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Dean

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(54) **BICYCLE CARRIER**

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 10/321,299, filed on Dec. 16, 2002, now Pat. No. 6,851,590, which is a continuation of application No. 09/585,723, filed on May 31, 2000, now Pat. No. 6,494,351.

(51) **Int. Cl.**
B60R 9/048 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **224/324; 224/924**

(58) **Field of Classification Search** **224/324, 224/924, 315, 322**

See application file for complete search history.

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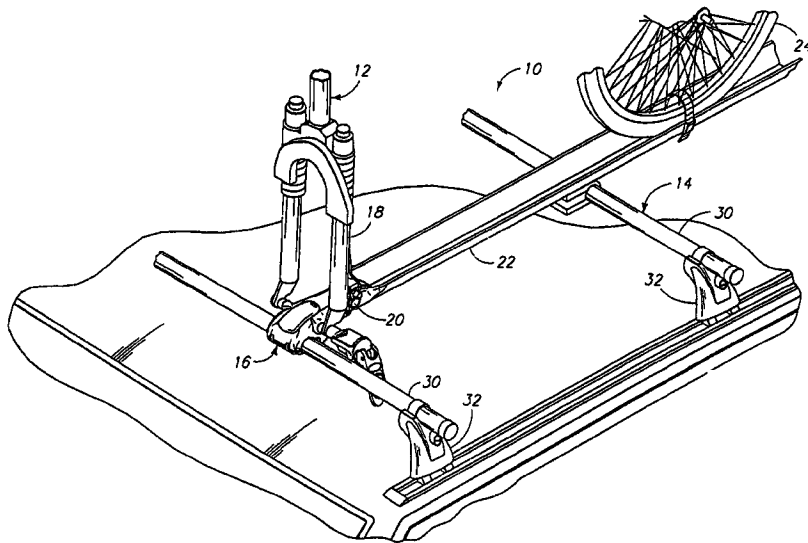
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A sports equipment carrier for a vehicle including a rack structure adapted to be mounted to a vehicle and an equipment securing portion. The equipment securing portion includes a clamping mechanism and an adjustment member, where the clamping mechanism includes a housing and is operable between open and closed configurations. Operation of the clamping mechanism shifts the adjustment member into and at least partially out of the housing so that the adjustment member is accessible to a user in the open configuration and inaccessible to a user in the closed configuration.

9 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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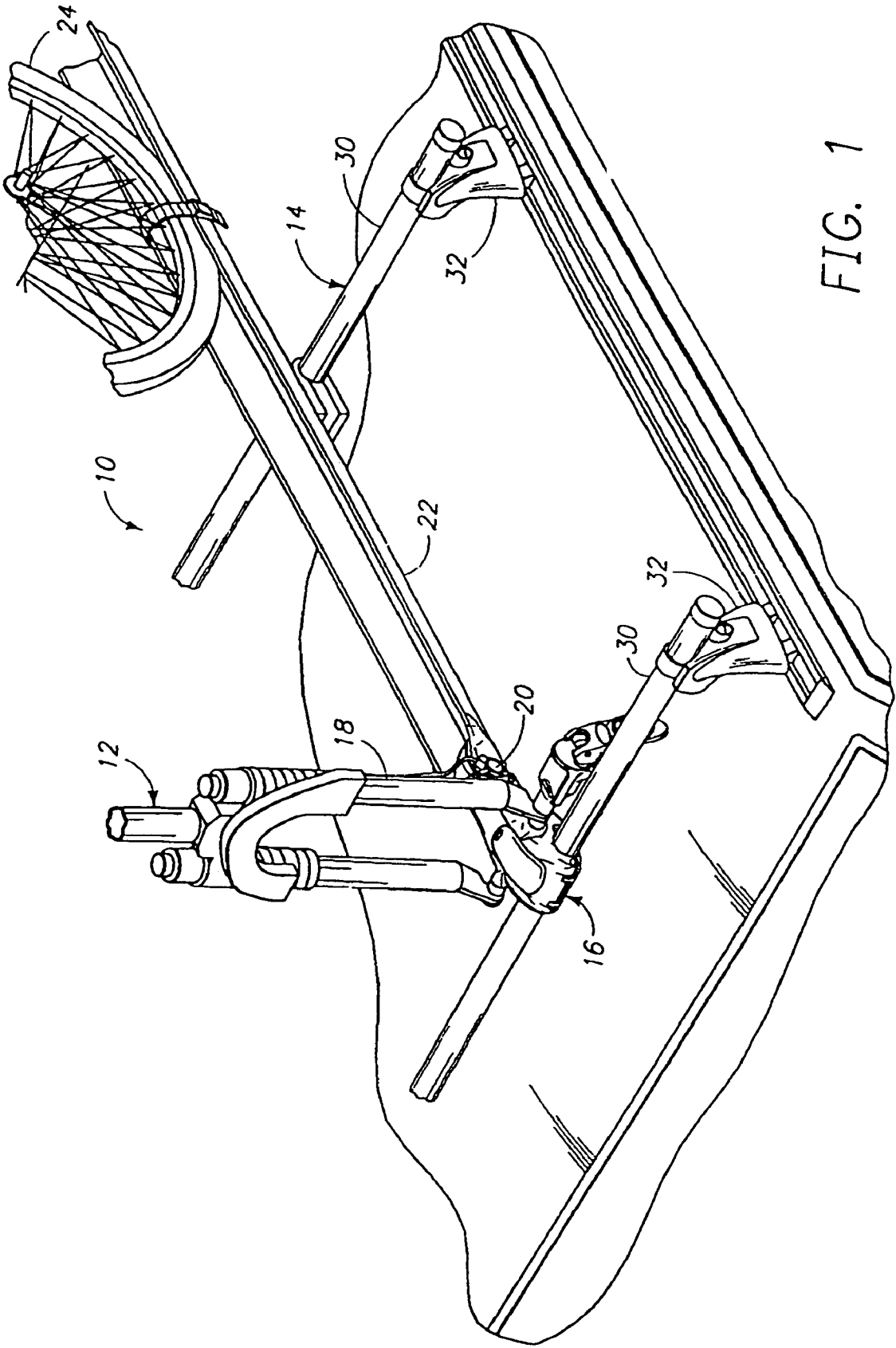


