US005354202A

United States Patent [19]

Moncrief et al.

[11] Patent Number: 5,354,202

[45] Date of Patent: Oct. 11, 1994

[54] **SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR DRIVER TRAINING WITH MULTIPLE DRIVER COMPETITION**

[75] Inventors: **Rick L. Moncrief; Stephanie J. Mott,** both of San Jose; **Max L. Behensky,** Hayward; **Jed Margolin,** San Jose, all of Calif.

[73] Assignee: **Atari Games Corporation,** Milpitas, Calif.

[21] Appl. No.: **80,582**

[22] Filed: **Jun. 18, 1993**

Related U.S. Application Data

[63] Continuation of Ser. No. 739,906, Aug. 1, 1991, abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of Ser. No. 561,087, Aug. 1, 1990, abandoned.

[51] **Int. Cl.**[5] **G09B 9/04**

[52] **U.S. Cl.** ..... **434/69;** 434/65; 434/307 R; 434/373; 364/410; 364/578; 273/86 B; 273/434; 273/454; 273/DIG. 28; 345/4

[58] **Field of Search** ..... 434/29, 38, 307, 308; 273/85 G, 86 R, 86 B, 434, 437, 440, 442, 445, 454, DIG. 28; 364/410, 578; 395/152; 348/121; 345/4

[56] **References Cited**

U.S. PATENT DOCUMENTS

4,383,827	5/1983	Foerst .	
4,710,873	12/1987	Brisbois et al.	273/85 G X
4,716,458	12/1987	Heitzman et al. .	
4,750,888	6/1988	Allard et al. .	
4,760,388	7/1988	Tatsumi et al.	434/69 X
5,005,148	4/1991	Behensky	434/69 X
5,269,687	12/1993	Mott et al.	434/69

FOREIGN PATENT DOCUMENTS

0145598	6/1985	European Pat. Off. .	
0404381	12/1990	European Pat. Off. .	
3816543	11/1989	Fed. Rep. of Germany .	
8620293	4/1990	Fed. Rep. of Germany .	
9000851	4/1990	Fed. Rep. of Germany .	
8806776	9/1988	World Int. Prop. O.	482/902
9111792	8/1991	World Int. Prop. O. .	

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

"Hard Drivin'" Advertising Brochure, Atari Games Corporation, 1988.

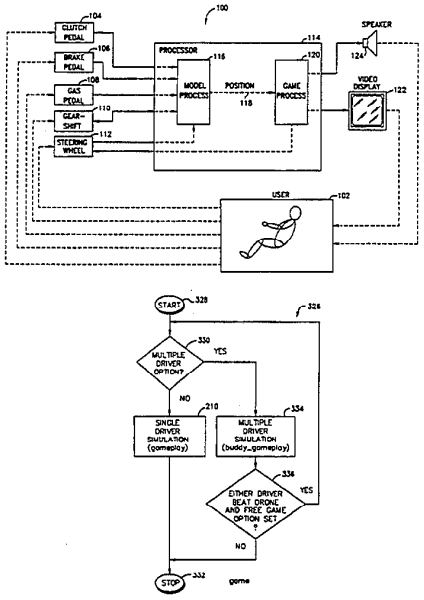
"Hard Drivin'Operator's Manual", Atari Games Corporation, pp. ii, 1-4, 1-5, 1989.

Primary Examiner—Richard J. Apley
Assistant Examiner—Joe H. Cheng
Attorney, Agent, or Firm—Knobbe, Martens, Olson & Bear

[57] **ABSTRACT**

A driver training system for a user of a simulated vehicle. The system includes input devices for controlling the simulated vehicle, a video display having three-dimensional graphics, modeling software for determining position information based on the input devices, and recursive training software to display a previous route through an environment simultaneously with a present route through the environment. The user then incrementally and recursively maximizes parameters associated with vehicle operation skill. In addition, a present user may compete with one or more previous users by having previously recorded routes played back on the video display simultaneously with the route of the present user. The driver training system may be embodied as an arcade game.

10 Claims, 11 Drawing Sheets



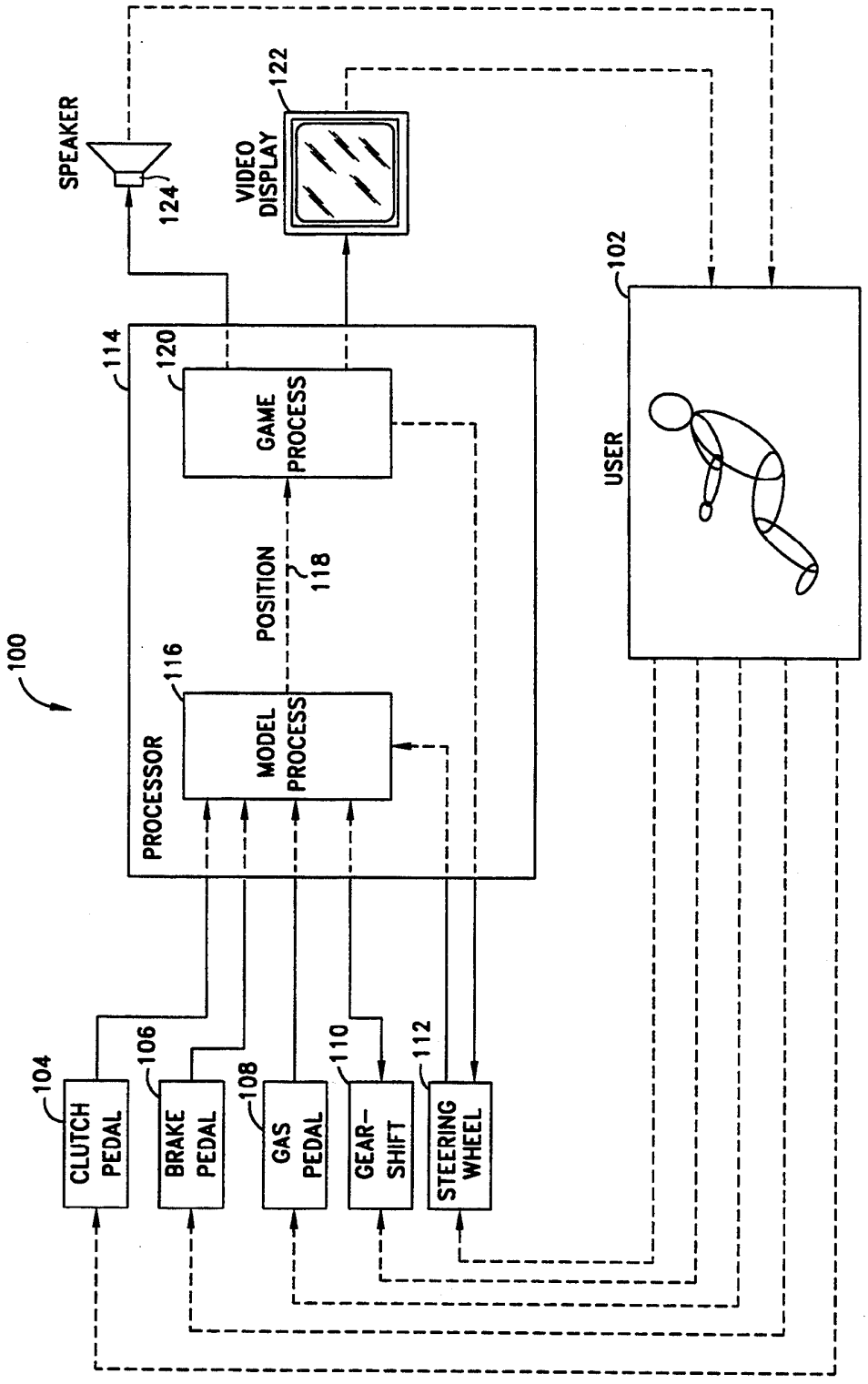
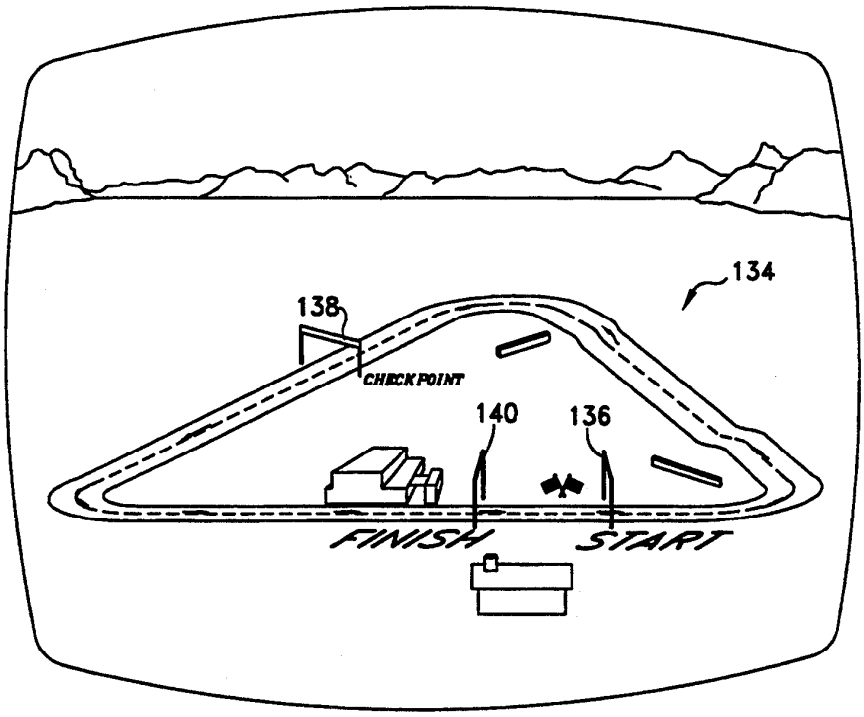

SPEAKER
124
VIDEO DISPLAY
122
102
USER
114
120
GAME PROCESS
POSITION
118
100
116
MODEL PROCESS
PROCESSOR
104
CLUTCH PEDAL
106
BRAKE PEDAL
108
GAS PEDAL
110
GEAR-SHIFT
112
STEERING WHEEL

