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(54) **UNDER-SPEED DETECTION IN A VARIABLE-SPEED POWER TOOL**

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

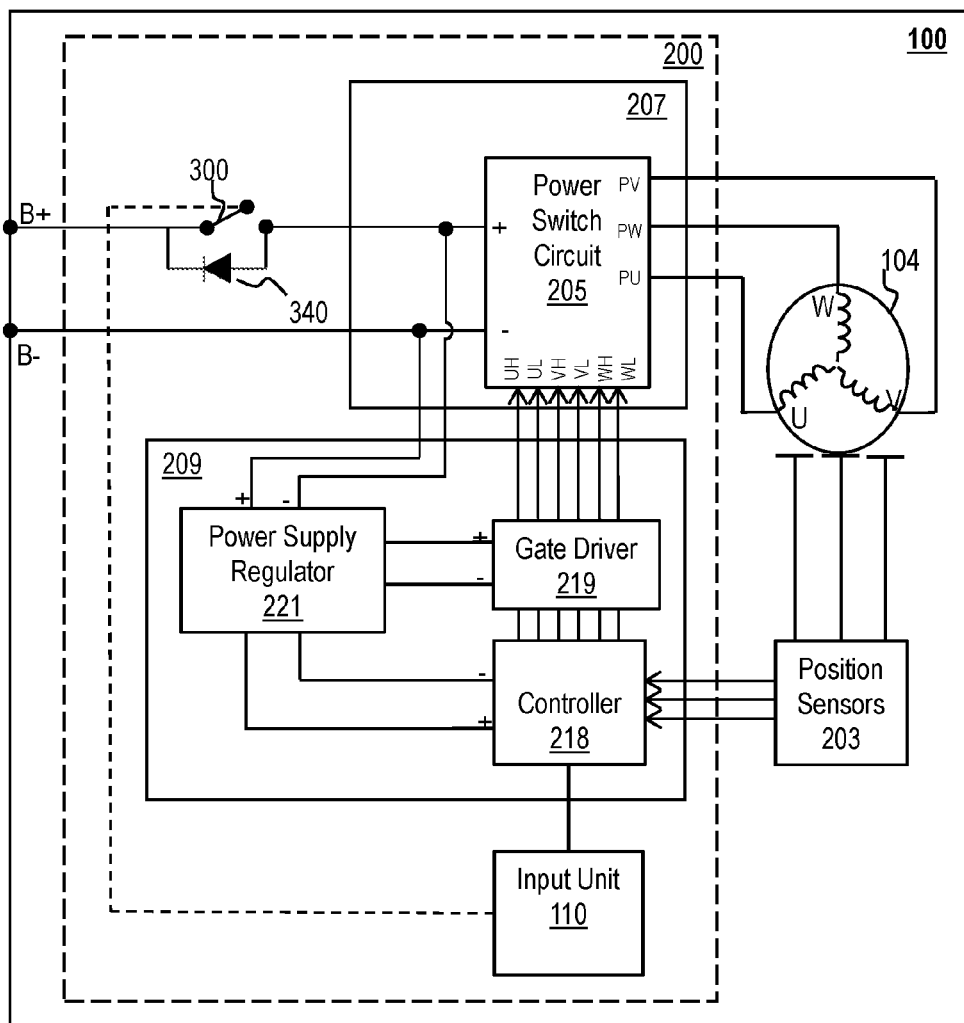
(21) Appl. No.: **18/624,430**

A method of operating a power tool having a motor and a controller is provided. The method includes: receiving a speed signal from a variable-speed input mechanism mounted on the power tool; determining a target speed of the motor corresponding to the speed signal; controlling a supply of power to the motor based on the target speed; determining an underspeed threshold corresponding to at least one of the target speed or the speed signal; determining a rotational speed of the motor; and interrupting a supply of power to the motor if the rotational speed of the motor meets a criterion in relation to the underspeed threshold.

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Related U.S. Application Data

(63) Continuation of application No. 17/739,617, filed on May 9, 2022, now Pat. No. 11,973,451.



