



(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
ANSCHUBER et al.

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2018/0134300 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: May 17, 2018**

(54) **METHOD FOR OPERATING A VEHICLE COMBINATION, VEHICLE COMBINATION, TOWING VEHICLE, AND WORK DEVICE**

B60W 10/08 (2006.01)
B60K 6/485 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
CPC *B60W 30/18136* (2013.01); *B60W 10/198* (2013.01); *B62D 59/04* (2013.01); *B60W 10/119* (2013.01); *B60W 2300/14* (2013.01); *B60W 10/08* (2013.01); *B60K 6/485* (2013.01); *B60Y 2200/145* (2013.01); *B60W 20/15* (2016.01)

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(21) Appl. No.: **15/574,616**

(22) PCT Filed: **May 20, 2016**

(86) PCT No.: **PCT/EP2016/061434**

§ 371 (c)(1),

(2) Date: **Jan. 8, 2018**

(30) **Foreign Application Priority Data**

May 20, 2015 (DE) 10 2015 209 245.3

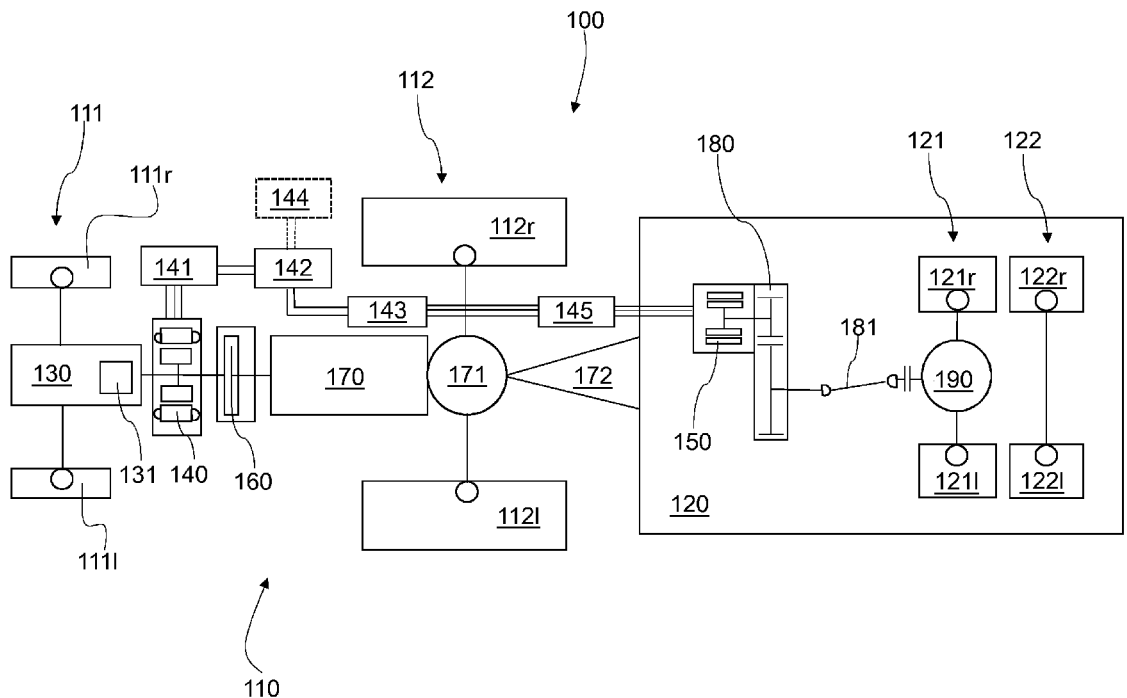
Publication Classification

(51) **Int. Cl.**

B60W 30/18 (2006.01)
B60W 10/198 (2006.01)
B62D 59/04 (2006.01)
B60W 10/119 (2006.01)
B60W 20/15 (2006.01)

(57) **ABSTRACT**

The invention relates to a method for operating a vehicle/trailer unit, an appropriately designed vehicle/trailer unit, as well as a towing vehicle and an implement for such a vehicle/trailer unit, with the vehicle/trailer unit having a towing vehicle and an implement. The towing vehicle has a combustion engine and a first machine that can be operated as a prime mover, as well as a first axle that can be driven by means of the combustion engine, with it being possible for the combustion engine to be driven by means of the first machine. The implement has a second machine that can be operated as a work machine and a second axle that is mechanically coupled with the second machine. When the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, the vehicle/trailer unit can be operated in a first operating mode in which the second machine is operated as a work machine and driven by means of the mechanical kinetic energy of the second axle, while the first machine is operated as a prime mover and drives the combustion engine, with it being possible for at least a portion of the energy generated by the second machine to be utilized to drive the first machine.