FIG. 1

FIG. 2


134
138
CHECK POINT
140
136
FINISH
START

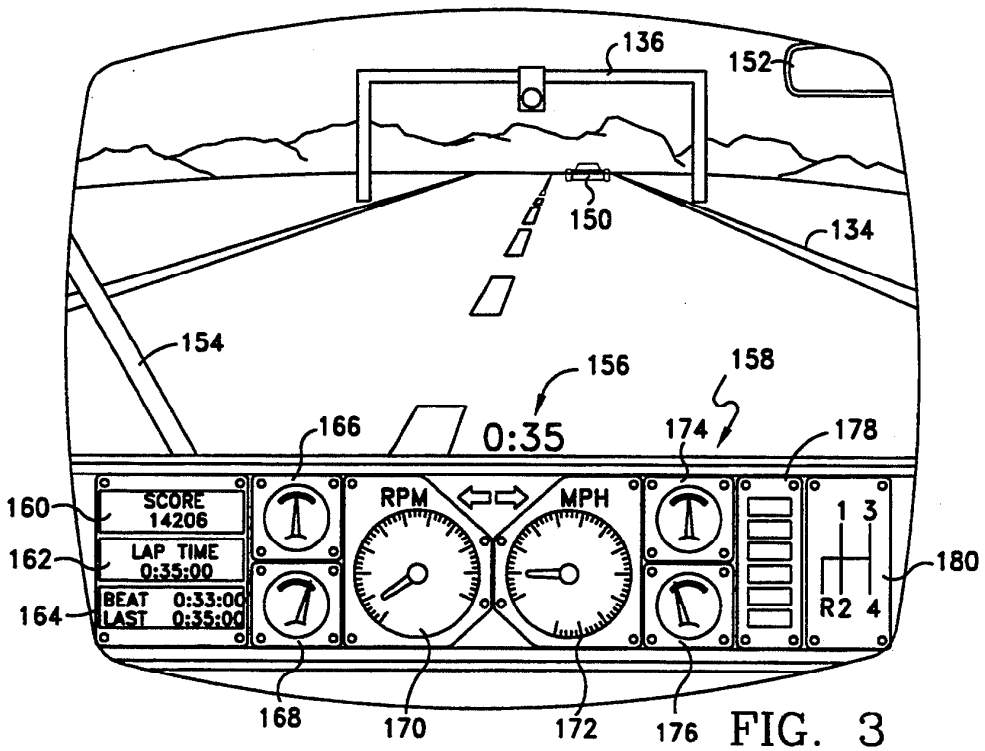
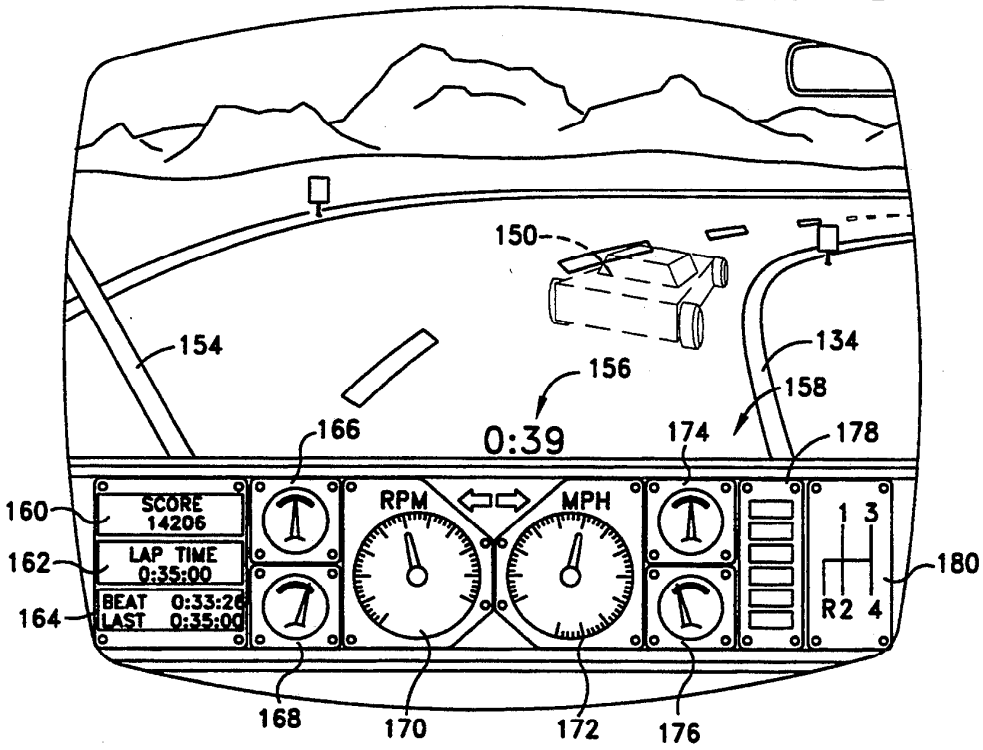

136
152
150
134
154
156
158
0:35
166
174
178
160
SCORE
14206
162
LAP TIME
0:35:00
164
BEAT 0:33:00
LAST 0:35:00
RPM
MPH
1 3
R2 4
180
168
170
172
176

FIG. 3

FIG. 4


150
154
156
0:39
134
158
166
174
178
160
SCORE
14206
162
LAP TIME
0:35:00
164
BEAT 0:33:26
LAST 0:35:00
RPM
MPH
1 3
R2 4
180
168
170
172
176

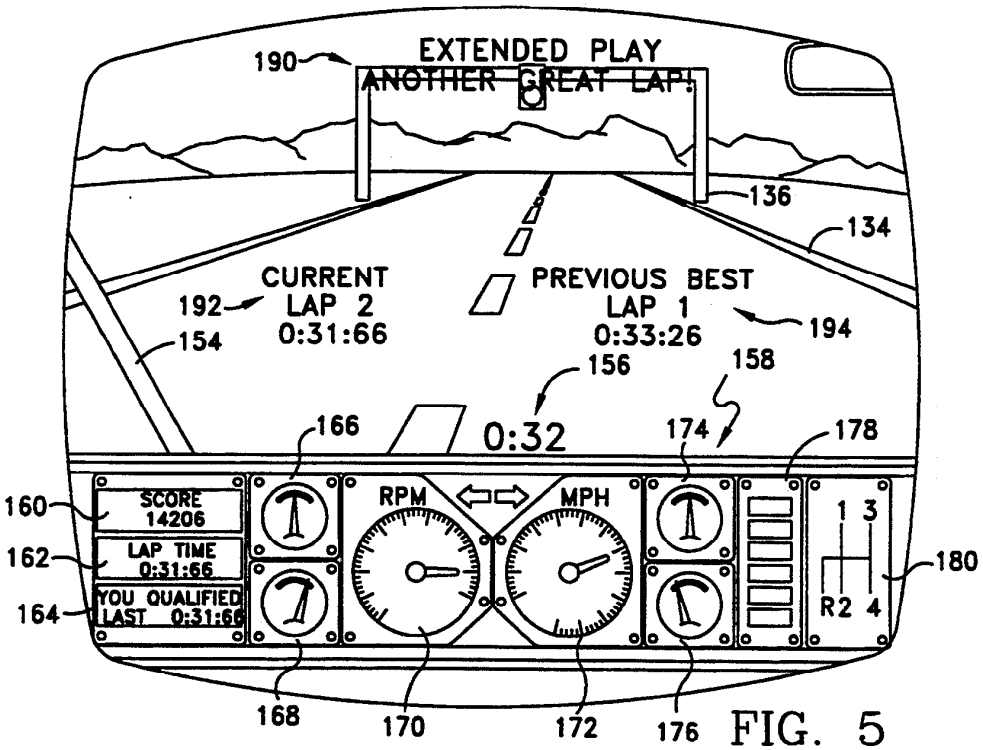
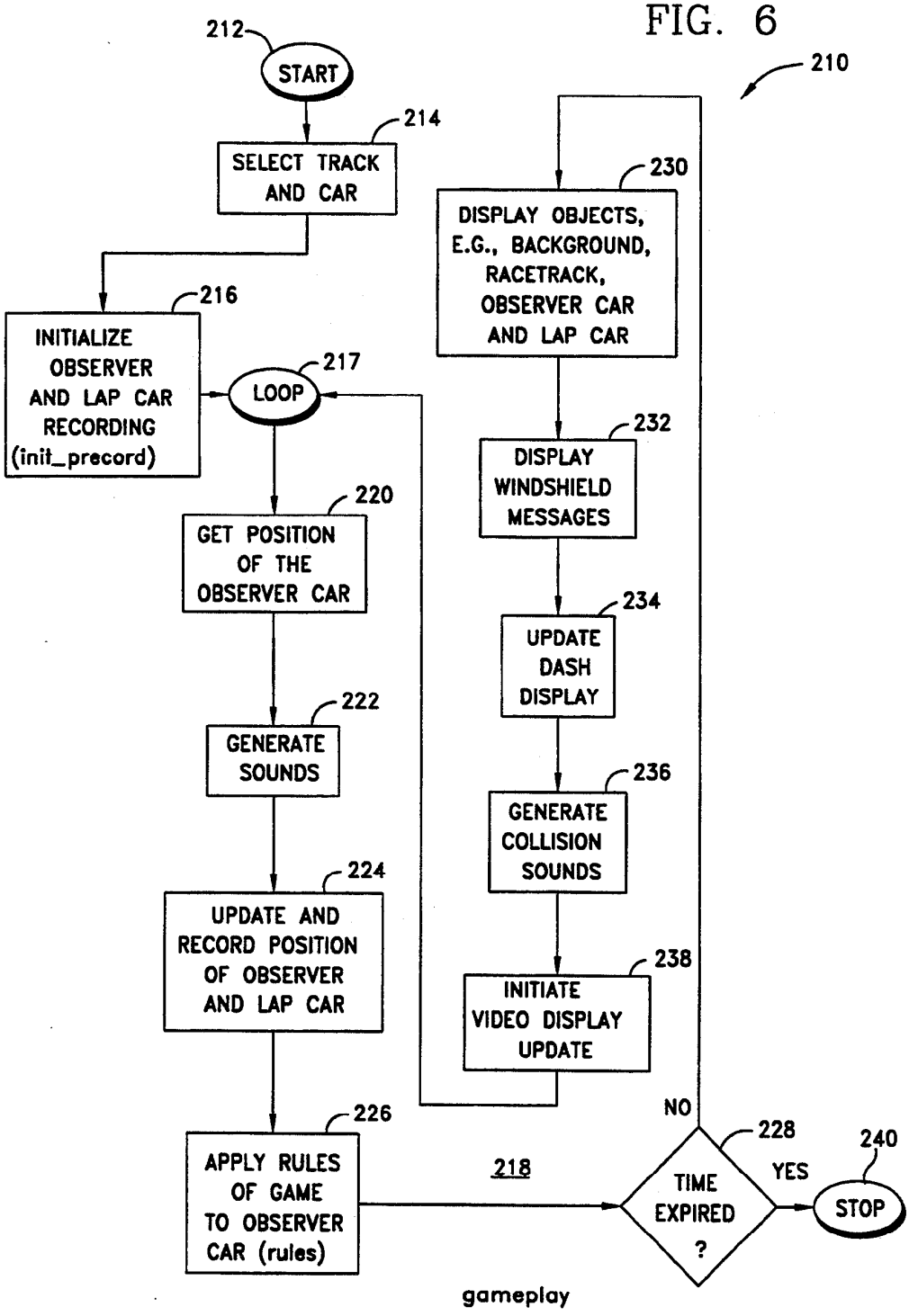
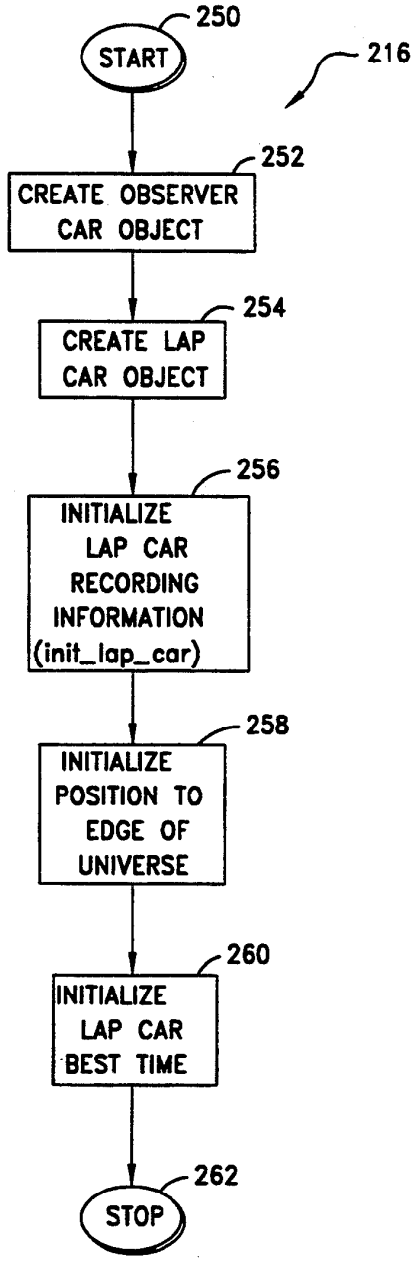