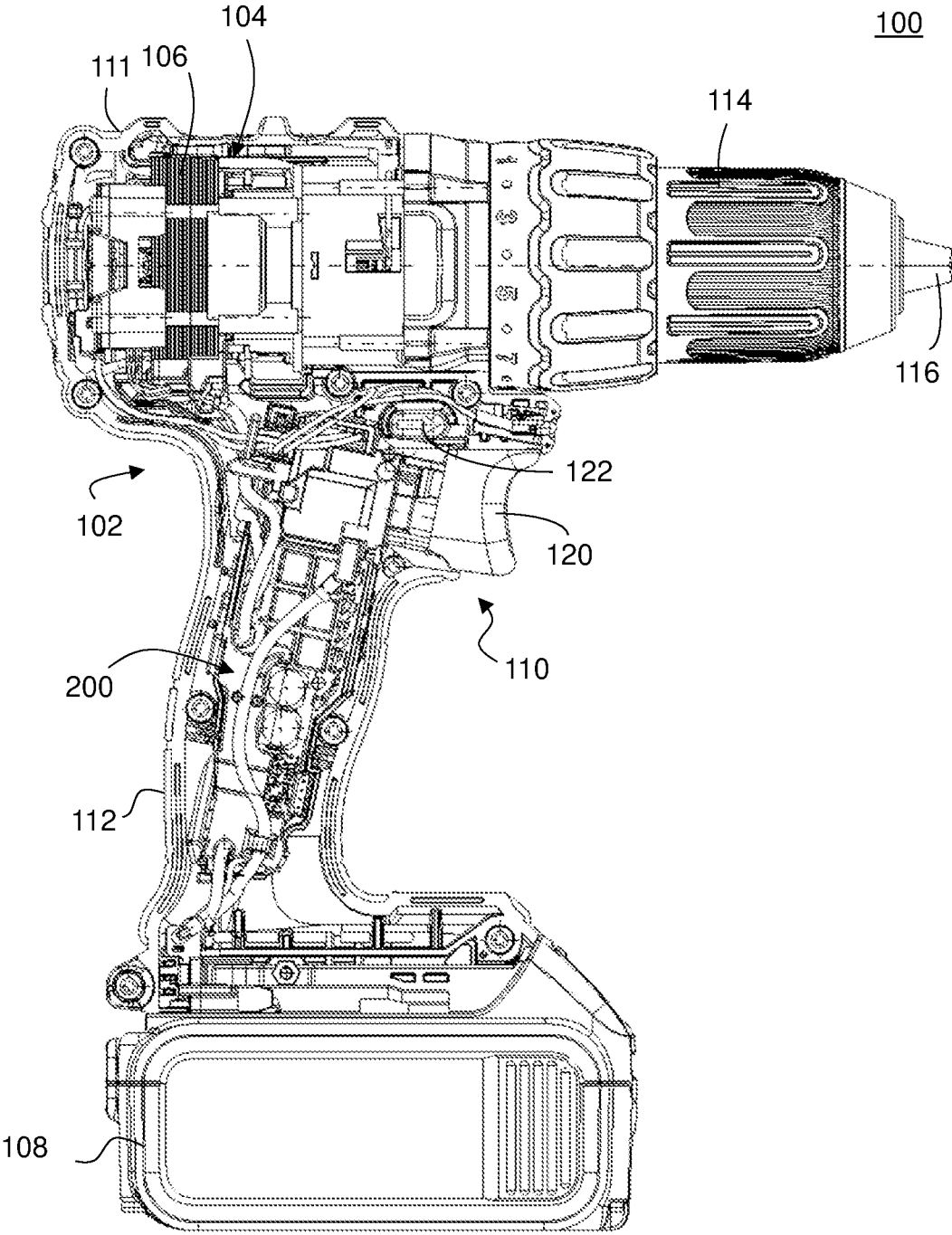


FIG. 1

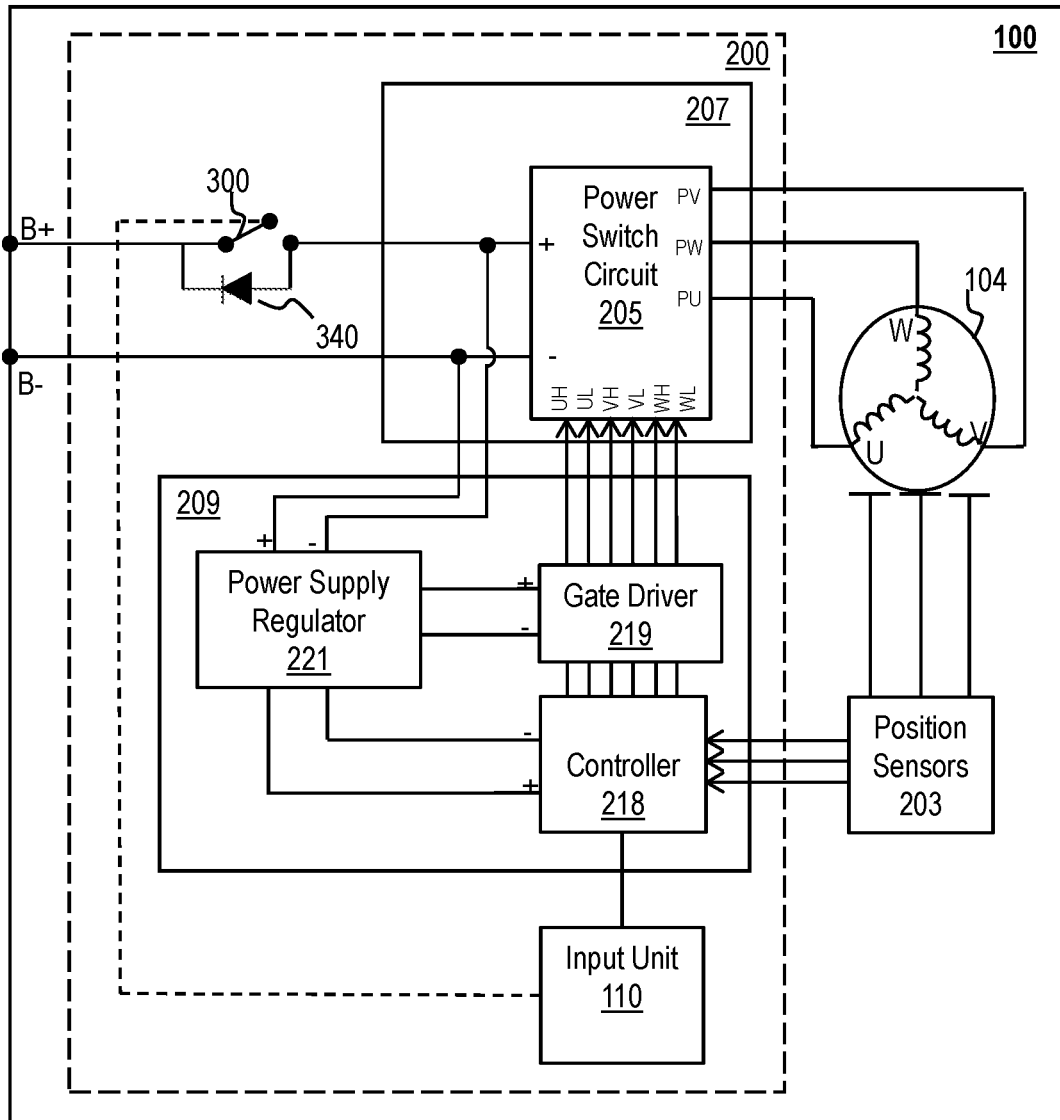


FIG. 2

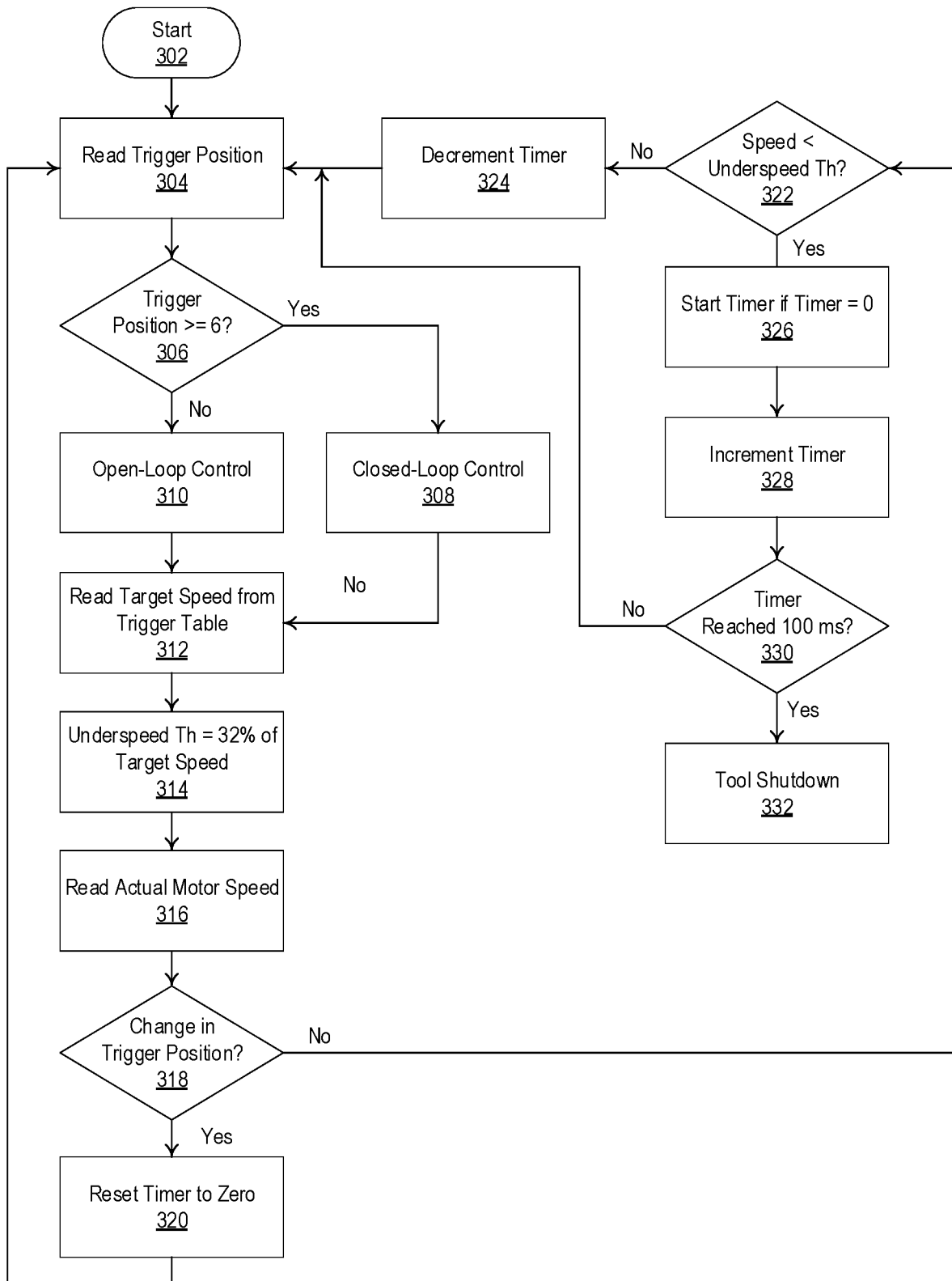


FIG. 3

UNDER-SPEED DETECTION IN A VARIABLE-SPEED POWER TOOL

RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This patent application is a continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 17/739,617 filed May 9, 2022, which claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application No. 63/186,885 filed May 11, 2021, both of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entireties.

FIELD

[0002] This application relates to a variable-speed power tool, and in particular, to speed control in a variable-speed power tool.

SUMMARY

[0003] According to an embodiment, a method of operating a power tool having a motor and a controller is provided, the method comprising: receiving a position of a variable-speed input mechanism mounted on the power tool; determining a target speed of the motor corresponding to the position of the variable-speed input mechanism; determining an underspeed threshold corresponding to the target speed; determining a rotational speed of the motor; and interrupting a supply of power to the motor if the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold.

[0004] In an embodiment, the supply of power to the motor is interrupted if the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold for a predetermined period of time.