FIG. 1

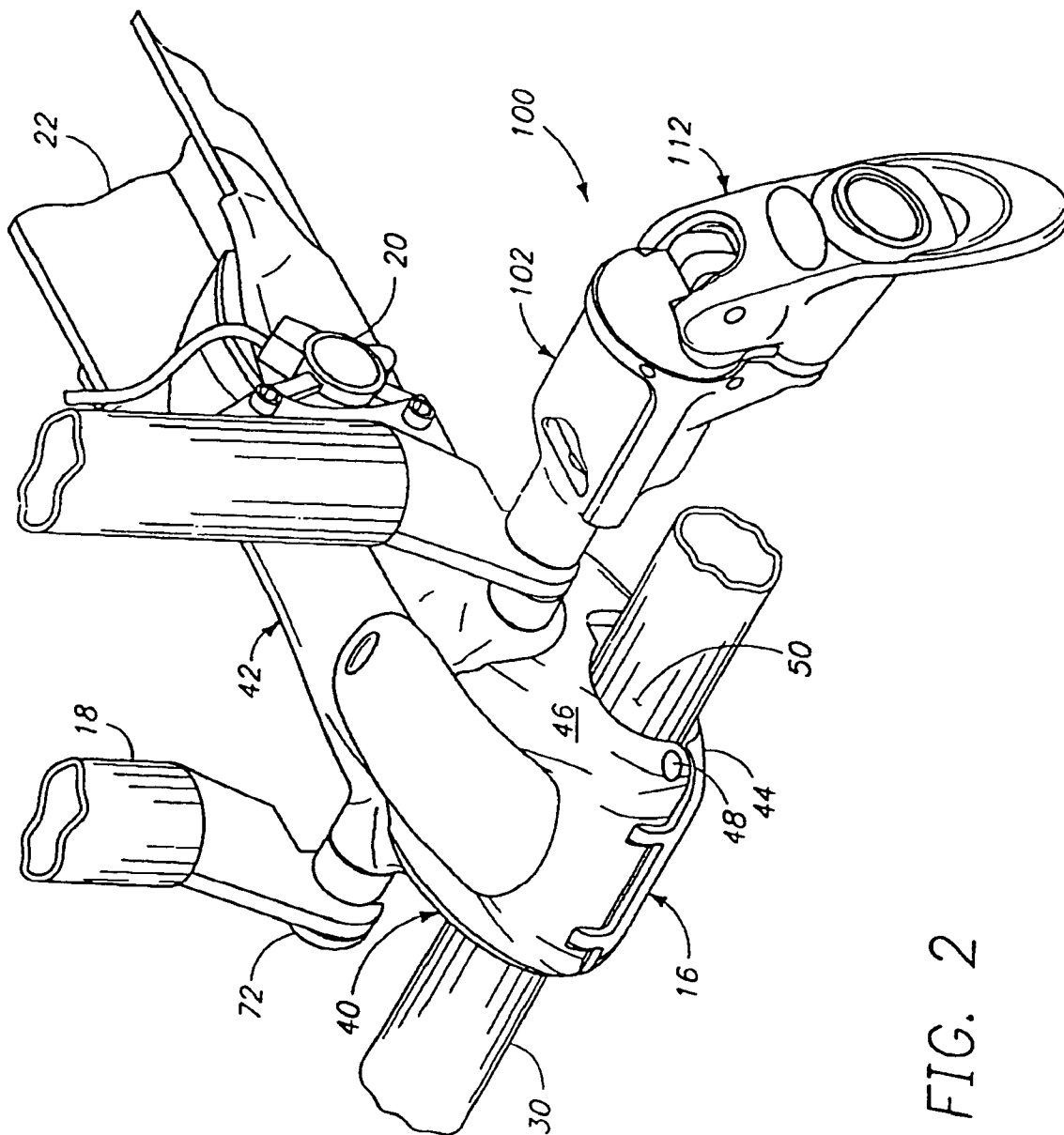


FIG. 2

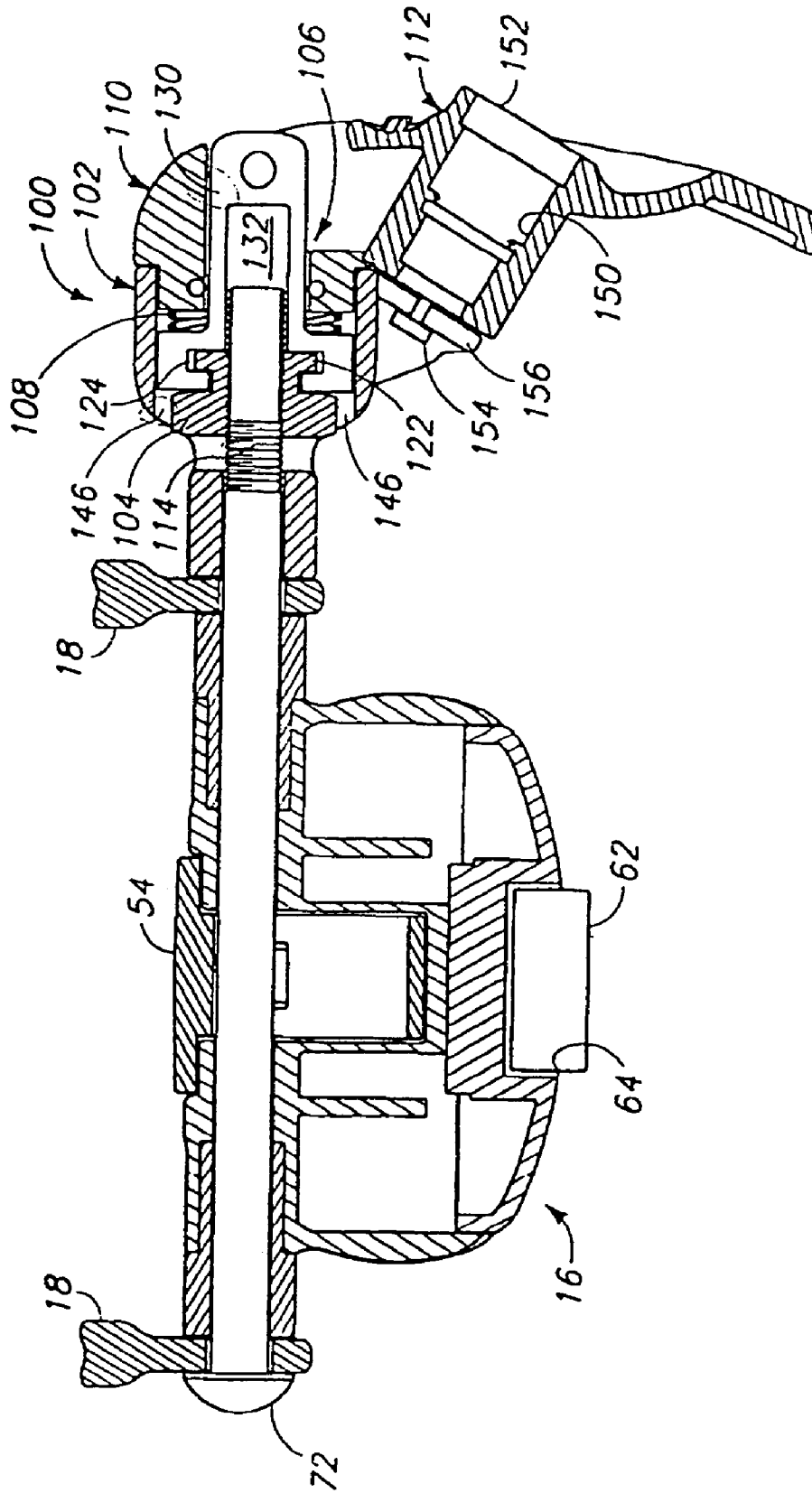


FIG. 9

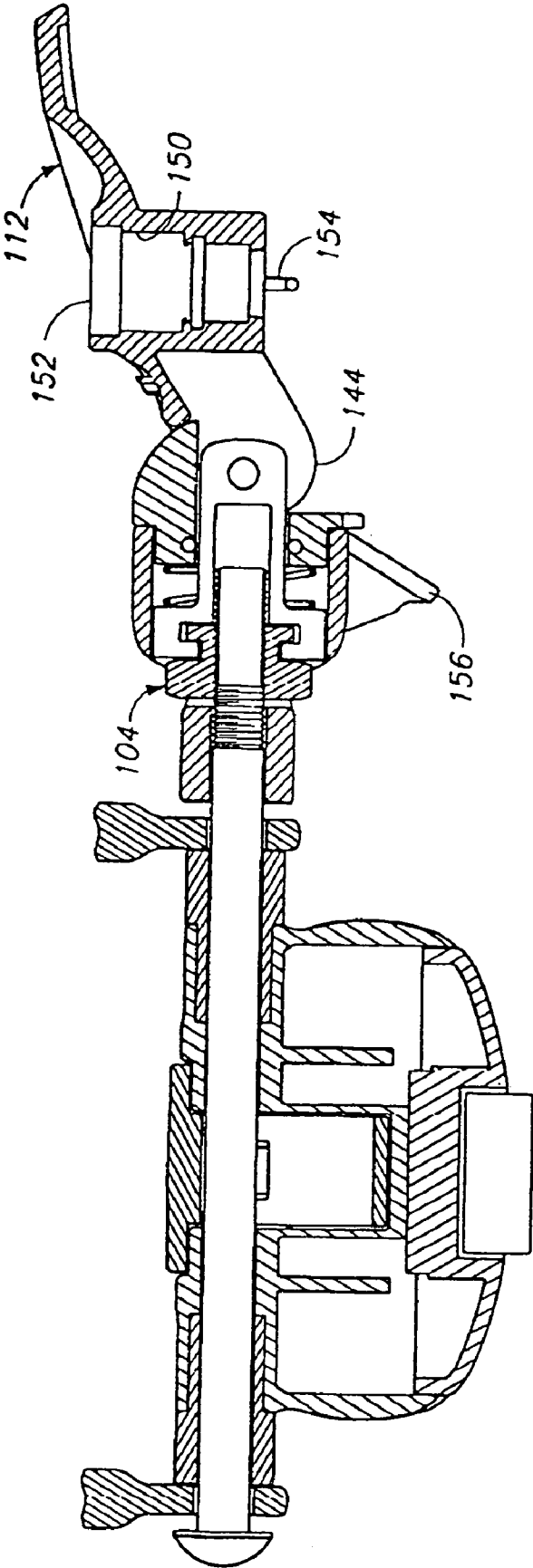


FIG. 10

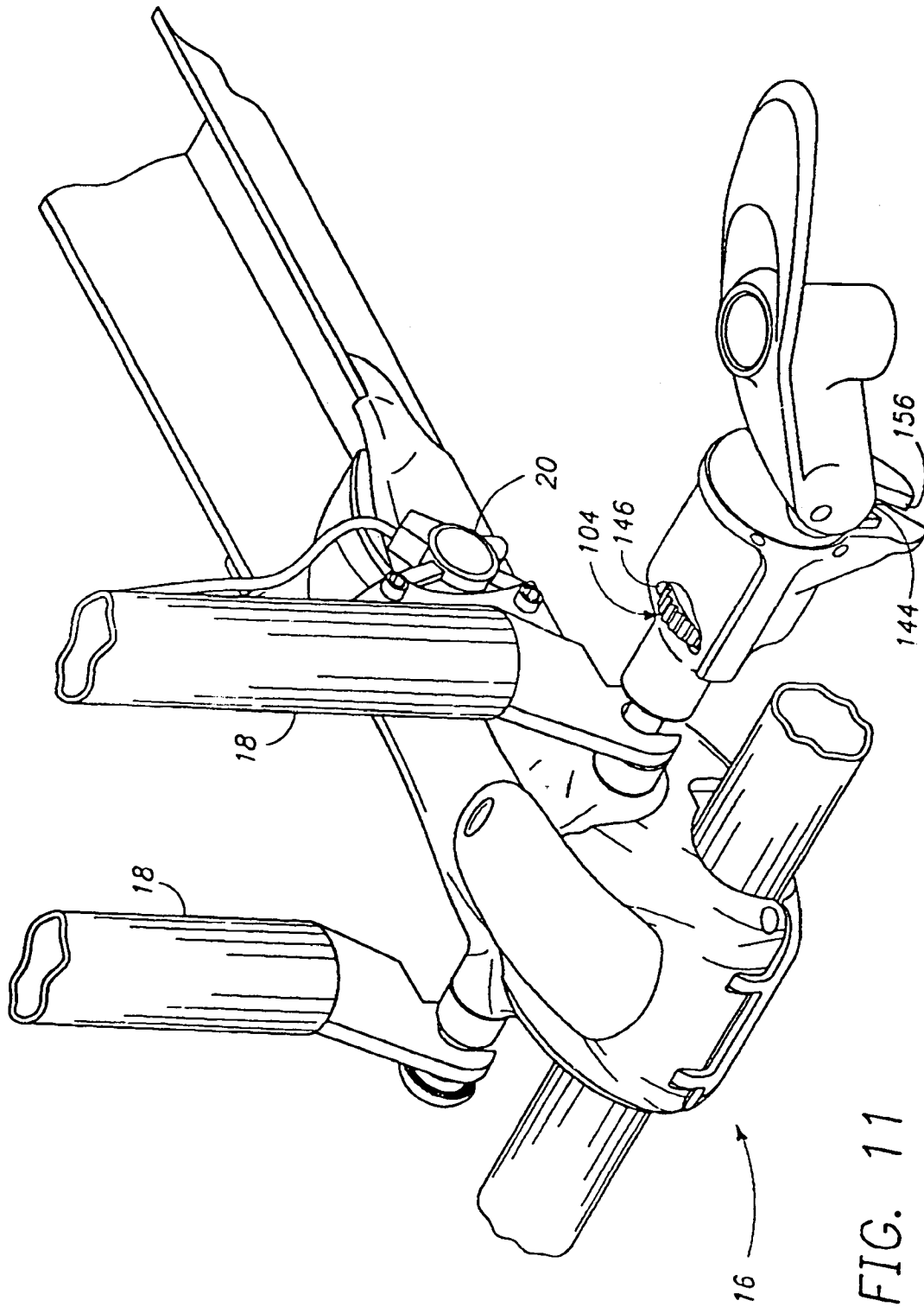


FIG. 11

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BICYCLE CARRIER

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/321,299 filed Dec. 16, 2002 now U.S. Pat. No. 6,851,590 which is a continuation application of Ser. No. 09/585,723 filed May 31, 2000, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,494,351, and are hereby incorporated by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to devices for securing bicycles and more particularly to a bicycle carrier for use on vehicles.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Bicycles are often transported on vehicles. Numerous racks and devices have been devised to secure bicycles to vehicles during transport. One particularly common bicycle carrier utilizes a fork block mounted to a rack structure. The fork block has a skewer that clamps the front forks of a bicycle to secure the bicycle to the rack. The clamping pressure of the skewer on the forks is sufficient to stabilize the bicycle against tipping during travel. Typically, a wheel tray extends back from the fork block to support the rear wheel.

