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(54) **REMOVABLE RUNNING BOARD AND LOADING RAMP WITH ROTATING WIDTH ADJUSTMENT**

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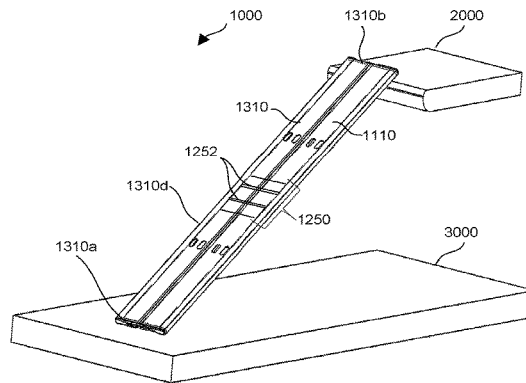
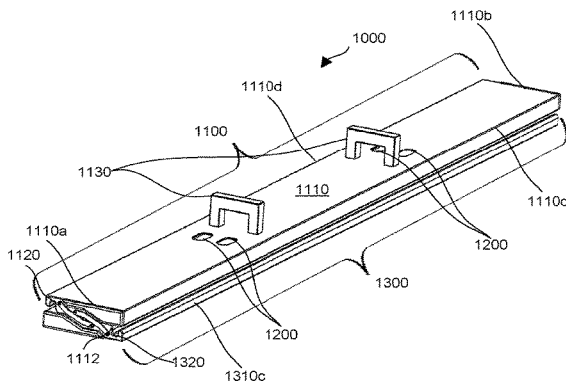
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A platform apparatus for a vehicle including a first structure including a first surface and a first interlocking joint; a second structure including a second surface and a second interlocking joint to receive the first interlocking joint; and a linkage that connects the first structure and the second structure and articulates the apparatus from a closed position to an open position. In the closed position the first surface and the second surface are vertically stacked and in the open position the first structure and the second structure are interlocked through the first interlocking joint and the second interlocking joint and the first surface and the second surface are horizontally adjacent.