190
EXTENDED PLAY
ANOTHER GREAT LAP!
136
134
CURRENT
LAP 2
0:31:66
192
PREVIOUS BEST
LAP 1
0:33:26
194
154
156
158
0:32
166
174
178
160
SCORE
14206
162
LAP TIME
0:31:66
164
YOU QUALIFIED
LAST 0:31:66
RPM
MPH
1 3
R2 4
180
168
170
172
176

FIG. 5

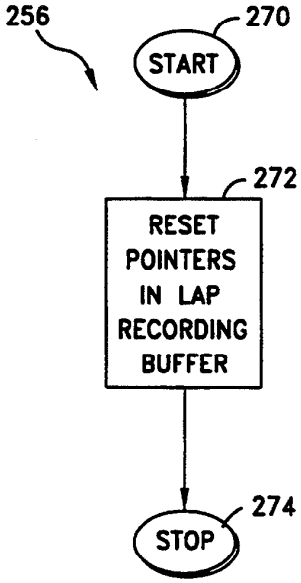
FIG. 6


212
START
214
SELECT TRACK AND CAR
216
INITIALIZE OBSERVER AND LAP CAR RECORDING (init_precord)
217
LOOP
220
GET POSITION OF THE OBSERVER CAR
222
GENERATE SOUNDS
224
UPDATE AND RECORD POSITION OF OBSERVER AND LAP CAR
226
APPLY RULES OF GAME TO OBSERVER CAR (rules)
218
210
230
DISPLAY OBJECTS, E.G., BACKGROUND, RACETRACK, OBSERVER CAR AND LAP CAR
232
DISPLAY WINDSHIELD MESSAGES
234
UPDATE DASH DISPLAY
236
GENERATE COLLISION SOUNDS
238
INITIATE VIDEO DISPLAY UPDATE
NO
228
TIME EXPIRED ?
YES
240
STOP
gameplay



init_precord

FIG. 7



init_lap_car

FIG. 8

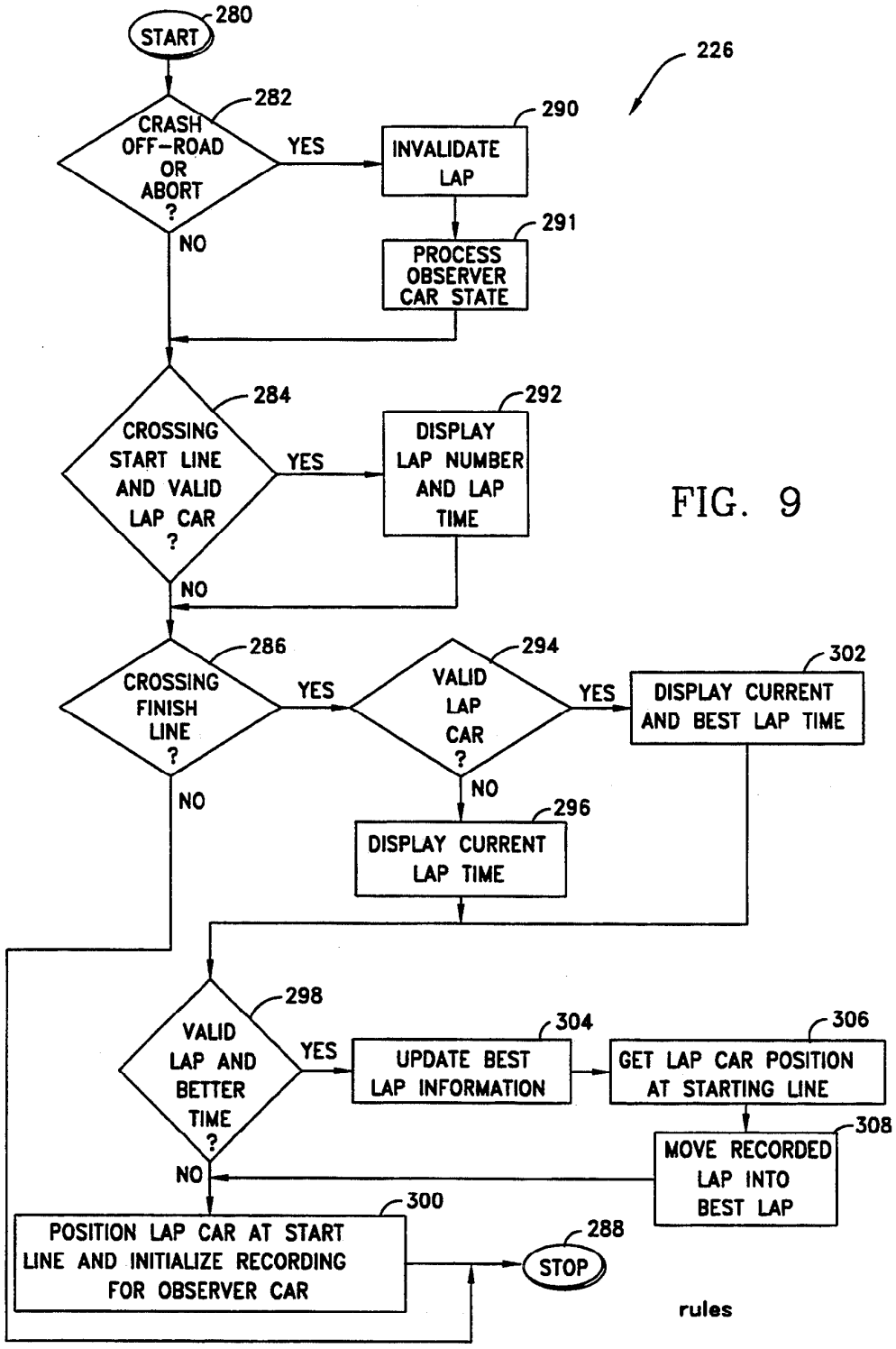

226
START
280
CRASH OFF-ROAD OR ABORT ?
282
YES
INVALIDATE LAP
290
NO
PROCESS OBSERVER CAR STATE
291
CROSSING START LINE AND VALID LAP CAR ?
284
YES
DISPLAY LAP NUMBER AND LAP TIME
292
NO
CROSSING FINISH LINE ?
286
YES
VALID LAP CAR ?
294
YES
DISPLAY CURRENT AND BEST LAP TIME
302
NO
DISPLAY CURRENT LAP TIME
296
NO
VALID LAP AND BETTER TIME ?
298
YES
UPDATE BEST LAP INFORMATION
304
GET LAP CAR POSITION AT STARTING LINE
306
MOVE RECORDED LAP INTO BEST LAP
308
NO
POSITION LAP CAR AT START LINE AND INITIALIZE RECORDING FOR OBSERVER CAR
300
STOP
288
rules

FIG. 9

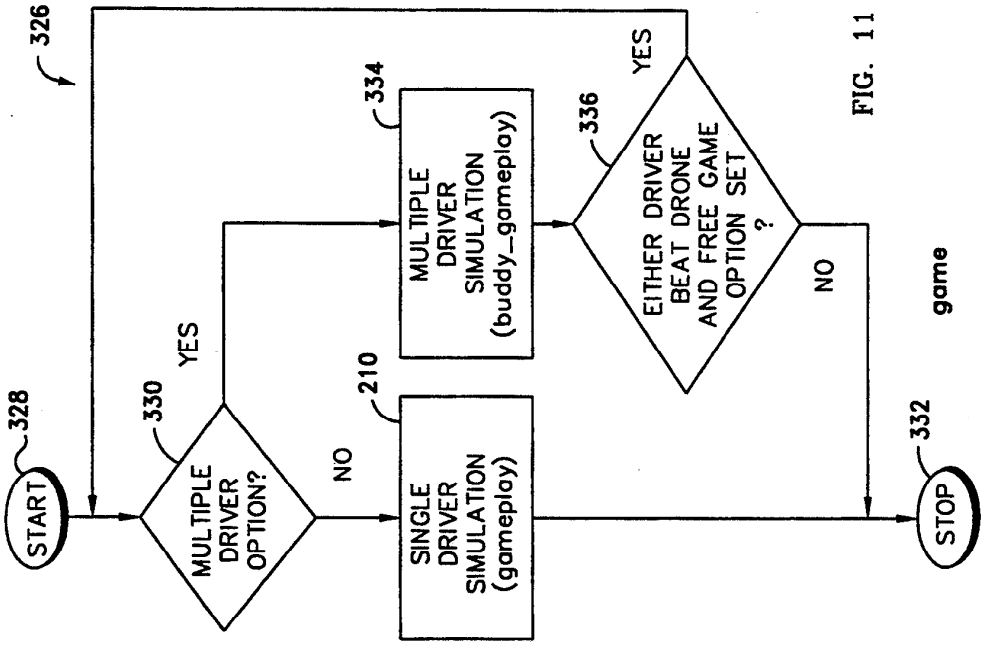

326
328
START
330
MULTIPLE DRIVER OPTION?
YES
NO
334
MULTIPLE DRIVER SIMULATION (buddy_gameplay)
210
SINGLE DRIVER SIMULATION (gameplay)
336
EITHER DRIVER BEAT DRONE AND FREE GAME OPTION SET ?
YES
NO
332
STOP
game