[0005] In an embodiment, the method further includes utilizing a timer that is incremented every time the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold, wherein the timer is reset every time a change in the position of the variable-speed input mechanism is detected.

[0006] In an embodiment, the timer is decremented every time the rotational speed of the motor is greater than or equal to the underspeed threshold.

[0007] In an embodiment, the method further includes: controlling the rotational speed of the motor in a closed-loop speed control if the position of the variable-speed input mechanism is greater than or equal to a threshold position, wherein the rotational speed of the motor is maintained at the target output speed even with increased torque; and controlling the rotational speed of the motor in an open-loop speed control if the position of the variable-speed input mechanism is not greater than or equal to the threshold position, wherein the rotational speed of the motor varies with increased torque.

[0008] In an embodiment, in closed-loop speed control, a pulse-width modulation (PWM) duty cycle for driving the motor is set according to the position and at least one of a measured current of the motor or a detected change in a rotational speed of the motor.

[0009] In an embodiment, the variable-speed input mechanism includes at least one of a trigger switch, a speed dial, a capacitive switch, or a touch-switch.

[0010] In an embodiment, the controller is configured to determine the target speed of the motor from a look-up table or a continuous equation, and calculate the underspeed threshold as a function of the target speed.

[0011] According to an embodiment, a power tool is provided including a housing, a motor disposed within the

housing, a variable-speed input mechanism mounted on the housing, and a controller configured to control a supply of power from a power source to the motor. In an embodiment, the controller executes any combination of the aforementioned methods.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] Example embodiments of the present invention will become more fully understood from the detailed description given herein below and the accompanying drawings, wherein like elements are represented by like reference numerals, which are given by way of illustration only and thus are not limitative of the example embodiments of the present invention.

[0013] FIG. 1 depicts a longitudinal cross-sectional view of a power tool with a housing half removed, according to an embodiment;

[0014] FIG. 2 depicts an exemplary block circuit diagram for an electronic control module for controlling the power tool motor, according to an embodiment; and

[0015] FIG. 3 depicts an exemplary flow diagram for controlling the speed of the power tool motor.

DESCRIPTION

[0016] Example embodiments will now be described more fully with reference to the accompanying drawings.

