SYSTEM, APPARATUS, AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING CONTROL OF A TOY VEHICLE

CROSS-REFERENCES TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This Application for Patent claims the benefit of priority from, and hereby incorporates by reference for any and all purposes the entire disclosure of, co-pending U.S. Provisional Application for Patent having Serial No. 60/268,447, filed February 12, 2001.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Technical Field of the Invention

The principals of the present invention generally relate to toy vehicles that may be ridden by people, and more specifically, but not by way of limitation, to a system, apparatus, and method for softening the initiation of motion of the toy vehicle.

Description of Related Art

As shown in FIGURE 1, toy vehicles 100 for riding on or in have become popular for operators 110, such as children. The toy vehicles 100 may generally include ride-on and ride-in vehicles, including, but not limited to, automobiles, trucks, boats, airplanes, scooters, etc. Conventional control systems for the toy vehicles 100 have typically been limited to applying a direct current (DC) from a DC battery to a motor upon pressing or otherwise operating a "gas" pedal or other throttle mechanism. This type of control, however, basically operates as an on/off switch. In other words, when the pedal is pressed, the motor is applied a voltage for full power (i.e. maximum angular velocity). One reason for such a simplistic design is cost reasons.

FIGURE 2 is an exemplary block diagram of a conventional control system 200 for the toy vehicle 100. The conventional control system 200 includes a battery 205, foot pedal switch 210, forward/reverse switch 215 for direction control, hi/lo switch 220 for fast and slow speeds, and motors 225a and 225b. The toy vehicles 100 are typically limited to a battery 205 for a power source rather than using other fuel sources, such as gasoline. The battery 205 is coupled to a foot pedal switch 210, which operates to provide power from the battery 205 to other electrical components of the control system 200 via line 212. The battery 205 supplies battery voltage V_{BATT}. Additionally, the foot pedal switch 210 operates as a failsafe device that prevents power from incidentally or accidentally being applied to the motors 225 for safety purposes. To operate as a failsafe device, the foot pedal switch 210 is a "make or break" switch with a spring return to OFF as understood in the art. The foot pedal switch 210 is further coupled to the forward/reverse switch 215 via line 217 and generates a throttle signal 218.

The forward/reverse switch 215 receives battery power via line 217, is operable to switch the direction of the motors 225 from forward to reverse so as to operate the toy vehicle 100 forward or reverse, respectively. The forward/reverse switch

produces two signals, FWD and REV, which are applied to the hi/lo switch 220 via lines 222a and 222b (collectively 222). The hi/low switch 220 is further coupled to the motors 225 and operable to drive the motors 225 in parallel or series to provide for high and low speed of the toy vehicle 100. Further, the hi/lo switch 220 is coupled to the negative terminal 227 of the battery 205, which is electrically coupled to the low side. As understood in the art, each of the components of the control system 200 receive power from the battery, but that power is relatively high for solid state electronics, thereby making alternative control systems difficult and too expensive for the toy industry to consider a viable option.

There exists several problems when utilizing the control system 200, or any other basic direct drive system for controlling toy vehicles 100. These problems may include (i) excessive acceleration, (ii) jerk, (iii) safety (e.g., controlling and flipping the vehicle at startup), and (iv) wearing of the mechanical components of the drive train for the toy vehicle 100. While each of these problems have existed in the toy vehicles 100 for a long period of time, the toy industry and makers of toy vehicles 100 are very cost sensitive due to consumer pricing demands and production costs. Solutions to these problems have been unavailable due in large part to

pricing and technical concerns of toy manufacturers for the toy vehicles 100.

With regard to excessive acceleration (dV/dt) and jerk (dA/dt), the acceleration and jerk result in a whiplash effect on the operator 110 and passenger(s). In terms of wearing of the mechanical components, when the toy vehicle 100 changes direction from forward to reverse and vice versa, a complete stop is not required. As all gear drives have a certain amount of backlash (i.e., small amounts of gap between gear teeth), the gears allow the motor to turn in the opposite direction without applying force to the output (e.g., wheels) of the drive train until the entire backlash is reduced to zero, thereby subjecting the motors 225 and drive train to the full load at full speed at each change in direction. In other words, since the motor 225 has no significant initial resistance to movement in the opposite direction due to backlash, the motor 225 accelerates rapidly until the backlash is eliminated. The motor 225 is therefore moving at near full speed in the reverse direction while the vehicle is still moving in a high speed in the opposite direction. Once the backlash is eliminated, the input and output to the drive train are rotating in the opposite direction and the gears exert substantial forces on one another as the drive train suddenly reverses direction. These

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