direction.

[0028] Advantageously the sliding edge or surface is curved and/or convex. Further advantageously the rear edge or surface and the inner rear wall are orthogonal to the displacement movement and/or to the pulling direction.

[0029] Furthermore, the protruding pulling element can be provided with a further protruding positioning aid edge to pre-position the pulling element into the pulling recess.

[0030] Also, a recess or slot can be provided in the housing or side walls to receive the protruding pulling element after it is engaged within the pulling recess or pulling slot wherein this recess or slot is arranged to overlap with the pulling recess or slot.

[0031] In cases where there is no gap between the front panel and the front face(s) from the beginning the pulling force is completely used for exerting a pressure between the front panel and the front face(s) it bears against.

[0032] However, in the majority of cases, there is initially a gap between the front panel and the at least one front face. In this case and the pulling device by the pulling force first closes, in a pulling movement, the gap and then exerts a residual pulling force as a pressure between the front panel and the at least one front face. Preferably, to support this, the pulling displacement of the two pulling elements is larger than the gap. The residual pulling force is preferably maintained by elastic restoring forces.

[0033] In a preferred embodiment the pulling direction is substantially orthogonal or perpendicular to the fixing direction. Furthermore, typically, the pulling direction is substantially horizontal. Preferably the fixing direction is substantially vertical and/or downwards or in the direction

of gravity, so that the fixing takes place from above.

[0034] The fixing movement of the fixing elements and/or the displacement movement of the two pulling elements is preferably a linear or straight movement.

[0035] Usually the front panel comprises at least one, preferably two, accommodation recesses for accommodation of a detergent drawer and/or a user interface or operating panel. Preferably said bracket element is arranged in a region above said accommodation recess(es) and/or comprises fixing components for fixing at least one detergent drawer and/or a user interface in a region below said bracket element. The bracket element can also form a support for a worktop or top plate and comprises fixing components for fixing said worktop to said bracket element.

[0036] The present invention will be described further with reference to the accompanied drawings, in which

- FIG 1 illustrates an exploded perspective view of a cabinet for a laundry appliance according to an embodiment of the present invention with a separate bracket element,
- FIG 2 is a view from above onto the cabinet of FIG 1,
- FIG 3 illustrates a perspective view of the cabinet for the laundry appliance of FIG 1 and 2 after the bracket and the front panel are both mounted,
- FIG 4 is a partial top view of a side of a front panel and a side wall of the cabinet according to the embodiment of FIG 1 to 3,
- FIG 5 illustrates a side view of a bracket end portion of the cabinet according to the embodiment of FIG 1 to 4,
- FIG 6 illustrates a sectional longitudinal view of a front top portion of the cabinet for the laundry appliance during mounting of the bracket and the front panel at the side wall(s),
- FIG 7 shows, in the view of FIG 6, the front top portion of the cabinet in a further mounting stage after pulling with a pulling flap,
- FIG 8 depicts, in the view of FIG 6 and 7, the front top portion of the cabinet in a yet further mounting stage after fixing with a fixing screw,
- FIG 9 illustrates a sectional longitudinal enlarged view of a part of the front top portion of the cabinet for the laundry appliance before the pulling in a further embodiment,
- FIG 10 depicts, in the view of FIG 9, the part of the front top portion of the cabinet for the laundry appliance after pulling and fixing,

FIG 11 illustrates an exploded perspective view of a cabinet for a laundry appliance according to another embodiment of the present invention with an integrated bracket element,

FIG 12 is a view from above onto the cabinet of FIG 11,

FIG 13 shows a side view of a top portion of the front panel with integrated bracket element,

FIG 14 shows an example of a finally mounted laundry appliance,

FIG 15 illustrates a further embodiment of a front panel,

FIG 16 a holding section of the front panel in an enlarged partial view of FIG 15 marked by XVI in FIG 15,

FIG 17 a housing for receiving a front panel of FIG 15 and 16,

FIG 18 a holding section of the housing in an enlarged partial view of FIG 17 marked by XVIII in FIG 17,

FIG 19 a holding element to be used in the holding section of the housing of FIG 17 and 18,

FIG 20 a first mounting stage of the two holding sections of FIG 15 to 18 in a view from the front,

FIG 21 a final mounting stage of the two holding sections of FIG 15 to 18 and 20 in a view from the front and

FIG 22 the final mounting stage of the two holding sections of FIG 21 in a vertical section.

[0037] The cabinet 2 as illustrated is provided for a laundry appliance, in this example a laundry washing machine, and comprises a housing 10, a front panel (or front wall) 12 and a bracket element (or: bridging element, transversal element or bar) 14.

The housing 10 includes two vertical side walls 10A, 10B, a vertical rear wall 10C and a bottom part 10D. For example, the side walls 10A and 10B, the rear wall 10C and the bottom part 10D of the housing 10 are connected to each other by screws or other fastening elements.

[0038] The bracket element 14 connects both side walls 10A and 10B in an upper front region in a transversal horizontal direction thereby providing for and increasing the stiffness of the cabinet 2 in the front.

[0039] In the embodiments of FIG 1 to 10 the bracket element 14 is provided as a separate part from the front panel 12, whereas in the embodiments of FIG 11 to 13

the bracket element 14 is integral with the front panel 12, for example formed as a single piece part. FIG 14 shows an example of a finally assembled appliance for all embodiments.

[0040] For example, the bracket element 14 has an elongated, preferably substantially flat, form of a bracket or a bar or sheet or the like with two relatively short end portions 36A and 36B which are connected with the relative long horizontal middle part (or: central portion) 36D through a relatively short step-like or bent or S- shaped intermediate or transition portion and are basically parallel to the middle part 36D and, in the mounted state, displaced downwards with respect to the middle part 36D.

[0041] Preferably, the bracket element 14 is made of a metal sheet, for example with extruding portions produced by stamping, punching and/or bending. In this example, said metal sheet has a thickness of about 0.6 to 1.5 mm, for example 1.2 mm in case of a separate bracket element 14 and 0.7 mm in case of an integral bracket element 14. Also the side walls 10A and 10B and/or the front panel 12 are preferably made of metal sheet, but can also be made of a plastics material.

[0042] The end portion 36A of the bracket element 14 is connected from above to a corresponding connecting portion 136A positioned on a connection bar (or: connection flange, connection bend) 101A at the inner side of the side wall 10A, i.e. the side facing the other side wall 10B, whereas the other end portion 36A of the bracket element 14 is connected from above to a corresponding connecting portion 136B positioned on a connection bar 101B at the inner side of the side wall 10B, i.e. the side facing the other side wall 10A.

[0043] Each connection bar 101A and 101B at each side wall 10A and 10B has an upper substantially flat and horizontal surface as a resting (or: bearing) surface for at least a part of the corresponding end portion 36A or 36B of the bracket element 14 and at least two screw holes 22 and 26, matching in the mounted state with a respective screw hole 31 and 33 in the end portion 36A or 36B of the bracket element 14 to insert and rotate a fixing screw 38 from above vertically in each pair of overlapping or matching screw holes 22 and 31 and 26 and 33 as parts of the connecting portion 136A or 136B. Preferably also a third screw hole 24 and/or a slot 28 (to be explained later) are provided in each connecting portion 136A or 136B (see FIG 2 and 4).

[0044] Each connection bar 101A and 101B or its resting surface 102A and 102B is displaced downward or placed deeper than the upper edge 100A and 100B of the side wall 10A and 10B by a vertical distance or depth t (see FIG 1). By this measure it is possible to counter-sink or hide the fixing screws 38 also from the side by the upper part of the side wall 10A or 10B just below the upper edge 100A or 100B and to avoid scratching of the outer side wall surface during assembly.

[0045] The front panel (or: front wall) 12 covers, for example as seen from the front in a horizontal projection,

completely the front side of the housing 10 and for example the front faces (or: front sides) 112A and 112B of the two side walls 10A and 10B. The front panel 12 for example at least abuts with or extends further outwardly than the housing 10 or the side walls 10A and 10B in lateral and vertical directions.

[0046] Preferably the front panel 12, in the mounted state as shown in FIG 2, at its upper edge 120 has a greater height than the side walls 10A and 10B or their respective upper edges 100A and 100B. The resulting difference in height h between the upper edge 120 of the front panel 12 and the upper edge 100A of the side wall 10A is shown in FIG 2 and is normally the same also between the upper edge 120 of the front panel 12 and the upper edge 100B of the side wall 10B. This height difference h is preferably chosen large enough so that the front face 112A and 112B and the upper edges 100A and 100B of the side walls 10A and 10B are hidden or covered as seen from the front, by the front panel 12 and preferably also that the upper edge 120 of the front panel 12 is arranged above the bracket 14 when mounted so that also the bracket 14 will be hidden or covered behind the front panel 12 when looking from the front. In an embodiment with a top plate, like the top plate 224 shown in FIG 14, also the thickness of the top plate should be accounted for so that the height difference h is sufficient to also cover the front of the top plate. Typically the values of the difference in height h will range in between a few, e.g. 5, millimetres and some, e.g. up to 10, centimetres.

[0047] In the front panel 12 a drawer opening 121 for arranging a drawer 221 for detergents etc. (FIG 14) and an operating panel opening 122 for arranging an operating panel 222 (FIG 14) are provided, for instance next to each other, and, e.g. below, a door opening 123 for arranging a door 223 for loading and unloading the laundry.

[0048] In the embodiments shown in FIG 1 to 10 the front panel 12 is a part separate from the bracket element 14 and thus needs to be fixed separately to the housing 10, but preferably together with the bracket element 14 in one process step.

[0049] In FIG 11 to 13, the bracket element 14 is fixed to the housing 10 and thus also fixes, automatically or at the same time or in the same process step, the front panel 12 being integral with it.

[0050] In the embodiments of FIG 1 to 10, for connecting the front panel 12 to the side walls 10A and 10B and with the bracket element 14, the front panel 12 includes, in each of the two upper corners, a horizontal connecting flap 12A and 12B, which is for example made by cutting and bending from the sheet metal of the front panel 12. The connecting flaps 12A and 12B extend rearwards and horizontally from the rear side or inner wall 12D of the front panel 12 and are substantially flat extending in a horizontal plane.

[0051] As can be seen best in FIG 4, each connecting flap 12A and 12B includes at least one screw hole 18 and a pulling slot 20. When mounting the front panel 12 the connecting flap 12B (or 12A) is placed with its flat

lower surface onto the front portion of the horizontal resting surface 102B (or 102A) of the horizontal bar 101B (or 101A) of the side wall 10B (or 10A) in the connecting portion 136B (or 136A) until or so that the screw hole 18 of the connecting flap 12B (or: 12A) overlaps with the screw hole 22 of the connecting portion 136B (or 136A) below and the pulling slot 20 of the connecting flap 12B (or: 12A) overlaps with the slot 28 of the connecting portion 136B (or 136A).

[0052] The bracket element 14 is placed, with its respective end portions 36A and 36B on top of the connecting flaps 12A and 12B in its front portion and directly onto the resting surface 102A and 102B in a subsequent further backward portion in such a way or until the screw hole 31 of the bracket element 14 overlaps with the screw hole 18 of the connecting flap 12B (or: 12A) underneath and with the screw hole 22 of the connecting portion 136B (or 136A) yet further underneath and the screw hole 33 of the bracket element 14 overlaps with the screw hole 26 of the connecting portion 136B (or 136A) underneath. In this way there is, as can be seen best in FIG 6 to 10, a sandwich structure of the three elements 101A or 101B and 12A or 12B and 36A and 36B, stacked one above the other, in the front region towards the front panel 12 and a sandwich structure of only two elements 101A or 101B and 36A and 36B further away from the very front.

[0053] In order to provide for intermediate space for the connecting flap 12A or 12B in between the end portion 36A or 36B of the bracket element 14 and the connection bar 101A or 101B of the side wall 10A or 10B and, at the same time, to allow for direct contact behind the connecting flap 12A or 12B there is a transition or step 35 in the lower surface of the end portion 36A or 36B compensating for the different heights required.