[0017] With reference to the FIG. 1, a power tool **100** constructed in accordance with the teachings of the present disclosure is illustrated in a longitudinal cross-section view. Power tool **100** in the particular example provided may be a hand held dill, but it will be appreciated that the teachings of this disclosure is merely exemplary and the power tool of this invention could be any power tool. The power tool shown in FIG. 1 may include a housing **102**, an electric motor **104**, a battery receptacle for receiving a removable battery pack **108**, a transmission assembly (gear case) **114**, and an output spindle (not shown) driving a chuck **116**. The gear case **114** may be removably coupled to the housing **102**. The housing **102** can define a motor housing **111** and a handle **112**.

[0018] According to an embodiment, motor **104** includes a stator **106** received in motor housing **111**. Motor **104** maybe be any type of motor and may be powered by an appropriate power source. In an embodiment, the motor is a brushless DC electric motor including stator **106** and a rotor rotatably received within the stator **106**, and is powered by battery pack **108**.

[0019] According to an embodiment of the invention, power tool **100** further includes an integrated electronic switch and control module **200**. Electronic control module **200**, in an embodiment, may include a controller and electronic switching components for regulating the supply of power from the battery pack **108** to motor **106**. In an embodiment, electronic control module **200** is disposed within the handle **112** below the motor housing **111**, though it must be understood that depend on the power tool shape and specifications, electronic control module **200** may be disposed at any location within the power tool. Electronic control module may also integrally include components to support a user-actuated input unit **110** (hereinafter referred to as "input unit" **110**) for receiving user functions, such as an on/off signal, variable-speed signal, and forward-reverse signal. In an embodiment, input unit **100** may include a

variable-speed trigger **120**, although other input mechanism such as a touch-sensor, a capacitive-sensor, a speed dial, etc. may also be utilized. In an embodiment, an on/off signal is generated upon initial actuation of the variable-speed trigger **120**. In an embodiment, a forward/reverse button **122** is additionally provided on the tool **100**. The forward/reverse button **122** may be pressed on either side of the tool in a forward, locked, or reverse position. In an embodiment, the associated circuitry and components of the input unit **110** that support the variable-speed trigger **120** and the forward/reverse button **122** may be fully or at least partially integrated into the electronic control module **200**. Based on the input signals from the input unit **110** and associated components, the controller and electronic switching components of the electronic control module **200** modulate and regulate the supply of power from the battery pack **108** to motor **106**. Details of the electronic control module **200** are discussed later in detail.

[0020] While in this embodiment, the power source is battery pack **108**, it is envisioned that the teachings of this disclosure may be applied to a power tool with an AC power source. Such a power tool may include, for example, a rectifier circuit coupled to the AC power source.

[0021] It must be understood that, while FIG. 1 illustrates a power tool drill having a brushless motor, the teachings of this disclosure may be used in any power tool, including, but not limited to, drills, saws, nailers, fasteners, impact wrenches, grinders, sanders, cutters, etc. Also, teachings of this disclosure may be used in any other type of tool or product that include a rotary electric motor, including, but not limited to, mowers, string trimmers, vacuums, blowers, sweepers, edgers, etc.

[0022] The electronic control module **200** is described herein, according to an embodiment of the invention.

[0023] Referring to FIG. 2, a circuit block diagram of power tool **100** including motor **104** and electronic control module **200** is depicted, according to an embodiment.

[0024] In an embodiment, electronic control module **200** includes the input unit **110**, a power unit **207** and a control unit **209**. In FIG. 2, power tool **100** received DC power from a DC power source such as a battery pack via B+ and B- terminals.

[0025] In an embodiment, power unit **207** may include a power switch circuit **205** coupled between the power source B+/B- terminals and motor windings to drive BLDC motor **104**. In an embodiment, power switch circuit **205** may be a three-phase bridge driver circuit including six controllable semiconductor power devices (e.g. FETs, BJTs, IGBTs, etc.).

[0026] In an embodiment, control unit **209** may include a controller **218**, a gate driver **219**, and a power supply regulator **221**. In an embodiment, controller **218** is a programmable device arranged to control a switching operation of the power devices in power switching circuit **226**. In an embodiment, controller **218** receives rotor rotational position signals from a set of position sensors **203** provided in close proximity to the motor **104** rotor. In an embodiment, position sensors **203** may be Hall sensors. It should be noted, however, that other types of positional sensors may be alternatively utilized.

[0027] In an embodiment, controller **218** is activated by the input unit **110** upon the initial actuation of the trigger **120**. The input unit **110** also provides a variable voltage signal indicative of the displacement of the trigger **120** to the

controller **218**. Based on the rotor rotational position signals from the position sensors **203** and the variable voltage signal, controller **218** outputs drive signals UH, VH, WH, UL, VL, and WL through the gate driver **219**, which provides a voltage level needed to drive the gates of the semiconductor switches within the power switch circuit **205** in order to control a PWM switching operation of the power switch circuit **205**.