FIG. 11

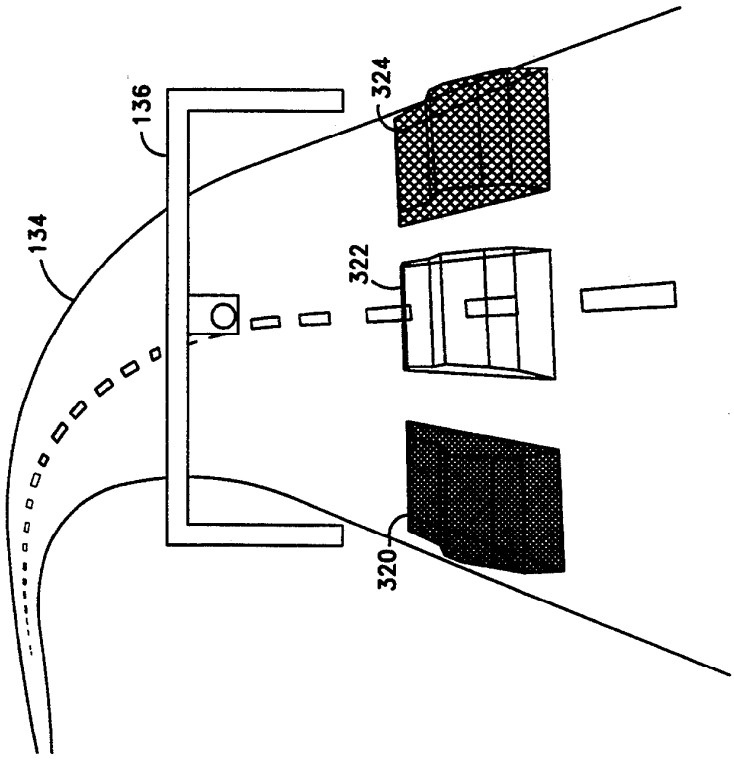

136
324
134
322
320

FIG. 10

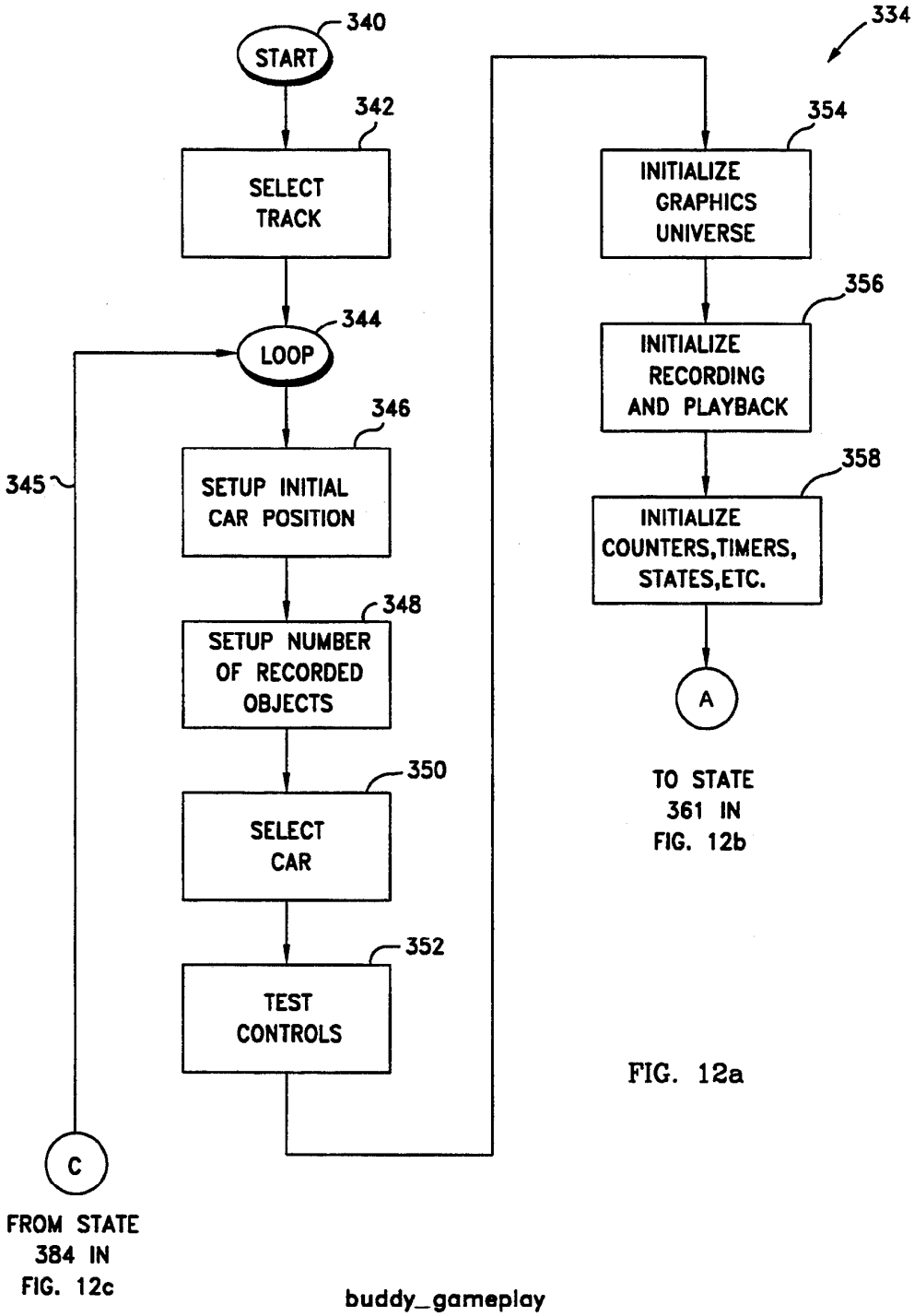


FIG. 12a

buddy_gameplay

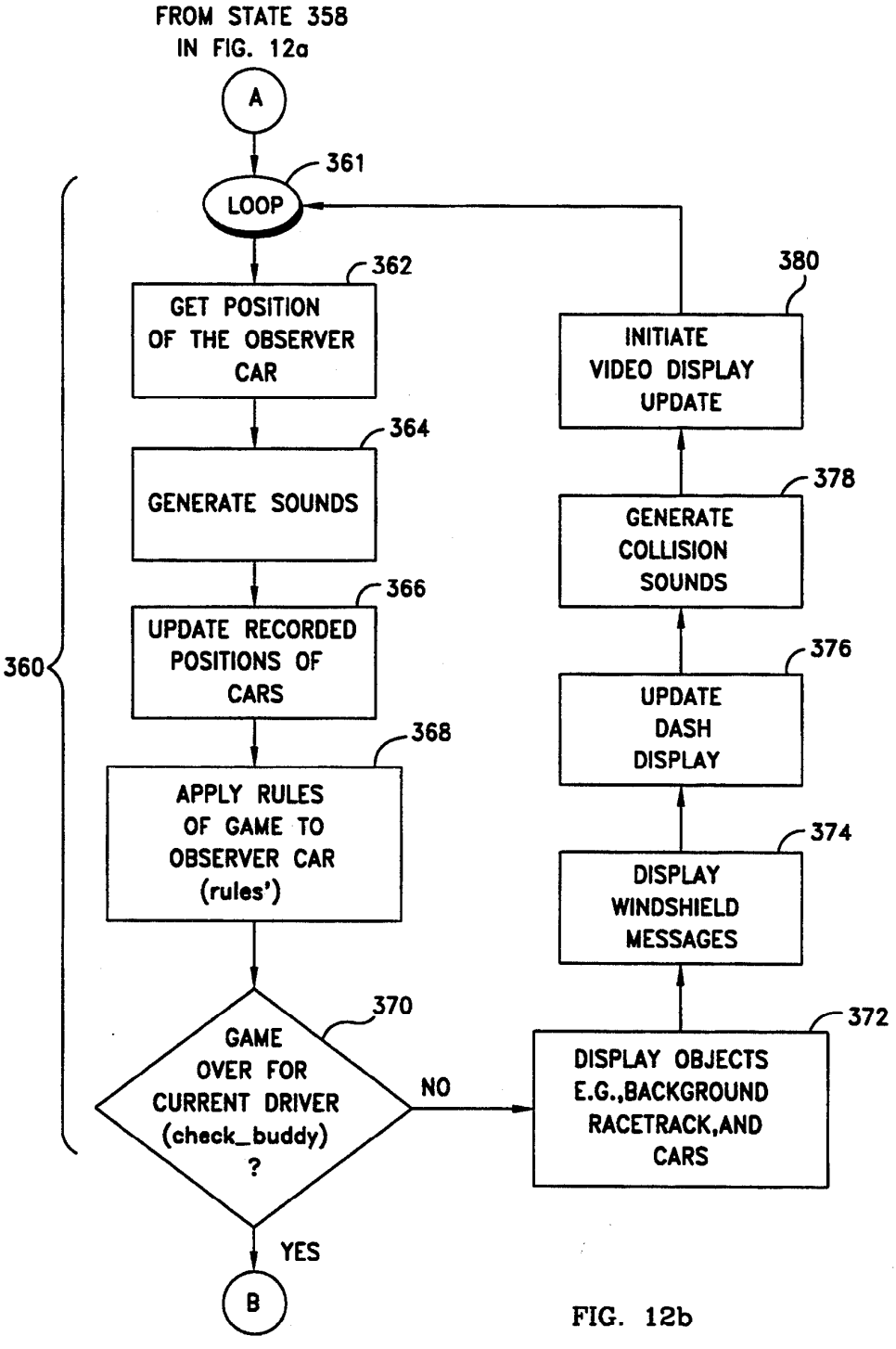


FIG. 12b

buddy_gameplay

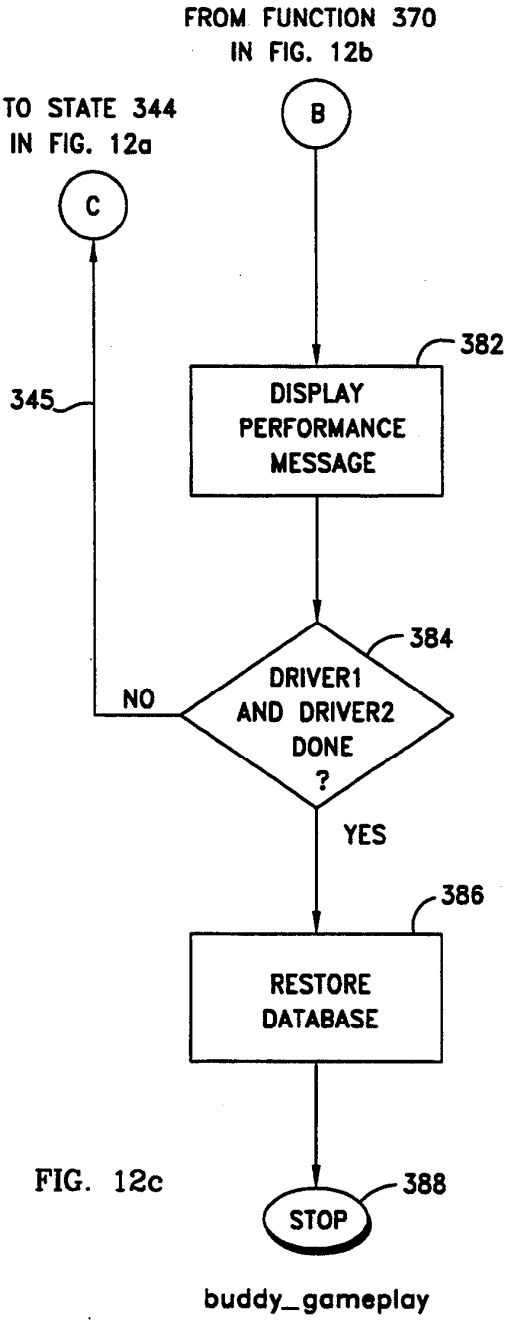


FIG. 12c

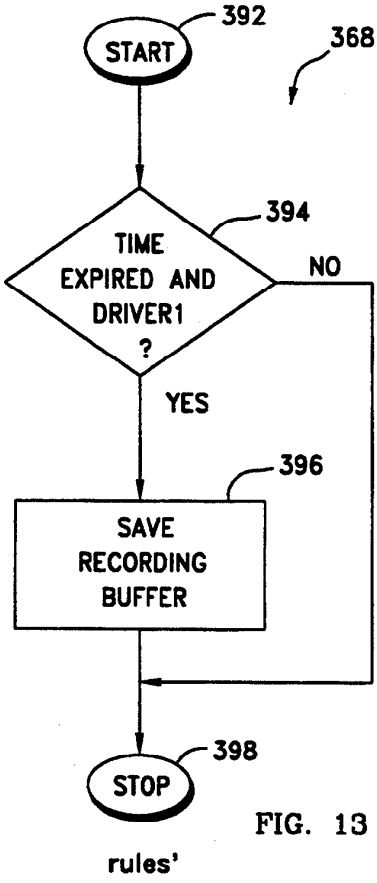
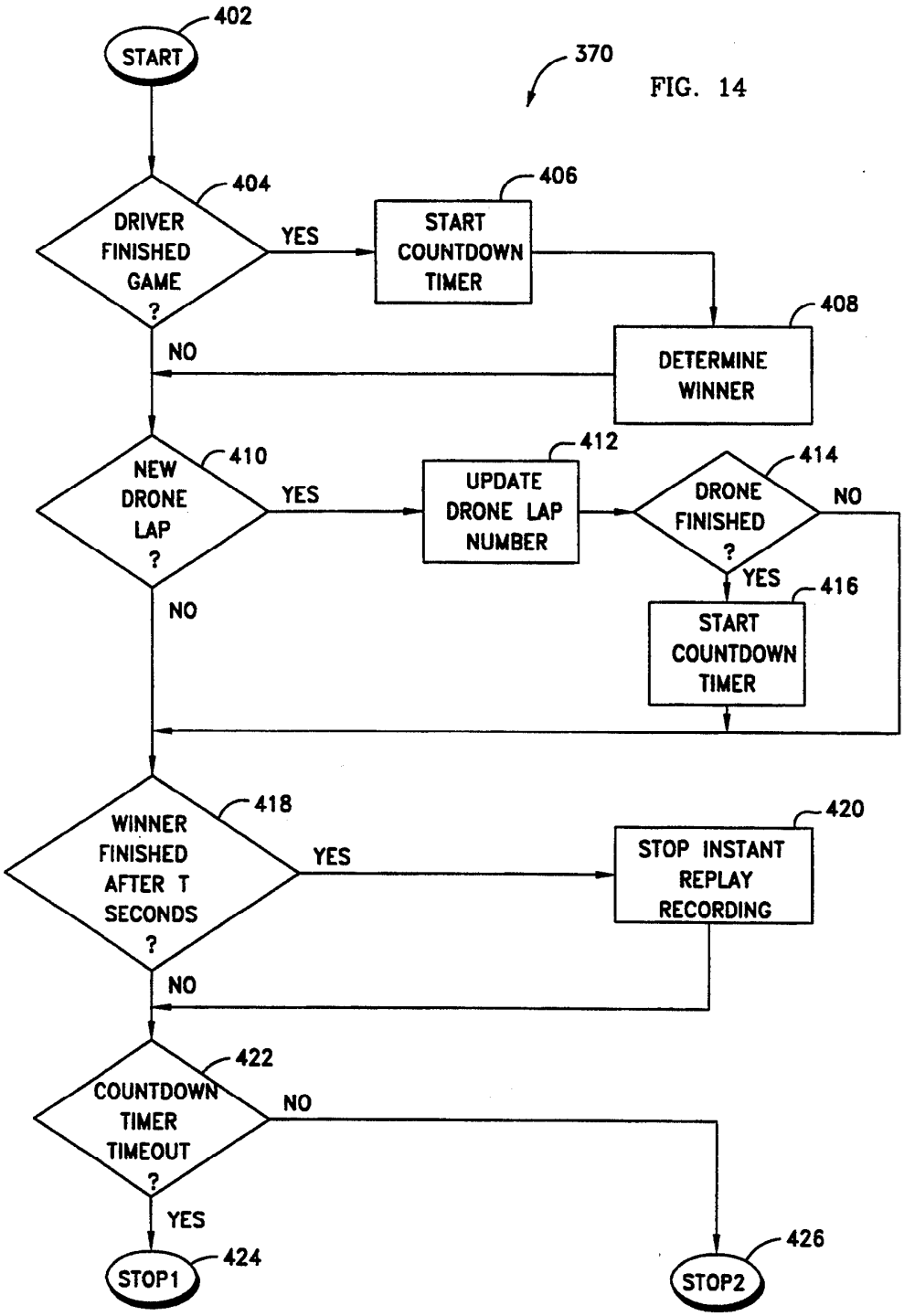


FIG. 13


402
START
370
FIG. 14
404
DRIVER FINISHED GAME ?
YES
406
START COUNTDOWN TIMER
408
DETERMINE WINNER
NO
410
NEW DRONE LAP ?
YES
412
UPDATE DRONE LAP NUMBER
414
DRONE FINISHED ?
NO
YES
416
START COUNTDOWN TIMER
NO
418
WINNER FINISHED AFTER T SECONDS ?
YES
420
STOP INSTANT REPLAY RECORDING
NO
422
COUNTDOWN TIMER TIMEOUT ?
NO
YES
424
STOP1
426
STOP2

check_buddy

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR DRIVER TRAINING WITH MULTIPLE DRIVER COMPETITION

This application is a continuation of application Ser. No. 07/739,906, filed Aug. 1, 1991, now abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of copending application Ser. No. 07/561,087, filed Aug. 1, 1990, entitled Driver Training System, now abandoned.

RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present application is a continuation-in-part of copending application, U.S. Ser. No. 561,087, filed Aug. 1, 1990, entitled Driver Training System.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention generally relates to automated training and, more particularly, is concerned with vehicle simulators.

2. Description of the Prior Art

A vehicle simulator can be defined as a system that simulates the operating conditions of a vehicle in an environment. Where the vehicle simulated is a car, the environment typically includes a road. In this case the environment may also include weather conditions such as rain or snow. Besides cars, examples of other types of vehicles that may be simulated include airplanes, ships, submersibles and space vehicles.

Vehicle simulators provide the means to efficiently train vehicle operators. That is, a simulator can be used where an operator has a need to safely learn how to operate the particular vehicle being simulated. Rather than train an operator on a real-world vehicle, the simulator is used thereby avoiding accidents. Clearly, experience garnered through making mistakes on a simulator is invaluable when compared to the inherent risks of vehicle damage, and moreover, operator injury, associated with making a driving error in a real-life situation.

In some sense, a simulator achieves a balance between testing the operator's knowledge of the "rules of the road" and testing the operator's use of a vehicle. Testing the operator's knowledge is typically and conveniently accomplished through written and/or verbal examinations. However, examinations are of limited usefulness for operator training. For example, operator reflexes are not tested at all, and, moreover, such examinations do not adequately address the skills necessary for real-time decision-making.

Besides concerns for operator safety, the other alternative, actual vehicle operation, has its pitfalls too. First, the cost of instructor time may be prohibitive. Furthermore, the actual vehicle itself, such as for space or undersea operation, may simply not be available. Lastly, there is always the risk of an accident when a student is training on an actual vehicle under realistic conditions. Although a certain amount of training may occur in benign environments, for example, learning to drive a car in an empty parking lot, there comes a time, early in the operator's training, where driving in an unrealistic environment is no longer useful or practical.

Vehicle simulators address the issue of presenting the operator with a realistic training environment. The principal shortcoming of existing training systems, however, is that they do not provide realistic feedback for incremental learning. For example, in most known systems there are no means for instantaneously gauging

one's progress against a prior use of the vehicle while it is in operation.

Video arcade games are another technology providing a certain degree of user feedback. Arcade games are typically placed in public areas such as arcade halls, theaters, airports and other such areas where the users can occupy time and entertain themselves by playing the game. Arcade games utilizing video displays have been around for some time now, beginning with the simplistic game of bouncing a ball across a line with paddles known as "Pong". However, with the passage of time, video arcade games have become ever more sophisticated and realistic.

Because arcade games have housings which occupy limited space, the game computer equipment is subject to strict space constraints. In addition, the user's interest must be captured and maintained by the simulator, thus requiring that processing be accomplished in real-time. The competing space and time goals thus make the task of injecting realism into the games more difficult.