[0054] Further, the bracket element 14 includes a protruding hook 32 at each front portion, for example in the end portions 36A or 36B or intermediate portions towards the middle part 36C, for prepositioning the bracket element 14 and the front panel 12 with each other by hooking the hooks 32 into corresponding receiving sections, for example flanges or openings, at the rear side or inner wall of the front panel 12.

[0055] Also the front panel 12, at its inner wall 12D and between the connecting flaps 12A and 12B is provided with a horizontal connecting flange 12C which is supported by a supporting surface 36C of the middle part 36D of the bracket element 14. Preferably, the flange 12C has several e.g. three, screw holes 125 matching with screw holes 145 in the supporting surface 36C for additional fixing by screws (not shown).

[0056] In the embodiments according to FIG 11 to 13, where the bracket element 14 is integral with the front panel 12 and there is therefore no need for the connecting flaps 12A and 12B and consequently those are not provided, the step 35 is also not provided and the end portion 36A or 36B of the bracket element 14 rests on the resting surface 102A or 102B of the connection bar 101A or 101B also in the front, preferably over the whole length in lon-

gitudinal direction (not shown).

[0057] As illustrated in FIG 6 to 10, a first fixing screw 38 is now screwed or inserted and rotated through the three overlapping screw holes 31, 18 and 22 in the front in each case, preferably in a vertical fixing direction FD pointing downward or from above as indicated by the arrows in FIG 7 to 10. The screw head 38A bears from above against an at least in this region flat bottom wall 131 of the bracket 14 in the corresponding end portion 36A or 36B and the thread portion 38B of the screw 38 is screwed or turned into a counter-thread in the screw hole 22 in the connection bar 101A or 101B of the side wall 10A or 10B (FIG 8 and 10). The bottom wall 131 of the bracket 14 bears from above on the connecting flap 12A or 12B of the front panel 12 and the connecting flap 12A or 12B bears from above on the resting surface 102A or 102B of the side wall 10A or 10B. By these first fixing screws 38 the front panel 12 and the bracket element 14 are jointly fixed to the side walls 12A and 12B.

[0058] A second fixing screw (not shown) can be screwed or inserted and rotated through the two overlapping screw holes 33 and 26 to directly fix the bracket element 14 to the side walls 12A and 12B to provide for a four point connection with higher rigidity.

[0059] The screws, for example screws 38, can be self-cutting, i.e. their thread portions 38B cut their own counter-threads into a collar provided around the screw hole 22.

[0060] Instead of screws other fastening elements can be provided, which for example provide for a fixing movement in the vertical fixing direction FD, for instance rivets or ratching or snapping elements, as long as they provide for a sufficient fixing force.

[0061] As the fixing direction FD is vertical and from above, for example along the direction of gravity, against a horizontal counter or resting surface, the connection is very stable at the fixing points and easy to assemble, as the weight of the front panel 12 is carried and as enough space during the assembly is provided for the fixing operation even in this case of a high front panel 12 jutting out at the top. Furthermore the screws or other fastening elements can be elegantly hidden from sight.

[0062] However, due to the vertical fixing direction FD the fixing movement itself cannot provide for a horizontal pulling force for pulling the front panel 12 towards the housing 10, for example against the front faces 112A and 112B, in order to avoid gaps due to tolerances and disturbing rattling noises as a result of that.

[0063] Therefore, in addition, a pulling or positioning device is provided for exerting a pulling force F pulling the front panel 12 towards the housing 10, for example towards or against the front faces 112A and 112B of the side walls 10A and 10B.

[0064] If there is, as shown e.g. in FIG 6 and FIG 9, initially a gap or a distance d1 between the front panel 12, for example its inner wall 12D, and the housing 10, for example the front faces 112A and 112B, the pulling force F will lead to a pulling movement or displacement

in a pulling or positioning direction PD until the gap is closed, i.e. $d_1 = 0$, and preferably result in a residual pulling pressure, by which the front panel 12, for example its inner wall 12D, is pressed against the housing 10, for example the front faces 112A and 112B, as shown in FIG 7 and 8 and 10 for instance.

[0065] A preferred embodiment of such pulling or positioning device is illustrated in FIG 6 to 8 and another in FIG 9 and 10. The pulling or positioning device transforms the fixing force in the fixing movement in the vertical fixing direction FD of the screw 38 into a pulling force F in the horizontal pulling direction PD and preferably comprises pulling flaps 30 at the underside of the bottom wall 131 in the end portions 36A and 36B of the bracket element 14 which pulling flaps 30 interact with the pulling slots 20 of the connecting flap 12A or 12B of the front panel 12 and the positioning slots 28 of the connection bar 101A or 101B when they are in an approximately overlapping position.

[0066] The longitudinal axes of the pulling slots 20 and 28 and the pulling flaps 30 each extend, preferably in all embodiments, horizontally and perpendicular to a front plane of the front panel 12 and/or parallel to the side walls 10A and 10B and their upper edges 100A and 100B or wall planes and/or along the longitudinal directions of the horizontal bars 101A and 101B in order to allow for a pulling action in that direction, which corresponds to the pulling direction PD. A rear inner wall of each slot 20 in the inward direction or pulling direction PD is designated by 200.

[0067] Now each pulling flap 30 protruding downwards from each horizontal end portion 36 of the bracket element 14 is flat and slightly thinner than the slots 20 and 28 so that it can be inserted into the slots 20 and 28. Furthermore, each pulling flap 30 has a vertical front edge 301 and a vertical rear edge 302 which is shorter than the front edge 301 and ends in a convexly curved guiding or sliding edge 300, e.g. a rounded corner. The front edge 301 preferably ends in a rounded positioning aid edge 303 being the furthest downward part of the flap 30. The guiding or sliding edge 300 preferably is connected with the positioning aid edge 303 by a straight horizontal edge.

[0068] During assembly the pulling flap 30 enters first with its positioning aid edge 303 the two slots 28 and 20 and then the sliding edge 300 comes into contact with the upper surface of the connecting flap 12B next to the rear inner wall 200 of the slot 20. The distance between the rear edge 302 of the flap 30 and the rear inner wall 200 of the slot 20 is designated by d_2 and is preferably greater than the distance d_1 , i.e. $d_2 > d_1$ (FIG 9).

[0069] The screw 38 being screwed in the fixing direction FD exerts a vertical fixing force downward in the fixing direction FD onto the end portion 36A or 36B of the bracket element 14 which, conducted or transferred through the bottom wall 131, presses or forces the pulling flap 30 further into the pulling slot 20 wherein the curved guiding or sliding edge 300 rolls or slides over the upper edge of the rear inner wall 200 and the flap 30 glides or slides or

moves into the slot 20 so that the rear edge 302 of the flap 30 eventually rests against the rear inner wall 200 at the inside of the slot 20 (FIG 7 and FIG 10).

[0070] This results in a pulling movement in the pulling direction PD of the connecting flap 12A or 12B with respect to the pulling flap 30 and thus the connecting flap 12A or 12B exerts a pulling force F onto the front panel 12 which first closes the gap of the distance d_1 to the side wall 10A or 10B or its front face 112A or 112B and then results in a residual pulling force F which is a result of elastic deformation within the connecting flap 12A or 12B and the front panel 12 by the distance $d_2 - d_1$. The residual or remaining pulling force F or pressure of the front panel 12 against the housing 10, e.g. the front faces 112A and 112B, reduces the problem of rattling significantly. The screw hole 18 in the connecting flap 12A or 12B is big enough to allow the latter to be moved relative to the screw 38 by the distance d_2 in the pulling direction PD.

[0071] The screw 38 is then screwed or turned further into the screw hole 22 to finish its fixing movement in the fixing direction FD until, in a final fixing position of the screw 38, the end portion 36A or 36B is in contact and pressed onto the connecting flap 12A or 12B and the connecting flap 12A or 12B onto the resting surface 102A or 102 (FIG 8 and FIG 10). The vertical length of the rear edge 302 of the pulling flap 30 is chosen big enough to allow for this final fixing movement, for example at least as big as the thickness of the connecting flap 12A or 12B. The final height $h' = h + t$ of the upper edge 120 of the front panel 12 over the resting surface 101A or 101B is shown in FIG 8.

[0072] The flap 30 and the slot 20 constitute examples for pulling elements of the pulling device. In an embodiment not shown, the flap 30 and slots 20 and 28 can also be arranged in reverse order or exchanged at the parts. Also pulling elements with bigger and/or more complex sliding and resting surfaces than just edges 300 and 302 etc. can be provided. Other pulling elements for transforming the vertical fixing movement into a horizontal pulling force or also movement are possible, such as a gear, for example toothed gear.

[0073] In FIG 14 the laundry appliance is shown after final assembly. It can be seen that neither fastening elements for fixing the front panel 12 to the housing 10 nor the bracket element 14 are visible from the outer side.

[0074] In FIG 15 an alternative embodiment of a front panel 12 is shown which is similar to the front panel 12 shown in FIG 1, but has in addition at the inner walls 12D, formed by inwardly bent flanges of the front panel 12, at each side a corresponding holding section comprising a key hole 12E and 12F. Each key hole 12E and 12F comprises a larger hole section 15 having a bigger inner diameter and a smaller hole section 15 with a smaller inner diameter which are preferably formed in a pocket 19 extending towards the outside of the front panel 12, which can be seen in FIG 16. The two hole sections 13 and 15 have at their sides facing away from each other a semi-

circular shape.

[0075] As can be seen in FIG 17 and 18 the housing 10 has at the front faces 112A and 112B of the side walls 10A and 10B corresponding holding sections which comprise a holding pin composed of a holding screw 16E and 16F and, as is shown in detail in FIG 19, also a bushing 17E which is placed upon the thread portion of the holding screw 16E and has a smooth cylindrical outside surface.

[0076] As can be seen in FIG 20 to 22 the key hole 12E is placed with its larger section 13 which is larger in its inner diameter than the outer diameter of the screw head of the holding screw 16E through or onto the holding screw 16E. Then the holding screw 16E with the bushing 17E is moved into the smaller hole section 15 until the bushing 17E hits the upper semi-circular edge of the smaller hole section 15 and is firmly held within this smaller hole section 15. The radius of the semi-circular edge corresponds approximately to the radius of the bushing 17. This type of key-hole or bayonet connection provides for a mounting process which is like a hooking process from above and allows for sufficient tolerance during the mounting process in the upper corners described above, for instance at and with the connecting flanges 12A and 12B. Instead of separate parts 16E and 17E also a single piece screw can be provided having a collar instead of the bushing 17E.

[0077] Although illustrative embodiments of the present invention have been described herein with reference to the accompanying drawings, it is to be understood that the present invention is not limited to those precise embodiments, and that various other changes and modifications may be affected therein by one skilled in the art without departing from the scope or spirit of the invention. All such changes and modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the invention as defined by the appended claims.

Claims

1. Laundry appliance, for example laundry washing machine, laundry dryer or laundry washer dryer, comprising a cabinet with at least two side walls (10A, 10B), a front panel (12) and a bracket element (14), wherein the front panel (12) is fixed to the two side walls (10), wherein said bracket element (14) substantially extends in between the two side walls (10A, 10B) and is fixed to said side walls (10A, 10B) in end portions (36A, 36B), **characterised in that** each end portion (36A, 36B) of said bracket element (14) and an upper or uppermost region of a corresponding side wall (10A, 10B) and a corresponding upper or uppermost region of the front panel (12) are connected with each other.

2. Laundry appliance according to claim 1, wherein

each end portion (36A, 36B) of said bracket element (14) rests at least partially on and/or is mounted from above onto a corresponding resting surface (102A, 102B) of a corresponding side wall (10A, 10B) which resting surface faces upwardly.

3. Laundry appliance according to claim 2, wherein each resting surface (102A, 102B) is an upper surface of a connection bar (101A, 101B) formed at the inner side of the corresponding side wall (10A, 10B) at a depth (t) downwards from the upper edge (100A, 100B) of the side wall (10A, 10B).