[0028] In an embodiment, power supply regulator **221** may include one or more voltage regulators to step down the power supply to a voltage level compatible for operating the controller **218** and/or the gate driver **219**. In an embodiment, power supply regulator **221** may include a buck converter and/or a linear regulator to reduce the power voltage of battery down to, for example, 15V for powering the gate driver **219**, and down to, for example, 3.2V for powering the controller **218**.

[0029] In an embodiment, electronic control module **200** includes components and circuitry associated with the user-actuated input unit **110**. Such components may detect a movement of the trigger **120** and initiate a signal to turn on the controller and other components of electronic control module **200**. In an example, as described in U.S. Pat. No. 9,508,498, content of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, electronic control module **200** may include a series of conductive pads coupled to a series of resistors that output various voltages based on the position of a wiper coupled to the trigger switch. Upon initial engagement of the trigger switch, the output voltage signal (referred to as the WIPER signal in FIG. 12 of the '498 patent, and as the switch signal hereinafter) exhibits a prescribed change in voltage that, though associated circuitry, couples the controller to battery power supply and turns the controller on.

[0030] In an embodiment, the switch signal may be active high, meaning that a high voltage signal is generated on the switch signal when the trigger is pressed. Alternatively, and consistent with FIG. 12 of the '498 patent discussed above, the switch signal may be active low, meaning that the voltage signal on Switch Signal is normally a high voltage (e.g., equivalent to the battery voltage), that changes to a lower voltage amount when the trigger is pressed.

[0031] In an embodiment, electronic control module **200** is provided with a power contact switch **300** and a flyback diode **340** disposed in parallel to the power contact switch **300**. Power contact switch **300** is a contact ON/OFF switch coupled to the trigger **120** and/or the input unit **110**.

[0032] In an embodiment, as the trigger **120** is pressed, the output voltage signal from the conductive pads varies in correspondence to the amount of trigger pull. This controller **218** monitors the output voltage signal and determines the target speed of the motor **104** accordingly. The controller **218** controls the speed of the motor **104** by setting the PWM duty cycle of the power switch circuit **205** as a function of the target speed. This is typically done via a look-up table, where the trigger position is designated 10 discrete values ranging from the initial trigger position (1) to maximum trigger position (10), and PWM duty cycle is set incrementally as a function of the trigger position between 0% at the initial trigger position to 100% at the maximum trigger position. In an embodiment, additionally and or alternatively, the controller **218** may vary the conduction angle (i.e., conduction band) of the phases of the motor **104** in accordance with the trigger position.

[0033] In an embodiment, the speed of the motor **104** is controlled only as a function of the trigger position, in what is commonly known as open-loop speed control. In this scheme, as the increased torque on the motor demands higher current to be drawn from the power supply, the PWM duty cycle and/or the conduction band of the motor **104** is not varied by the controller **218**. This cause the output speed to drop as torque increases. Alternatively, the speed of the motor **104** is controlled so as to maintain the target speed even as the torque varies, in what is commonly known as closed-loop speed control.

[0034] In an embodiment, closed-loop speed control is desirable particularly for high torque applications. However, in a variable-speed power tool, at low target speeds where the user has begun to press the trigger switch, the user should desirably be given the ability to get speed feedback for a given amount of trigger pull and judge whether a given application should be operated at a higher speed setting. Also, at very high torque, operating the motor with closed-loop speed control may cause the motor to be operated at high levels of duty cycle (e.g., even up to 100%) at very low trigger positions, whereas desirably high levels of duty cycle should be preferably achieved only at high speed settings.

[0035] According to an embodiment of the invention, to implement closed-loop speed control efficiently for variable-speed tools, closed-loop speed control is activated for an upper range of trigger positions and deactivated for a lower range of trigger positions. In an example, as shown in Table 1 below, at trigger positions 1-5, the motor **104** is run at open-loop, and closed-loop speed control is only activated at trigger positions 6-10. This allows the controller **218** to operate the motor **104** at closed-loop at high trigger positions to maintain constant speed at high torque without sacrificing the user experience at low trigger positions where speed feedback is desired.

[0036] Additionally, in many power tools, an underspeed shutdown protection is provided, where the controller **218** shuts down the tool if the duty cycle is at 100% and the output speed of the motor **104** is below a specified underspeed threshold. This indicates that the motor **104** is drawing too much current, but since the speed is too low, it is not performing its intended application effectively. For example, in some conventional power tools, the underspeed condition is detected at the last trigger position and, if the condition persists for a given period of time (e.g., 100 ms), the controller shuts down supply of power to the motor. This could open chances of failure when the tool is operating at lower than the maximum trigger position.