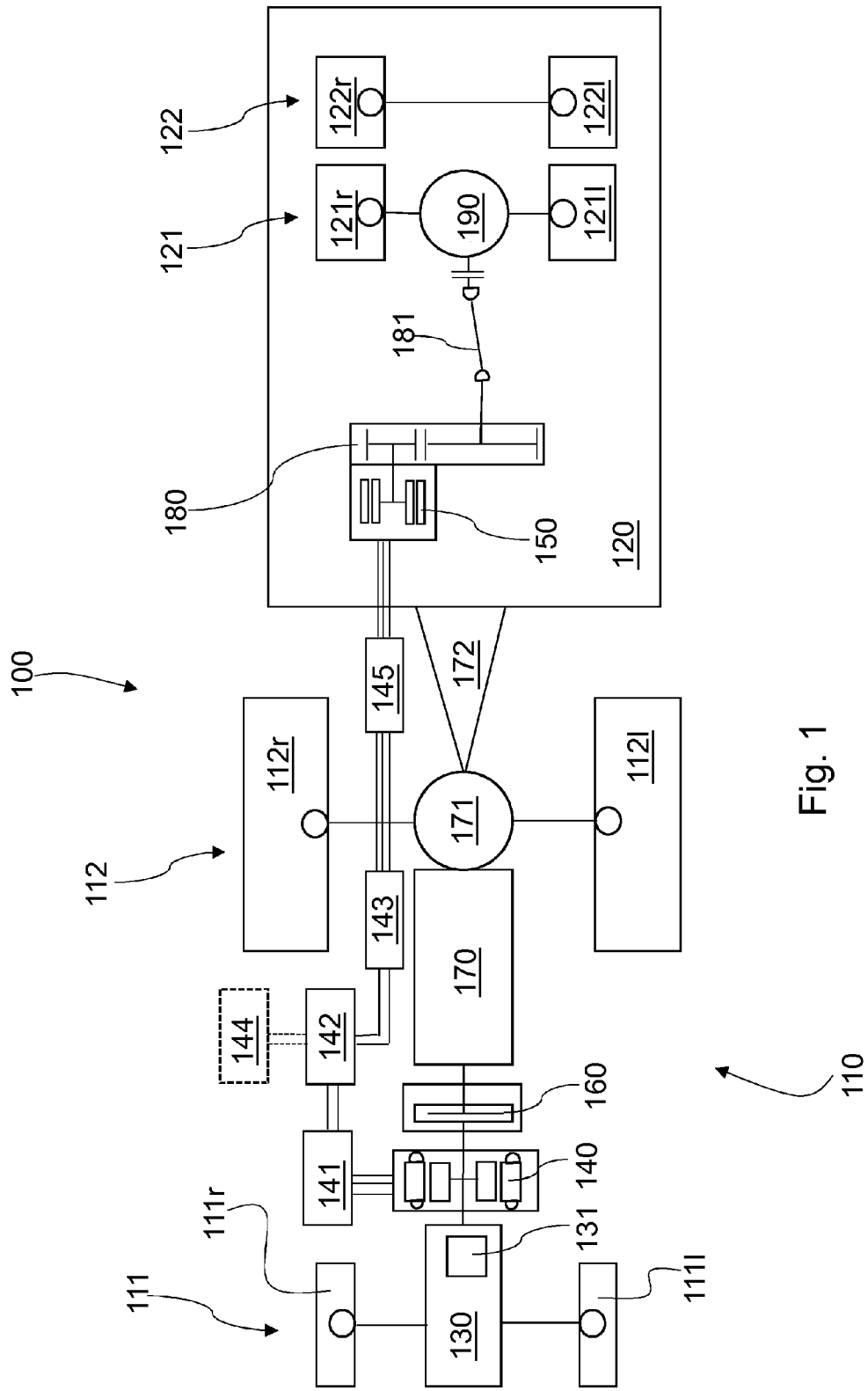


Fig. 1

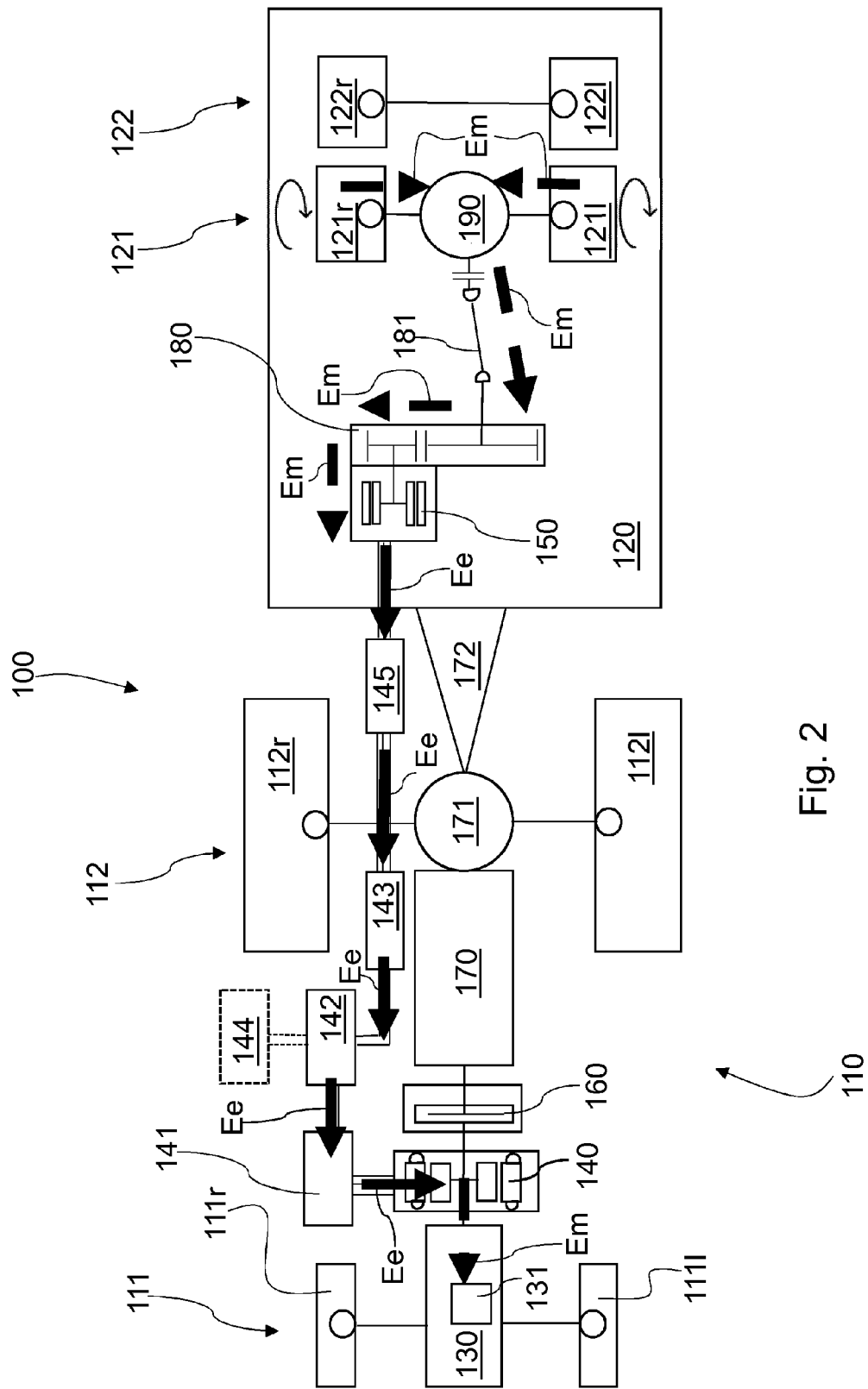


Fig. 2

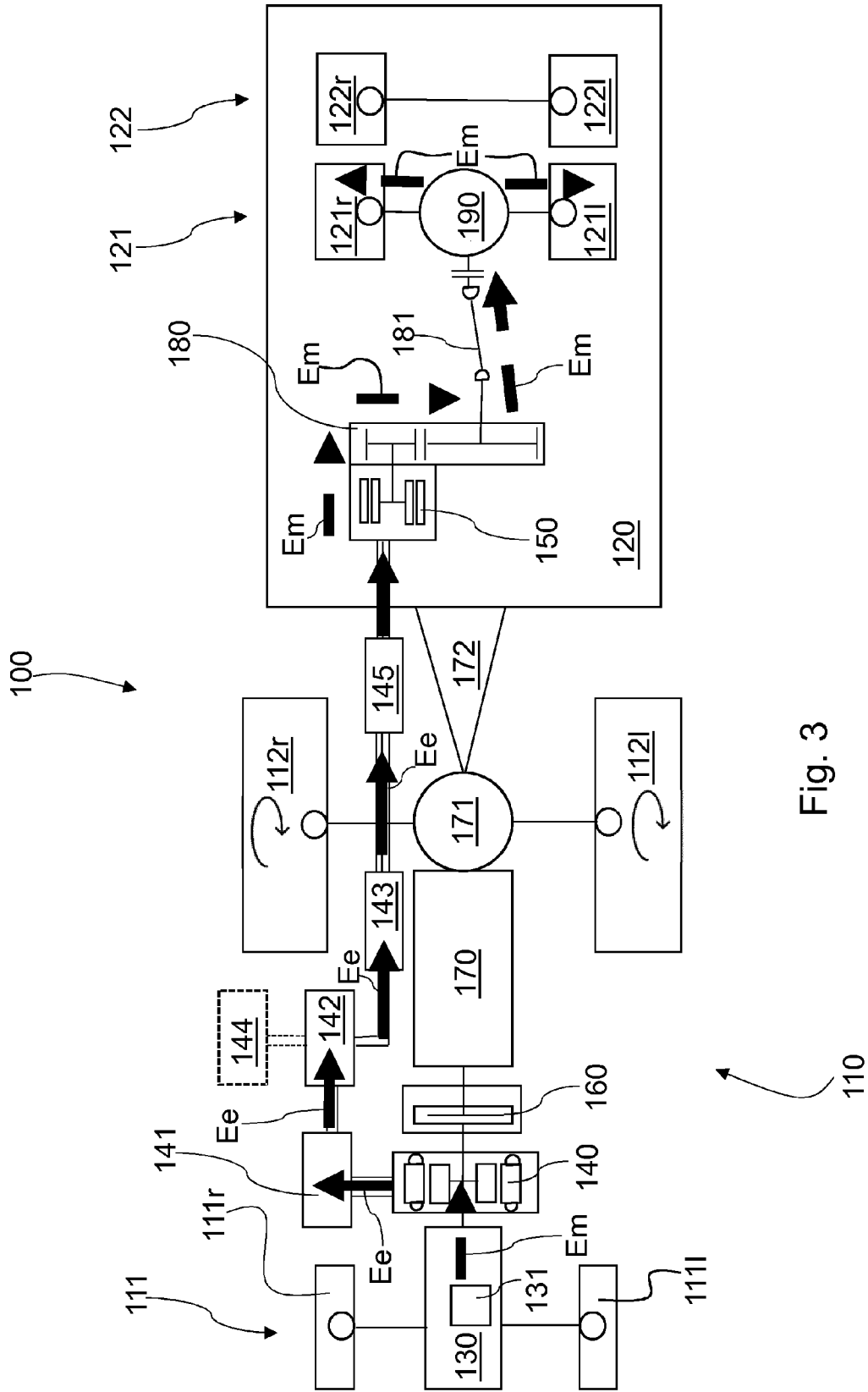


Fig. 3

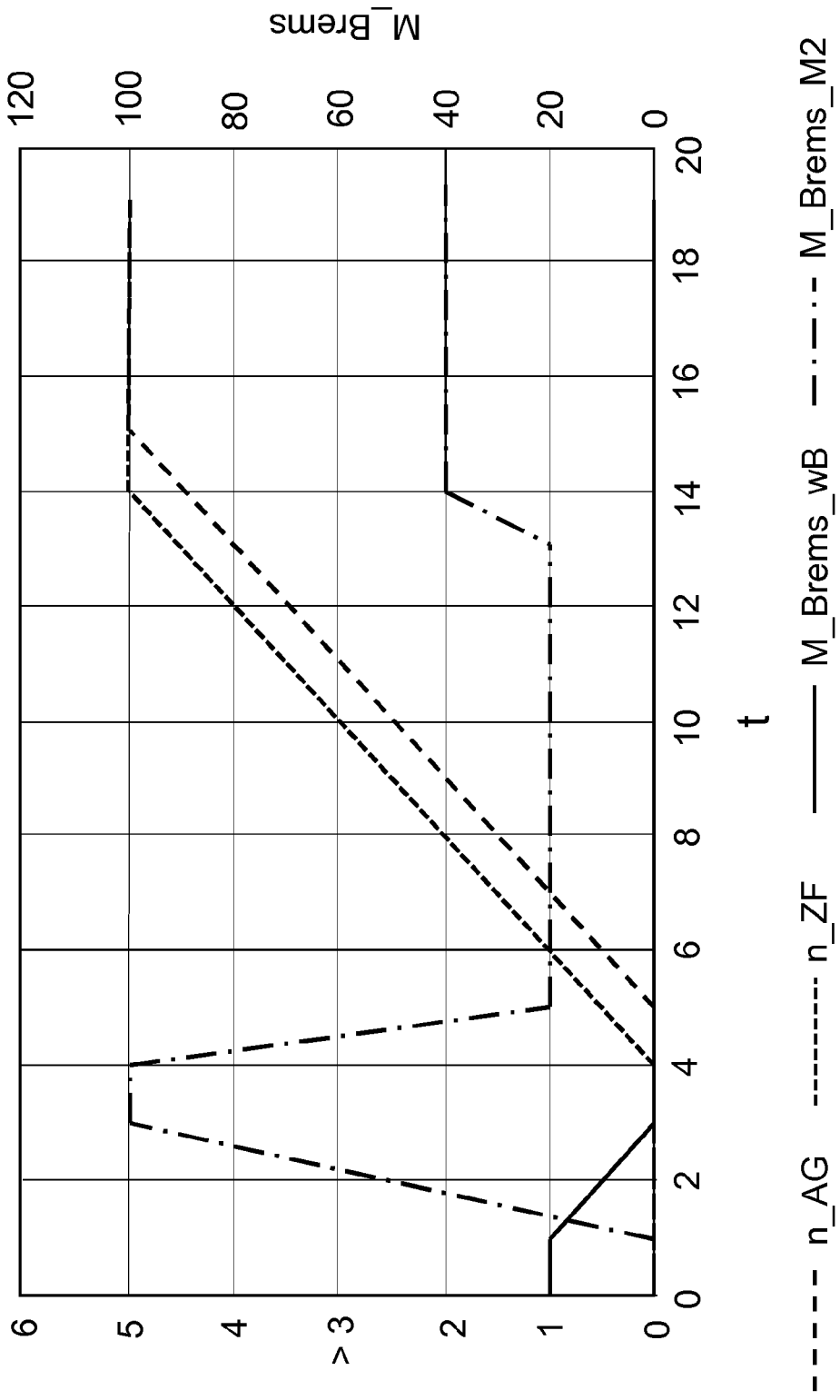


Fig. 4

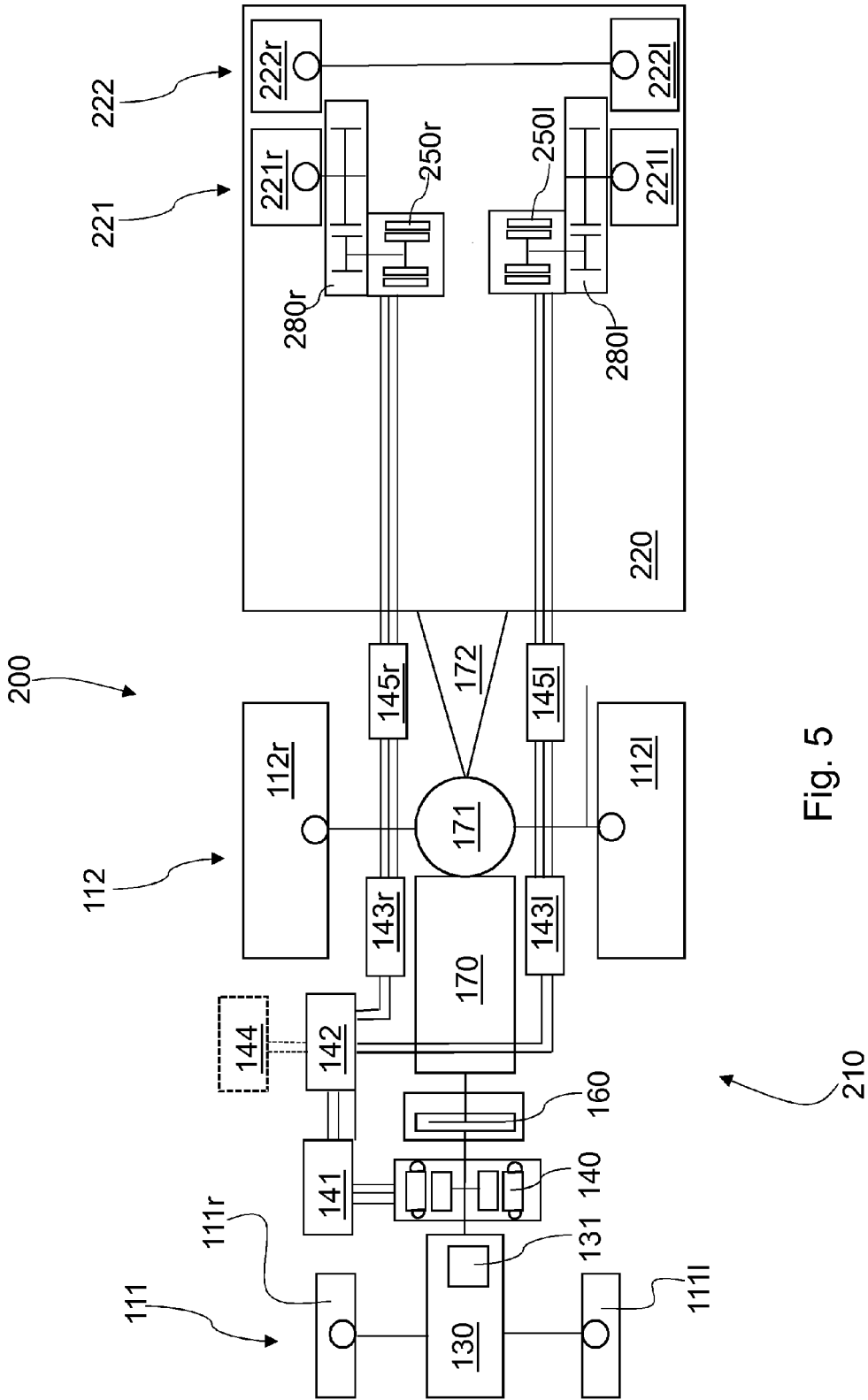


Fig. 5

METHOD FOR OPERATING A VEHICLE COMBINATION, VEHICLE COMBINATION, TOWING VEHICLE, AND WORK DEVICE

[0001] The invention relates to a method for operating a vehicle/trailer unit, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit has a towing vehicle, particularly a towing vehicle that is embodied as a tractor or self-driving work machine, and at least one implement that can be mechanically connected to the towing vehicle and coupled therewith, particularly electrically and/or hydraulically, for energy transfer, particularly at least one trailer. The towing vehicle has a combustion engine and at least one first machine that can be operated as a prime mover, as well as at least one first axle that can be driven by means of the combustion engine, with it being possible for the combustion engine to be driven by means of the first machine. The implement has at least one second machine that can be operated as a work machine and at least one second axle that is mechanically coupled with the second machine.

[0002] Moreover, the invention relates to a previously-described vehicle/trailer unit as well as to a towing vehicle for such a vehicle/trailer unit and an implement for such a vehicle/trailer unit.

[0003] Vehicle/trailer units of this generic type, as well as towing vehicles and implements of this generic type and methods of this generic type for operating such vehicle/trailer units are inherently known from the prior art.

[0004] In particular, towing vehicles are known which have a combustion engine and a machine that can be operated as a prime mover, with the combustion engine generally being an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor that is provided as a starter motor for the combustion engine and/or as a prime mover for an auxiliary drive.

[0005] Furthermore, trailers with recuperative brake are known which have a work machine that is coupled with at least one axle and can be driven by the mechanical kinetic energy of the axle, with the work machine generally being an electric machine that can be operated as a generator.

[0006] It is an object of the present invention to provide an alternative method for operating a previously-described vehicle/trailer unit, particularly an improved method that enables a vehicle/trailer unit to be operated more efficiently. The object also includes the provision of an alternative, particularly improved vehicle/trailer unit and the provision of an alternative towing vehicle and an alternative implement.

[0007] This object is achieved by means of a method according to the teaching of claim 1, by means of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the teaching of claim 9, as well as by a towing vehicle according to the teaching of claim 21 and by an implement according to the teaching of claim 22. Preferred embodiments of the method according to the invention and of the vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention are the subject matter of the dependent claims. The wording of the claims is incorporated into the content of the description by express reference.

