TO: KSI/Scientific & Technical Information Division
Attention: Miss Winnie M. Morgan.

FROM: GP/Office of Assistant General Counsel for Patent Matters

SUBJECT: Announcement of NASA-Owned U.S. Patents in STAR

In accordance with the procedures agreed upon by Code GP and Code KSI, the attached NASA-owned U.S. Patent is being forwarded for abstracting and announcement in NASA STAR.

The following information is provided:

U.S. Patent No. : 3,745,475

Government or Corporate Employee : U.S. Government

Supplementary Corporate Source (if applicable) :

NASA Patent Case No. : MFS-20658-1

NOTE - If this patent covers an invention made by a corporate employee of a NASA Contractor, the following is applicable:

Yes ☒ No ☒

Pursuant to Section 305(a) of the National Aeronautics and Space Act, the name of the Administrator of NASA appears on the first page of the patent; however, the name of the actual inventor (author) appears at the heading of column No. 1 of the Specification, following the words "... with respect to an invention of..."

Elizabeth A. Carter
Enclosure
Copy of Patent cited above
A measurement system for providing an indication of a varying physical quantity represented by or converted to a variable frequency signal. Timing pulses are obtained marking the duration of a fixed number, or set, of cycles of the sampled signal and these timing pulses are employed to control the period of counting of cycles of a higher fixed and known frequency source. The counts of cycles thus obtained from the fixed frequency source provide a precise measurement of the average frequency of each set of cycles sampled, and thus successive discrete values of the quantity being measured. The frequency of the known frequency source is made such that each measurement is presented as a direct digital representation of the quantity measured.

5 Claims, 2 Drawing Figures
FIG. 2

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1

MEASUREMENT SYSTEM

ORIGIN OF THE INVENTION

The invention described herein was made by an employee of the United States and may be manufactured and used by or for the Government of the United States of America for Governmental purposes without the payment of any royalties thereon or therefor.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to measurement systems in which the frequency of a signal is detected by counting techniques and particularly to a new and improved system for sequentially sampling and measuring frequency, or a quantity represented by a frequency, where the frequency of the signal involved varies over a fairly wide range and wherein the frequencies are not greater than the sampling rate.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

Measurements of physical quantities are frequently made through detectors or transducers which respond by providing an electrical signal output which varies in frequency as a function of variation in the quantity of the physical function being observed. The varying frequency electrical signal is then measured and scaled, by counting or other techniques, to provide a direct reading or measurement of the physical quantity. Pressure, temperature and electrical voltage are typical quantities which may be measured in this fashion. For purposes of stability the band of frequencies chosen for such measurements is usually within the upper audio range. Since it is difficult to linearly modulate a frequency source over a very great range, the change in frequency representative of the change in physical quantity is usually rather small. One of the most accurate and versatile known methods of measuring frequency employs a gated counter, wherein periodic signals are counted for a known time period and the resulting count is displayed on a conventional digital display. One difficulty with this method is that at low frequencies a rather long counting period is required to produce an accurate determination of frequency and this in turn increases the possibility that significant variations in frequency occurring during a measurement period may go undetected. If counting periods are shortened to provide more frequent measurements there is introduced an additional problem in that the gated counter has an accuracy of one cycle and thus there is introduced an error which varies inversely with the number of cycles sampled and thus duration of the sampling period.

A further difficulty with certain existing systems is that they are not adapted to provide outputs to more than one scale and thus outputs must be rescaled by further computation, mentally by an observer or by means of an auxiliary computer.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Accordingly it is the object of this invention to provide an improved frequency responsive measurement system. The invention encompasses a system as follows:

A varying frequency signal, typically sinusoidal in form, at which the frequency of which is to be incrementally detected to provide discrete successive values for frequency, or other quantity represented by frequency, is processed by a zero crossing detector which responds by providing a square wave output with transitions between high and low states occurring precisely at times of zero voltage crossings of the input signal. A counter is then employed to count a selected number, for example 50, of the square wave cycles and to provide pulse outputs precisely timed to coincide with the zero crossing of the beginning of the first of the square waves and the ending of the last of the square waves so counted. Thus there is provided timing pulses precisely indicating the duration of a timing interval corresponding to a precise number or sampling of input cycles of the input frequency to be measured. Each timing interval thus is indicative of the average input frequency during a timing interval or sampling period.