[0037] In an embodiment, to avoid nuisance shutdowns and provide a more robust and reliable underspeed provide protection scheme in variable-speed tools, discrete underspeed shutdown thresholds are provided corresponding to various trigger positions, as shown in Table 1 below. In an embodiment, the underspeed shutdown threshold is calculated as a function (e.g., 32%) of the target speed for the given trigger position. If the output speed of the motor falls below the underspeed shutdown threshold for a predetermined amount of time (e.g., 100 ms), the controller **218** deactivates the power switch circuit **205** to shut off flow of current to the motor **104**.

TABLE 1

Wiper Step (i.e., Trigger Position)	Target Speed	Commanded Duty	Underspeed Shutdown Threshold	Closed Loop Duty
1.	0	0	0	Disabled
2.	1600	6%	512	Disabled
3.	1839	7%	588	Disabled
4.	3675	14%	1176	Disabled
5.	6007	22.9%	1922	Disabled
6.	8794	33.5%	2814	Enabled
7.	12007	45.8%	3842	Enabled
8.	15623	59.62%	4999	Enabled
9.	19624	74.9%	6279	Enabled
10.	26200	100%	8384	Enabled

[0038] FIG. 3 depicts a flow diagram **300** executed by the controller **218** to execute the under-speed and closed-loop speed control method described above. In an embodiment, beginning in step **302**, the current position of the trigger **120** is read at step **304**. The trigger position is compared to a threshold value, in this example, 6 out of 10 steps, at step **306**. If the trigger position is greater than or equal to the threshold value, the controller **218** executes closed-loop speed control at step **308**. Otherwise, the controller **218** executes open-loop speed control at step **310**.

[0039] In an embodiment, the controller **218** proceeds to read a target speed corresponding to the read trigger position from Table 1 at step **312** and operate the motor at a duty cycle corresponding to the target speed. The underspeed threshold is also read from Table 1 or calculated as a function (e.g., 32%) of the target speed at step **314**. The actual motor speed is read via position sensors **203** or calculated via a known sensorless mechanism (e.g., by monitoring the back-emf voltage of the motor) at step **316**.

[0040] In an embodiment, a timer is used by the controller **218** to interrupt power to the motor **104** if an undervoltage condition is detected for a predetermined amount of time, e.g. 100 ms. In an embodiment, to ensure that the motor **104** has had the necessary time to catch up to its target speed in the event the trigger position has gone through a change, the controller **218** determines whether the trigger position has changed since its previous evaluation at step **318**. If a change in the trigger position is detected, the controller **218** resets the timer to zero at step **320** and returns to step **304**. This ensures that the underspeed detection process is performed anew for any given trigger position. If no change in the trigger position is detected, the controller **218** proceeds to steps **322**, where it compares the speed of the motor to the underspeed threshold. If the motor speed is greater than or equal to the underspeed threshold, the controller **218** decrements the timer (if the timer is already running) to a value no less than zero at step **324** and returns to step **304** where the process is repeated. However, if the motor speed is less than the underspeed threshold, the timer is started (if it is not already running) at step **326** and incremented at step **328**. The timer is compared to the threshold time (e.g., 100 ms) at step **330**. If the timer has reached the threshold time, the controller **218** determines that an underspeed condition has occurred for the given trigger position and shuts down flow of current to the motor **104** at step **332**. Otherwise the process is repeated beginning at step **304**. Incrementing the timer each time an underspeed condition is detected, and similarly decrementing the timer each time an underspeed condition is not detected, ensures that the motor **104** is only

shut down when the underspeed condition is persistent, and not upon detection of sporadic and infrequent underspeed events.

[0041] The foregoing description of the embodiments has been provided for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the disclosure. Individual elements or features of a particular embodiment are generally not limited to that particular embodiment, but, where applicable, are interchangeable and can be used in a selected embodiment, even if not specifically shown or described. The same may also be varied in many ways. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the disclosure, and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of the disclosure.

[0042] The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular example embodiments only and is not intended to be limiting. As used herein, the singular forms “a,” “an,” and “the” may be intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. The terms “comprises,” “comprising,” “including,” and “having,” are inclusive and therefore specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof. The method steps, processes, and operations described herein are not to be construed as necessarily requiring their performance in the particular order discussed or illustrated, unless specifically identified as an order of performance. It is also to be understood that additional or alternative steps may be employed.

[0043] When an element or layer is referred to as being “on,” “engaged to,” “connected to,” or “coupled to” another element or layer, it may be directly on, engaged, connected or coupled to the other element or layer, or intervening elements or layers may be present. In contrast, when an element is referred to as being “directly on,” “directly engaged to,” “directly connected to,” or “directly coupled to” another element or layer, there may be no intervening elements or layers present. Other words used to describe the relationship between elements should be interpreted in a like fashion (e.g., “between” versus “directly between,” “adjacent” versus “directly adjacent,” etc.). As used herein, the term “and/or” includes any and all combinations of one or more of the associated listed items.