[0008] A method according to the invention is characterized in that, when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, the vehicle/trailer unit is operated at least intermittently in a first operating mode in which the second machine is operated as a work machine and driven by means of the mechanical kinetic energy of the second axle and in which the first machine is operated as a prime mover

and drives the combustion engine, with at least a portion of the energy generated and/or converted by the second machine being utilized to drive the first machine.

[0009] In other words, this means that, according to the invention, when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, the vehicle/trailer unit is operated at least intermittently such that energy is generated and/or converted from mechanical kinetic energy of the second axle of the implement by means of the second machine, which is being operated as a work machine, and is transferred at least partially to a prime mover of the towing vehicle, with this energy being used at least partially for driving the first machine, which is being operated as a prime mover.

[0010] In terms of the invention, a “vehicle/trailer unit” is an aggregation of at least one towing vehicle with at least one additional vehicle and/or at least one implement.

[0011] A “vehicle” is understood in terms of the invention to be a mobile means of transport. A “towing vehicle” is a vehicle that is designed to pull and/or push other vehicles.

[0012] An “implement” is understood in terms of the invention to be a device that can be coupled with a towing vehicle, such as a trailer, a hay tedder, or the like.

[0013] In terms of the invention, a “tractor” is understood to be a towing vehicle that is used particularly in agriculture and is designed to pull one or more vehicles but also to drive agricultural machines and/or implements.

[0014] A “self-driving work machine” is understood in terms of the invention to be a motor vehicle which, due to its design and special equipment that is securely connected to the vehicle, is intended and suitable for performing work but not for the transporting of people or goods. Some examples of self-driving work machines are harvesting machines, combine harvesters, construction machines, and various special machines such as truck-mounted cranes and the like.

[0015] In terms of the invention, a “prime mover” is understood to be a machine that outputs energy.

[0016] A “work machine” is understood in terms of the invention to be a machine that can be driven and is designed to consume energy in the form of mechanical work.

[0017] A “drivable axle” is understood in terms of the invention to be an axle that can be driven by means of a prime mover.

[0018] The use of the energy that is generated from the mechanical kinetic energy of the second axle of the implement to drive the first machine of the towing vehicle enables the especially efficient operation of the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly the energy-efficient operation of the towing vehicle.

[0019] In an advantageous development of the method according to the invention, the portion of the energy generated and/or converted by the second machine that is not used to drive the first machine is fed to an energy store, at least in some driving situations.

[0020] In an alternative but also advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, all of the energy that is generated and/or converted by the second machine is used to drive the first machine, at least in some driving situations.

[0021] During operation according to the invention in the first operating mode, the at least one implement, particularly the at least one trailer, is mechanically connected to the towing vehicle and coupled with the towing vehicle for

energy transfer, with the implement being preferably electrically and/or hydraulically coupled with the towing vehicle.

[0022] It is not absolutely necessary, however, particularly if the vehicle/trailer unit has several implements, for every one of the implements to be directly connected to the towing vehicle and/or coupled directly electrically and/or coupled directly hydraulically with the towing vehicle. One or more implements can also be connected indirectly to the towing vehicle mechanically and/or electrically and/or hydraulically. In particular, two or more implements—two trailers, for example—can be arranged one after another in a row on the towing vehicle, in which case only the implement that is arranged directly behind the towing vehicle is connected directly mechanically to the towing vehicle and coupled directly therewith for energy transfer, and other implements are connected indirectly.

[0023] Preferably, the first axle of the towing vehicle, which can be driven by means of the combustion engine, is coupled mechanically with the crankshaft of the combustion engine, particularly via at least one gearbox and one clutch.

[0024] The first machine is preferably an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor, a reciprocating piston engine, or a turbomachine that can be operated as a turbine, particularly a hydraulic engine.

[0025] If the towing vehicle is a tractor, it can be advantageous if the first machine is embodied as an axial piston engine.

[0026] Preferably, the first machine is coupled mechanically with the crankshaft of the combustion engine, particularly via at least one gearbox, for example a gear train and/or a belt drive.

[0027] The second machine is particularly an electric machine that can be operated as a generator or a turbomachine that can be operated as a pump, particularly a hydraulic turbomachine, preferably a hydraulic pump.

[0028] If the towing vehicle is a tractor, it can be advantageous in some cases if the second machine is embodied as an axial piston pump or as a gear pump.

[0029] Preferably, the first machine and the second machine are coupled directly with one another, particularly electrically or hydraulically. However, the first machine and the second machine can also be coupled together indirectly through interposition of an energy store and/or power electronics.

[0030] In an advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, the vehicle/trailer unit is operated at least intermittently in overrun mode and/or braking mode while traveling downhill in the first operating mode, preferably all the time while traveling downhill. The substantially greater forces at work while traveling downhill in comparison to driving on level ground—with the acting forces increasing as the slope gradient increases—result in greater mechanical kinetic energy. Therefore, an especially large quantity of mechanical energy can be converted and made available by means of the second machine while traveling downhill. Consequently, especially efficient operation is possible if the downhill travel is exploited to the greatest possible extent in the first operating mode.

[0031] In another advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, in which the towing vehicle has an engine braking device, a defined engine braking torque is applied at least intermittently by means of the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle, with

the engine braking torque being preferably applied when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, particularly when the vehicle/trailer unit is in the first operating mode. Engine braking devices with which kinetic energy can be converted particularly into thermal energy are inherently known from the prior art, particularly as decompression brakes.

[0032] By virtue of the possibility of driving the combustion engine by means of the first machine in overrun mode and/or braking mode, with it being possible for the energy required for this to be made available by the second machine, the engine-braking performance can be augmented substantially. In particular, the other braking systems of the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly braking devices of towing vehicle and implement that do not function in a wear-free manner, can be relieved, with it being especially advantageous that the energy can be generated recuperatively by the second machine in overrun mode and/or braking mode.

[0033] In order to increase the braking performance of the combustion engine, other components such as, preferably, an engine fan and/or an air compressor can be additionally coupled with the combustion engine with load torque, particularly in overrun mode and/or braking mode. In towing mode, by contrast, these components, particularly the engine fan and/or the air compressor, can be preferably decoupled from the combustion engine such that they do not effect any load torque on the crankshaft that can be driven by means of the combustion engine, however.

[0034] In another advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, a defined engine braking torque is applied at least intermittently by means of the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle while traveling downhill in overrun mode and/or braking mode. In this way, the load of the other braking devices, which are usually embodied as friction-pad brakes and prone to wear, can be substantially reduced. What is more, the danger of brake fading—an unwanted diminishing of the braking effect as a result of the heating or overheating of the brake that can result in a safety-critical lengthening of the braking distance—can be reduced. Another advantage is that the engine braking device works in a nearly wear-free manner.

[0035] In another advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, a defined braking torque is applied at least intermittently by means of a second machine to the second axle of the implement, with the braking torque being preferably applied when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, particularly when the vehicle/trailer unit is in the first operating mode.

[0036] In another advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, a defined braking torque is applied by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement at least intermittently while traveling downhill, particularly if the vehicle/trailer unit is composed of a towing vehicle and a very heavy implement. After all, it can be advantageous particularly when traveling downhill to also brake the implement in order to maintain the stability of the vehicle/trailer unit.

[0037] Through the application of the braking torque to the second axle by means of the second machine, the load of the braking device of the implement, which is usually embodied as a friction-pad brake and is prone to wear, can be substantially reduced in a simple manner and even avoided completely on small slope gradients. In particular, the thermal loading and thus the danger of fading can be

reduced substantially. A defined braking torque can also be applied in a nearly wear-free manner to the second axle by means of the second machine.

[0038] If the vehicle/trailer unit has a control device for controlling the first machine and the engine braking device and/or the second machine, the first machine and/or the engine braking device and/or the second machine are preferably controlled such that a defined engine braking torque is applied to the first axle of the towing vehicle and/or a defined braking torque is applied to the second axle of the implement, with the defined engine braking torque and/or the defined braking torque being preferably applied as a function of a determined driving state.

[0039] In another advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, the first machine and/or the engine braking device and/or the second machine are controlled such that a defined braking torque distribution is achieved between the engine braking torque applied by means of the first machine and/or the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle and the braking torque applied by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement.

[0040] In another advantageous embodiment of the method according to the invention, the braking torque distribution is set such that a defined stretching or compressing of the vehicle/trailer unit is achieved, with the defined braking torque distribution being preferably set as a function of the current compression or stretching.