13 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



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Fig. 1A

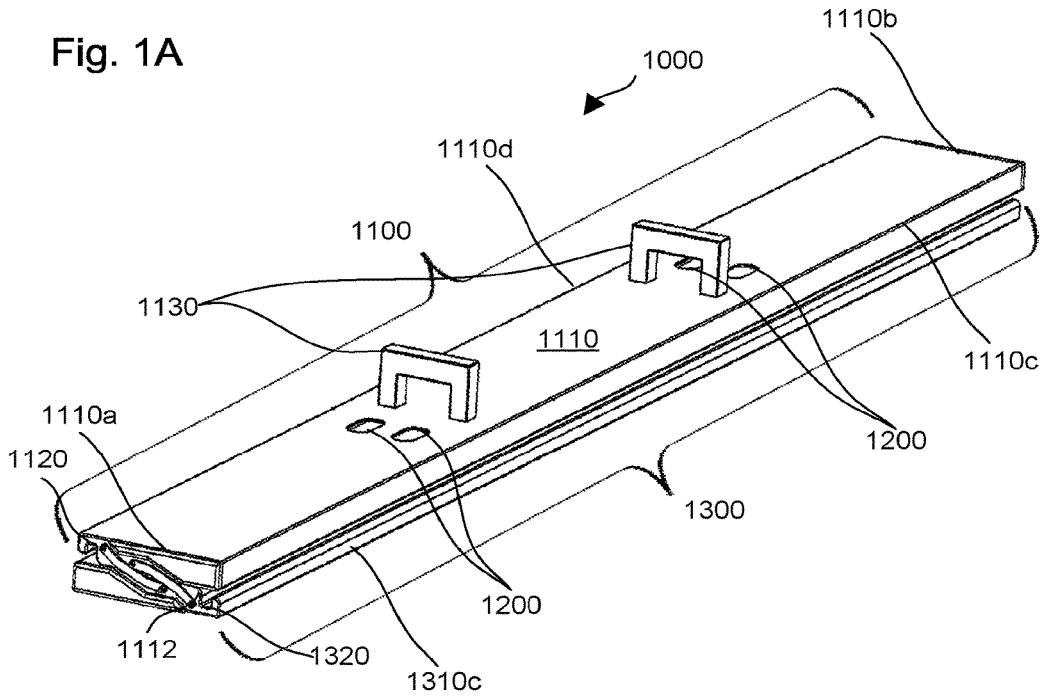