[0044] Although the terms first, second, third, etc. may be used herein to describe various elements, components, regions, layers and/or sections, these elements, components, regions, layers and/or sections should not be limited by these terms. These terms may be only used to distinguish one element, component, region, layer or section from another region, layer or section. Terms such as “first,” “second,” and other numerical terms when used herein do not imply a sequence or order unless clearly indicated by the context. Thus, a first element, component, region, layer or section discussed below could be termed a second element, component, region, layer or section without departing from the teachings of the example embodiments.

[0045] Spatially relative terms, such as “inner,” “outer,” “beneath,” “below,” “lower,” “above,” “upper,” “bottom,” “lower,” and the like, may be used herein for ease of description to describe one element or feature’s relationship to another element(s) or feature(s) as illustrated in the figures. Spatially relative terms may be intended to encom-

pass different orientations of the device in use or operation in addition to the orientation depicted in the figures. For example, if the device in the figures is turned over, elements described as “below” or “beneath” other elements or features would then be oriented “above” the other elements or features. Thus, the example term “below” can encompass both an orientation of above and below. The device may be otherwise oriented (rotated 90 degrees or at other orientations) and the spatially relative descriptors used herein interpreted accordingly.

1. A method of operating a power tool having a motor and a controller, the method comprising:

receiving a speed signal from a variable-speed input mechanism mounted on the power tool;

determining a target speed of the motor corresponding to the speed signal;

controlling a supply of power to the motor based on the target speed;

determining an underspeed threshold corresponding to at least one of the target speed or the speed signal;

determining a rotational speed of the motor; and
interrupting a supply of power to the motor if the rotational speed of the motor meets a criterion in relation to the underspeed threshold.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein the supply of power to the motor is interrupted if the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold for a predetermined period of time.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising utilizing a timer that is incremented every time the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold, wherein the timer is reset every time a change in the position of the variable-speed input mechanism is detected.

4. The method of claim 3, wherein the timer is decremented every time the rotational speed of the motor is greater than or equal to the underspeed threshold.

5. The method of claim 1, further comprising:

controlling the rotational speed of the motor in a closed-loop speed control if the target speed is greater than or equal to a threshold target, wherein the rotational speed of the motor is maintained at the target speed even with increased torque; and

controlling the rotational speed of the motor in an open-loop speed control if the target speed is not greater than or equal to the threshold target, wherein the rotational speed of the motor varies with increased torque.

6. The method of claim 5, wherein in closed-loop speed control, a pulse-width modulation (PWM) duty cycle for driving the motor is set according to the target speed and at least one of a measured current of the motor or a detected change in a rotational speed of the motor.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein the variable-speed input mechanism includes at least one of a trigger switch, a speed dial, a capacitive switch, or a touch-switch.

8. A power tool comprising:

a housing;

a motor disposed within the housing;

a variable-speed input mechanism mounted on the housing; and

a controller configured to receive a speed signal from the variable-speed input mechanism, determine a target speed of the motor corresponding to the speed signal, control a supply of power to the motor based on the target speed, determine an underspeed threshold corre-

sponding to at least one of the target speed or the speed signal, determine a rotational speed of the motor, and interrupt the supply of power to the motor if the rotational speed of the motor meets a criterion in relation to the underspeed threshold.

9. The power tool of claim 8, wherein the supply of power to the motor is interrupted if the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold for a predetermined period of time.

10. The power tool of claim 9, wherein the controller utilizes a timer that is incremented every time the rotational speed of the motor is less than the underspeed threshold, wherein the timer is reset every time a change in the position of the variable-speed input mechanism is detected.

11. The power tool of claim 10, wherein the timer is decremented every time the rotational speed of the motor is greater than or equal to the underspeed threshold.

12. The power tool of claim 8, wherein the controller is further configured to:

control the rotational speed of the motor in a closed-loop speed control if the target speed is greater than or equal

to a threshold target, wherein the rotational speed of the motor is maintained at the target speed even with increased torque; and

control the rotational speed of the motor in an open-loop speed control if the target speed is not greater than or equal to the threshold target, wherein the rotational speed of the motor varies with increased torque.

13. The power tool of claim 12, wherein in closed-loop speed control, a pulse-width modulation (PWM) duty cycle for driving the motor is set according to the target speed and at least one of a measured current of the motor or a detected change in a rotational speed of the motor.

14. The power tool of claim 8, wherein the variable-speed input mechanism includes at least one of a trigger switch, a speed dial, a capacitive switch, or a touch-switch.

15. The power tool of claim 8, wherein the controller is configured to determine the target speed of the motor based on the speed signal using at least one of a look-up table or a continuous equation, and calculate the underspeed threshold as a function of the target speed.

* * * * *