[0041] Alternatively or in addition, the defined braking torque distribution can also be set as a function of variables other than stretching or compression, particularly in a lag-optimized manner, for example as a function of a vehicle/trailer unit speed or a brake pedal pressure or slip. The slip on the wheels of the drive axle of the towing vehicle and on the wheels of the drive axle of the implement is preferably set by adjusting a drive power and/or a braking power by appropriately controlling the first machine and/or the second machine.

[0042] In particular, the engine braking torque and/or the braking torque can be applied to the first axle of the towing vehicle and/or the second axle of the implement such that a desired, defined torque distribution is achieved between a towing vehicle total drive torque that is acting on the towing vehicle and an implement total drive torque that is acting on the implement, thereby achieving a desired, defined stretching or compressing and/or a desired, defined slip.

[0043] In order to set the braking torque distribution as a function of the current compression or stretching, the current stretching and/or compression is preferably determined, particularly directly or indirectly, with it being possible for the stretching to be determined directly by means of a force-measuring device between towing vehicle and implement, for example, or indirectly from detected wheel speeds of towing vehicle and implement, and the actual vehicle speed.

[0044] In order to ensure that the vehicle/trailer unit can be safely started up, the implement must be prevented from pushing the vehicle/trailer unit. This can be achieved by setting a defined amount of stretching or compressing when starting.

[0045] For this purpose, in another advantageous embodiment of the method according to the invention, particularly for starting downhill from a braked standstill in the direction of forward travel, with the vehicle/trailer unit being held by

means of an additional braking device in order to bring about a stretching of the vehicle/trailer unit when starting downhill in the direction of forward travel, in a first step upon release of the additional braking device the second machine is controlled such that a braking torque is applied by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement such that the implement is held at a standstill until a defined stretching of the vehicle/trailer unit has been achieved as a result of the forward motion of the towing vehicle after the additional braking device is released. In a second step, the braking torque applied by means of the second machine is gradually reduced such that the defined stretching that is achieved remains nearly constant until the implement has reached the same vehicle speed as the towing vehicle. In case of the further acceleration of the implement, the braking torque is increased again as necessary in one or more steps by means of the second machine such that a defined stretching continues to be maintained while traveling downhill.

[0046] Preferably, the vehicle/trailer unit can be operated in a first operating mode or in at least one additional operating mode as a function of a determined driving state.

[0047] For this purpose, the first machine can also be preferably operated as a work machine, and the second machine also as a prime mover, and the second axle is preferably a drivable axle, particularly an axle that can be driven electrically and/or hydraulically.

[0048] In another advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, the first machine is operated as a work machine at least in one additional operating mode, particularly in a second operating mode, and driven by means of the combustion engine, with the second machine being operated as a prime mover and driving the drivable axle of the implement, and with the first machine and the second machine being coupled together such that the energy generated by the first machine in generator mode can be utilized to drive the second machine.

[0049] In an especially advantageous embodiment of a method according to the invention, the vehicle/trailer unit is operated at least intermittently in a second operating mode when the vehicle/trailer unit is in towing mode.

[0050] A vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention has a towing vehicle, particularly a towing vehicle that is embodied as a tractor or self-driving work machine, and at least one implement that can be mechanically connected to the towing vehicle and coupled therewith, particularly electrically and/or hydraulically, for energy transfer, particularly at least one trailer. The towing vehicle has a combustion engine and at least one first machine that can be operated as a prime mover, as well as at least one first axle that can be driven by means of the combustion engine, with it being possible for the combustion engine to be driven by means of the first machine. The implement has at least one second machine that can be operated as a work machine and at least one second axle that is mechanically coupled with the second machine.

[0051] According to the invention, the vehicle/trailer unit is embodied such that at least a portion of an energy generated by the second machine can be utilized to drive the first machine.

[0052] In other words, a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention is embodied such that the energy generated and/or converted by the second machine can be transferred at least partially to the towing vehicle, particularly to the first machine. That is, the towing vehicle and the implement can

not only be interconnected mechanically, but can be coupled together such that at least a portion of the energy generated by the second machine can be transferred from the implement to the towing vehicle and particularly to the first machine.

[0053] In a first embodiment of the towing vehicle, the first machine of the towing vehicle, which can be operated as a prime mover, is preferably an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor, a reciprocating piston engine, or as a turbomachine that can be operated as a turbine. In an advantageous embodiment of the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly of the implement, the second machine is an electric machine that can be operated as a generator or a turbomachine that can be operated as a pump.

[0054] In another advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, the first machine of the towing vehicle can also be operated as a work machine and the second machine of the implement can also be operated as a prime mover, and the second axle of the implement, which is mechanically coupled with the second machine, can be driven by means of the second machine.

[0055] Preferably, the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly the towing vehicle, has a device for determining at least one driving state and can be operated in a first operating mode or in at least one additional operating mode particularly as a function of a determined driving state; in the at least one additional operating mode, the first machine is operated as a work machine and driven by means of the combustion engine, the second machine is operated as a prime mover and drives the drivable axle of the implement, with the first machine and the second machine being coupled together such that energy generated by the first machine can be utilized for driving the second machine.

[0056] For this purpose, in another advantageous embodiment, the first machine is preferably an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor and as a generator, that is, a so-called motor generator, or a turbomachine that can be operated as a pump and as a turbine, that is, a so-called pump turbine.

[0057] The second machine is preferably an electric machine that can be operated as a generator and as an electric motor, that is, a so-called motor generator, or a turbomachine that can be operated as a turbine and as a pump, that is, a so-called pump turbine.

[0058] Preferably, the first machine and/or the second machine are each an electric machine that can be operated both as an electric motor and as a generator, that is, a motor generator, or a turbomachine that can be operated both as a turbine and as a pump, that is, a pump turbine.

[0059] If the towing vehicle is a tractor, it can be advantageous in some cases if the first machine and/or the second machine is an axial piston engine.

[0060] It has proven to be especially advantageous, however, if the second machine is an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor and as a generator and the first machine is as well, or if the second machine is an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor and as a generator and the first machine is a pump turbine—that is, a turbomachine that can be operated both as a turbine and as a pump.

[0061] Preferably, the towing vehicle and the implement are mechanically interconnected and coupled together for energy transfer, particularly electrically and/or hydraulically,

depending on the design of the first machine and of the second machine, particularly depending on the design of the second machine.

[0062] If the second machine of the implement is an electric machine that can be operated as a generator, the vehicle/trailer unit is embodied according to the invention such that the electrical energy generated by the second machine, which is embodied as an electric machine, can be transferred to the towing vehicle.

[0063] If the second machine is embodied as a turbomachine, for example as a turbine, particularly as a pump turbine, the towing vehicle is preferably coupled with the implement such that the flow energy generated by the second machine can be transferred to the towing vehicle.

[0064] In another advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, the towing vehicle has an engine braking device, with it being possible for an engine braking torque to be applied by means of the engine braking device at least to the first axle of the towing vehicle. The vehicle/trailer unit is preferably embodied such that the engine braking torque can be applied when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, particularly when the vehicle/trailer unit is in the first operating mode and the combustion engine is driven by the first machine.

[0065] In another advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, the engine braking device has an exhaust braking device, with the exhaust braking device preferably having at least one exhaust-side control flap with which counterpressure and thus resistance can be applied in the exhaust system, whereby an engine braking torque is generated that acts on the crankshaft of the combustion engine. Exhaust braking devices of this generic type are generally known from the prior art, for example as the so-called Jacobs Exhaust Brake® by Jacobs Vehicle Systems®.

[0066] In an alternative or additional advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, the engine braking device has a decompression braking device. Decompression braking devices of this generic type are also known from the prior art, for example as the so-called Compression Release Brake by Jacobs Vehicle Systems®.

[0067] A “decompression braking device” is understood in terms of the invention to be a braking device that has at least one exhaust valve or an additional valve that can be opened at the end of the compression stroke in order to relieve pressure in the cylinder—that is, in order to perform decompression. As a result, no more work can be transferred to the crankshaft in the expansion stroke, since the energy that was used for the compression has already been discharged through the decompression.

[0068] In another alternative or additional advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, the engine braking device has a vented braking device. Vented braking devices are also known from the prior art, for example in the form of so-called bleeder brakes, also by Jacobs Vehicle Systems®.

[0069] A “vented braking device” is understood in terms of the invention as a braking device that has at least one constant throttle in the form of an additional small valve with a small cross section parallel to the exhaust valves of the combustion engine that can be maintained in a defined open position throughout the entire operation of the engine

brake, or as a braking device that has at least one exhaust valve that can be maintained in a defined open position throughout the entire operation of the engine brake.