In many senses, the arcade game called "Hard Drivin' TM", manufactured and distributed by Atari Games Corp. of Milpitas, Calif., represents the state of the art in arcade game realism. The physical layout of the game includes clutch, brake and gas pedals, a gearshift and a steering wheel. The user, or driver, is provided feedback response from a video display having a three-dimensional graphical representation of the driving environment and from a speaker which generates realistic sounds of driving. A digital processor, comprising a number of microprocessors and a memory, is the interface between the user inputs and the feedback response.

Many current arcade games, including the one previously described, require that the user compete against some unknown "best" or "champion" player who has played the game at some point in the past. A player becomes a new champion by maximizing some metric or set of parameters and thereby displacing a previous champion. Besides the noted issue of anonymity, in most of these arcade games the only indicia of the champion's skill level is a single numeric score. Hence, there is no indication of what moves, speeds, etc., the champion used to obtain the high score. A recording of a game would be most important if the user desired to improve his skill level as against someone having greater skill at playing the game such as the champion.

Other systems have incorporated the device of connecting two arcade games together and having users compete against one another with full knowledge of who they are competing against, their actions being coordinated and displayed simultaneously. In such multiple machine configurations, a serious disadvantage is that it is costly to the proprietor since the play area doubles and the cost of machines doubles for the given game. Furthermore, these games do not present an indication of what moves an individual player needs to improve if the competing player happens to be less skillful than his counterpart.

Consequently, a need exists for realistic vehicle simulators and arcade games to provide personalized feedback, wherein the feedback may be personalized by either the operator/user or by an instructor/champion.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention concerns an automated training system for use in vehicle simulators. More particularly, the invention concerns a driver training system

for use in simulating vehicle operation, comprising a plurality of simulated input devices for controlling a simulated vehicle, and further comprising audio and video output devices for displaying a simulated vehicle environment.

The present invention overcomes the shortcomings of existing vehicle simulators and fulfills the need for realistic vehicle simulators by providing an automated training system with recursive training software. The invention enables a user to simultaneously compare present performance with a previously recorded performance, providing the user with real-time personalized feedback for incremental learning. In addition, the invention facilitates multi-user simulations by enabling a user to simultaneously compare a present performance with another user's previously recorded performance.

In the preferred embodiment of the present invention, a user operates mechanical input devices emulating vehicle driver controls. In one embodiment, the mechanical inputs include a gas pedal, clutch pedal, brake pedal, gearshift and steering wheel. The mechanical inputs are translated into electrical signals which are continuously processed by the invention. The invention provides computer software for modeling the position velocity and acceleration (position information) of a simulated vehicle in a simulated environment. The invention further provides computer software for driving a video display and audio device, presenting the user with real-time views and sounds of a simulated environment.

In one embodiment the user is shown a display placing the user in the position of an observer inside a simulated vehicle. The display includes a track or roadway, a simulated vehicle interior including dashboard indicators, and two or more vehicles. The position of a current driver's vehicle represents the present user's performance. The position a last driver's vehicle represents the recorded performance of a previous user. Optionally, the route of a drone vehicle can be prerecorded and played back for purpose of further competition.

The invention accomplishes a reduction in computer hardware heretofore required by multi-driver simulators by replacing additional simulators required by previous multidriver simulators with the recursive training software of the present invention. The recursive training software of the present invention displays a previous route taken by a first driver simultaneously with a present route taken by a second driver. By running successive simulations on one system, the present invention provides real-time competition between multiple users (e.g., instructor and student) at reduced cost and space requirements. Consequently, the present invention may also be embodied as an arcade game.