Fork block-type bicycle carriers present a number of design challenges. First, the fork block/skewer must grip the forks of the bicycle firmly enough to provide the needed stability. At the same time, it should be easy to secure the bicycle to or release it from the fork block, as well as easy to adjust to fit various bikes. In addition, the carrier should provide some way of securing the bicycle against theft when it is left unattended. More recently, bicycles have begun to incorporate front disk brakes. The disk brakes require calipers mounted to the front forks and such calipers often will not fit over the wheel tray on existing designs.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE FIGURES

FIG. 1 is an isometric view of a bicycle carrier constructed according to the present invention.

FIG. 2 is an isometric view of a fork block portion of the carrier of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3 is a cross-sectional view through the fork block of FIG. 2 in a closed configuration.

FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional view through the fork block of FIG. 2 in an open configuration.

FIG. 5 is a cross-sectional view through the fork block of FIG. 2 in a locked configuration.

FIG. 6 is an exploded isometric view of the fork block of FIG. 2.

FIG. 7 is an isometric view of the backside of a handle forming part of the fork block of FIG. 2.

FIG. 8 is a top view of the fork block of FIG. 2.

FIG. 9 is a cross-sectional view through the fork block and skewer assembly of FIG. 2 in a closed configuration.

FIG. 10 is a cross-sectional view through the fork block and skewer assembly of FIG. 9 in an open configuration.

FIG. 11 is an isometric view of a fork block portion of the carrier of FIG. 2 with the skewer in an open configuration.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A sport equipment carrier in the form of a bicycle carrier according to the present invention is shown generally at **10** in FIG. 1. Carrier **10** is adapted to receive and secure a bicycle **12**. The carrier includes a rack portion **14** adapted to be mounted to a vehicle. Typical racks are mounted on the roof or rear of a vehicle. The carrier also includes an equipment securing portion in the form of a fork block **16** adapted to secure forks **18** of bicycle **12**. Brake calipers **20** are mounted to forks **18**. A wheel tray **22** extends back from the fork block to receive and stabilize rear tire **24** of the bicycle.

Rack portion **14**, shown mounted to the roof of a vehicle, includes crossbars **30**, which extend across the roof and are typically either round or rectangular in cross section. The crossbars are secured to the vehicle by towers **32** that may secure to the gutters at the edge of the roof or an original equipment rack. Alternatively, the rack portion may be part of a hitch-mounted rack or other type of rack.

As shown in FIG. 2, fork block **16** includes a head portion **40** and an extension portion **42**. Head portion **40** has a generally clamshell like mounting mechanism to selectively mount to crossbar **30**. In particular, the head portion includes a lower jaw **44** pivotally connected to a fixed upper jaw **46** by a hinge pin **48**. See FIGS. 3-6. The jaws define an opening **50** adapted to receive either a round or rectangular crossbar. It should be noted that the opening is shaped to grip the round bar as close to the hinge point as possible to thereby maximize clamping force on the round bar.

Lower jaw **44** is selectively secured by a catch **52** controlled by a handle **54**. Handle **54** is pivotally mounted to head portion **40** at a pivot pin **56**. The catch includes an upper hoop **58** that fits around a pin **60** carried by handle **54**. The catch also includes a lower hook **62** that fits into a recess **64** formed in the free end of the lower jaw.

As the handle is raised to the open position, the catch is lowered sufficiently to allow the hook to be removed from the recess, releasing the lower jaw. To secure the jaw, the hook is placed in the recess and the handle is depressed. This brings the catch up and closes the jaw. The hook has sufficient curvature to provide some tension on the lower jaw in the closed position. The arrangement of couplings between the handle, catch and lower jaw creates an over-center geometry when the handle is in the closed position so that the handle tends to remain closed unless manually opened.

Head portion **40** includes a passage **70** configured to receive a skewer bolt **72**. As will be described below, the skewer bolt is removable and serves to clamp the forks to the head portion. A locking mechanism interacts with the skewer bolt to selectively permit or prevent the opening of the lower jaw. The locking mechanism includes a toggle member **74** pivotally mounted on pivot pin **56**. The toggle member includes a lever end **76** and an interference end **78** that projects through slots **80**, **82** formed in the handle and catch into passage **70**. See FIG. 7. Prior to installation of the skewer bolt, the lever can be pushed down to place the interference end above the skewer bolt or raised to place the interference end below the skewer bolt. Once the skewer bolt is installed, the toggle member cannot be transitioned between the upper and lower positions.

