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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION TRANSMITTAL

(Only for new nonprovisional applications under 37 CFR 1.53(b))

Attorney Docket No.	1-23649
First Inventor	James E. Smith and Anthony B. McDonald
Title	Automatic Directional Control System For Vehicle Headlights
Express Mail Label No.	EL 777901929 US

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

See MPEP chapter 600 concerning utility patent application contents.

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1. [ ] Fee Transmittal Form (e.g., PTO/SB/17) *(Submit an original, and a duplicate for fee processing)*
2. [ ] Applicant claims small entity status. See 37 CFR 1.27.
3. [✓] Specification *[Total Pages 25]* *(preferred arrangement set forth below)*
   - Descriptive title of the invention
   - Cross Reference to Related Applications
   - Statement Regarding Fed sponsored R & D
   - Reference to sequence listing, a table, or a computer program listing appendix
   - Background of the Invention
   - Brief Summary of the Invention
   - Brief Description of the Drawings *(if filed)*
   - Detailed Description
   - Claim(s)
   - Abstract of the Disclosure
4. [✓] Drawing(s) *(35 U.S.C. 113)* *[Total Sheets 7]*
5. Oath or Declaration *[Total Pages 2]*
   a. [ ] Newly executed (original or copy)
   b. [ ] Copy from a prior application (37 CFR 1.63(d)) *(for continuation/divisional with Box 18 completed)*
      i. [ ] DELETION OF INVENTOR(S) Signed statement attached deleting inventor(s) named in the prior application, see 37 CFR 1.63(d)(2) and 1.33(b).
6. [ ] Application Data Sheet. See 37 CFR 1.76
7. [ ] CD-ROM or CD-R in duplicate, large table or Computer Program *(Appendix)*
8. Nucleotide and/or Amino Acid Sequence Submission *(if applicable, all necessary)*
   a. [ ] Computer Readable Form (CRF)
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ACCOMPANYING APPLICATION PARTS

9. [ ] Assignment Papers (cover sheet & document(s))
10. [ ] 37 CFR 3.73(b) Statement *(when there is an assignee)* [ ] Power of Attorney
11. [ ] English Translation Document *(if applicable)*
12. [ ] Information Disclosure Statement (IDS)/PTO-1449 [ ] Copies of IDS Citations
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14. [✓] Return Receipt Postcard (MPEP 503) *(Should be specifically itemized)*
15. [ ] Certified Copy of Priority Document(s) *(if foreign priority is claimed)*
16. [ ] Nonpublication Request under 35 U.S.C. 122 (b)(2)(B)(i). Applicant must attach form PTO/SB/35 or its equivalent.
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18. If a CONTINUING APPLICATION, *check appropriate box, and supply the requisite information below and in a preliminary amendment, or in an Application Data Sheet under 37 CFR 1.76:*

[ ] Continuation [ ] Divisional [ ] Continuation-in-part (CIP) of prior application No.: ____ / ____

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Serial No.	Filing Date	Examiner	Group Art Unit

Invention: AUTOMATIC DIRECTIONAL CONTROL SYSTEM FOR VEHICLE HEADLIGHTS

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UTILITY PATENT APPLICATION

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TITLE

AUTOMATIC DIRECTIONAL CONTROL SYSTEM FOR VEHICLE HEADLIGHTS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application claims the benefit of United States Provisional Application Nos. 60/335,409, filed October 31, 2001; 60/356,703, filed February 13, 2002; and 60/369,447, filed April 2, 2002, the disclosures of which are incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates in general to headlights that are provided on vehicles for illuminating dark road surfaces or other areas in the path of movement. In particular, this invention relates to an automatic directional control system for such vehicle headlights.

Virtually all land vehicles, and many other types of vehicles (such as boats and airplanes, for example), are provided with one or more headlights that are adapted to illuminate a portion of a dark road surface or other area in the path of movement of the vehicle to facilitate safe travel thereon. Typically, each headlight is mounted on or near the front end of the vehicle and is oriented in such a manner that a beam of light is projected forwardly therefrom. The angle at which the beam of light projects from the headlight can, for example, be characterized in a variety of ways, including (1) up and down relative to a horizontal reference position or plane and (2) left and right relative to a vertical reference position or plane. Such directional aiming angles are usually set at the time of assembly of the headlight into the vehicle so as to illuminate a predetermined portion of the road surface or other area in the path of movement of the vehicle.

In the past, these headlights have been mounted on the vehicle in fixed positions relative thereto such that the beams of light are projected therefrom at

predetermined directional aiming angles relative to the vehicle. Although such fixed aiming angle headlight systems have and continue to function adequately, they cannot alter the directional aiming angles of the headlights to account for changes in the operating conditions of the vehicle. For example, if the speed of the vehicle is increased, it would be desirable to adjust the aiming angle of the headlights upwardly such that an area that is somewhat farther in front of the vehicle is more brightly illuminated. On the other hand, if the speed of the vehicle is decreased, it would be desirable to adjust the aiming angle of the headlights downwardly such that an area that is somewhat closer in front of the vehicle is more brightly illuminated. Similarly, if the vehicle turns a corner, it would be desirable to adjust the aiming angle of the headlights either toward the left or toward the right (depending on the direction of the turn) such that an area that is somewhat lateral to the front of the vehicle is more brightly illuminated.

To accomplish this, it is known to provide a directional control system for vehicle headlights that is capable of automatically altering the directional aiming angles of the headlights to account for changes in the operating conditions of the vehicle. A variety of such automatic directional control systems for vehicle headlights are known in the art. However, such known automatic headlight directional control systems have been found to be deficient for various reasons. Thus, it would be desirable to provide an improved structure for an automatic headlight directional control system that addresses such deficiencies.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to an improved structure and method for operating a directional control system for vehicle headlights that is capable of automatically altering the directional aiming angles of the headlights to account for changes in the operating conditions of the vehicle. One or more operating condition sensors may be provided that generate signals that are representative of an operating condition of the vehicle, such as road speed, steering angle, pitch, suspension height, rate of change of road speed, rate of change of steering angle, rate of change of pitch, and rate of change

of suspension height of the vehicle. A controller is responsive to the sensor signal for generating an output signal. An actuator is adapted to be connected to the headlight to effect movement thereof in accordance with the output signal. The controller can include a table that relates values of sensed operating condition to values of the output signal. The controller is responsive to the sensor signal for looking up the output signal in the table.

Various objects and advantages of this invention will become apparent to those skilled in the art from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiments, when read in light of the accompanying drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram of an automatic directional control system for a vehicle headlight in accordance with this invention.

Fig. 2 is a flow chart of an algorithm for calibrating the automatic directional control system illustrated in Fig. 1 so as to define an initial reference position for the headlight from which the headlight directional controller can implement directional angle adjustments.

Fig. 3 is a flow chart of an algorithm for generating a table that relates one or more sensed vehicle operating condition values to one or more headlight directional angle adjustment factors and for storing such table in the headlight directional controller illustrated in Fig. 1.

Fig. 4 is an example of a table that can be generated and stored in the headlight directional controller in accordance with the table generating algorithm illustrated in Fig. 3.

Fig. 5 is a flow chart of an algorithm for operating the headlight directional controller illustrated in Fig. 1 to automatically implement directional angle adjustments in accordance with sensed condition values.

Fig. 6 is a flow chart of an algorithm for operating the headlight directional controller illustrated in Fig. 1 to automatically implement directional angle

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