These and other objects and features of the present invention will become more fully apparent from the following detailed description and appended claims taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings. It should be understood, however, that the detailed description and the specific examples, while representing the preferred embodiment of the invention, are given only for illustration and shall not limit the scope of the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram of one preferred arcade game of the present invention;

FIG. **2** is a diagram of an autocross racetrack corresponding to a video screen display provided by the arcade game of FIG. **1**;

FIG. **3** is a diagram of the user's view before reaching the start line of the autocross track wherein the diagram corresponds to a video screen display of the arcade game shown in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **4** is a diagram of the user's view while maneuvering around a curve in the autocross track wherein the diagram corresponds to a video screen display of the arcade game shown in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **5** is a diagram of the user's view just after crossing the finish line of the autocross track wherein the diagram corresponds to a video screen display of the arcade game shown in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **6** is a flow diagram of the "gameplay" function which forms a portion of the game process shown in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **7** is a flow diagram of the "init_precord" function used by the "gameplay" function shown in FIG. **6**;

FIG. **8** is a flow diagram of the "init_lap_car" function used by the "init_precord" function of FIG. **7**;

FIG. **9** is a flow diagram of the "rules" function used by the "gameplay" function shown in FIG. **6**.

FIG. **10** is a diagram of the user's view at the start line of the multiple driver simulation wherein the diagram corresponds to a partial video screen display of the arcade game shown in FIG. **1**;

FIG. **11** is a flow diagram of the "game" function which forms a portion of the game process shown in FIG. **1**;

FIGS. **12***a*, **12***b* and **12***c* are the flow diagram of the "buddy_gameplay" function used by the "game" function shown in FIG. **11**;

FIG. **13** is the flow diagram of the "rules'" function used by the "buddy_gameplay" function shown in FIG. **12**; and

FIG. **14** is the flow diagram of the "check_buddy" function used by the "buddy_gameplay" function shown in FIG. **12**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Reference is now made to the drawings wherein like numerals refer to like parts throughout.

FIG. **1** shows one preferred embodiment of a driver training system **100** of the present invention. The driver training system **100** is operated by a user or driver **102** (shown schematically), who desires to improve driving performance. It should be understood that the driver training system **100** as hereinafter described is applicable to any type of vehicle that is operated by a human. Also, the embodiment of the driver training system **100** as presented in the following figures and description is presented as an arcade game for racing. However, the present invention includes a personalized feedback response that is easily generalized to driver training systems for all kinds of simulated vehicles and types of driving.

In FIG. **1**, the user **102** preferably sits in a booth or housing (not shown) such as the one described in the assignee's issued U.S. patent, entitled "Rear Entry Booth and Adjustable Seat Apparatus for a Sit-Down Arcade Video Game", U.S. Pat. No. 4,960,117. In that way, distractions are minimized and the user **102** can concentrate on self-improvement. The sitting position also better simulates the actual conditions associated with driving a car.

In the driver training system **100**, the user **102** depresses a clutch pedal **104**, brake pedal **106** and gas pedal **108** in the customary manner. In addition, a gearshift **110** is manipulated by the user **102** to maximize acceleration and deceleration for the given velocity of the vehicle as simulated by the simulator **100**. A steering wheel **112** is turned by the user **102** so as to guide the simulated vehicle in the desired direction of travel.

The mechanical inputs provided by the user **102** to the input devices **104, 106, 108, 110** and **112** are translated by transducers into electrical signals which are fed into a processor **114**. The processor **114** in the preferred embodiment includes a microprocessor (not shown) such as, for example, a Motorola 680x0. The processor **114** executes computer software which is stored in a memory (not shown) such as **27512** read-only memory (ROM) integrated circuits. The computer software in the processor **114** is logically organized to include a model process **116**.

The model process **116** receives digitized signals from the input devices **104–112** and models the velocity and acceleration vectors of the simulated car. Thus, at a time T, position data, i.e., the Cartesian coordinates of the car, are determined by the model process **116**. The position data is available, across a data path **118**, to a game process **120**. Accordingly, the game process **120** applies the "rules of the road" to the new position of the car, and initiates signals to drive a video display **122** and a speaker **124**.

The video display **122** preferably generates a color, three-dimensional graphical representation of the environment, i.e., the user's perspective of a graphical universe including items such as a roadway. The speaker **124** produces sounds such as gear changes, engine revving, skidding, and so on. Thus, the user **102** is presented with real-time feedback from the output devices **122, 124** that is personalized according to his own individual performance.

FIG. **2** is a diagram of a video screen display showing one example of a roadway, or track **134**. In the embodiment of the present invention described herein, the user **102** (FIG. **1**) is presented with the track **134** with a basic objective of trying to achieve better lap times while increasing his overall score. In point of fact, the user **102** presents the arcade game (hereinafter "system" to collectively describe the game and simulator embodiments) **100**, with one or more coins. The system **100** then allows the user **102** a choice as to the type of track to run. The selected track can be the autocross track **134** shown in FIG. **2**, a roadway having intersections and signal lights, a stunt course, and so on. As another option, and in the preferred embodiment, the system **100** allows the user **102** to select from a number of different models of the simulated vehicle. In a driver training system embodiment of the present invention, a selection of cars would preferably include simulations of the vehicles used for actual road tests.

Also shown in FIG. **2** is a start line **136**, checkpoint **138** and finish line **140**. When the user **102** begins the game, or initiates the system **100**, the user's view is looking ahead at the start line **136** (e.g., FIG. **3**). The checkpoint **138**, which may be one of many (including the start and finish lines **136, 140** which are checkpoints), serves two fundamental purposes. First, a driver can increase his remaining time for playing the game by crossing the checkpoint **138** within some predetermined time, and he can increase the time of game play. Second, if the driver **102** crashes on the course near the checkpoint **138**, the simulated car will be automatically reset to a position on the track **134** at the checkpoint **138**. An instant replay capability shows the driver **102** what went wrong by playing back a "God's eye" view of the crash.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, the user **102** (FIG. **1**) is placed in the position of an observer inside of the vehicle being simulated. The diagram of FIG. **3** is a representation of another screen display generated on the video display **122** of FIG. **1**. The scene represented in FIG. **3** is one wherein the user **102** is driving the simulation vehicle, also called the observer car (not shown), and is proceeding towards the start line **136**. In a waiting position at the start line **136** is a "ghost" car or lap car **150**.

The lap car **150** represents the best time around the track **134** in all the laps made by the driver **102** thus far. In this way, the driver **102** is provided with a means of self-improvement which is called recursive training. That is, at each iteration n around the track, the driver **102** tries to beat the best time accumulated in the past n−1 laps. For the arcade game embodiment of the system **100** described and shown herein, there is a single parameter of performance which is time. However, it will be understood that in other driver training systems there will be a multiplicity of parameters which may not necessarily include time. For example, a beginning driver would attempt to improve on safety parameters such as braking distances, centering the vehicle on the road, and so forth. Furthermore, in other variations of the invention the route, or position information, through the simulated environment will not be a racetrack.

The ghost car **150** thus is a complete recording of the lap that was previously run by the user **102** which represents the current "best" of n−1 laps.

To provide a higher degree of realism in the system **100**, certain aspects of the interior of the vehicle are displayed on the video display **122** (FIG. **1**). For example, a portion of a rear view mirror **152** is shown in the upper right hand corner of the display. Also, an A-strut **154** of the simulated vehicle is shown in the center left of the video display **122**. At the bottom of the display is a remaining time message **156** which is simulated as a message on the windshield such as would be provided, for example, by a heads-up display. In the preferred embodiment, accurate time is maintained by the processor **114** by counting the interrupts generated by a four millisecond interval timer (not shown).

Directly underneath the remaining time message **156**, on the video display **122**, is an instrument panel **158**. The instrument panel **158**, in the embodiment shown in FIG. **3**, includes a score display **160**. The score display **160** contains a numeric indicator of the user's performance. As discussed above, the score in the score display **160** is a function of, among other things, the driver **102** reaching the checkpoint **138**. Beneath the score display **160** is a current parameter display **162**. Thus, in the present embodiment, once the finish line **140** (FIG. **2**) has been passed, the lap time is fixed and indicates the complete time of the last lap. Of course, for training an inexperienced driver, a time parameter may be inappropriate and some other set of parameters will be used to measure the driver's performance. Beneath the current parameter display **162** is a previous parameter display **164**. The previous parameter display **164** contains the time to beat, or the time to qualify for a "championship lap" (determined by the current champion), and the last

lap time. The last lap time is the previous lap time achieved by the user **102**.

The instrument panel **158** shown in FIG. **3** also comprises an alternator gauge **166**, a temperature gauge **168**, a tachometer **170**, a speedometer **172**, an oil pressure gauge **174** and a fuel gauge **176**. The gauges become active when the user **102** "starts" the simulated vehicle. Of principal significance to this discussion are the tachometer **170**, to indicate when shifting should be performed, and the speedometer **172**, to provide a measurement of speed. The fuel gauge **176** reads empty when the game completes. On the right hand side of the instrument panel **158** is a set of warning lights **178** and a gear indicator **180**. The gear indicator **180** visually displays the position of the gearshift **110** shown in FIG. **1**.

FIG. **4** is another screen display wherein the lap car **150** is shown ahead of the observer car driven by the user **102**. The lap car **150** is intentionally displayed as a wire frame model so that the user **102** may actually drive "through" the lap car **150** without the fear of a crash.

FIG. **5** is another screen display which is generated on the video display **122** of the system **100** (FIG. **1**). The user **102** has just passed the finish line **140** (FIG. **2**) and is approaching the start line **136**. At the top of the screen there is displayed a predetermined feedback message **190**, in this example, the words "EXTENDED PLAY—ANOTHER GREAT LAP!". Beneath the predetermined feedback message **190** there is also displayed a current lap feedback message **192** showing the current lap number and time, and a previous best lap feedback message **194** showing the previous best lap number and time.

FIG. **6** illustrates the flow diagram for the top-level function of the game process **120** (FIG. **1**) called "game_play" **210**. In one preferred embodiment, the game process **120** is written in the "C" programming language and cross-compiled on a Digital Equipment Company VAX computer using a Green Hills Software, Inc. "C" compiler available from Oasys, a division of Xel, Inc. of Waltham, Mass. The game process **120** is then executed on a Motorola **68010** microprocessor located in the processor **114**. However, one skilled in the art of computers will recognize that many other computer languages and computers, including pluralities of each, may be used to achieve the same result.

Beginning at a start state **212**, the user **102** (FIG. **1**) will insert money into the arcade game. Moving to a state **214** the processor **114** (FIG. **1**) directs the video display **122** to display a menu of tracks from which the user **102** selects a track. Among the tracks to select are multiple player tracks and single player tracks such as the autocross track shown in FIG. **3**. The user **102** is then prompted to select a car from among a menu of cars that is presented to the user.

Moving to a function called "init_precord" **216**, the processor **114** initializes observer and lap car recording. The lap positions of the observer and lap cars are recorded, or saved, in unique buffers called "lap **1**" and "lap **0**", respectively. "Lap **0**" is overwritten by "lap **1**" whenever the observer car outperforms the lap car.

The processor **114** then moves to the beginning **217** of a loop **218** which terminates only when time has expired. For example, at the beginning of the game the user **102** will be given an initial allocation of time. The time allocation may be increased by crossing checkpoints, completing laps, and so forth, but eventually the game will complete. The loop **218** is preferably completed at least five times per second so that position information can be displayed in real-time providing the loop car **150** and environment with fluid movement.