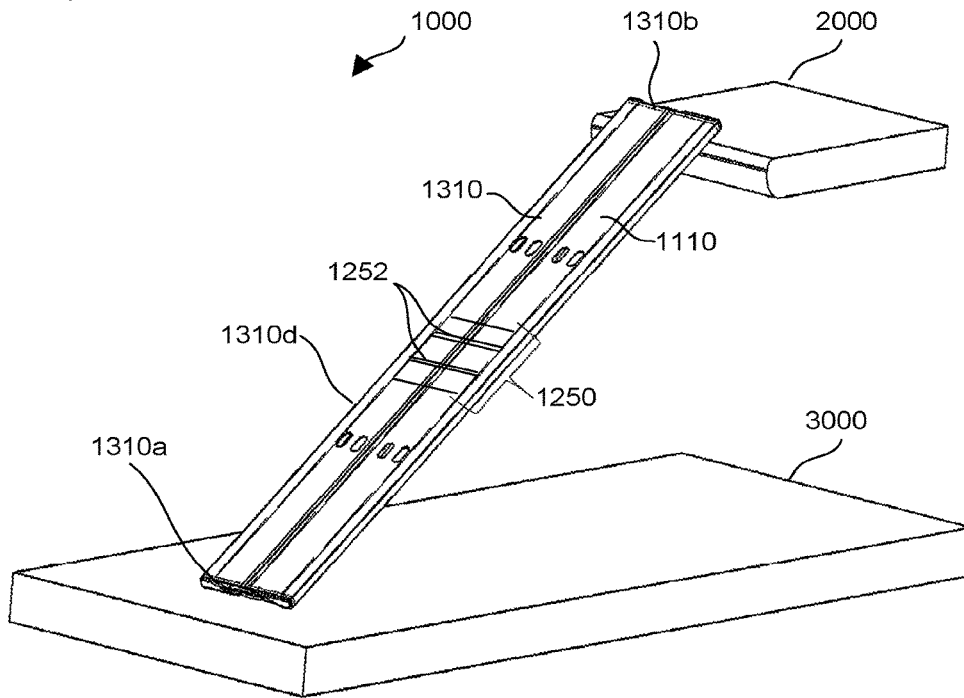
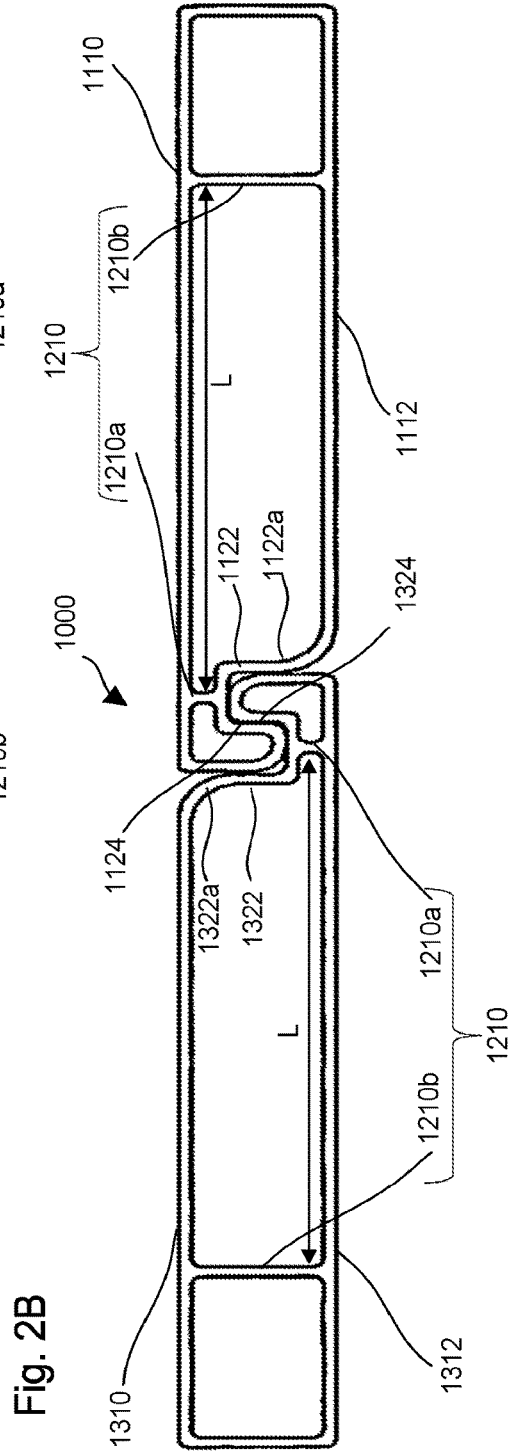
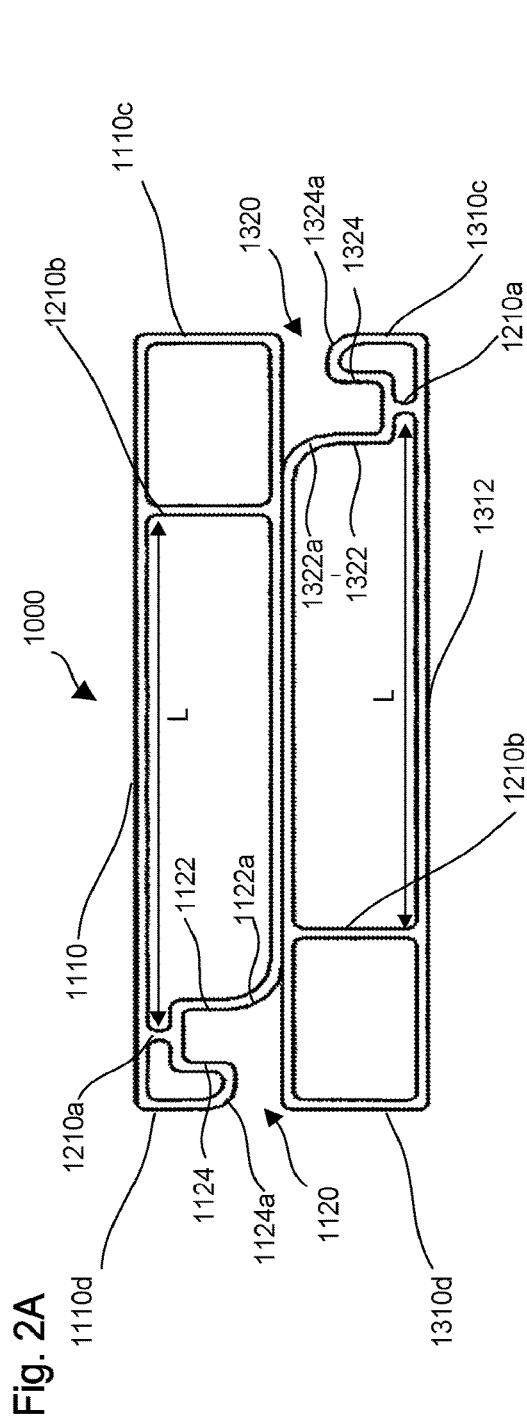