When the toggle member is in the lower or released configuration, the handle can be operated normally to clamp or release a crossbar. However, when the toggle member is in the upper or locked configuration, it blocks movement of the handle and therefore release of the crossbar. More

specifically, in the locked configuration, the upper surface of the interference end rides against the lower surface of the skewer, while the lower surface is located against the bottom of slot **80**. In order to rotate the handle, the bottom of the slot must rotate upward, which cannot happen while the toggle is under the skewer bolt.

By using the locking mechanism, a user can select at the time they install the skewer bolt whether or not they want the fork block to be releasable on the crossbar with the skewer locked. By engaging the locking mechanism, additional security against theft of the fork block and/or bicycle is obtained. However, by unlocking the mechanism, it is easier to adjust the location of the fork blocks on the crossbars to accommodate various bicycles or combinations of other equipment that might be mounted to the crossbars.

Extension portion **42** is generally elongate and extends back from head portion **40** to a wheel tray mount **86**. The wheel tray is secured to the wheel tray mount by a bolt **88** and nut **90**. The extension portion includes a waist region **92** between the head portion and wheel tray mount to provide increased clearance for calipers **20**. See FIG. **8**. Waist region **92** includes two elongate side members **94**. It should be noted that waist region **92** is narrower than the wheel tray. In fork blocks where the wheel tray mounts to the fork block adjacent the skewer, the wheel tray interferes with the calipers. Typical wheel trays are formed as an aluminum extrusion and have a width that is dictated by the size of bicycle tires. Therefore, the wheel trays cannot easily be resized to provide the clearance offered by extension portion **42**.

Skewer bolt **72** forms part of a skewer assembly **100**. See FIG. **6**. In addition to bolt **72**, skewer assembly **100** includes a housing **102**, an adjustment wheel **104**, a transfer link **106**, a spring **108**, a cam plate **110** and a cam lever **112**. The skewer bolt has a threaded end **114** that fits through a fork-clamping end **116** of housing **102**. The threaded end of the skewer is formed with flats **118** on each side of the threaded region. Wheel **104** threads onto threaded end **114** to provide adjustment of the clamping pressure spacing on the skewer.

Wheel **104** includes a textured gripping perimeter **120** and a coupling flange **122**. The coupling flange **122** is captured in recesses **124** formed in halves **126**, **128** of transfer link **106**. This arrangement allows the wheel to rotate within the link, but not move longitudinally relative to it. The flattened end of the skewer bolt rides in shank section **130** of the link in an elongate track **132** formed in each half of the link. The tracks have a flat bottom that interacts with the flats on the end of the skewer bolt to prevent the skewer bolt from rotating in the link, while still permitting the bolt to shift longitudinally for adjustment purposes. The link includes tabs **133** that slide in tracks **134** formed in housing **102**.

Spring **108** fits over shank section **130** and biases against the bottom of cam plate **110**. This tends to push the wheel away from the cam plate and therefore biases the skewer bolt to the open position. The cam plate includes ribs **136** that fit in tracks **134** to prevent the cam plate from rotating in the housing. The cam plate is secured to the housing by a pair of lock pins **137** pressed through holes **138** in the housing and cam plate.

Cam lever **112** is attached to the end of the shank section of transfer link **106** via a pin **140** pressed through holes **142** formed in the shank and lever. The cam lever includes an arcuate cam surface **144** that rides against cam plate **110**. As the lever is rotated, the cam surface is shaped to shift the link toward and away from the lever end of the skewer assembly to tighten or loosen the skewer assembly. See FIGS. **9** and

10. By turning the wheel until it completely unthreads from the skewer bolt, it is possible to remove the housing and associated components from the skewer bolt. This allows the skewer bolt to be removed from the fork block to in turn allow the toggle to be flipped between states.

It should be noted that the housing including access openings **146** that provide access to the adjustment wheel when the lever is in the released position. See FIG. **11**. Thus, when the lever is open, the user can rotate the wheel to select the correct spacing and tension to accommodate a particular set of bicycle forks. However, when the lever is closed, the wheel is retracted into the housing, preventing further adjustment. This is significant because it prevents a third party from using pliers or some other tool to loosen the skewer assembly so long as the lever remains in the closed position. So long as the toggle is placed in the locked configuration, the fork block also cannot be removed from the crossbars.