At a state **220**, the position of the observer car is obtained from the model process **116**. The model process **116** calculates the last position of the observer car based upon the user's inputs which occur asynchronously. Moving to the next state **222**, the processor **114** generates or modifies the sounds that are appropriate for the-observer car, for example, skidding sounds if the observer car is losing traction on the track **134** (FIG. **2**).

Next, at a state **224**, the recorded positions of observer and lap cars are updated. This means that the cars are placed in a certain position in the graphical universe or environment prior to the display system of the processor **114** (FIG. **1**) actually updating the video display **122**. In a function called "rules" **226**, the processor **114** applies the rules of the game to the observer car. For example, if the user **102** crashed, or was off-road and unable to return to the track **134** within a predetermined time, then the position of the observer car is automatically reset to the nearest checkpoint.

At this point in the loop **218**, moving to a decision state **228**, the processor **114** checks to see whether time has expired. The time checked is the same allowed the user **102** by the system **100**. This time is presented to the user **102** in the remaining time message **156** (FIG. **3**).

Next, moving to a state **230** if time has not expired, a display command is initiated to a digital signal processor (not shown) in the processor **114** (FIG. **1**), such as the ADSP-2100 chip available from Analog Devices of Norwood, Mass. In this state **230**, display objects, such as the racetrack, background, observer car and lap car, are appropriately translated in the graphical universe according to the perspective of the user **102**, for later display on the video display **122**. In a state **232**, windshield messages are displayed such as, for example, at the beginning of the game, checkpoints and the end of the game and the remaining time message **156** (FIG. **3**) are displayed. Also, if the observer car goes off-road (i.e., off of the track **134**), the system **100** displays arrows that point the user **102** in the direction of the track **134** (FIG. **2**). Moving to a state **234**, the lap time **162**, score display **160** and gauges, including the tachometer **170** and speedometer **172**, are updated. Then, at a state **236**, collision sounds are generated. These are the sounds associated with the observer car colliding with barriers, cones, buildings, and the like. At a state **238**, the video display **122** has its three-dimensional graphics display updated by a command being issued to a graphics signal processor such as, for example, the 34010 chip distributed by Texas Instruments, which can handle color filled three-dimensional graphics in real-time.

Returning to the decision state **228**, if time has expired, the current session is terminated in a stop state **240**.

Referring now to FIG. **7**, there is illustrated the flow diagram for the "init_precord" function **216** shown in FIG. **6**. Beginning at a start state **250**, the processor **114** (FIG. **1**) moves to a state **252** to create the graphical object called the observer car. The observer car object is created because there are times, for instance, after a crash during instant replay, when the system **100** zooms out of the observer car to show the user **102** the scene as from the point of view of a third party observer. At a state **254**, the processor **114** creates the graphical object called the lap car, e.g., the car indicated at **150** in FIG. **4**. Moving to a function called "init_lap_car" **256**, lap

car recording information is initialized in the circular buffer called "lap 0". Then, in a state **258**, the position of the observer car object is set to the edge of the universe so that it is not seen on the video display **122** (until instant replay time, for example).

The lap car best time is initialized after the processor **114** moves to a state **260**. The best time is set to be the highest possible time allowed by the system, e.g., 7FFFFFFF in hexadecimal notation. Thus, after the first lap, assuming there was not a crash or the user **102** did not abort the lap (the user may abort a lap by pushing an abort button (not shown)), the observer car will automatically become the new lap car with the first lap time displayed in the previous parameter display **164** shown in FIG. **3**. The function **216** then terminates at a stop state **262**.

FIG. **8** illustrates the flow diagram for the "init_lap_car" function **256** shown in FIG. **7**. The "init_lap_car" function **256** is entered at a start state **270** by the processor **114** (FIG. **1**) at the beginning of each game as shown in FIG. **7**, and also at the end of a lap if a new lap car is to be recorded as shown in FIG. **9**. At a state **272**, pointers to the lap car recording buffer "lap 0", such as the last lap position, are reset. Also a playback flag is reset to indicate that the buffer does not contain valid information and therefore should not be displayed. The "init_lap_car" function **256** terminates in a stop state **274**.

FIG. **9** illustrates the flow diagram for the "rules" function **226** shown in FIG. **6**. Beginning at a start state **280**, the processor **114** (FIG. **1**) moves to a decision state **282**. Among the functions carried out by "rules" **226** is the "replacement" function when the observer car goes off-road for more than some predetermined time, ten seconds, for example, the car is replaced onto one of the checkpoints such as the checkpoint **138** shown in FIG. **2**. At a decision state **282**, if the observer car is not crashed, not off-road and the game has not been aborted, a decision state **284** tests whether the observer car is crossing the start line and there is a "valid" lap car. By valid, it is meant that the car did not crash and the lap was not aborted. If the lap car is valid, then another test is made to determine whether the observer car is crossing the finish line at a decision state **286**. If the observer car is not crossing the finish line, then processing for the "rules" function terminates at a stop state **288**.

Referring back to the state **282**, if the observer car is either crashed, off-road or the lap was aborted, then the processor **114** moves to a state **290** to invalidate the lap and continues processing at the state **284**. Moving to a state **291**, the processor **114** processes the observer car state, such as resetting the observer car to the nearest checkpoint if the observer car was crashed.

If at the decision state **284** the lap car is crossing the start line and there is a valid lap car, then the lap number and lap time are displayed at a state **292** and control returns to the decision state **286**.

Referring back to the decision state **286**, if the observer car is crossing the finish line, the processor **114** moves to a decision state **294**. If, at the decision state **294**, there is no valid lap car, then the current lap time is displayed at a state **296** and control continues to a decision state **298**. In the decision state **298**, the processor **114** tests whether it is a valid lap and a better time was run. If not, then control moves to a state **300** to position the lap car at the start line and initialize recording for the observer car. State **300** uses the "init_lap_car" function shown in FIG. **8**. At this point in the processing, the user **102** sees the rear-end of the lap car as, for example, shown in FIG. **3**.

Referring back to the decision state **294**, if there is a valid lap car then the processor **114** moves to a state **302** to display current and best lap times, e.g., the messages **192** and **194** in FIG. **5**, before entering the decision state **298**.

From the decision state **298**, if it is a valid lap and a better time was achieved, then the processor **114** moves to a state **304** to update the best lap information. Moving next to a state **306**, the processor **114** gets the lap car position at the starting line and stores the position and, at a state **308**, moves the recorded lap buffer information stored in "lap 1" into the best lap buffer "lap 0", moving from the state **308** to the state **300** and proceeding as described above.

FIG. **10** illustrates the user's view of the multiple driver simulation of the present invention. In particular, the start line **136** on the track **134** is shown in FIG. **10**. The multiple driver simulation allows the user to control a current driver's car **320** which competes against a drone car **322** and a last driver's car **324**. The competition is judged based on a set of parameters, such as time and/or points, as was previously discussed with respect to the recursive driver simulation, e.g., gameplay **210**, which will hereinafter be referred to as the single driver simulation.

Multiple driver simulation is characterized by self-improvement through competition with another driver. In the arcade game embodiment of the present invention, a first player (or user) will compete against the drone car **322**. At that time, only the drone car **322**, having an associated prestored route through the graphical universe, and the current driver's car **320** under the control of the first player, are displayed on the video display **122**. After the first player's competition is finished, and before the game ends, the second player takes the controls and a view such as FIG. **10** is presented by the driver training system **100**. The first player's route through the graphical universe has been recorded in the memory of the processor **114** (FIG. **1**) and this recording is played back as the last driver's car **324** so as to affect a competitive environment for the second player who now controls the current diver's car **320**.

In the simulator embodiment of the driver training system **100**, or other such simulation system, typically the first driver will be the instructor and the second driver will be the student. The details of the preferred arcade game embodiment of the multiple driver simulation will now be described hereinbelow, although the applicability to a simulator embodiment will be understood.

With reference now to FIG. **11**, a flow diagram is shown for an integrated arcade game **326** that includes the features of the single and multiple driver simulations. The game **326** begins at a start state **328** and proceeds to a decision state **330**, wherein the game **326** prompts the user **102** (FIG. **1**) to select between the single and multiple diver simulations. If the user **102** selects the former, then the game **326** enters the single driver simulation function (gameplay) **210** as previously described, and upon termination of the function **210** the game **326** completes at the stop state **332**.

Otherwise, assuming the user **102** selects the multiple driver option, the game **326** enters a multiple driver simulation function (buddy_gameplay) **334**. (This simulation function **334** is further discussed in some detail

below.) Upon termination of the simulation function **334**, the game **326** enters the decision state **336** wherein a status variable (not shown) is checked to determine whether either driver, as represented by the cars **320**, **324** (FIG. **10**), beat the drone car **322** and, in addition, if a free game option variable (not shown) is set. In this arcade game embodiment, the operator (not shown) of the arcade game may selectably set a free game option. If the test at the decision state **336** is satisfied, then the game **326** continues in a loop back to the state **330** for a free game. Otherwise, the game completes by moving from the decision state **336** to the stop state **332**.

Referring to FIGS. **12***a*, **12***b* and **12***c*, the flow of multiple player simulation function (buddy_gameplay) **334** is elaborated. More particularly, referring to FIG. **12***a*, the multiple player simulation function **334** begins at a start state **340**. Moving to a state **342**, the function **334** requests that the user select a track. For example, in the presently preferred embodiment, the tracks that the user may select from include the same tracks as discussed hereinabove. The selected track, such as the track **134** shown in FIG. **10**, is a computer simulated representation of a physical track on which actual cars are driven.

The next sequence of states, **344–384**, form an outer loop, denoted in FIG. **12***a* by the return of control path **345** to the loop state **344**. The outer loop **345** may be repeated one or more times until both of the cars **320**, **324** have completed the multiple player simulation function **334**.

After entering the outer loop **345** at the loop state **344**, the function **334** moves to a state **346** to set up the initial car position. That is, the initial car position will be on either the lefthand side or the righthand side of the drone car **322** (FIG. **10**). For example, as currently configured, the first player's car will appear as the current driver's car **320** on the lefthand side of the drone car **322**. When the second player begins play, a recording of the first player's car begins as the last driver's car **324** on the righthand side of the drone **322**, and the second player is assigned to the current driver's car **320**.

Proceeding to a state **348**, the buddy_gameplay function **334** sets up the number of recorded objects that will be moved around the track **134**. For example, when the first player plays the game, the number of recorded objects is set to "1" so that only the drone car **322** is played back, and when the second player plays the game, the number of recorded objects is set to "2" so that the drone car **322** and last player's car **324** are played back. Next, the function **334** moves to a state **350** wherein the user **102** (FIG. **1**) is requested to select a type of car to be driven. In one presently preferred embodiment, the user may select from among four cars with certain preselected mechanical and performance characteristics as follows: automatic transmission; manual transmission; convertible roadster, which has somewhat better handling characteristics than the other cars; and speedster, which is somewhat faster than the other cars but may not handle as well. The buddy_gameplay function **334** next transitions to a state **352** to test the controls of the driver training system **100** (FIG. **1**), including the clutch **104**, the gearshift **110** and the brake **106**. At this point the function **334** may reconfigure the car or stop play for operator assistance. If the clutch **104** returns an error condition, for example, and the user **102** has chosen a car with a manual transmission, (i.e., manual shifting cannot be simulated), then the function **334** automatically reconfigures the car to have an automatic transmission such that the user **102** can still play the game.