Fig. 1B





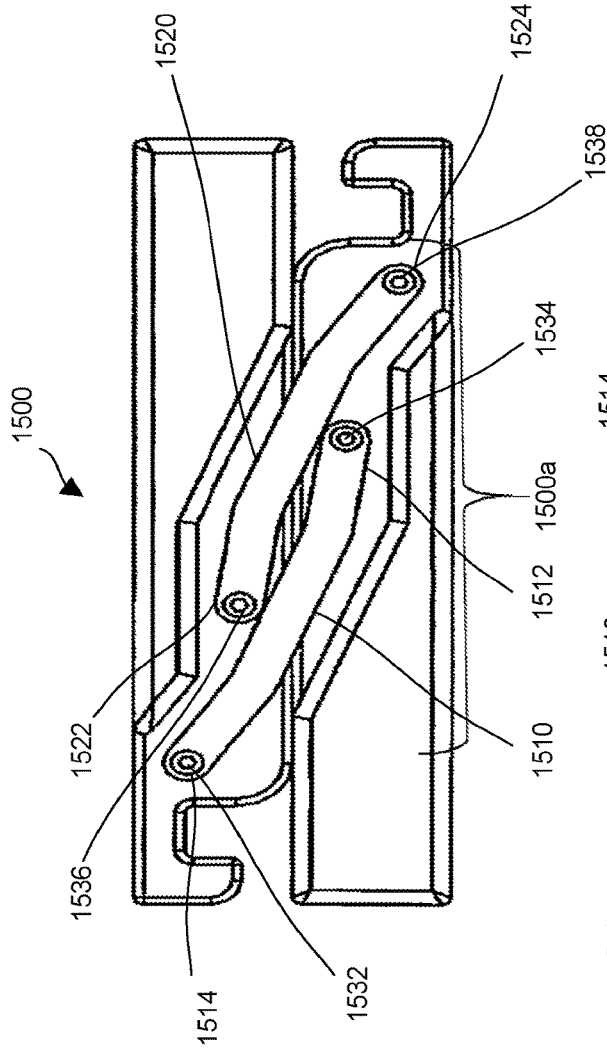


Fig. 3A

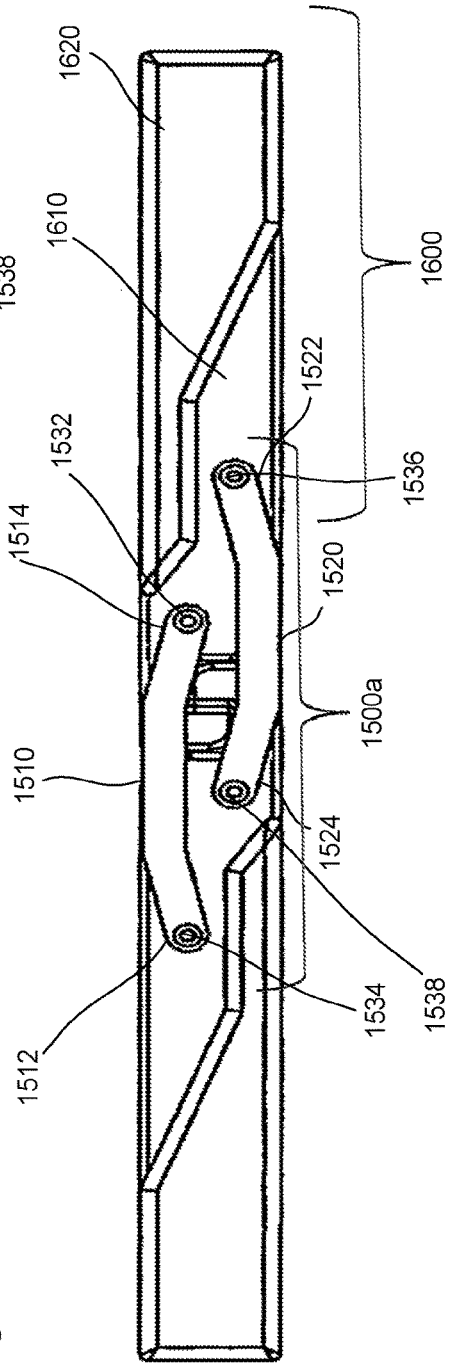


Fig. 3B

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REMOVABLE RUNNING BOARD AND LOADING RAMP WITH ROTATING WIDTH ADJUSTMENT

BACKGROUND

Field of the Disclosure

The present disclosure relates to a platform apparatus for a vehicle that can be used as a running board and a loading ramp.

Description of the Related Art

Utility and recreational vehicles such as light duty trucks or sport utility vehicles (SUVs) are often employed to transport heavy cargos such as tools, materials or small vehicles such as tractors or all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). Such a transport often requires a user to load and unload these heavy cargos to and from a higher cargo area of the vehicle. To facilitate the loading and unloading of the heavy cargos a loading ramp forming an inclined surface between the ground surface and the cargo area is often used.

Furthermore, these utility and recreational vehicles are often provided with high door entrances requiring the use of support or stepping surfaces such as running boards placed beneath the entrance doors. A platform apparatus combining the function of a loading ramp and a running board is then desired.

Several platform apparatus with the ability to be used as a loading ramp and a running board have been disclosed.

For example, in the U.S. Pat. No. 7,717,445 B2, a detachable side step assembly including two elongated section hinges is described. The hinges render the detachable side step component structurally weak. Furthermore, the detachable side step requires a special attachment bracket to connect to the vehicle. The detachable side step in U.S. Pat. No. 7,717,445 B2 is difficult to fit onto and remove from the brackets. In addition, a modification of the tailgate of the vehicle is required when the side step assembly is used as a loading ramp.

In another example, in the pre-grant publication US2009/0044729A1, a multifunctional running board that can also be used as a loading ramp is described. The running board includes a single platform, which can be dismounted and mounted to a vehicle using a pin, bolt, or knob, and a storage compartment that can house a ramp or other items. The width of the platform cannot be adjusted when used as a loading ramp which limits the practicability of the platform. In other words, this platform might be not appropriate for extremely large cargo.

