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Turbine-driven swimming pool cleaning apparatus

Abstract

A swimming pool cleaner is driven along a submerged surface by water and debris flowing past a turbine positioned between an inlet and outlet of the cleaner. Retractable elements carried proximate the inlet form a plenum for water to enhance adherence of the pool cleaner to the submerged pool surface being cleaner. A drive train independently drives each of two wheels for maneuvering the pool cleaner in forward and reverse directions along the submerged surface. A hose connector operable with an outlet port is angled toward the forward direction of movement of the pool cleaner such that a suction hose will be placed slightly ahead of the pool cleaner when climbing a side wall surface to provide a weight for keeping the cleaner below the water surface and thus prevent an undesirable sucking of air at the inlet.

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Background/Summary

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS (1) This is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/813,665, filed Mar. 9, 2020, now U.S. Pat. No. 11,359,398, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 16/156,629, filed Oct. 10, 2018, now U.S. Pat. No. 10,584,507, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 15/891,786, filed Feb. 8, 2018, now U.S. Pat. No. 10,145,137, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/976,404, filed Dec. 21, 2015, now U.S. Pat. No. 10,036,175, which is a continuation-in-part application of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/685,861, filed Apr. 14, 2015, now U.S. Pat. No. 9,217,260 which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/017,758, filed Sep. 4, 2013, now U.S. Pat. No. 9,032,575, which claims priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/720,208, filed Oct. 30, 2012 for Turbine-Driven Swimming Pool Cleaning Apparatus and Method, the disclosures of which are hereby incorporated by reference herein in their entirety.

FIELD OF INVENTION

(1) The present invention generally relates to swimming pool cleaners, and more particularly to an automatic pool cleaner driven by a flow of water through a turbine engine for providing movement along and cleaning of submerged surfaces to be cleaned.

BACKGROUND

(2) Submersible pool cleaners having driving mechanisms carried within a housing that engages the submerged surface of the pool are generally well known, such as the three or four wheeled swimming pool pressure cleaners with internal steering mechanism described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 6,782,578 and 6,854,148 to Rief et al., the disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety. Various pool cleaners are turbine driven, as in the aforementioned patents, including a turbine motor as described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,292,970, the disclosures of which are herein incorporated by reference in their entirety. Further, also generally known are the problems associated with debris clogging fluid flow passages, wearing cleaner components rendering the cleaner ineffective or unusable, and the difficulty for a consumer attempting to replace such worn components.

(3) As is well known, and as emphasized in U.S. Pat. No. 6,131,227 to Rief et al, the disclosure of which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety, the proper functioning of swimming pool cleaners typically relies on a skirt bordering and extending downwardly from the body of the pool cleaner. The skirt generally maintains an effective fluid suction within a plenum of water proximate

the inlet to the cleaner, generally dislodges loose debris, accommodates uneven surfaces, provides a fluid suction force to keep the pool cleaner pressed against the submerged surface and yet allow the pool cleaner to travel up and across submerged steeply inclined and vertical surfaces.
(4) There remains a need to improve upon performance of the submersible pool cleaner such that the pool cleaner can effectively and efficiently automatically navigate over obstacles such as bottom drains and larger debris, and be able to upright itself in the event it should fall on its back. Yet further, when debris flows through the turbine, it is desirable to have the debris work its way through the cleaner while maintaining maximum power without compromising function, and without having to stop automatic operation and access the housing to clean the debris. Those experienced with submersible pool cleaners appreciate that it is desirable to keep the cleaner below the water surface to prevent it from sucking air as it climbs vertical walls of the pool.
(5) Embodiments of the present invention herein described provide an efficiently run submersible cleaner which includes components that are easily replaceable by the consumer and operate to meet such needs.

SUMMARY

(6) By way of example, submersible pool cleaners according to the teachings of the present invention may comprise a turbine motor driven by a flow of water for operation of the pool cleaner along a submerged surface to be cleaned. The turbine comprises a turbine housing having a rotor rotatably mounted in a chamber to provide a flow path for water and debris around the rotor. Turbine vanes may be rigidly attached about and extend from a periphery of the turbine rotor. A valve element may be located proximate the vanes and inlet port such that the valve element is movable with respect to distal ends of the turbine vanes to allow passage of debris of substantial size through the turbine. The pool cleaner may include a roller positioned on a bottom forward portion thereof proximate the inlet port and a retractable element, such as an elongate flap or second roller, pivotably carried by the pool cleaner and positioned on a bottom rearward portion proximate the inlet port. The roller and retractable element, in combination with walls of the housing of the cleaner, form a plenum of water enhancing adherence of the pool cleaner to the pool surface.
(7) A hose connector operable with an outlet port is angled toward the forward direction of movement of the pool cleaner such that a hose connected to the hose connector will be placed slightly ahead of the pool cleaner when climbing a side wall surface. A water filled hose provides weight for keeping the cleaner below the water surface and thus prevents a sucking of air at an inlet port.