[0070] In another advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly the towing vehicle, has at least one control device for controlling the first machine and/or the engine braking device, with the first machine and/or the engine braking device being controlled such that a defined engine braking torque can be applied to the first axle of the towing vehicle.

[0071] In another advantageous embodiment of the vehicle/trailer unit, the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly the implement, has at least one control device for controlling the second machine, with the second machine being preferably controlled such that a defined torque, particularly a defined braking torque, can be applied to the second axle of the implement.

[0072] In another advantageous embodiment of the vehicle/trailer unit, the vehicle/trailer unit is embodied such that there is a defined braking torque distribution that can be set between the engine braking torque that can be applied by means of the first machine and/or the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle and the braking torque that can be applied to the second axle of the implement by means of the second machine.

[0073] In another advantageous embodiment of the vehicle/trailer unit, the braking torque distribution can be set such that a defined stretching or compressing of the vehicle/trailer unit occurs, with it being preferably possible to set the defined braking torque distribution as a function of the current compression and/or stretching.

[0074] That is, the torque distribution can be used to set a defined stretching or compression; in particular, an engine torque and a torque can be applied to the first axle and the second axle such that a desired, defined torque distribution is set between a towing vehicle total drive torque acting on the towing vehicle and an implement total drive torque acting on the implement, thereby achieving the desired, defined stretching or compression.

[0075] In another advantageous embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, particularly of the implement, the implement has, in addition to the second machine, a third machine, with the second machine being coupled mechanically at least with a left wheel of the second axle of the implement, and with the third machine being coupled mechanically at least with a right wheel of the second axle, with it being possible for the second and the third machine to be operated at least as a work machine. As a result, an individual braking torque distribution is enabled not only between towing vehicle and implement, but also between left and right axle side of the implement, whereby the stability of the trailer can be achieved particularly on loose ground and when traveling transverse to the slope.

[0076] A towing vehicle according to the invention, particularly towing vehicle according to the invention that is embodied as a tractor or self-driving work machine, is characterized in that it is designed to form a vehicle/trailer unit with an appropriately designed implement in at least a mechanically coupled state.

[0077] An implement according to the invention, particularly a trailer according to the invention, is characterized in

that it is designed to form a vehicle/trailer unit with an appropriately designed towing vehicle in an at least mechanically coupled state.

[0078] This and other features and advantages follow not only from the claims and description, but also from the drawings, with it being possible for each of the individual features to be realized alone or together in the form of subcombinations in an embodiment of the invention and can inherently constitute an advantageous and patentable embodiment, for which protection is likewise claimed.

[0079] Some of the cited features and characteristics relate both to a method according to the invention and to a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention, a towing vehicle according to the invention, and an implement according to the invention. Some of these features and characteristics are only described once but apply independently of one another in the context of technically possible embodiments both for an inventive method and for an inventive vehicle.

[0080] In the following, the invention is explained in further detail on the basis of several exemplary embodiments, with the invention being illustrated schematically for this purpose in the enclosed drawings.

[0081] FIG. 1 shows a schematic representation of a first exemplary embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention;

[0082] FIG. 2 shows, on the basis of the schematic representation of FIG. 1, the energy flow between the individual subunits of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention according to an exemplary execution of a method according to the invention while braking and traveling downhill in the direction of forward travel;

[0083] FIG. 3 shows, on the basis of the schematic representation of FIG. 1, the energy flow between the individual subunits of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention according to an exemplary execution of the method according to the invention while starting from a stop and traveling downhill in the direction of forward travel;

[0084] FIG. 4 shows a diagram with profiles of the speeds of the wheels of the first axle and the speed of the second axle, a braking torque applied by the second machine to the second axle, and a braking torque applied by the hand brake to the second axle over time resulting during an exemplary execution of a method according to the invention while starting from a stop and traveling downhill in the direction of forward travel; and

[0085] FIG. 5 shows a schematic representation of a second exemplary embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention.

[0086] FIG. 1 shows a first exemplary embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit **100** according to the invention with a first exemplary embodiment of a towing vehicle **110** according to the invention that is coupled both mechanically and electrically with an implement **120** according to the invention in the form of a two-axle trailer.

[0087] The mechanical coupling of the towing vehicle is achieved using a drawbar **172**, whereas a high-voltage line with an AEF connector **145** is provided for electrical coupling, particularly for transferring electrical energy between the towing vehicle **110** and the implement **120**.

[0088] The so-called AEF connector **145** is a plug connector that is embodied according to a common standard for agricultural machines, with the abbreviation AEF standing for Agricultural Industry Electronics Foundation, which is

additionally designed to transfer electrical energy in the high-voltage range for this vehicle/trailer unit **100**.

[0089] The towing vehicle **110** according to the invention is two-tracked with a front axle **111** and a rear axle **112**, each of which has a left wheel **111_l** and **112_l**, respectively, and a right wheel **111_r** and **112_r**, respectively.

[0090] In this exemplary embodiment, the towing vehicle **110** is an all-wheel-drive tractor with a combustion engine **130** having an engine braking device **131**, with the combustion engine **130** being mechanically coupled with a first machine **140** that is coupled by means of a clutch **160** with the gearbox **170** and, via a rear axle differential **171**, with the two wheels **112_l** and **112_r** of the rear axle **112**. The combustion engine **130** is also coupled with the two wheels **111_l** and **111_r** of the front axle **111** and is designed to drive not only the rear axle **112**, but also the front axle **111**, with the front axle **111** also being coupled with the combustion engine **130** by means of a front axle differential (not shown here) and the gearbox **170**.

[0091] In this exemplary embodiment, the first machine **140** is an electric machine that can be operated both as an electric motor and as a generator—that is, a motor generator **140** that is both designed to be driven by the combustion engine **130** and provided for the purpose of driving the combustion engine **130**.

[0092] Moreover, the towing vehicle according to the invention has a first, grounded power converter **141**, a power distribution device **142**, a second, grounded power converter **132**, and an energy store **144**.

[0093] The first power converter **141** is designed to convert alternating current generated by the first electric machine into direct current, whereas the second power converter **143** is designed to convert direct current transferred from the power distribution device **142** to alternating current and feed it to the AEF connector **145** and, conversely, to convert alternating current to direct current from the current **145** fed via the AEF connector and to transfer it to the power distribution device **142**. All or only part of the electrical energy generated can be fed by means of the power distribution device **142** to the energy store **144**.

[0094] The implement **120** has a second machine **150** which, in this exemplary embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit **100** according to the invention, is also an electric machine **150** that can be operated both as a generator and as an electric motor—that is, also a motor generator. The second machine **150** is mechanically coupled with a second axle **121** by means of a spur gear **180**, a Cardan shaft **181**, and a differential gear **190**, with it being possible for the wheels **121_l** and **121_r** of the second axle **121** of the implement **120** to be driven electrically by means of the second machine **150**. In this case, the implement **120** also has an additional axle **122** with wheels **122_l** and **122_r** which, however, cannot be driven in this exemplary embodiment.

[0095] All of the axles of the vehicle/trailer unit **100**—that is, all of the axles of both the towing vehicle **110** and implement **120**—can be braked in this exemplary embodiment, with an appropriate friction-pad braking device being provided but not shown in further detail.

[0096] The vehicle/trailer unit **100** is embodied such that, when it is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, it can be operated at least intermittently in a first operating mode in which, according to the invention, the second machine **150** is operated as a generator and driven by means of the mechanical kinetic energy of the second axle **121**, whereas

the first machine **140** is operated as a electric motor and drives the combustion engine, with at least a portion of the energy generated by the second machine **150** being utilized to drive the first machine **140**.

[0097] The electrical energy generated by the second electric machine **150** can be transferred via a high-voltage line (not further specified here) and the AEF connector **145** from the trailer **120** to the towing vehicle **110**, particularly to the power converter **143**, which converts the alternating current generated by means of the second electric machine **150** to direct current and feeds it to the power distribution device **142**, by means of which the transferred electrical energy is distributed to the energy store **144** and/or the power converter **141**. The power converter **141** converts the direct current back into alternating current so that the electrical energy is available for driving the first electric machine **140**, with which the combustion engine **130** can be driven.

[0098] A defined engine braking torque can be applied by means of the engine braking device **131** of the combustion engine **130** at least intermittently to the first axle **112**, which can be driven by means of the combustion engine **130**.

[0099] At the same time, an engine braking torque can be applied when the vehicle/trailer unit **100** is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, particularly when traveling downhill and/or when the vehicle/trailer unit **100** is in the previously-described first operating mode according to the invention. This is especially advantageous because, due to the additional driving of the combustion engine **130** by the first machine **150**, an especially high level of engine braking power can be achieved, thereby substantially reducing the loading of the other braking devices, particularly the loading of the friction pad braking devices of the vehicle/trailer unit **100**.