In the U.S. Pat. No. 7,637,518 B2, a utility ramp and a running board system are disclosed. The utility ramp has two folding portions at the ends. Each folding portion has an internal mechanism including a spring and two links so that it grips a bracket to attach to the side of the vehicle. The folding portions also provide an entry and exit transition for the ramp on the ground and at the tailgate. The utility ramp in U.S. Pat. No. 7,637,518 B2 does not have adjustable width. It is always narrow, which is not good for loading medium and large equipment.

In the U.S. Pat. No. 7,708,294 B2, a detachable dual use platform apparatus that can be locked and unlocked to a vehicle with a key is disclosed. However, the platform in U.S. Pat. No. 7,708,294 B2 does not provide an adjustable width.

SUMMARY

Accordingly, the object of the present disclosure is to provide a platform apparatus which overcomes the above-mentioned limitations.

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More precisely, this platform apparatus relies on two similar parts that can be articulated from a closed position to an open position. In the closed position, the two parts are stacked on top of each other to form a narrow structure that may be used as a running board, while in the open position the two parts are locked side by side to form a wide structure that may be used as a loading ramp.

In addition, this platform apparatus disclosed a plurality of holes providing the ability to secure the platform apparatus in the open position without any modification of the vehicle.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

To easily identify the discussion of any particular element or act, the most significant digit or digits in a reference number refer to the figure number in which that element is first introduced.

FIG. 1A is a perspective view of a platform apparatus in a closed position, according to certain aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 1B is a perspective view of the platform apparatus in an open position, according to certain aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 2A is a sectional view of the platform apparatus in the closed position, according to certain aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 2B is a sectional view of the platform apparatus in the open position, according to certain aspects of the disclosure;

FIG. 3A is a side view of the platform apparatus in the closed position, according to certain aspects of the disclosure; and

FIG. 3B is a side view of the platform apparatus in the open position, according to certain aspects of the disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

All publications, patent applications, patents, and other references mentioned herein are incorporated by reference in their entirety. Further, the materials, methods, and examples discussed herein are illustrative only and are not intended to be limiting.

In the drawings, like reference numerals designate identical or corresponding parts throughout the several views. Further, as used herein, the words "a", "an", and the like include a meaning of "one or more", unless stated otherwise. The drawings are generally drawn not to scale unless specified otherwise or illustrating schematic structures or flowcharts.

FIGS. 1A-1B are perspective views of a platform apparatus **1000** in a closed position and in an open position, respectively and according to certain aspects of the disclosure. FIGS. 2A-2B are sectional views of the platform apparatus **1000** in the closed position and in the open position, respectively and according to certain aspects of the disclosure.

The platform apparatus **1000** includes a first structure **1100** and a second structure **1300** linked together via a linkage **1500**, see FIGS. 3A-3B. The linkage **1500** enables to articulate the platform apparatus **1000** from the closed position to the open position and vice versa.

In the closed position, the first structure **1100** is stacked on top of the second structure **1300** in order for the platform apparatus **1000** to form a narrow structure that may be used as a running board, e.g. a narrow step fitted under a side door

of a vehicle. Accordingly, a first contact surface **1110** and a second contact surface **1310** are vertically stacked.

In the open position, the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** are placed side by side in order for the platform apparatus **1000**. Accordingly, the first contact surface **1110** and the second contact surface **1310** are interlocked through a first interlocking joint **1120** and a second interlocking joint **1320**, see FIGS. 2A-2B, and the first contact surface **1110** and the second contact surface **1310** are horizontally adjacent to form a wide structure that may be used as a loading ramp to facilitate the loading of a load, e.g. a small all-terrain vehicle, from a lower support structure **3000** to an upper support structure **2000**. For example, the upper support structure **2000** may be a tailgate or a bed of a truck and the lower support structure **3000** may be a ground surface.

The first structure **1100** may have a rectangular shape with a first front side **1110a** opposite to a first rear side **1110b** and a first right side **1110c** opposite to a first left side **1110d**. The first front side **1110a**, the first rear side **1110b**, the first right side **1110c**, and the first left side **1110d** are positioned between the first contact surface **1110** facing upwards and a first non-contact surface **1112** facing downwards.