4. Laundry appliance according to any of claims 1 to 3, wherein each end portion (36A, 36B) of said bracket element (14) is displaced downwardly with respect to a middle part (36D) of the bracket element (14).

5. Laundry appliance according to any of claims 1 to 4, wherein an upper edge (120) of the front panel (12) is arranged vertically higher than the upper edges (100A, 100B) of the side walls (10A, 10B) and higher than the bracket element (14) and/or hides front faces (112A, 112B) and the bracket element (14) from horizontal sight from the front and/or wherein the bracket element (14) extends parallel to an upper edge (120) of said front panel (12).

6. Laundry appliance according to any of the claims 1 to 5, wherein said bracket element (14) is formed integrally with said front panel (12).

7. Laundry appliance according to any of the claims 1 to 5, wherein said bracket element (14) is formed as a separate part from said front panel (12).

8. Laundry appliance according to claim 7, wherein a corresponding connecting part (12A, 12B), extending from the rear side of the front panel (12) is jointly fixed with a corresponding end portion (36A, 36B) of said bracket element (14) to a corresponding side wall (10A, 10B).

9. Laundry appliance according to claim 8 and claim 2, wherein the corresponding connecting part (12A, 12B) is arranged in between a front portion of the end portion (36A, 36B) of said bracket element (14) and the resting surface (102A, 102B) of the side wall (10A, 10B).

10. Laundry appliance according to claim 9, wherein a further backward portion of the end portion (36A, 36B) of said bracket element (14) is arranged directly on the resting surface (102A, 102B) of the side wall (10A, 10B).

11. Laundry appliance according to any of claims 7 to 10, wherein a hook (32) is provided at or near each

end portion of the bracket element to be arranged in a receiving section of the front panel to pre-position and/or hold the bracket element in relation to the front panel and/or wherein a supporting surface (35C) is provided at the middle part (35D) of the bracket element (14) for supporting a connecting flange (12C) of the front panel (12).

12. Laundry appliance according to one of the preceding claims, wherein said front panel (12) comprises at least one accommodation recess for accommodation of a detergent drawer and/or a user interface or operating panel and wherein said bracket element (14) is arranged in a region above said accommodation recess(es) and/or comprises fixing components for fixing at least one detergent drawer and/or a user interface in a region below said bracket element (14) and/or wherein said bracket element (14) forms a support for a worktop or top plate and comprises fixing components for fixing said worktop to said bracket element (14).
13. Laundry appliance according to one of the preceding claims, comprising further at least one fixing device (38, 22, 131) for fixing said front panel (12) to the housing (10) by applying a fixing force in a fixing direction (FD), wherein the or each fixing device comprises at least two fixing elements being, at least partly under the influence of or during applying of the fixing force, movable or moved in a fixing movement in a fixing direction (FD) relative to or towards or into each other, at least one first fixing element (38, 131) being coupled to or being part of the front panel (12) and/or the bracket (14) and at least one second fixing element (22) being coupled to or being part of the side wall (10A, 10B).
14. A laundry appliance according to claim 13, wherein the fixing direction (FD) is substantially vertical and/or downwards.
15. A laundry appliance according to claim 13 or 14, comprising at least one pulling device (20, 30, 12A, 12B) for exerting a pulling force (F) in a pulling direction (PD) onto the front panel (12) pulling the front panel (12) against at least one front face (112A, 112B) of the housing (10, 10A, 10B), wherein the fixing direction (FD) of the fixing force is different or perpendicular to the pulling direction (PD) of the pulling force (F), and wherein the fixing device (38A, 131) is coupled to the pulling device (30) in such a way that the fixing force generates the pulling force (F) or is partly transformed into the pulling force (F).

Patentansprüche

1. Waschgerät, beispielsweise Wäschewaschmaschine, Wäschetrockner oder Wäschewaschtrockner, mit einer Kammer mit wenigstens zwei Seitenwänden (10A, 10B), einer Vorderplatte (12) und einem Klammerelement (14), wobei die Vorderplatte (12) an den beiden Seitenwänden (10) befestigt ist, wobei sich das Klammerelement (14) im Wesentlichen zwischen den beiden Seitenwänden (10A, 10B) erstreckt und an den Seitenwänden (10A, 10B) in Endabschnitten (36A, 36B) befestigt ist, **dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass** jeder Endabschnitt (36A, 36B) des Klammerelements (14) und ein oberer oder oberster Bereich einer entsprechenden Seitenwand (10A, 10B) und ein entsprechender oberer oder oberster Bereich der Vorderplatte (12) miteinander verbunden sind.
2. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 1, wobei jeder Endabschnitt (36A, 36B) des Klammerelements (14) wenigstens teilweise auf einer entsprechenden Ruhefläche (102A, 102B) einer entsprechenden Seitenwand (10A, 10B) ruht und/oder von oben darauf befestigt ist, wobei die Ruhefläche nach oben zeigt.
3. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 2, wobei jede Ruhefläche (102A, 102B) eine obere Fläche einer Verbindungsstange (101A, 101B) ist, die an der inneren Seite der entsprechenden Seitenwand (10A, 10B) bei einer Tiefe (t) nach unten von der oberen Kante (100A, 100B) der Seitenwand (10A, 10B) gebildet ist.
4. Waschgerät nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 3, wobei jeder Endabschnitt (36A, 36B) des Klammerelements (14) nach unten in Bezug auf einen mittleren Teil (36D) des Klammerelements (14) versetzt ist.
5. Waschgerät nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 4, wobei eine obere Kante (120) der Vorderplatte (12) vertikal höher als die oberen Kanten (100A, 100B) der Seitenwände (10A, 10B) und höher als das Klammerelement (14) angeordnet ist und/oder vordere Flächen (112A, 112B) und das Klammerelement (14) vor horizontaler Sicht von vorne verdeckt und/oder wobei sich das Klammerelement (14) parallel zu einer oberen Kante (120) der Vorderplatte (12) erstreckt.
6. Waschgerät nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 5, wobei das Klammerelement (14) einstückig mit der Vorderplatte (12) gebildet ist.
7. Waschgerät nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 5, wobei das Klammerelement (14) als Teil separat von der Vorderplatte (12) gebildet ist.

8. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 7, wobei ein entsprechendes Verbindungsteil (12A, 12B), das sich von der Rückseite der Vorderplatte (12) erstreckt, gemeinsam mit einem entsprechenden Endabschnitt (36A, 36B) des Klammerelements (14) an einer entsprechenden Seitenwand (10A, 10B) befestigt ist. 5
9. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 8 und Anspruch 2, wobei das entsprechende Verbindungsteil (12A, 12B) zwischen einem vorderen Abschnitt des Endabschnitts (36A, 36B) des Klammerelements (14) und der Ruhefläche (102A, 102B) der Seitenwand (10A, 10B) angeordnet ist. 10
10. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 9, wobei ein weiterer hinterer Abschnitt des Endabschnitts (36A, 36B) des Klammerelements (14) direkt auf der Ruhefläche (102A, 102B) der Seitenwand (10A, 10B) angeordnet ist. 15
11. Waschgerät nach einem der Ansprüche 7 bis 10, wobei ein Haken (32) an einem jeden Endabschnitt oder in der Nähe eines jeden Endabschnitts des Klammerelements bereitgestellt ist, so dass er in einem aufnehmenden Abschnitt der Vorderplatte angeordnet ist, um das Klammerelement in Bezug auf die Vorderplatte vorzupositionieren und/oder zu halten und/oder wobei eine Abstützfläche (35C) an dem mittleren Teil (35D) des Klammerelements (14) zum Abstützen eines Verbindungsflansches (12C) der Vorderplatte (12) bereitgestellt ist. 20 25 30
12. Waschgerät nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, wobei die Vorderplatte (12) wenigstens eine Aufnahmeaussparung zur Aufnahme einer Waschmittelschublade und/oder einer Benutzerschnittstelle oder eines Bedienfelds umfasst, und wobei das Klammerelement (14) in einem Bereich über der Aufnahmeaussparung/den Aufnahmeaussparungen angeordnet ist und/oder Befestigungskomponenten zum Befestigen von wenigstens einer Waschmittelschublade und/oder einer Benutzerschnittstelle in einem Bereich unter dem Klammerelement (14) umfasst und/oder wobei das Klammerelement (14) eine Abstützung für eine Arbeitsplatte oder obere Platte bildet und Befestigungskomponenten zum Befestigen der Arbeitsplatte an dem Klammerelement (14) umfasst. 35 40 45
13. Waschgerät nach einem der vorhergehenden Ansprüche, das ferner wenigstens eine Befestigungsvorrichtung (38, 22, 131) zum Befestigen der Vorderplatte (12) an dem Gehäuse (10) durch Aufbringen einer Befestigungskraft in eine Befestigungsrichtung (FD) umfasst, wobei die oder jede Befestigungsvorrichtung wenigstens zwei Befestigungselemente umfasst, die, wenigstens teilweise unter dem Einfluss der oder während des Aufbringens der 50 55

Befestigungskraft, in einer Befestigungsbewegung in eine Befestigungsrichtung (FD) relativ zueinander oder in Richtung zueinander oder ineinander beweglich sind oder bewegt werden, wobei wenigstens ein erstes Befestigungselement (38, 131) mit der Vorderplatte (12) verbunden ist oder einen Teil davon bildet und/oder die Klammer (14) und wenigstens ein zweites Befestigungselement (22) mit der Seitenwand (10A, 10B) verbunden sind oder einen Teil davon bilden.

14. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 13, wobei die Befestigungsrichtung (FD) im Wesentlichen vertikal und/oder nach unten gerichtet ist.
15. Waschgerät nach Anspruch 13 oder 14, das wenigstens eine Ziehvorrichtung (20, 30, 12A, 12B) zum Ausüben einer Ziehkraft (F) in eine Ziehrichtung (PD) auf die Vorderplatte (12) umfasst, die die Vorderplatte (12) gegen wenigstens eine Vorderfläche (112A, 112B) des Gehäuses (10, 10A, 10B) zieht, wobei sich die Befestigungsrichtung (FD) der Befestigungskraft von der Ziehrichtung (PD) der Ziehkraft (F) unterscheidet oder senkrecht dazu ist, und wobei die Befestigungsvorrichtung (38A, 131) mit der Ziehvorrichtung (30) auf eine derartige Weise verbunden ist, dass die Befestigungskraft die Ziehkraft (F) erzeugt oder teilweise zur Ziehkraft (F) umgewandelt wird.

Revendications

1. Lave-linge, par exemple machine à laver le linge, séchoir à linge ou machine à laver et sécher le linge, comprenant une enceinte présentant au moins deux parois latérales (10A, 10B), un panneau avant (12) et un élément de console (14), dans lequel le panneau avant (12) est fixé aux deux parois latérales (10), dans lequel ledit élément de console (14) s'étend sensiblement entre les deux parois latérales (10A, 10B) et est fixé auxdites parois latérales (10A, 10B) dans des parties d'extrémité (36A, 36B), **caractérisé en ce que** chaque partie d'extrémité (36A, 36B) dudit élément de console (14) et une région supérieure ou supérieure extrême d'une paroi latérale correspondante (10A, 10B) et une région supérieure ou supérieure extrême du panneau avant (12) sont connectées les unes aux autres.
2. Lave-linge selon la revendication 1, dans lequel chaque partie d'extrémité (36A, 36B) dudit élément de console (14) repose au moins partiellement sur et/ou est montée par le dessus sur une surface d'appui correspondante (102A, 102B) d'une paroi latérale correspondante (10A, 10B), ladite surface d'appui étant orientée vers le haut.