A highly stable frequency generator, included in the system, provides a selected frequency output at a frequency substantially higher than the highest input signal to be measured and a gating circuit, controlled by the timing pulses, is connected to the output of the signal generator to pass sets of cycles occurring between timing pulses. Thus, the number in a particular set would vary directly with the period between timing pulses and would vary inversely with the frequency of the input signal during a particular period of sampling. Assuming then the usual case where a readout is desired which varies directly with frequency, the pulses of each set are fed to an appropriately preset down counter which is counted down to a desired minimum or zero count at the lowest input frequency (longest timing interval) and down fewer counts or none, to a maximum value.

The relationship between parameters is such that the frequency of the frequency generator would be made of increased frequency with increased sampling rates to insure that the gated pulses for a sample period represent a number with sufficient significant digits to reflect the true input frequency, or magnitude of physical condition represented by the input frequency, within the degree of precision provided by the transducer performing translation from the physical condition to electrical frequency.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an electrical block diagram of an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 2 consists of a series of waveforms illustrative of operation of the invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Referring to the drawings, measurement system 10 is divided into three functional circuits: control circuit 12, crystal oscillator circuit 14, and storage and display circuit 16. Pressure transducer 18 is of the type which provides an electrical sinusoidal output signal, waveform a of FIG. 2, which changes in frequency from 10 KHz to 12.5 KHz with changes in sensed pressure between zero and 100 PSI. The output signals from transducer 18 are coupled to the negative input of zero crossing detector 20 of control circuit 12. As indicated by the symbol, zero crossing detector 20 is an operational amplifier with its positive input grounded. It converts the sinusoidal wave signals, waveform a, to square wave signals, waveform b, wherein the leading and trailing edges precisely correspond to zero crossings of input signals.
Output terminal 22 of zero crossing detector 20 is connected to clock input c (FIG. 1) of first stage 24 of six stage binary counter 26 of control binary divider circuit 28. Binary divider circuit 28 generates two basic timing periods of intervals, \( I_1 \) and \( I_2 \) and illustrated b/ waveform c. Interval \( I_1 \) is the "1" output of binary divider circuit 28 and it is initiated at some arbitrary time \( T_0 \) by the positive going signal 30, waveform 'b, and pulse, waveform 'f, FIG. 2. The output of each of storage register stages \( R_i-R_n \) by the positive going signal 32, at time \( T_1 \), upon the occurrence of positive going signal 32. The second timing interval, interval \( I_2 \), is triggered by positive going signal 32 at time \( T_1 \) and is of a duration which is precisely equal to the duration of sequential (except separated and visually displayed in the form of a five digit decimal number by a conventional display tube. BCD information is gated by internal logic into buffer stages of printer 70, upon the receipt of a print command. Decimal point control 94 of display 92 selectively enables decimal point indicator lamps, not shown, within display stages \( D_j-D_{j-5} \).

Operation

To examine operation of the system, assume that transducer 18 initially senses a zero pressure condition from a source such as a pressure vessel, not shown. A steady state condition of all logic elements within the system at time \( T_0 \) will be established by assuming that one cycle before, at time \( T_0 \), representing the end of one sampling or measurement interval \( I_2 \) (waveform c) control flip-flop 34 is switched to a "set" condition by the output of binary counter 26. The reset output of flip-flop 34, pulse 35, defines reset interval \( I_1 \), during which a chain of events occurs as follows to recycle the system preparatory to taking the next pressure sample. At the beginning of this interval, set output \( S_0 \) of flip-flop 44 triggers one shot 46 which provides a ten microsecond pulse, waveform d, to set flip-flops 24, 38 and 40 to reset counter 26.