Near to the first left side **1110d** and from the first front side **1110a** to the first rear side **1110b**, the first non-contact surface **1112** forms the first interlocking joint **1120** that may have a similar shape and/or function as a tabled splice joint. The first interlocking joint **1120** may include a first internal cheek **1122** and a first external cheek **1124**.

The second structure **1300** may be substantially identical to the first structure **1100**. Accordingly, the second structure **1300** may have a rectangular shape with a second front side **1310a** opposite to a second rear side **1310b** and a second right side **1310c** opposite to a second left side **1310d**. The second front side **1310a**, the second rear side **1310b**, the second right side **1310c** and the second left side **1310d** are positioned between the second contact surface **1310** facing upward and a second non-contact surface **1312** facing downward.

Near to the second left side **1310d** and running from the second front side **1310a** to the second rear side **1310b**, the second contact surface **1310** forms the second interlocking joint **1320** similar to the first interlocking joint **1120**. The second interlocking joint **1320** may include a second internal cheek **1322** and a second external cheek **1324**.

As shown in FIG. 2A, when the platform apparatus **1000** is placed in the closed position, the first non-contact surface **1112** of the first structure **1100** lays on the second contact surface **1310** of the second structure **1300**.

As shown in FIG. 2B, when the platform apparatus **1000** is placed in open position, the first contact surface **1110** is substantially aligned with the second contact surface **1310** and the first interlocking joint **1120** is inserted into the second interlocking joint **1320**.

When the first interlocking joint **1120** and the second interlocking joint **1320** are inserted between each other, the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** cannot be pulled from each other in a direction parallel to the first contact surface **1110** and the second contact surface **1310**. In other words, the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** are interlocked. The interlocking between the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** is due to the lateral connections between the first internal cheek **1122** and the second right side **1310c**; the second external cheek **1324** and the first external cheek **1124**; and the first left side **1110d** and the second internal cheek **1322**.

In addition, the first internal cheek **1122** and the first non-contact surface **1112** may be connected by a first internal rounded corner **1122a** while the first external cheek **1124** and the first left side **1110d** may be connected by a first external rounded corner **1124a**. Similarly for the second structure **1300**, the second internal cheek **1322** and the second contact surface **1310** may be connected by a second internal rounded corner **1322a** while the second external cheek **1324** and the second right side **1310c** may be connected by a second external rounded corner **1324a**.

The first internal rounded corner **1122a**, the first external rounded corner **1124a**, the second internal rounded corner **1322a**, and the second external rounded corner **1324a** facilitate the insertion of the first interlocking joint **1120** into the second interlocking joint **1320** as well as the withdrawal of the first interlocking joint **1120** from the second interlocking joint **1320**.

The first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** may have a hollow structure with internal walls **1210** to increase the stiffness of the platform apparatus **1000**. The internal walls **1210** may include small ribs **1210a** and big ribs **1210b**. The small ribs **1210a** may be arranged at a concave portion of the first interlocking joint **1120** and of the second interlocking joint **1320** while the big ribs **1210b** may be arranged in the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300**.

The small ribs **1210a** may support parts of the first interlocking joint **1120** and the second interlocking joint **1320** that could be weak and/or subject to severe stresses and strains when the platform apparatus **1000** is in the open or closed position. The small ribs **1210a** may be arranged in thin parts of the first interlocking joint **1120** and the second interlocking joint **1320**, e.g., between the first internal cheek **1122** and the first external cheek **1124** and between the second internal cheek **1322** and the second external cheek **1324**.

The big ribs **1210b** may be positioned at a predetermined distance **L** from the small ribs **1210a** to evenly distribute a load on the first structure **1100** and on the second structure **1300**, when the platform apparatus **1000** is in the open position.

The first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** may be made from sturdy materials such as metallic alloys or plastics and be produced through extrusion techniques.

Due to the similarity between the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300**, the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** may be made from a one single extruded piece.

The first contact surface **1110** and/or the second contact surface **1310** may include a plurality of holes **1200**. The plurality of holes **1200** may be used to mount the platform apparatus **1000** in the closed position under the side door of the vehicle. For example, brackets protruding from a side of the vehicle may have tightening mechanisms that can be inserted into at least one hole of the plurality of holes **1200** to sturdily affix the platform apparatus **1000** to the vehicle. The tightening mechanisms may be protrusions mounted on an end of the brackets that can be fastened to at least one hole of the plurality of holes **1200**. For example, the tightening mechanisms may be threaded rods that can be inserted and fastened, e.g., via a nut, to at least one hole of the plurality of holes **1200**.