3. Lave-linge selon la revendication 2, dans lequel chaque surface d'appui (102A, 102B) est une surface supérieure d'une barre de connexion (101A, 101B) formée à un côté intérieur de la paroi latérale correspondante (10A, 10B) à une profondeur (t) vers le bas à partir du bord supérieur (100A, 100B) de la paroi latérale (10A, 10B). 5
4. Lave-linge selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 3, dans lequel chaque partie d'extrémité (36A, 36B) dudit élément de console (14) est déplacée vers le bas par rapport à une partie intermédiaire (36D) de l'élément de console (14). 10
5. Lave-linge selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 4, dans lequel un bord supérieur (120) du panneau avant (12) est agencé verticalement plus haut que les bords supérieurs (100A, 100B) des parois latérales (10A, 10B) et plus haut que l'élément de console (14) et/ou dissimule les faces avant (112A, 112B) et l'élément de console (14) à la vue horizontale depuis l'avant, et/ou dans lequel l'élément de console (14) s'étend parallèlement à un bord supérieur (120) dudit panneau avant (12). 15 20 25
6. Lave-linge selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 5, dans lequel ledit élément de console (14) est formé intégralement avec ledit panneau avant (12). 30
7. Lave-linge selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 5, dans lequel ledit élément de console (14) est formé comme une partie séparée dudit panneau avant (12). 35
8. Lave-linge selon la revendication 7, dans lequel une partie de connexion correspondante (12A, 12B), qui s'étend à partir du côté arrière du panneau avant (12), est fixée de façon jointive avec une partie d'extrémité correspondante (36A, 36B) dudit élément de console (14) à une paroi latérale correspondante (10A, 10B). 40
9. Lave-linge selon la revendication 8 et la revendication 2, dans lequel la partie de connexion correspondante (12A, 12B) est agencée entre une partie avant de la partie d'extrémité (36A, 36B) dudit élément de console (14) et la surface d'appui (102A, 102B) de la paroi latérale (10A, 10B). 45 50
10. Lave-linge selon la revendication 9, dans lequel une partie arrière supplémentaire de la partie d'extrémité (36A, 36B) dudit élément de console (14) est agencée directement sur la surface d'appui (102A, 102B) de la paroi latérale (10A, 10B). 55
11. Lave-linge selon l'une quelconque des revendications 7 à 10, dans lequel un crochet (32) est prévu à ou à proximité de chaque partie d'extrémité de l'élément de console de manière à être agencé dans une section de réception du panneau avant afin de pré-positionner et/ou de maintenir l'élément de console par rapport au panneau avant, et/ou dans lequel une surface de support (35C) est prévue à la partie intermédiaire (35D) de l'élément de console (14) afin de supporter une bride de connexion (12C) du panneau avant (12).
12. Lave-linge selon l'une des revendications précédentes, dans lequel ledit panneau avant (12) comprend au moins un évidement de réception pour recevoir un tiroir de détergent et/ou une interface d'utilisateur ou un panneau de commande, et dans lequel ledit élément de console (14) est agencé dans une région au-dessus dudit/desdits évidement(s) de réception et/ou comprend des composants de fixation pour fixer au moins un tiroir de détergent et/ou une interface d'utilisateur dans une région située en dessous dudit élément de console (14), et/ou dans lequel ledit élément de console (14) forme un support pour un plan de travail ou une plaque supérieure et comprend des composants de fixation pour fixer ledit plan de travail audit élément de console (14).
13. Lave-linge selon l'une des revendications précédentes, comprenant en outre au moins un dispositif de fixation (38, 22, 131) pour fixer ledit panneau avant (12) au boîtier (10) en appliquant une force de fixation dans une direction de fixation (FD), dans lequel le ou chaque dispositif de fixation comprend au moins deux éléments de fixation qui sont, au moins partiellement sous l'influence ou pendant l'application de la force de fixation, mobiles ou déplacés dans un mouvement de fixation dans une direction de fixation (FD) l'un par rapport à l'autre ou l'un en direction de l'autre ou l'un dans l'autre, au moins un premier élément de fixation (38, 131) étant couplé au ou faisant partie du panneau avant (12) et/ou de la console (14), et au moins un deuxième élément de fixation (22) étant couplé à ou faisant partie de la paroi latérale (10A, 10B).
14. Lave-linge selon la revendication 13, dans lequel la direction de fixation (FD) est sensiblement verticale et/ou orientée vers le bas.
15. Lave-linge selon la revendication 13 ou 14, comprenant au moins un dispositif de traction (20, 30, 12A, 12B) pour exercer une force de traction (F) dans une direction de traction (PD) sur le panneau avant (12) afin de tirer le panneau avant (12) contre au moins une face avant (112A, 112B) du boîtier (10, 10A, 10B), dans lequel la direction de fixation (FD) de la force de fixation est différente de ou perpendiculaire à la direction de traction (PD) de la force de traction (F), et

dans lequel le dispositif de fixation (38A, 131) est couplé au dispositif de traction (30) de telle sorte que la force de fixation génère la force de traction (F) ou est partiellement transformée en la force de traction (F).