Reset output pulse 35 functions to disable AND gate 50, thus no pulses are gated to input C of decade counter 61. One shot, 52, 54 and 56, which provide necessary sequencing and timing delays, are simultaneously triggered by the leading edge of pulse 35. One shot 54 provides a 10 microsecond pulse to register stages \( R_1-R_5 \) of register 63, the trailing edge of which shifts BCD information resulting from a previous count from counter 61 into storage registers \( R_1-R_5 \). where it is coupled to decode and display stages \( D_5-D_9 \) in an updated visual readout of pressure.

Simultaneously, the output of one shot 56 (waveform g) steps divide-by-eight divider 64, resetting it to zero (waveform h) to trigger one shot 66. One shot 66 provides a 25 microsecond pulse output (waveform i), the trailing edge of which triggers printer 70, which through internal sequencing completes one print cycle before a second print command occurs at the end of eight sample intervals, \( I_2 \). One shot 52 provides a 70 microsecond pulse (waveform j), the trailing edge of which strobes a decimal count of 50,000, as determined by setting of BCD switches 59, into decade counter 61. Readout system 10 is now in a condition to sample the output of transducer 18.

At time \( T_5 \), the trailing edge of square wave input b steps counter 26 from a count of 13, binary 1101, to a count of 14, binary 1110. Output \( R_e \) from second stage 36 of counter 26 resets control bistable 34. AND gate 50 is now enabled by reset output \( R_e \) of bistable 34 and 10 MHz pulses are fed through input 88 of AND
gate 50 to input C of decade counter 61 during measuring or sample time interval $t_1$. The output from transducer 18 is 10 KHz, responsive to a pressure input of 0 PSI and the sample time $t_1$ is 0.005 seconds, the period of 50 Hz at a rate of 10 KHz. During this 5 millisecond interval from $T_1$ through $T_2$, or $T_3$ of FIG. 2, 50,000 hertz, pulses, from 10 MHz standard oscillator 72 occur and thus subtract 50,000 counts from decade counter 61. At $T_3$, output 45 again "sets" control bistable 34, completing one sample time. After data shift pulse $f$, the decimal number now displayed by display stage modules $D_1-D_5$ is 00000 (000.00 with decimal selected by decimal point control 94) representing zero pressure, since the count of 50,000 which was initially strobed into decade counter 61 is now reduced to zero.

In order to illustrate a full scale reading, it will be assumed that a 100 PSI pressure is applied to transducer 18. Once again, during reset interval $t_1$, measurement system 10 recycles as before and a count of 50,000 is reset into decade counter 61. At $T_1$, reset output $R_0$ of control bistable 34 enables AND gate 50 and pulses from crystal oscillator 72 are gated into decade counter 61 for an interval of 50 cycles of output from transducer 18. The output frequency from transducer 18 is now 12.5 KHz, representing the input pressure of 100 PSI. Sample time $t_1$ is now 0.004 seconds, the period of 50 hertz occurring at the rate of 12.5 KHz. During this period 40,000 pulses from crystal oscillator 72 are subtracted from counter 61 leaving a remainder of 10,000 counts. The number now displayed in decade stages $D_1-D_5$ is thus 100.00 (with correct selection of decimal point) representing an input pressure of 100 PSI. By appropriate setting of the decimal point control 94 the reading directly represents pressure from transducers having full scale readings of 5, 50, 500 and 5,000 PSI can be read directly, assuming, of course, the decimal point is placed in the proper position and the same range of signal frequencies are provided by the transducer.