In addition, the plurality of holes **1200** may be used to secure the platform apparatus **1000** in the open position to the upper support structure **2000** and/or the lower support structure **3000**. For example, straps affixed to the upper support structure **2000** and/or lower support structure **3000**

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may be inserted in the plurality of holes **1200** to securely tie the platform apparatus **1000**. Securing the platform apparatus **1000** via straps does not require any modification of the upper support structure **2000**. For example, when the upper support structure **2000** is a tailgate or a bed of a truck, the straps can be tied to any element of the truck, e.g. a hook, a hinge or a toolbox.

Alternatively, the first contact surface **1110** of the first structure **1100** may include a pair of handles **1130** to carry and articulate the apparatus **1000**. The pair of handles **1130** may be any kind of handle that do not substantially protrude from the first contact surface **1110** when not in use. For example, the pair of handles **1130** may be a pair of retractile handle capable of laying on the first contact surface **1110** when not in use and capable of being pull up from the first contact surface **1110** when in use. Alternatively, the pair of handles **1130** may be a pair of removable handles that can be anchored to the platform apparatus **1000** through a grip, e.g. a hole or a hook.

Alternatively, the first contact surface **1110** and/or the second contact surface **1310** may include a plurality of slip resistant elements **1250** in order to increase the friction coefficient between the first contact surface **1110** and/or the second contact surface **1310** and the load to be loaded from the lower support structure **3000** to the upper support structure **2000**. For example, the plurality of slip resistant elements **1250** may be textured surface sections of the first contact surface **1110** and/or the second contact surface **1310** forming transversal ridges **1252** or may be textured surface elements coated with anti-slippery materials, such as rubbers.

FIGS. 3A-3B are side views of the platform apparatus **1000** in the closed position and in the open position, respectively.

The linkage **1500** enables the user to articulate the apparatus **1000** from the closed position to the open position, and vice versa, in one smooth step, e.g., by pivoting the first structure **1100** on top of the second structure **1300**.

The linkage **1500** includes a front linkage **1500a** linking the first front side **1110a** with the second front side **1310a**. The front linkage **1500a** includes a first arm **1510** with a C-shape and a second arm **1520** with a C-shape. Needless to say, for example, the shape of the linkage **1500a** may be modified in a linear shape.

The first arm **1510** has a first extremity **1512** affixed to the second front side **1310a** substantially near the first contact surface **1110** via a first pivot **1532** and a second extremity **1514** affixed to the first front side **1110a** substantially near the second contact surface **1310** via a second pivot **1534**.

The second arm **1520** has a first extremity **1522** affixed to the first front side **1110a** substantially near the first non-contact surface **1112** via a third pivot **1536** and a second extremity **1524** affixed to the second front side **1310a** substantially near the second surface non-contact surface **1312** via a fourth pivot **1538**.

The first pivot **1532**, the second pivot **1534**, the third pivot **1536**, and the fourth pivot **1538** enable the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300** to rotate around each other.

The first pivot **1532**, the second pivot **1534**, the third pivot **1536**, and the fourth pivot **1538** may be any kind of fastening device capable that lets the first arm **1510** and the second arm **1520** rotating around the first structure **1100** and the second structure **1300**. For example, the first pivot **1532**, the second pivot **1534**, the third pivot **1536**, and the fourth pivot **1538** may be rivets or shoulder screws, or any other devices known by someone having ordinary skills in the art.

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When the apparatus **1000** is in the closed position, the first arm **1510** is below the second arm **1520** with the first arm **1510** and the second arm **1520** are facing each other in a staggered way. The first extremity **1522** of the second arm **1520** contacts the first arm **1510** while the first extremity **1512** of the first arm **1510** contacts the second arm **1520**.

When the apparatus **1000** is in the open position, the first arm **1510** is on top of the second arm **1520** without any contact between the first arm **1510** and the second arm **1520**.

In addition, the linkage **1500** includes a rear linkage, identical as the front linkage **1500a** but linking the first rear side **1110b** with the second rear side **1310b**. Since the rear linkage is the same as the linkage **1500a**, the disclosure and description of the rear linkage will not be repeated.

The first front side **1110a**, the second front side **1310a**, the first rear side **1110b**, and the second rear side **1310b**, may be each ended by an end cap **1600**.