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FIG 1

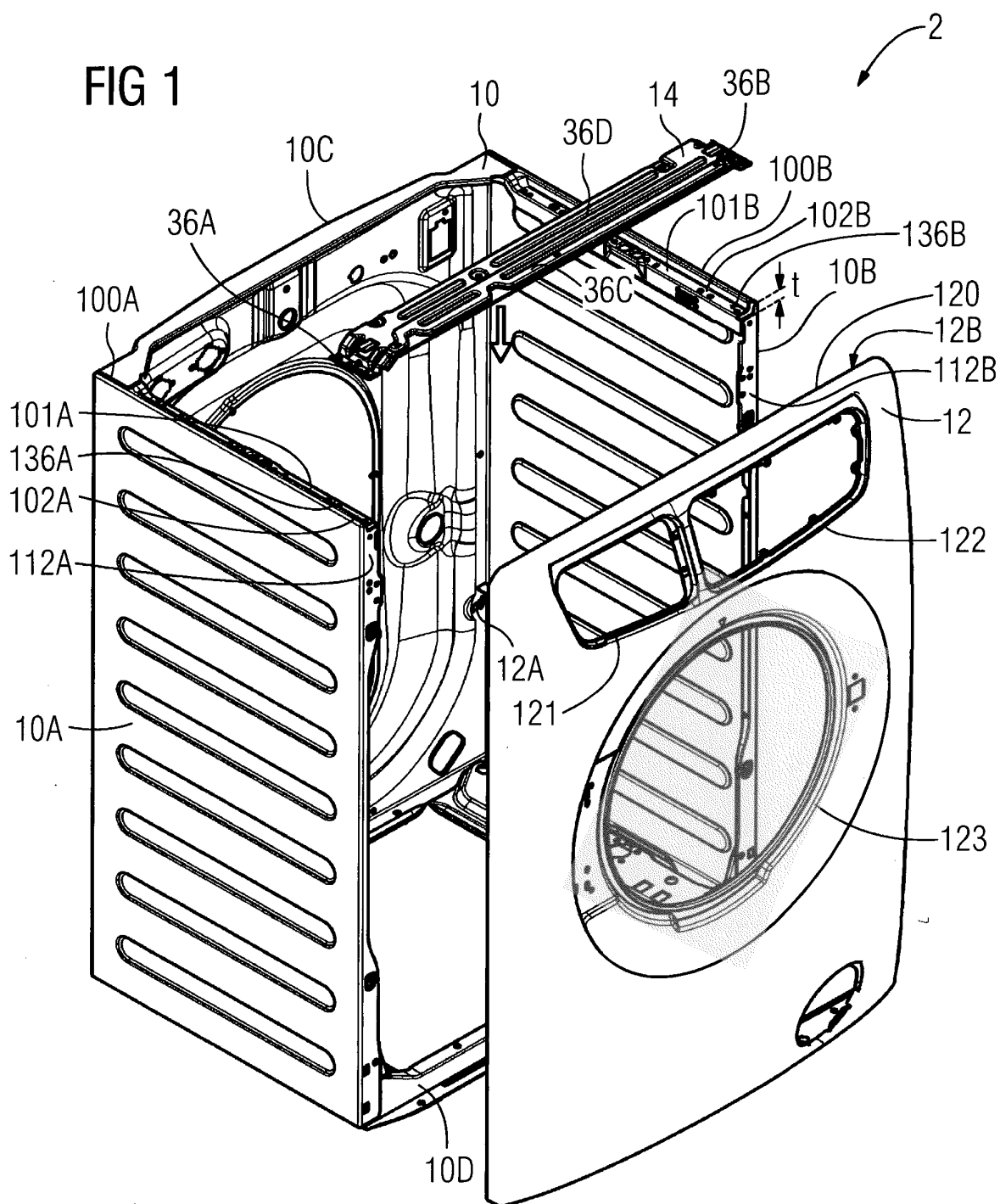


FIG 2

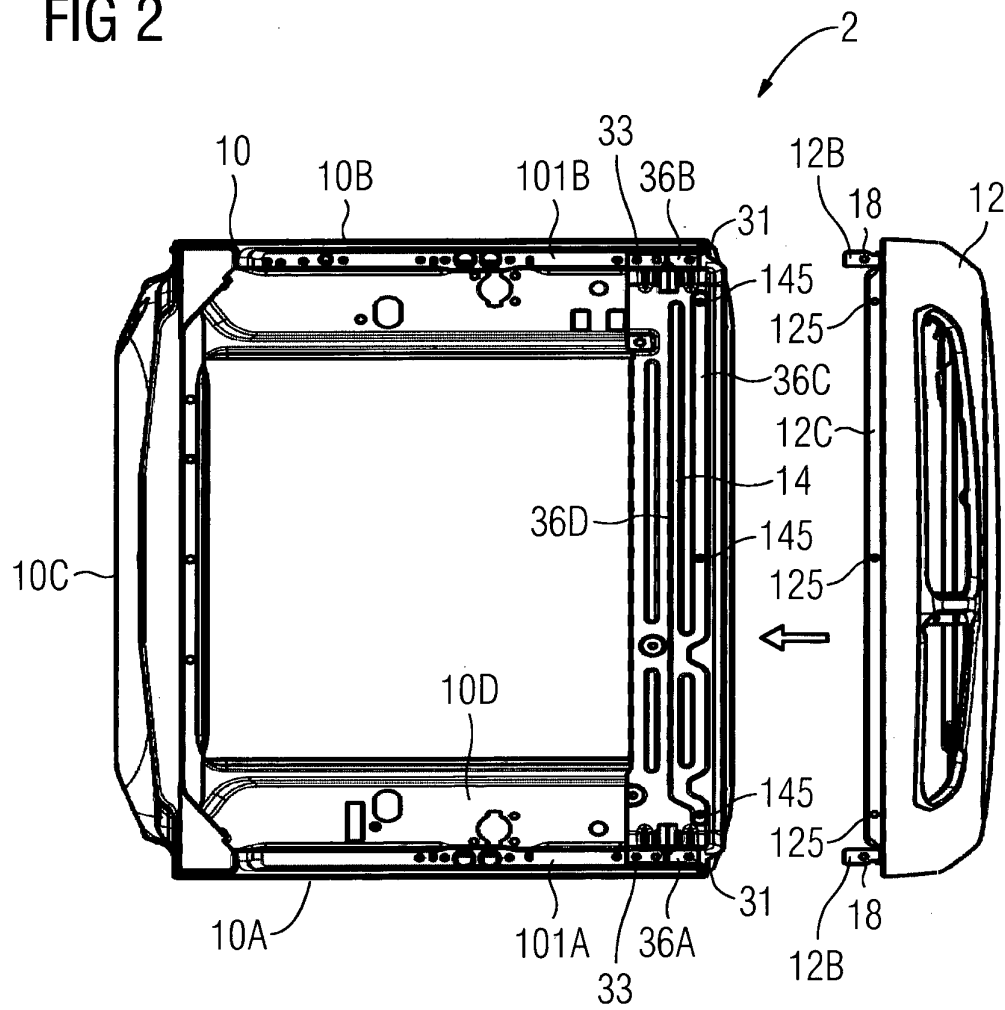


FIG 3

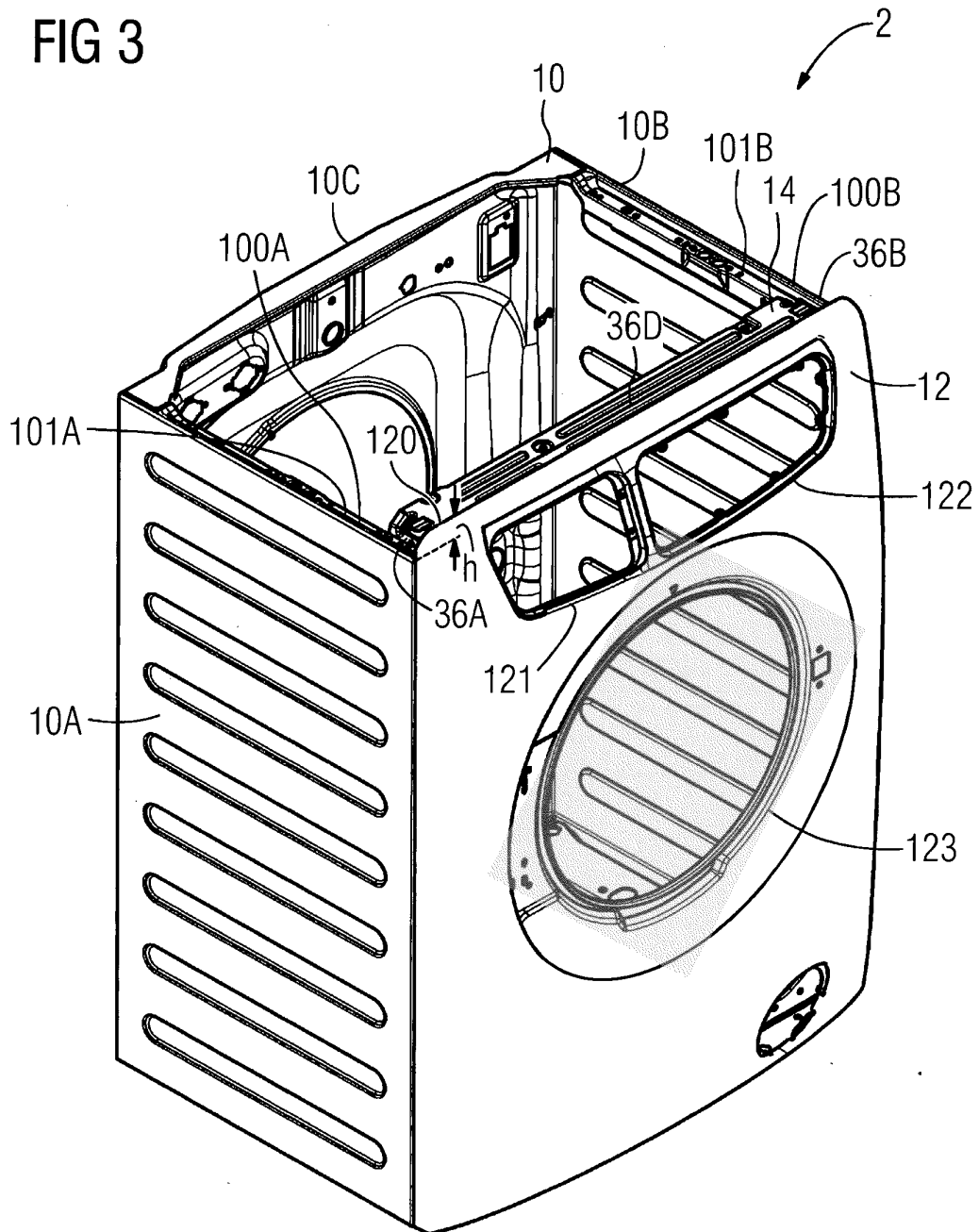


FIG 4

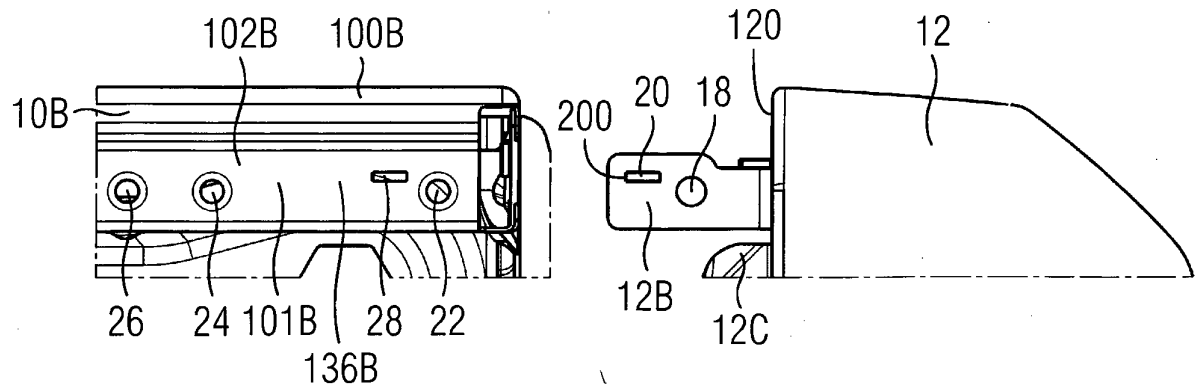


FIG 5

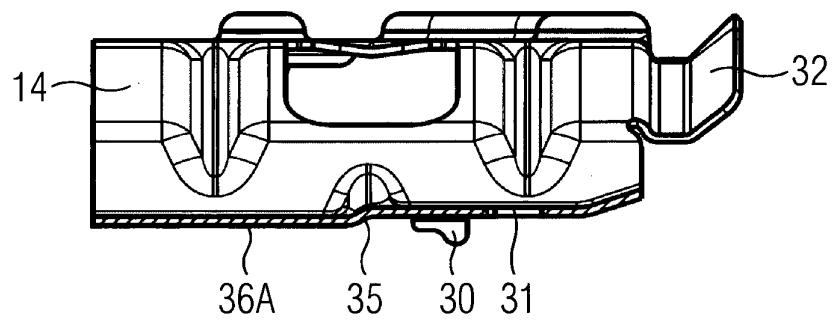


FIG 6