To determine an error condition, an operator would, prior to the beginning of the simulation, or game, use an operator menu (not shown) to determine that a control is malfunctioning and so enter that information into the system **100**. The operator opinion is tested by the test controls state **352** and acted upon accordingly.

The buddy_gameplay function **334** then moves from the test control state **352** to an initialize graphics universe state **354** wherein the cars **320**, **322** and **324** (FIG. **10**) are displayed on the track **134** and the camera zooms in to the start line **136**. Proceeding to the state **356**, the function **334** initializes recording and playback. Recording at state **356** is set up similarly to the state **216**, as shown and discussed with regard to FIG. **7** above. For playback, if the first player is operating the system **100**, only the drone car **322** is played back. If the second player is operating the system **100**, then both the first player's recorded route and the drone car **322** are played back. A separate, prestored route of the drone car **322** is required for each track, and the playback route of each drone is stored in a ROM in the processor **114** (FIG. **1**). The buddy_gameplay function **334** next transitions to a state **358** wherein various initialization is performed including zeroing lap counters, zeroing the time for the game, and zeroing the state flags for each car.

Leaving the state **358**, the buddy_gameplay function **334** proceeds to enter an inner loop **360** at a loop state **361** as **35** shown in FIG. **12***b*. The inner loop **360** comprises the states **361–380**, which is terminated at a decision function (check_buddy) **370**. From the state **361**, the function **334** enters sequentially the get position of the observer car state **362**, generate or modify sounds state **364**, and update recorded positions of cars state **366**, which are similar in function, respectively, to the states **220**, **222** and **224** in the gameplay function **210**, discussed above with respect to FIG. **6**. After getting the position of the observer car, generating sounds and updating the recorded positions of the cars, the buddy_gameplay function **334** proceeds to a rules' (or rules prime) function **368** to apply the rules of the game to the observer car. The rules' function **368** differs from the rules function **226**, which was shown and discussed with reference to FIG. **9** above. The function **368** will be further discussed hereinbelow with reference to FIG. **13**.

Still referring to FIG. **12***b*, the function **334** continues from the state **368** to the decision function **370** to check whether the game is over for the current driver. The check_buddy function **370** will be discussed hereinbelow with reference to FIG. **14**.

In FIG. **12***b*, the buddy_gameplay function **334** continues to a state **372**, after it has been determined that the game is not over for the current driver, and the function **334** proceeds through the following sequence of states: display objects **372**, display windshield messages **374**, update dash display **376**, generate collision sounds **378**, and initiate video display update. The functions of the audiovisual generation states **372–380** are similar, respectively, to the sequence of states **230–238**, which were shown and described with respect to the gameplay function **210** of FIG. **6**. After initiating the video display update at the state **380**, the buddy_gameplay function **334** returns to the loop state **361** to continue the inner loop **360**.

Referring now to FIG. 12*c*, the buddy_gameplay function **334** moves from the decision function **370** (FIG. 12*b*) to the state **382** if the game is over for the current driver. At the state **382**, a performance message is displayed. In the presently preferred embodiment, the performance message may be a disqualification message if driver1 was controlling the current car **320** (FIG. **10**) and did not finish the race. However, if driver1 or the drone crosses the finish line within a specified period (as preselected by the programmer of the system **100**), such as 10 or 15 seconds, before driver2, then a message indicating that driver2 is disqualified is displayed.

Moving to a decision state **384**, the function **334** determines whether driver1 and driver2 have finished the race. If only driver1 has completed the course, then control proceeds across the return path **345** to the top of the outer loop at the loop state **344** after saving the recording buffer for driver1, and driver2 is allowed to drive the car **324**. If, on the other hand, driver1 and driver2 have completed the game, the function **334** proceeds from the decision state **384** to a state **386** to restore the database associated with the buddy_gameplay function **334** (e.g., all cars are removed from the track **134** and the camera or observer position is reset to the start line **136**). The function **334** then proceeds to a stop state **388** to complete the function.

Turning to FIG. **13**, the control flow for the rules' function **368** (FIG. 12*b*) will now be discussed. The rules' function **368** specifies the rules of the game for the buddy_gameplay function **334**. The rules' function **368** begins at a start state **392** and proceeds to a decision state **394** wherein a test is made to determine whether a predetermined lap time has expired and driver1 is driving (FIG. **10**). This condition at state **394** basically specifies whether driver1 has finished. This is because, in the present embodiment, when the drone car **322** (FIG. **10**) crosses the finish line, the current car controlled by driver1 has a preselected time such as **10** seconds to finish the game, otherwise driver1 is disqualified. If the game has not terminated, then the buddy_gameplay function **334** continues and terminates the rules' function **368** at a stop state **398** without recording the lap for driver1.

Otherwise, if at the decision state **394** time has expired and driver1 controls the current car **320**, then the function **334** moves to a state **396** to fill out and save the recording buffer for driver1. The recording buffer is filled out by repeating the last position of the current car **320** into the recording buffer. Thereafter, the rules' function **368** is terminated at the stop state **398**.

FIG. **14** illustrates the control flow for the check_buddy function **370** which is a decision function for the buddy_gameplay function **334** shown in FIG. 12*b*. The check_buddy function **370** serves to determine whether a game is over for the current driver whose route across the track **134** is replayed and visually presented by the car **320** (FIG. **10**).

The function **370** is entered by the buddy_gameplay function **334** at a start state **402**, whereafter control proceeds to a decision state **404**. At state **404**, the function **334** tests whether the current driver has finished the game. If the condition at state **404** is satisfied, then the function **334** moves to a state **406** to start a countdown timer (not shown). The countdown timer is used to specify the disqualification time noted hereinabove. Thereafter, at a state **408**, the winner of the game is determined. Of course, the winner cannot yet be determined if driver2 has not yet operated the game.

Now if, on the other hand, at the decision state **404** it is determined that the driver has not finished the game, or if the function **334** is at the state **408**, the function **334** transitions to a decision state **410** to determine whether the drone car **322** (FIG. **10**) has started a new lap, i.e., if the car **322** crossed the start line **136**. If so, the drone lap number is updated at a state **412** and, moving to a decision state **414**, a test is made as to whether the drone car **322** has finished. If the drone car **322** has finished, then the countdown timer is started at a state **416** and the function **334** proceeds to a decision state **418**. If, at state **414**, it is determined that the drone did not finish, then the function **334** moves directly from state **414** to the decision state **418**.

At the decision state **418**, a test is made to determine whether the winner finished after T seconds from a finish by the drone car **322**. T is a preselected time that specifies whether there is an instant replay of the finish. If the test is affirmative, then the function **334** proceeds to a state **420** to stop the instant replay recording since the winner and drone car **322** will not have had a close race. From the state **420**, or if the test at state **418** is negative, then the function **334** proceeds to a decision state **422** to determine whether there is a countdown timer time-out, i.e., disqualification. If there is a time-out, the function **334** proceeds to a stop1 state **424** which terminates the inner loop **360** of FIG. 12*b*. Otherwise, if there is no time-out at the decision state **422**, the function **343** terminates the check_buddy function **370** at a stop2 state **426**. The stop2 state **426** corresponds to continuing the inner loop **360** of FIG. 12*b*.

Although the preferred embodiments of the present invention have been principally shown and described as relating to arcade games, the present invention could also be used as a vehicle simulator such as a driver training system.

While the above detailed description has shown, described and pointed out the fundamental novel features of the invention as applied to various embodiments, it will be understood that various omissions and substitutions and changes in the form and details of the device illustrated may be made by those skilled in the art, without departing from the spirit of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A driver training system, comprising:

a plurality of simulated input devices for controlling a simulated vehicle;

a video display for presenting a view of a simulated environment;

modeling means responsive to said input devices for determining position information of said simulated vehicle in said simulated environment;

first training means having a buffer, wherein the first training means stores and replays a first preprogrammed route through said simulated environment on said video display;

second training means having a buffer, wherein the second training means is representative of a first user and responsive to the position information provided by the first user, and wherein the second training means stores a second route of said simulated vehicle taken by the first user through said simulated environment in the buffer, replays the second route on said video display, and stores at least one parameter indicative of a performance characteristic of the second route in the buffer; and

third training means, representative of a second user, wherein the third training means is responsive to

the position information provided by the second user, and wherein the third training means displays a third route of said simulated vehicle taken by the second user through said simulated environment and determines at least one parameter indicative of a performance characteristic of the third route;

wherein said first preprogrammed route is independent of the routes taken by the users;

wherein said first route and said second route are replayed simultaneously with said display of said third route on said video display; and

wherein a best route through the simulated environment is selected by comparing route parameters.

2. The system defined in claim 1 wherein said input devices include a gas pedal, brake pedal and steering wheel.

3. The system defined in claim 2 wherein said input devices further include a gearshift.

4. The system defined in claim 3 wherein said input devices further include a clutch pedal.

5. The system defined in claim 3 wherein said steering wheel is responsive to a plurality of feedback signals from said second and third training means.

6. The system defined in claim 1, additionally comprising a speaker responsive to said second and third training means.

7. The system defined in claim 1, wherein said second and third training means are responsive to different position information provided by different users.

8. A system for driver training, comprising:

a plurality of simulated controls having analogues to controls of a real-world vehicle;

a visual device;

a processor responsive to said simulated controls for generating personalized feedback to a present user, including a simulated environment, a simulated vehicle having a preprogrammed route through said simulated environment, a present simulated vehicle having a present route through said simulated environment taken by said present user, wherein the present route has a parameter indicative of performance, and a previous simulated vehicle, wherein the previous simulated vehicle is a recording of a previous route taken by a previous user through said environment, wherein the previous route has a parameter indicative of performance, wherein the preprogrammed route is independent of the routes taken by the users, and wherein said personalized feedback is communicated to said visual device for presentation to said present user; and

means for comparing said parameters of said previous route and said present route, and wherein said present route is selected as a best route only if the present route parameter indicates a higher level of a performance than the previous route parameter.

9. A method of driver training in a driving simulator having a video display, a memory, a set of simulated input controls, and means for displaying a simulated vehicle in a simulated environment, the method comprising the steps of:

storing a preprogrammed route of a first simulated vehicle through the simulated environment;

receiving changes in the position of the simulated input controls as manipulated by a first user;

calculating position information of a second simulated vehicle based on the position changes of the simulatcd input controls;

storing the calculated position information indicative of the first user's route through the simulated environment in the memory;

displaying the first simulated vehicle, the second simulated vehicle and simulated environment on the video display;

receiving changes in the position of the simulated input controls as manipulated by a second user;

calculating position information of a third simulated vehicle based on the position changes of the simulated input controls as manipulated by the second user; and

displaying the stored positions indicative of the first simulated vehicle and the first user's route of the second simulated vehicle on the video display simultaneously with the position of the third simulated vehicle.

10. A driver training system, comprising:

means for providing user control of a simulated vehicle;

a video display for presenting a view of a simulated environment;

means, independent of the user control means, for controlling simulated travel of a first simulated vehicle through the simulated environment;

means, responsive to input from a first user, for controlling simulated travel of a second simulated vehicle through the simulated environment;

means, responsive to the means for controlling simulated travel of the second simulated vehicle, for storing a record of the simulated travel of the second simulated vehicle through the simulated environment;

means for simultaneously displaying the simulated travel of the first and second simulated vehicles on the video display;

means, responsive to input from a second user, for controlling simulated travel of a third simulated vehicle through the simulated environment; and

means for simultaneously display the simulated travel of the first, second and third simulated vehicles on the video display.

* * * * *