Each end cap **1600** can be used as an anchoring structure for the linkage **1500** as well as a foot to facilitate the loading of the load when the apparatus **1000** is in the open position.

Alternatively, the end cap **1600** may include a flat surface **1610** and a protrusion **1620**. The first pivot **1532** and the third pivot **1536**, or the second pivot **1534** and the fourth pivot **1538** may be affixed to the flat surface **1610** of the end cap **1600**.

The protrusion **1620** may cover the linkage **1500** and provide a protection for the linkage **1500** against unintentional contacts such as stepping.

The protrusion **1620** may have an inclined surface providing a gradual connection between the lower support structure **3000** and the first contact surface **1110** and/or the second contact surface **1310**.

The foregoing discussion discloses and describes merely exemplary embodiments of an object of the present disclosure. As will be understood by those skilled in the art, an object of the present disclosure may be embodied in other specific forms without departing from the spirit or essential characteristics thereof. Accordingly, the present disclosure is intended to be illustrative, but not limiting of the scope of an object of the present disclosure as well as the claims.

Numerous modifications and variations on the present disclosure are possible in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that within the scope of the appended claims, the disclosure may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described herein.

What is claimed is:

1. A platform apparatus for a vehicle, comprising:
 - a first structure including a first surface and a first interlocking joint;
 - a second structure including a second surface and a second interlocking joint to receive the first interlocking joint; and
 - a linkage that connects the first structure and the second structure and articulates the apparatus from a closed position to an open position, wherein
 - the linkage includes a first arm that is pivotably connected to each of an end of the first structure and an end of the second structure,
 - the linkage including a second arm that is pivotably connected to each of the end of the first structure and the end of the second structure, and
 - in the closed position the first surface and the second surface are vertically stacked and in the open position the first structure and the second structure are interlocked through the first interlocking joint and the second interlocking joint and the first surface and the second surface are horizontally adjacent.

- 2. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first structure includes a first pair of end caps, the second structure includes a second pair of end caps, and the linkage is affixed to the first pair of end caps and to the second pair of end caps. 5
- 3. The platform apparatus of claim 2, wherein each end cap of the first pair of end caps and the second pair of end caps includes a protrusion to protect the linkage. 10
- 4. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first and second surfaces include a plurality of slip resistant elements to increase friction between the first and second surfaces and a load. 10
- 5. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first structure includes at least one pair of handles to manipulate the platform apparatus. 15
- 6. The platform apparatus of claim 5, wherein the at least one pair of handles does not substantially protrude from the first surface when the at least one pair of handles is not in use. 20
- 7. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first structure and the second structure each include a plurality of holes to receive at least one strap to attach the platform apparatus to an upper support. 25
- 8. The platform apparatus of claim 7, wherein at least one hole of the plurality of holes is configured to mount the platform apparatus on a side of the vehicle.
- 9. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first interlocking joint and the second interlocking joint are on respective opposite sides of the platform apparatus when in the closed position. 30
- 10. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein the first structure includes a first rib at a concave portion of the first interlocking joint and the second structure includes a second rib at a concave portion of the second interlocking joint. 35

- 11. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein in the closed position the second arm is above first arm, and in the open position the first arm is above the second arm.
- 12. The platform apparatus of claim 1, wherein a first end of the first arm includes a first pivot connected to the first structure and a second end of the first arm includes a second pivot connected to the second structure, and a first end of the second arm includes a third pivot connected to the first structure and a second end of the second arm includes a fourth pivot connected to the second structure.
- 13. A platform apparatus for a vehicle, comprising:
 - a first structure including a first surface and a first interlocking joint;
 - a second structure including a second surface and a second interlocking joint to receive the first interlocking joint; and
 - a linkage that connects the first structure and the second structure and articulates the apparatus from a closed position to an open position,
 wherein in the closed position the first surface and the second surface are vertically stacked and in the open position the first structure and the second structure are interlocked through the first interlocking joint and the second interlocking joint and the first surface and the second surface are horizontally adjacent, wherein the first structure includes a first pair of end caps, the second structure includes a second pair of end caps, the linkage is affixed to the first pair of end caps and to the second pair of end caps, and the linkage includes a pair of arms that connects one end cap of the first pair of end caps and one end cap of the second pair of end caps to rotate the first structure and the second structure around each other from the closed position to the open position.

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