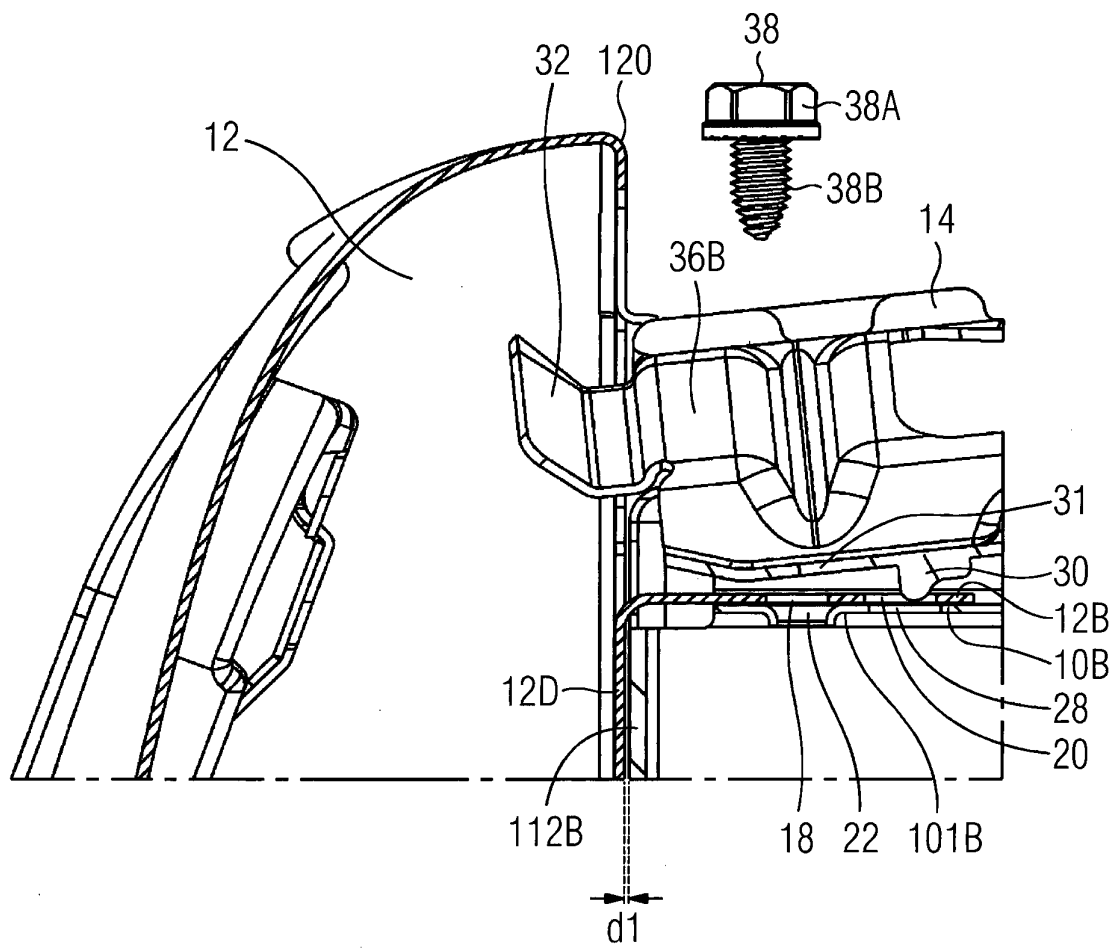


FIG 7

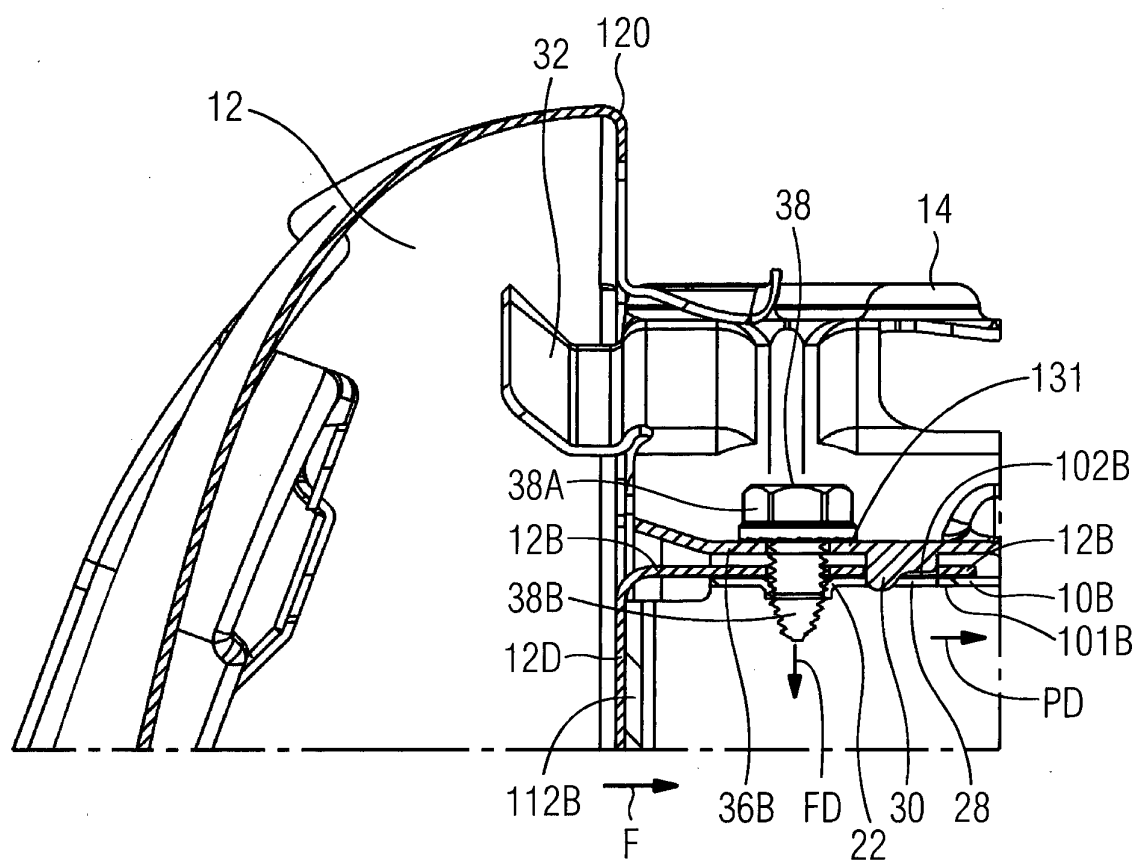


FIG 8

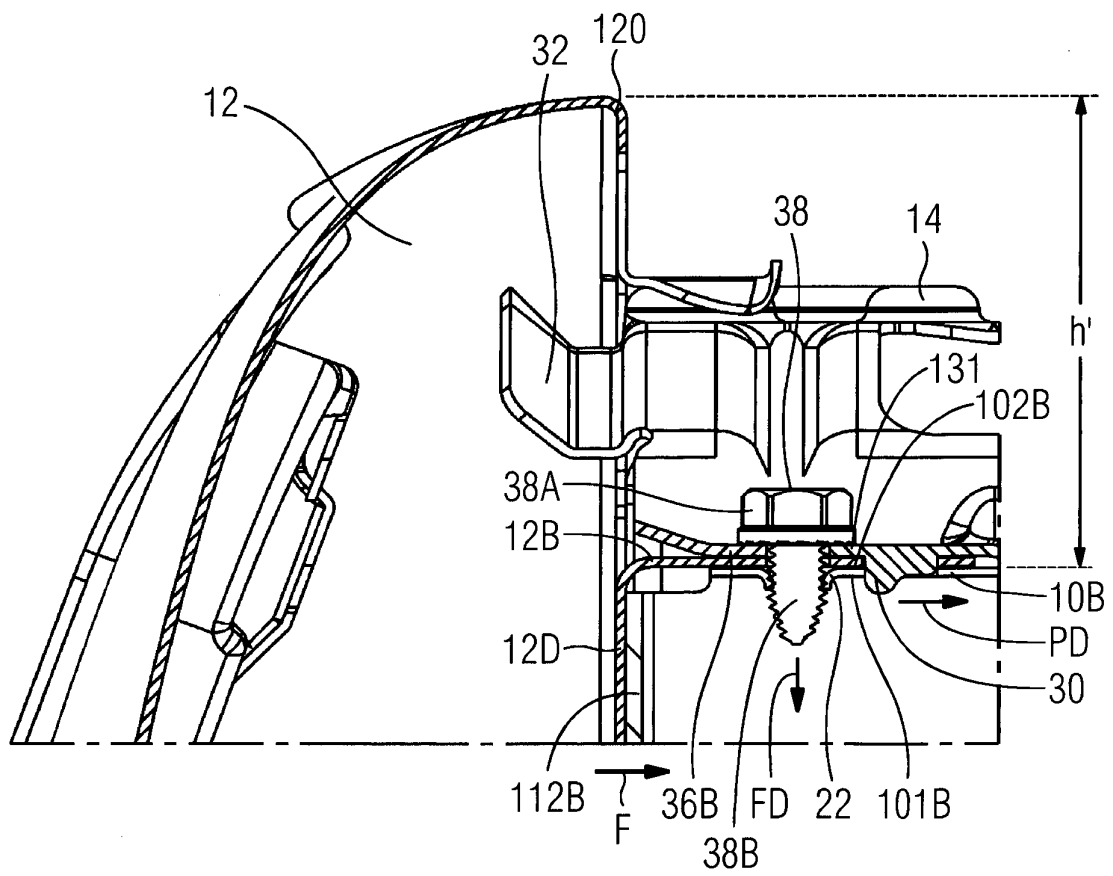


FIG 9

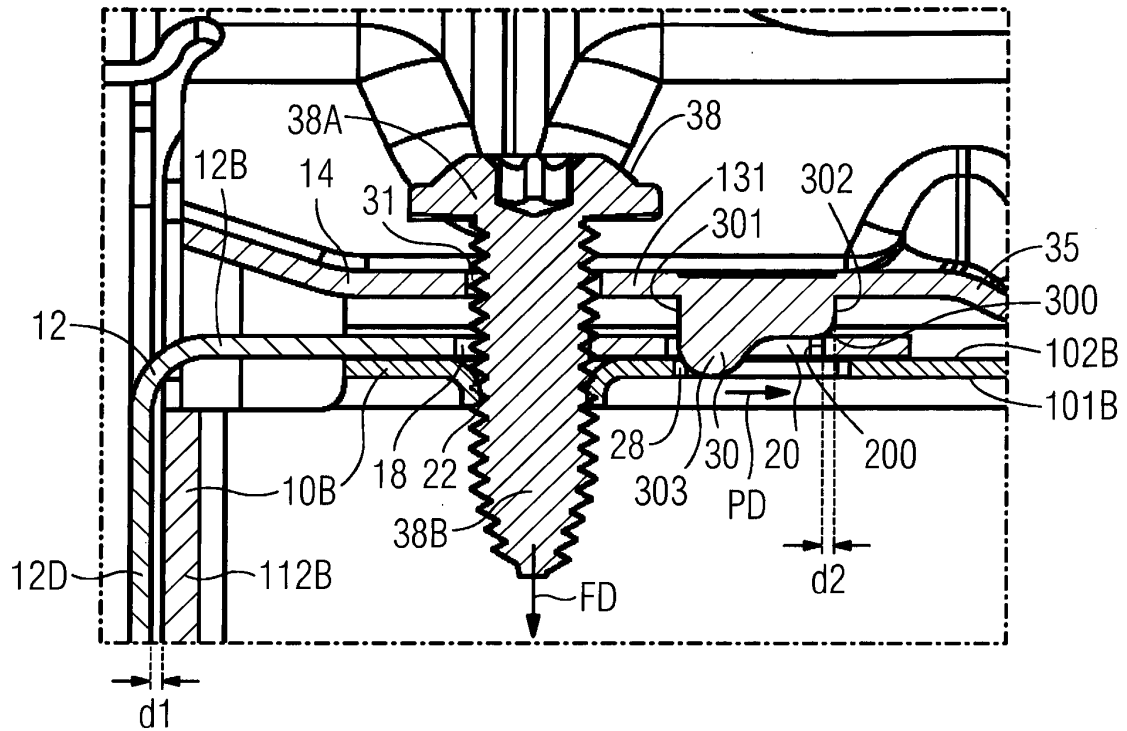


FIG 10

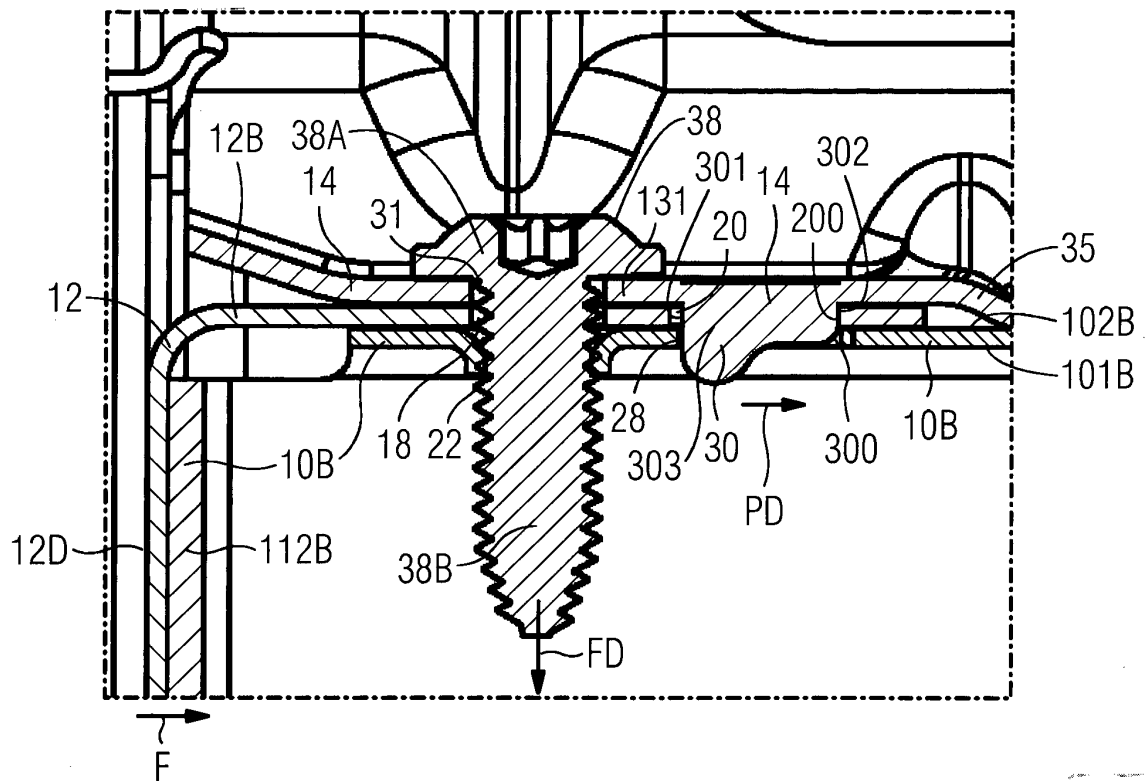


FIG 11

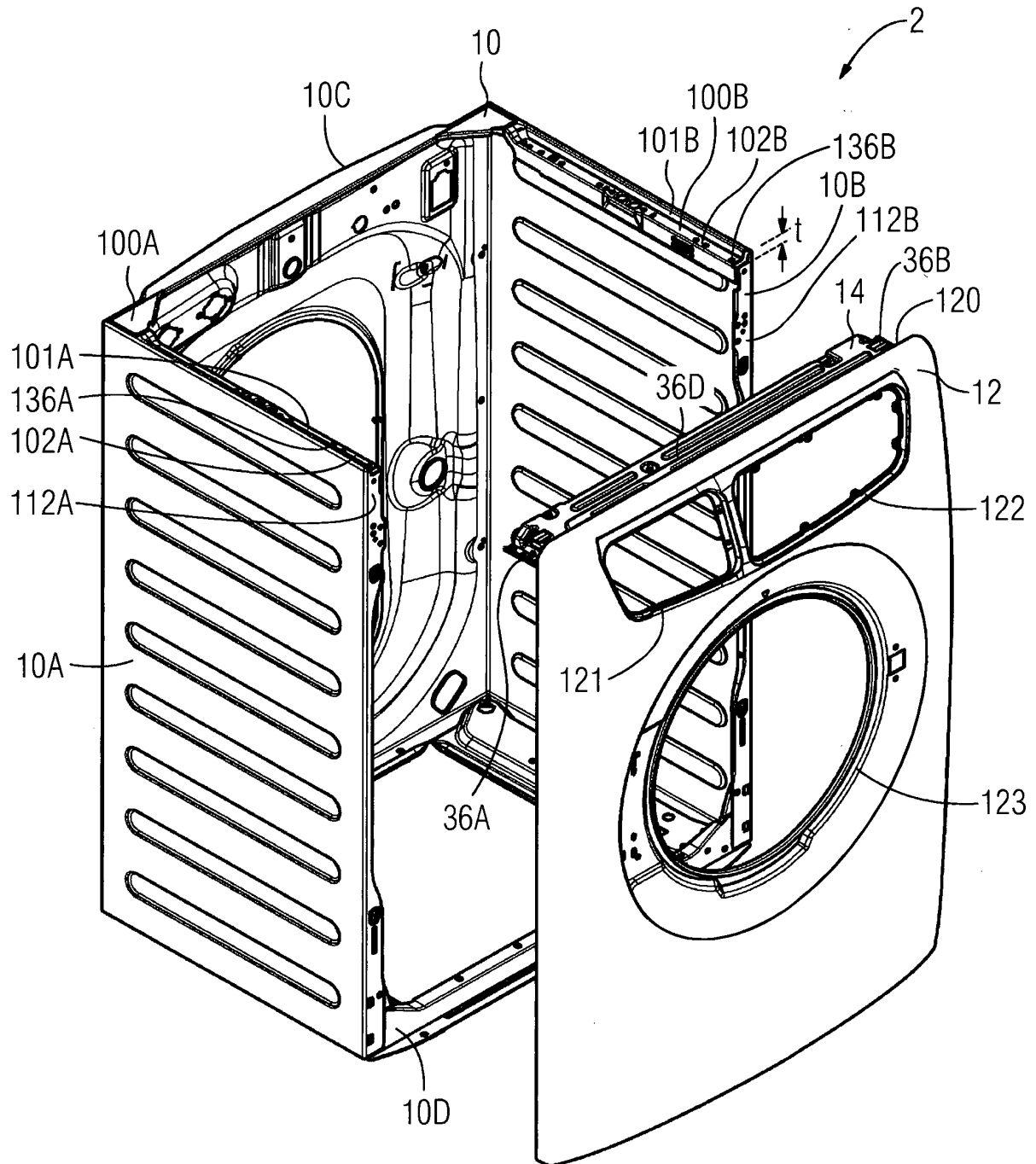


FIG. 12

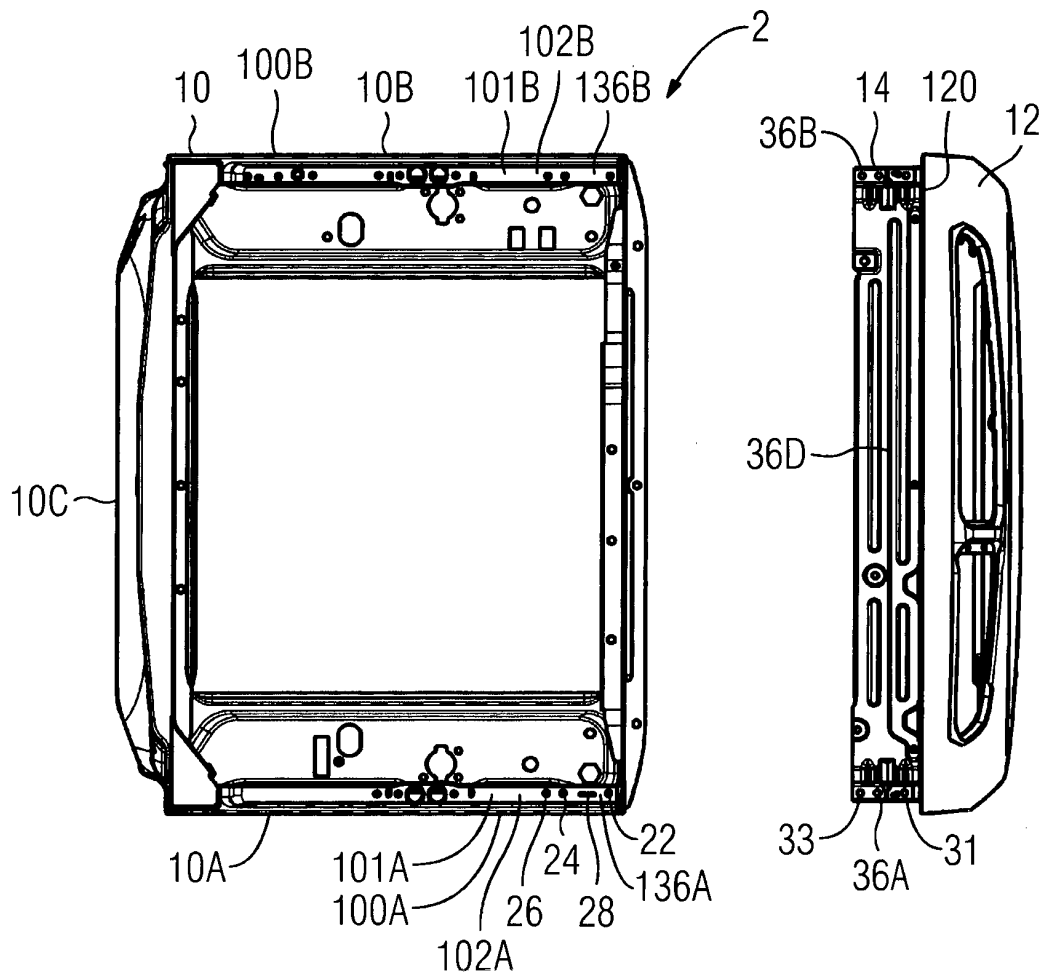