The lever includes a lock receptacle **150** configured to receive a lock body **152**. The lock body includes a rotatable T-catch **154** that can be rotated with a key to either pass through or catch on a slot **156** formed in a lock shelf located on the side of the housing. When the catch is engaged to catch on the slot, the lever cannot be opened to release the skewer assembly, and, as long as the lever remains closed, the wheel is hidden and cannot be used to loosen the skewer. Moreover, because the wheel is mounted inside the housing and the skewer housing cannot rotate on the skewer bolt because of the interaction of the flats in the transfer link, it is not possible to use the skewer housing as a handle to loosen the skewer assembly.

The various structural members of the disclosed embodiment may be constructed of steel, stainless steel, nylon, aluminum or similar materials with sufficient structural strength to withstand the loads incurred in use.

It is believed that the disclosure set forth above encompasses multiple distinct inventions with independent utility. While each of these inventions has been disclosed in its preferred form, the specific embodiments thereof as disclosed and illustrated herein are not to be considered in a limiting sense as numerous variations are possible. The subject matter of the inventions includes all novel and non-obvious combinations and subcombinations of the various elements, features, functions and/or properties disclosed herein. No single feature, function, element or property of the disclosed embodiments is essential to every one of the disclosed inventions. Similarly, where the claims recite "a" or "a first" element or the equivalent thereof, such claims should be understood to include incorporation of one or more such elements, neither requiring nor excluding two or more such elements.

It is believed that the following claims particularly point out certain combinations and subcombinations that are directed to some of the disclosed inventions and are novel and non-obvious. Inventions embodied in other combinations and subcombinations of features, functions, elements and/or properties may be claimed through amendment of the present claims or presentation of new claims in this or a related application. Such amended or new claims, whether they are directed to a different invention or directed to the same invention, whether different, broader, narrower or equal in scope to the original claims, are also regarded as included within the subject matter of the inventions of the present disclosure.

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I claim:

- 1. A bicycle carrier, comprising:
 first and second pairs of towers securing a pair of parallel crossbars on top of a vehicle,
 a fork block device,
 a wheel tray portion connected to the fork block device, the fork block device being configured to clamp around one of the crossbars, and
 a skewer assembly configured to secure forks of a bicycle to the fork block device, where the skewer assembly includes a skewer bolt passing through the fork block, an adjustment member permitting alteration of the skewer assembly to clamp various fork configurations, a cam lever moveable between open and closed positions, the adjustment member being hidden when the cam lever is in the closed position, and a lock for selectively retaining the lever in the closed position, wherein the adjustment member, cam lever, and lock are all located on the same side of the fork block so all manipulation to adjust, secure, and lock the front forks of a bicycle to the fork block may be performed from one side of the fork block.
- 2. The bicycle carrier of claim 1, wherein the skewer assembly includes a housing, the operation of the lever shifts the adjustment member into and at least partially out of the housing.
- 3. The bicycle carrier of claim 2, wherein the adjustment member is wheel-shaped and threads onto the skewer bolt.
- 4. The bicycle carrier of claim 1, wherein the fork block is selectively removable from the crossbar.

- 5. The bicycle carrier of claim 4, wherein the fork block includes a locking mechanism adjustable between first and second configurations, where in the first configuration the locking mechanism prevents the fork block from being removed from the rack structure and in the second configuration the locking mechanism allows the fork block to be removed from the crossbar.
- 6. The bicycle carrier of claim 5, wherein the locking mechanism is configured so that it can only be transitioned between the first and second configurations when the skewer assembly is removed from the bicycle securing portion.
- 7. The bicycle carrier of claim 1, where the fork block includes an elongate extension portion extending between the skewer assembly and a wheel tray mount configured to receive an end of the wheel tray.
- 8. The bicycle carrier of claim 1, where the fork block includes a moveable jaw pivotally connected to a fixed jaw at a hinge point, the jaws defining an opening therebetween adapted to receive a crossbar, where the opening is shaped to receive and clamp on either a round or a rectangular crossbar.
- 9. The bicycle carrier of claim 8, wherein the opening is shaped to hold a round crossbar in a position with the center of the crossbar closer to the hinge point than where the opening holds a rectangular crossbar.

* * * * *