[0100] In this exemplary embodiment, the trailer **120** according to the invention is embodied such that a defined braking torque can be additionally applied by means of the second electric machine **150** to the second axle **121** of the implement **120**, with it being possible for the braking torque to be applied when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, particularly when the vehicle/trailer unit is in the first operating mode.

[0101] Moreover, the vehicle/trailer unit has a control device (not shown here) for controlling the first machine **130** and/or the engine braking device **131** and/or the second machine **150**, with it being possible for all of the subunits—that is, the first machine **140** and/or the engine braking device **131** and/or the second machine **150**—to be controlled in this exemplary embodiment such that a defined engine braking torque can be applied to the first axle of the towing vehicle **110** according to the invention and/or a defined braking torque can be applied to the second axle **121** of the trailer **120** according to the invention. The defined engine braking torque and the defined braking torque can each be applied as a function of a determined driving state.

[0102] The engine braking torque and the braking torque that can be applied to the second axle **121** of the trailer **120** can be set such that a defined braking torque distribution is achieved between these two braking torques. In particular, the braking torque distribution can be set such that a defined stretching or compressing of the vehicle/trailer unit **100** occurs, with it being preferably possible to set the defined

braking torque distribution in an especially advantageous manner as a function of the current compression and/or stretching.

[0103] On the basis of FIG. 1, FIG. 2 shows a schematic illustration of the energy flow during the execution of the method according to the invention while traveling forward downhill in overrun mode and/or braking mode during the operation of the vehicle/trailer unit **100** in the first operating mode, with the solid arrows being intended here to symbolize the energy flow of the electrical energy E_e , and with the broken arrows symbolizing the energy flow of the mechanical energy E_m .

[0104] As was already described in detail with reference to FIG. 1, mechanical kinetic energy E_m is produced on the wheels **121L** and **121R** in this case in the first operating mode as a result of the downhill travel or rolling, which mechanical kinetic energy E_m is fed via the axle differential **190** and the Cardan shaft **181** as well as the spur gear **180** of the second electric machine **150**, which converts the mechanical kinetic energy E_m to electrical energy E_e .

[0105] By means of the high-voltage line and the AEF connector **145**, the electrical energy E_e is transferred from the implement **120** according to the invention to the towing vehicle **110** according to the invention and fed via the power converter **143** as well as via the interposed power distribution device **142** of the first electric machine **140** and/or to the energy store **144**. In this case, all of the electrical energy E_e generated by means of the second electric machine **150** in generator mode is fed to the first electric machine **140** of the towing vehicle **110**. The first electric machine **140** is driven with this electrical energy E_e and converts the electrical energy E_e appropriately to mechanical energy E_m , with which the combustion engine **130** is driven.

[0106] By the use of the drive power that is additionally applied by means of the first electric machine **140** to the combustion engine **140**, the braking power of the existing engine braking device can be substantially increased, since the combustion engine **130** can thus be operated at an operating point that is required for greater braking power, thus resulting in the substantially augmented braking performance of the towing vehicle **110** and, as a result, improved braking performance of the overall vehicle/trailer unit **100**. The friction pad braking device of the vehicle/trailer unit can thus be relieved substantially. In particular, it is possible to brake the vehicle/trailer unit with reduced wear.

[0107] What is more, by operating the second electric machine **150** as a generator, that is, as a work machine, a braking torque is additionally applied to the wheels **121l** and **121r** of the second axle **121** of the trailer **120**, whereby particularly the friction pad braking devices of the trailer **120** can be relieved and the trailer **120** can be braked in a wear-free manner.

[0108] Moreover, the vehicle/trailer unit **100** is embodied such that the first electric machine **140** can be operated as a generator, that is, as a work machine, so as to generate current, particularly as a result of being driven by means of the combustion engine **130**. That is, the energy flow occurs in precisely the opposite direction in this case; see FIG. 3.

[0109] In this case, mechanical energy E_m is transferred from the combustion engine **130** to the first electric machine **140**, which is operated as a work machine and supplies generated electrical energy E_e to the power converter **141**, from which the electrical energy E_e is transferred via the

power distribution device **142** to the power converter **143** and further via the AEF connector **145** to the trailer **120**. As will readily be understood, it is possible in this case as well to feed a portion of the electrical energy E_e to the energy store **144**.

[0110] The electrical energy E_e transferred to the trailer **120** is utilized in this case to drive the second electric machine **150**, which converts the electrical energy E_e to mechanical energy E_m , which is transferred by means of the spur gear **180** and the Cardan shaft **181** and the axle differential **190** to the two wheels **121l** and **121r** of the second axle **121** of the trailer **120**.

[0111] Furthermore, when starting from a stop in the downhill direction of forward travel with the vehicle/trailer unit held by means of an additional braking device, for example by means of the hand brake or the friction-pad brake (not further specified here), the described vehicle/trailer unit **100** is also designed to first apply a braking torque to the second axle **121** of the implement **120** upon the release of the additional braking device by means of the second machine **150** such that the implement **120** is kept at a stop until a defined stretching of the vehicle/trailer unit **100** has been achieved as a result of the forward motion of the towing vehicle **110** after the releasing of the additional braking device.

[0112] In a second step, the braking torque by means of the second machine can then be gradually reduced such that the defined stretching that is achieved remains nearly constant or a desired value is achieved until the implement **120** has reached the same driving speed as the towing vehicle **110**.

[0113] Where necessary, particularly in case of the further acceleration of the implement **120**, the braking torque can be increased and/or adjusted again in one or more steps by means of the second machine **150** such that a defined stretching of the vehicle/trailer unit **100** continues to be maintained during downhill travel.

[0114] This can be seen clearly in FIG. 4, which shows the progression of the speed of the wheels of the second axle **121** of the implement **120** and of the first axle **112** of the towing vehicle **110** over time together with the respectively applied braking torques $M_{\text{Brems_wB}}$ and $M_{\text{Brems_M2}}$ by the additional braking device and the second machine **150**.

[0115] The vehicle/trailer unit is first kept at a stop by means of the additional braking device—that is, a braking torque $M_{\text{Brems_wB}}$ (represented by the solid line) is first applied to the second axle **121**.

[0116] While the additional braking device is being released—that is, when this braking torque $M_{\text{Brems_wB}}$ drops—a braking torque $M_{\text{Brems_M2}}$ is applied by means of the second electric machine **150** to the second axle **121** of the trailer, so that the wheels **121l** and **121r** of the second axle **121** continue to be kept at a stop.

[0117] After the additional braking device has been released, the towing vehicle begins to roll, which can be seen clearly here from the speed n_{ZF} of the wheels **112l** and **112r** of the towing vehicle **110**, which is symbolized by the broken line.

[0118] With increasing speed n_{ZF} of the towing vehicle **110**, more particularly of the wheels **112l** and **112r** of the first axle **112**, the braking torque $M_{\text{Brems_M2}}$ being applied by means of the second machine **150** is increasingly reduced until the implement **120**, more particularly the wheels **121l** and **121r** of the second axle **121**, has/have reached the same

speed n_{AG} as the towing vehicle **110**, which is represented symbolically by the wide broken line running parallel to the wheel speed of the towing vehicle.

[0119] Once the towing vehicle **110** and the implement **120** have reached the same speed n_{ZF} and n_{AG} , respectively, the braking torque M_{Brems_M2} applied by means of the second electric machine **150** to the second axle **121** of the implement **120** can be increased again in order to set a defined speed n_{ZF} and n_{AG} , respectively, thus preventing further acceleration of the vehicle/trailer unit **100**.

[0120] This makes it possible to start traveling downhill in the direction of forward travel in an especially controlled manner, since the vehicle/trailer unit **100** can be stabilized by setting a defined amount of stretching.

[0121] FIG. 5 shows a second exemplary embodiment of a vehicle/trailer unit **200** according to the invention, with this vehicle/trailer unit **200** differing from the vehicle/trailer unit **100** described with reference to the previous figure in that the towing vehicle **210** has two AEF connectors **145/** and **145r** via which an electrical energy transfer, particularly in the form of alternating current between towing vehicle **210** and implement **220**, can be performed separately for a left side of the implement and towing vehicle and a right side of the implement and towing vehicle, with a separate power converter **143/** or **143r** being respectively coupled with the power distribution device **142**.

[0122] Accordingly, in this exemplary embodiment, the vehicle/trailer unit **200** has a trailer **220** with two electric machines **250/** and **250r**, each of which can be operated as an electric motor and as a generator, with one of the two electric machines **250/** and **250r** being provided to drive a left wheel **221/** of the second axle **221** of the implement **220** and one electric machine **250r** being provided to drive the right wheel **221r** of the second axle **221**. The electric machines **250/** and **250r** are each mechanically coupled by means of a separate spur gear **280/** and **280r**, respectively, with the respective associated wheel **221/** and **221r**.