FIG 13

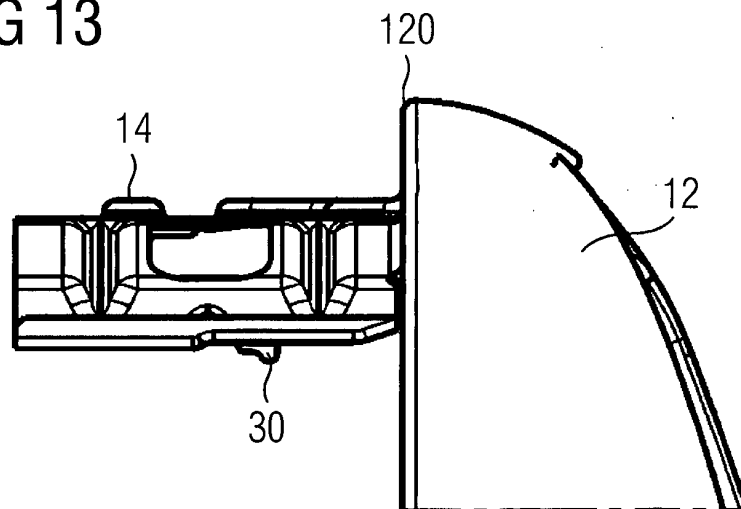


FIG 14

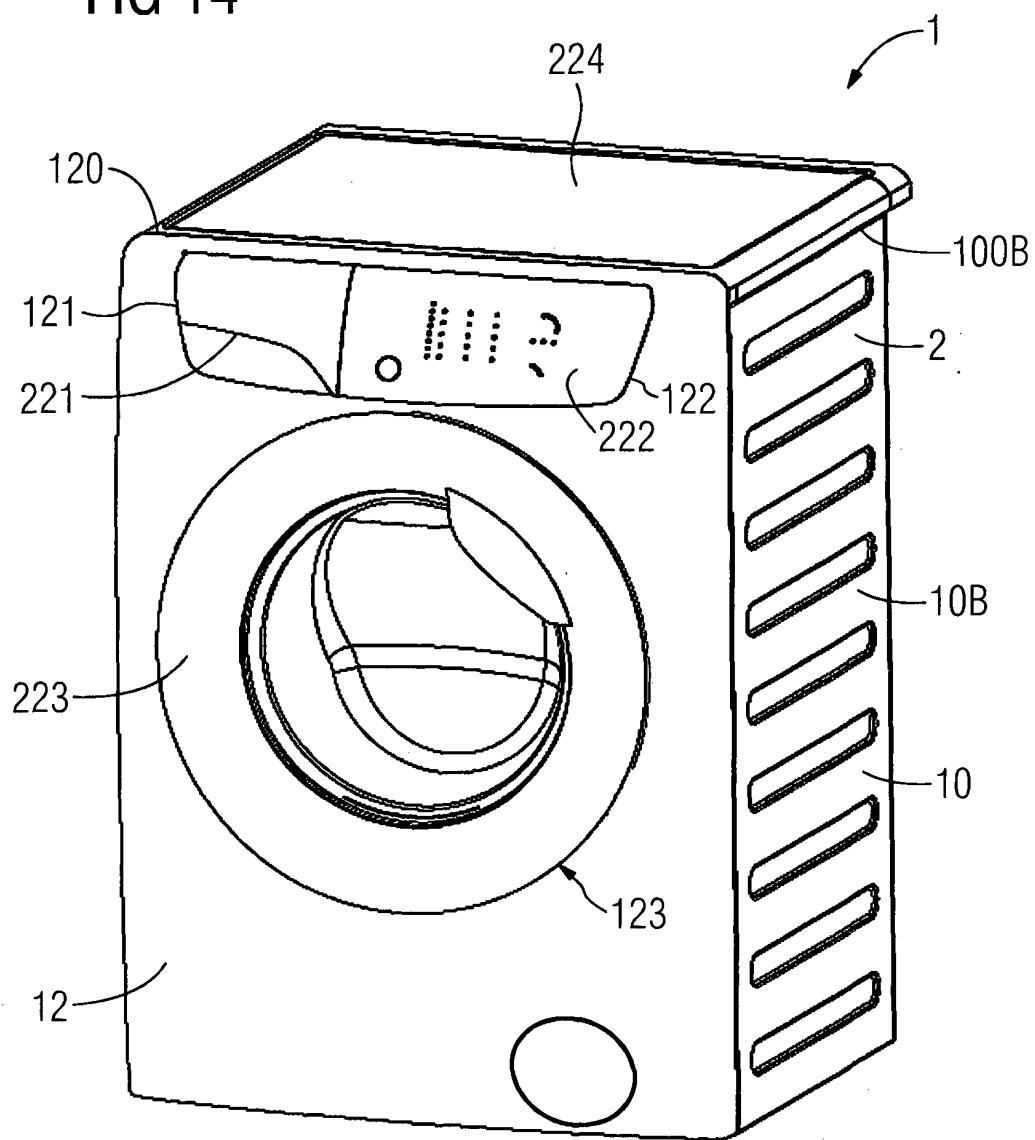


FIG 15

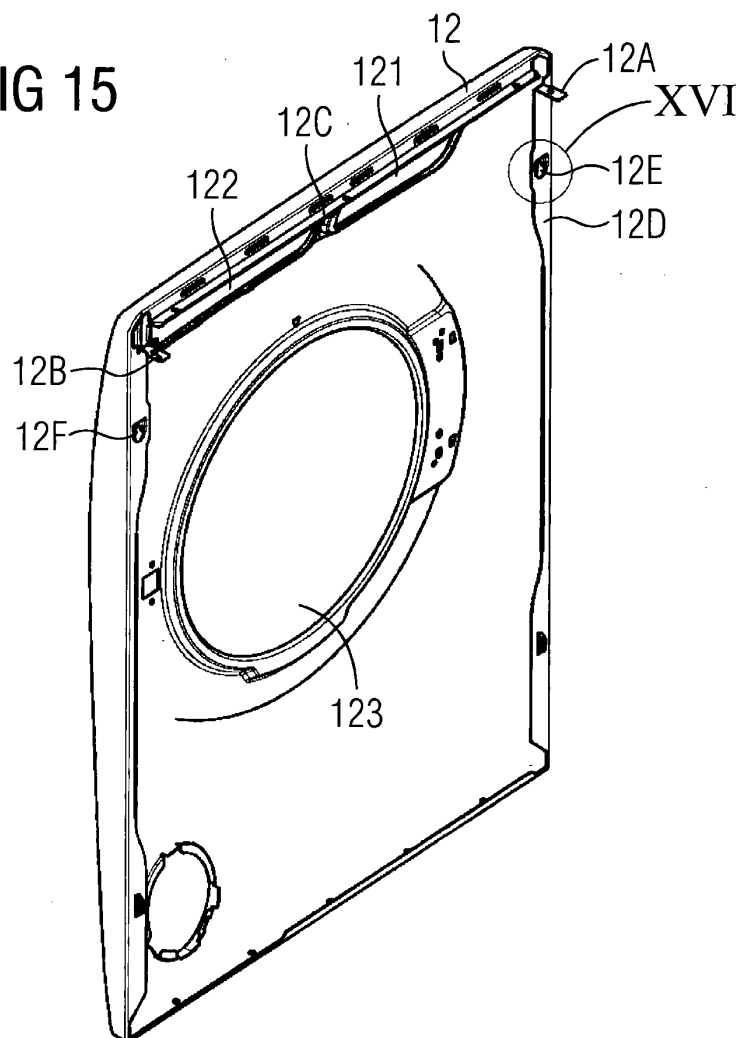


FIG 16

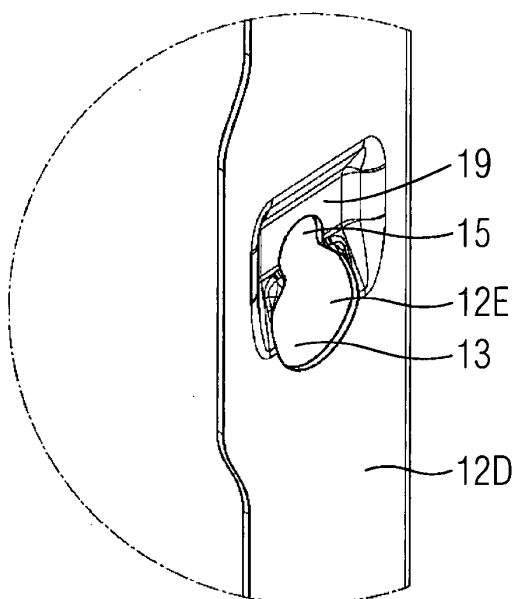


FIG 17

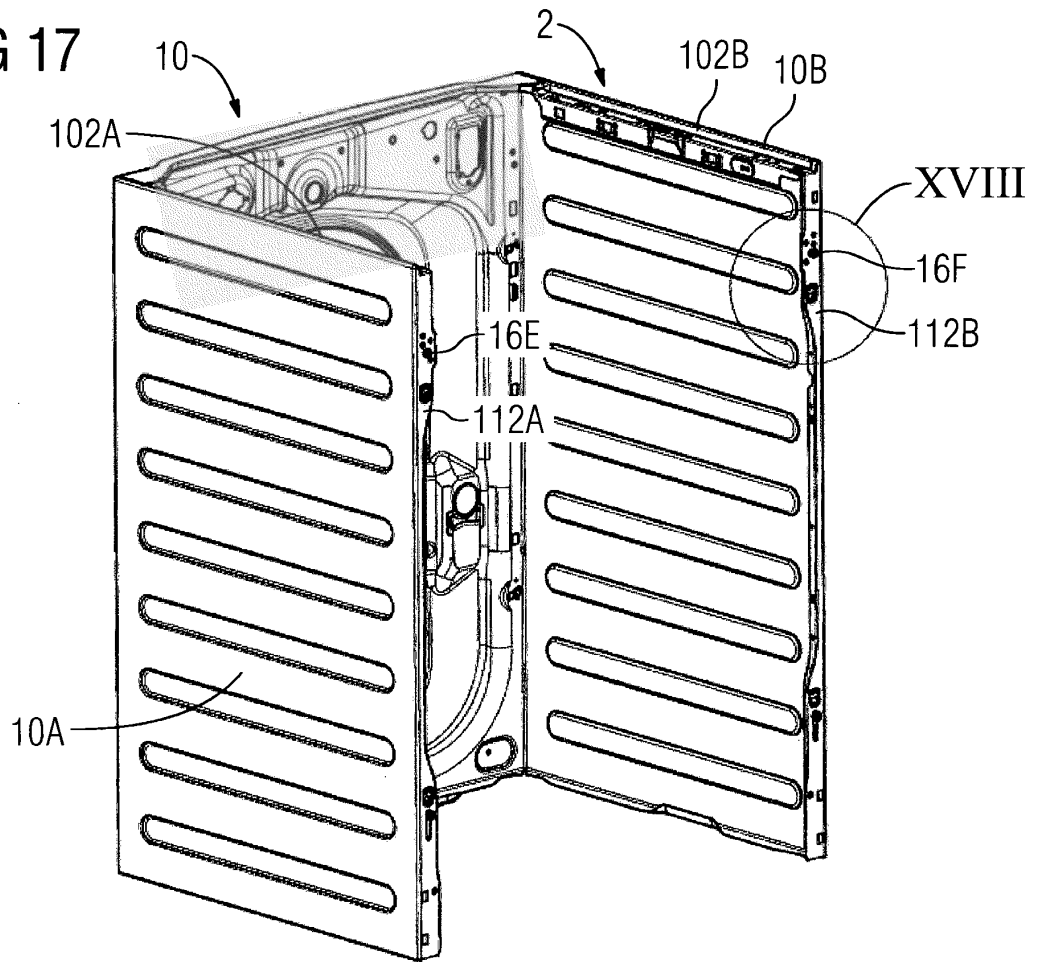


FIG 18

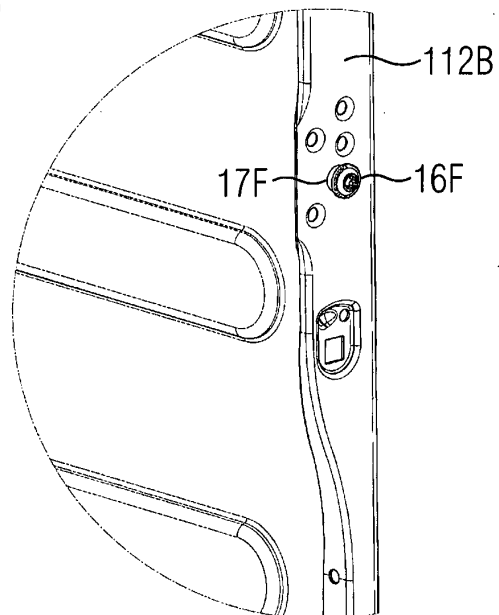