Thus from the foregoing examples it is to be noted that scale factors of transducers can be directly provided by selecting a frequency in MHz from crystal oscillator circuit 14 which corresponds to the significant number or numbers of a full scale reading. To the extent of a selected reduction of the 10 MHz output of crystal oscillator 14, there would be a like proportional reduction of the preset count provided counter 61 by preset switch 59. As an example, if the frequency in megahertz from output 86 of divide-by-two divider 82 used which is one-fourth of 10 MHz, or 2.5 MHz, then using this as a multiplier, multiplied by 10° through 10°, transducers with scale factors of a minimum of zero through maximum values of 2.5, 25, 250 or 2,500 PSI may be directly provided by the system. In such case preset switch 59 would be set at one-fourth of 50,000 counts or 12,500 counts. Then at a zero pressure input in each case, the 2.5 MHz pulses would fully subtract 12,500 counts and at maximum pressure would subtract 10,000 counts, leaving a remainder of 2,500 counts.

Thus far, only zero and maximum static pressures have been discussed, however, since sample time $t_1$ is directly proportional to the pressure applied, then it follows that static values of inputs between zero and maximum pressure will produce the desired proportional output readings from the system. Under static conditions, the accuracy of the system is dependent largely upon the stability of crystal oscillator 72. In the illustrated system, the accuracy is on the order of 0.05 percent for static measurements. Under dynamic conditions, since the readout is averaged over the gate period $t_2$, it is in error by one-half the change during this period. With a sample rate of 250 samples per second and a rate of change of 100 PSI per second, the error can only be 0.25 percent, representing an accuracy which is believed to be a substantial improvement over that provided by existing systems.

What is claimed is:

1. A measurement system for providing a series of discrete outputs indicative of the frequency of a source of variable frequency energy for discrete sampled periods comprising:

a source of fixed frequency energy providing an output of a preselected frequency which is higher in frequency than the highest frequency of the source of variable frequency energy to be measured;

timing means responsive to the output of said source of variable frequency energy for repetitively providing timing pulses marking the beginning and end of a selected like number of complete cycles of said source of variable frequency energy and denoting a sample period; and
cycle counting means responsive to said timing pulses and said source of fixed frequency energy for sequentially counting cycles of said source of fixed frequency energy occurring between said timing pulses and for providing as said discrete outputs a series of discrete counts, each indicative of the average frequency of said source of variable frequency energy for a said sample period.

2. A measurement system for providing a series of discrete outputs, each being proportional to the magnitude of a physical quantity represented by an electrical signal varying directly in frequency with changes in said magnitude, comprising:
   a source of fixed frequency energy providing an output higher in frequency than the highest frequency of said signal;
   timing means responsive to said signal for providing timing pulses marking the beginning and end of sets of like numbers of complete cycles of said signal and defining sample periods for said discrete outputs; and
   cycle counting means responsive to said timing pulses and said source of fixed frequency energy for sequentially counting said cycles occurring between said timing pulses and for providing as said discrete outputs a series of discrete counts proportional to the average said magnitude of said physical quantity for a said sample period.

3. A measurement system as set forth in claim 2 wherein said cycle counting means includes a countdown counter, presettable after each said discrete output to a selected value and the frequency of said source of fixed frequency energy is selected to count down said countdown counts to a value corresponding to the lowest magnitude of said physical quantity, represented by a maximum said sample period, and to a maximum value corresponding to the maximum magnitude of said physical quantity, represented by a minimum said sample period.

4. A measurement system as set forth in claim 3 wherein the said minimum value of a said physical quantity is zero and said frequency of said source of fixed frequency energy is selected to fully count down said countdown counter in a maximum said sample period.

5. A measurement system as set forth in claim 4 wherein:
   said source of fixed frequency energy comprises means for selectively providing a plurality of different fixed frequency outputs enabling the selected scaling of counts indicated by said hertz counting means to correspond with the scale of magnitude of physical quantity versus frequency of said signal;
   and
   said countdown counter comprises means for selectively setting therein a preset count.