[0123] By means of such a vehicle/trailer unit, it is possible not only to set a defined braking torque distribution between towing vehicle **210** and implement **220**, particularly between the first axle **112** of the towing vehicle **210** and the second axle **221** of the implement **220**, but also to set a desired, defined braking torque distribution particularly on the implement **220** between the left side and the right side, that is, between the left wheel **221/** and the right wheel **221r**. In this way, an even further improved stabilization of the vehicle/trailer unit **200**, particularly of the implement **220**, particularly in implements in the form of heavy trailers, can be achieved.

[0124] As will readily be understood, a multitude of modifications are possible without departing from the scope of the patent claims.

LIST OF REFERENCE SYMBOLS

[0125] **100, 200** vehicle/trailer unit according to the invention
 [0126] **110, 210** towing vehicle according to the invention
 [0127] **120, 220** implement according to the invention
 [0128] **111** front axle of the towing vehicle
 [0129] **111l, 111r** left and right wheel, respectively, of the front axle of the towing vehicle
 [0130] **112** first axle, rear axle of the towing vehicle
 [0131] **112l, 112r** wheels of the rear axle of the towing vehicle

[0132] **121, 221** second axle
 [0133] **121l, 121r**, wheels of the second axle of the implement
 [0134] **221l, 221r**
 [0135] **122, 222** additional axle of the implement
 [0136] **122l, 122r**, wheels of the additional axle of the implement
 [0137] **222l, 222r**
 [0138] **130** combustion engine
 [0139] **131** engine braking device
 [0140] **140** first machine
 [0141] **141** grounded power converter AC/DC
 [0142] **142** power distribution device
 [0143] **143, 143l, 143r** grounded power converter DC/AC
 [0144] **144** energy store
 [0145] **145, 145l, 145r** AEF connector
 [0146] **150, 250l, 250r** second machine
 [0147] **160** clutch
 [0148] **170** gearbox
 [0149] **171** rear axle differential
 [0150] **172** drawbar
 [0151] **180, 280l, 280r** spur gear
 [0152] **181** Cardan shaft
 [0153] **190** axle differential
 [0154] E_e electrical energy
 [0155] E_m mechanical energy
 [0156] n_{AG} speed of the wheels of the second axle
 [0157] n_{ZF} speed of the wheels of the first axle
 [0158] M_{Brems_wB} braking torque applied by hand brake
 [0159] M_{Brems_M2} braking torque applied by second machine
 [0160] t time

What is claimed is:

1. A method for operating a vehicle/trailer unit, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit comprises:
 - a towing vehicle, and
 - an implement that can be mechanically connected to the towing vehicle and coupled therewith, wherein the towing vehicle has a combustion engine and a first machine that can be operated as a prime mover, as well as a first axle that can be driven by means of the combustion engine, with the combustion engine being drivable by means of the first machine, and
 - wherein the implement has a second machine that can be operated as a work machine and a second axle that is mechanically coupled with the second machine,
 - wherein when the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode, the vehicle/trailer unit is operated at least intermittently in a first operating mode, in which
 - the second machine is operated as a work machine and driven by means of kinetic energy of the second axle, and
 - the first machine is operated as a prime mover and drives the combustion engine,
 - with at least a portion of the energy generated by the second machine being utilized to drive the first machine.
2. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit is operated at least intermittently in overrun mode when traveling downhill and/or at least intermittently in braking mode when traveling downhill in the first operating mode.

3. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein the towing vehicle has an engine braking device, wherein a defined engine braking torque is applied at least intermittently by means of the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle.

4. The method as set forth in claim 1, wherein a defined braking torque is applied at least intermittently by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement.

5. The method as set forth in claim 3, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit has a control device for controlling the first machine and the engine braking device and/or the second machine, wherein the first machine and/or the engine braking device and/or the second machine are controlled such that a defined engine braking torque is applied to the first axle of the towing vehicle and/or a defined braking torque is applied to the second axle of the implement.

6. The method as set forth in claim 5, wherein the first machine and/or the engine braking device and/or the second machine are controlled such that a defined braking torque distribution is set between the engine braking torque applied by means of the first machine and/or the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle and the braking torque applied by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement.

7. The method as set forth in claim 6, wherein the braking torque distribution is set such that a defined stretching or compressing of the vehicle/trailer unit occurs.

8. The method as set forth in claim 7, wherein in order to bring about the defined stretching of the vehicle/trailer unit when starting downhill in a direction of forward travel, in order to start downhill from a braked stop in the direction of forward travel in which the vehicle/trailer unit is held by means of an additional braking device,

in a first step upon release of the additional braking device, the second machine is controlled such that a braking torque is applied by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement such that the implement is held at a stop until the defined stretching of the vehicle/trailer unit has been achieved as a result of the forward motion of the towing vehicle after the additional braking device is released,

in a second step, the braking torque applied by means of the second machine is gradually reduced such that the defined stretching that is achieved remains nearly constant until the implement has reached the same driving speed as the towing vehicle,

in case of further acceleration of the implement, the braking torque is increased again as necessary in one or more steps by means of the second machine such that the defined stretching continues to be maintained while traveling downhill.

9. A vehicle/trailer unit, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit comprises:

a towing vehicle, and

an implement that can be mechanically connected to the towing vehicle and coupled therewith,

wherein the towing vehicle has a combustion engine and a first machine that can be operated as a prime mover, as well as a first axle that can be driven by means of the combustion engine, with the combustion engine being drivable by means of the first machine, and

wherein the implement has a second machine that can be operated as a work machine and a second axle that is mechanically coupled with the second machine, wherein the

vehicle/trailer unit is embodied such that at least a portion of an energy generated by the second machine can be utilized to drive the first machine.

10. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 9, wherein the first machine is an electric machine that can be operated as an electric motor, a turbomachine that can be operated as a turbine, or a reciprocating piston engine, and the second machine is an electric machine that can be operated as a generator or a turbomachine that can be operated as a pump.

11. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 9, wherein the first machine of the towing vehicle can also be operated as a work machine and the second machine of the implement can also be operated as a prime mover, and the second axle of the implement, which is mechanically coupled with the second machine, can be operated by means of the second machine,

that the vehicle/trailer unit, particularly the towing vehicle, has a device for determining at least one driving state,

that the vehicle/trailer unit can be operated in a first operating mode or in at least one additional operating mode as a function of a determined driving state,

that, in the first operating mode, in which the vehicle/trailer unit is in overrun mode and/or braking mode:

the second machine is operated as a work machine and driven by means of kinetic energy of the second axle, and

the first machine is operated as the prime mover and drives the combustion engine,

that, in the at least one additional operating mode:

the first machine is operated as the work machine and driven by the combustion engine, and

the second machine is operated as the prime mover and drives the drivable axle of the implement, and

that the first machine and the second machine are coupled together such that energy that is generated by the first machine can be utilized to drive the second machine.

12. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 9, wherein the first machine and/or the second machine is an electric machine that can be operated both as an electric motor or as a generator, or a turbomachine that can be operated as a turbine or as a pump.

13. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 9, wherein the towing vehicle has an engine braking device, wherein an engine braking torque can be applied by means of the engine braking device at least to the first axle of the towing vehicle.

14. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 13, wherein the engine braking device has an exhaust braking device.

15. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 13, wherein the engine braking device has a decompression braking device.

16. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 13, wherein the engine braking device has a vented braking device.

17. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 9, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit has at least one control device for controlling the first machine and/or the engine braking device, with it being possible for the first machine and/or the engine braking device to be controlled such that a defined engine braking torque can be applied to the first axle of the towing vehicle.

18. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim 9, wherein the vehicle/trailer unit has at least one control device for controlling the second machine, with it being possible for

the second machine to be controlled such that a defined torque, can be applied to the second axle of the of the implement.

19. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim **17**, wherein a defined braking torque distribution can be set between the engine braking torque that can be applied by means of the first machine and/or the engine braking device to the first axle of the towing vehicle and the braking torque that can be applied by means of the second machine to the second axle of the implement.

20. The vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim **19**, wherein the braking torque distribution can be set such that a defined stretching or compressing of the vehicle/trailer unit is achieved.

21. A towing vehicle, wherein the towing vehicle is designed to form a vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim **9** in at least one mechanically coupled state with an appropriately designed implement.

22. An implement, wherein the implement is designed to form a vehicle/trailer unit as set forth in claim **9** in an at least mechanically coupled state with an appropriately designed towing vehicle.

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