FIG 19

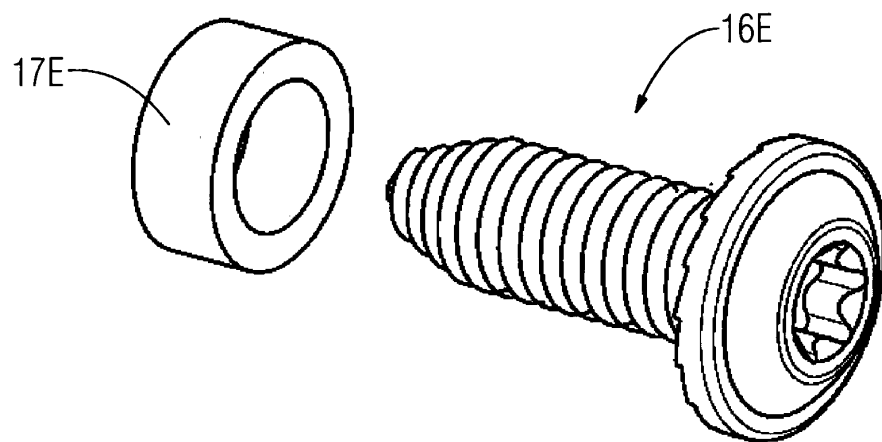


FIG 20

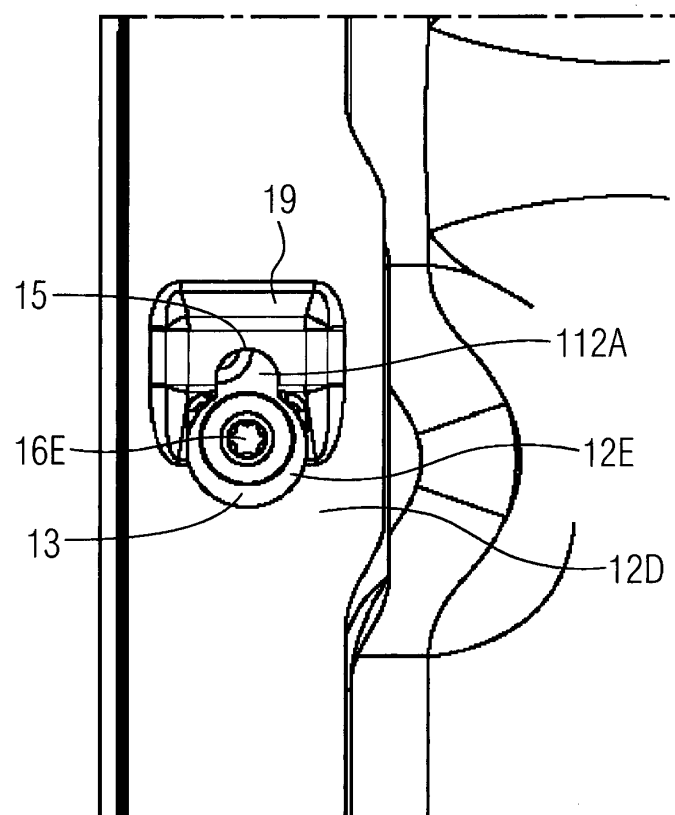


FIG 21

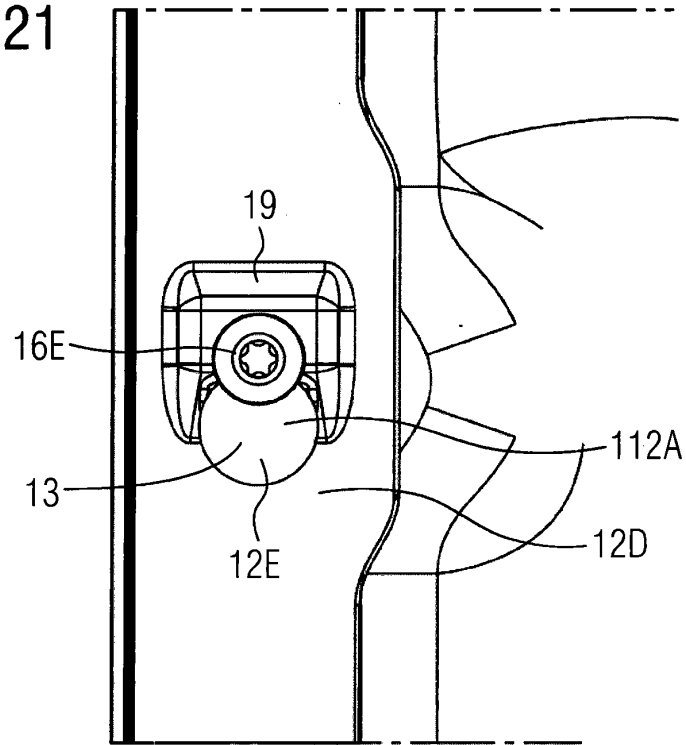
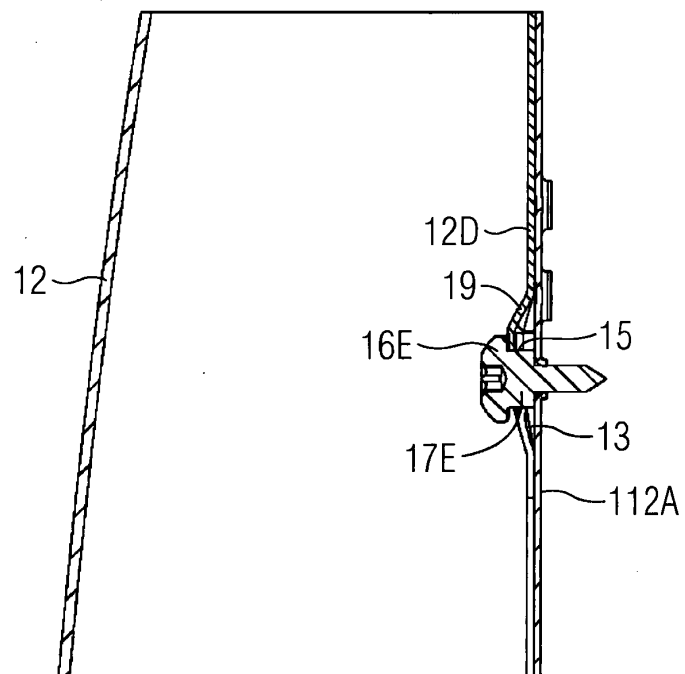


FIG 22



REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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