Description

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF DRAWINGS

(1) For a fuller understanding of the invention, reference is made to the following detailed description, taken in connection with the accompanying drawings illustrating various embodiments of the present invention, in which:
(2) FIG. **1** is a top, front right perspective view of one embodiment of a submersible swimming pool cleaner according to the teachings of the present invention;
(3) FIG. **2** is a front elevation view of the submersible swimming pool cleaner illustrated in FIG. **1**;
(4) FIG. **3** is a rear elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. **1**;
(5) FIG. **3**A is a rear elevation view of an alternate embodiment of FIG. **1**, wherein a rear roller is replaced with a wiper element, such as a flap, by way of example;
(6) FIG. **4** is a bottom view of the embodiment of FIG. **1**;
(7) FIG. **4**A is a bottom perspective of the embodiment of FIG. **1**
(8) FIG. **4**B is a top view of the embodiment of FIG. **1**;

(9) FIG. **4**C is a side elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. **1**;
(10) FIG. **4**D is a bottom plan view of the embodiment of FIG. **3**A;
(11) FIG. **5** is a cross-sectional view taken through lines **5**B-**5**B of FIG. **3**A;
(12) FIG. **5**A is a cut-away side view taken through lines **5**A-**5**A of FIG. **2** is a first position having forward and aft rollers extending outside a perimeter of the wheel;
(13) FIG. **5**B a cut-away view illustrating the rollers retracted within the perimeter of the wheels;
(14) FIG. **6** is a top perspective view of the embodiment of FIG. **5** illustrated with the turbine housing cover and hose connector removed for more clearly viewing the turbine;
(15) FIG. **7** is a partial top perspective view of the swimming pool cleaner of FIG. **1** illustrated with a top removable housing cover portion removed from the housing;
(16) FIG. **7**A is a partial top perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the swimming pool cleaner of FIG. **1** employing an independently operated dual drive system herein illustrated with the top removable housing cover portion removed from the housing;
(17) FIG. **8** is a bottom side perspective view of a partial embodiment of FIG. **1** having a wheel removed for viewing internal components;
(18) FIG. **8**A is a partial end view of a flap having a slot for slidably receiving a hinge pin therein as an alternate embodiment;
(19) FIGS. **9** and **9**A are cross-sectional views of FIGS. **1** and **3**A, respectfully, proximate side portions including wheel and internal gearing portions within the housing;
(20) FIGS. **10** and **11** are partial perspective views illustrating a drive shaft engagement with primary and secondary wheel gears, respectively, for forward and steering rotation of one wheel;
(21) FIGS. **10**A and **11**A are partial perspective views of the embodiment of FIG. **7**A, illustrating a drive shaft engagement with primary and secondary wheel gears, respectively, for forward and steering rotation of a second wheel within a two-wheel drive embodiment herein described by way of example;
(22) FIGS. **12** and **13** are partial perspective views illustrating a steering cam and drive shaft contactor assembly operable with the pool cleaners herein described;
(23) FIG. **14** is a bottom perspective view of the embodiment of FIG. **1**;
(24) FIGS. **15**A and **15**B are partial perspective and side cross-sectional views, respectively, of internal portions of the pool cleaner of FIG. **1**, illustrating a latch connection for securing a housing cover onto a lower body portion; and
(25) FIG. **16** is a partial cross-sectional view illustrating a rearward portion of the swimming pool cleaner housing and connection to a wall of housing portion thereof.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENTS

(26) The present invention will now be described more fully hereinafter with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which preferred embodiments of the invention are shown by way of example only. This invention may be embodied in many different forms and should not be construed as limited to the embodiments set forth herein. Rather, these embodiments are provided so that this disclosure will be thorough and complete, and will fully convey the scope of the invention to those skilled in the art. Like numbers refer to like elements throughout.
(27) Referring initially to FIGS. **1**-**4**, one embodiment of a pool cleaner **10** according to the teachings of the present invention is herein described by way of example. The pool cleaner **10** comprises a housing **12** and first and second wheels **14**, **16** for moving the pool cleaner over a submerged surface **18** to be cleaned. The pool cleaner **10** is operable with a hose **20** connected to a hose connector **22** at one end and optionally to a suction pump (not shown) at another end of the hose, as typically known in the industry.
(28) As illustrated with reference to FIG. **5**, a driving function is provided to the pool cleaner **10** by a water turbine **24** carried within a turbine housing **26**. The turbine housing **26** includes a water flow chamber **28** formed by a chamber wall **30**, as illustrated with reference to FIG. **6**, wherein a turbine housing cover **27**, illustrated earlier with reference to FIG. **5**, has been removed for clarity.

The water flow chamber **28** includes inlet and outlet ports **32**, **34** allowing a flow of water **36** through the chamber. The inlet port **32** is positioned for receiving water and debris from the submerged pool surface **18**.

(29) With continued reference to FIGS. **5** and **6**, a rotor **38** is rotatably mounted in the chamber **28** and spaced from the chamber wall **30** at all positions about the rotor to provide a flow path, as illustrated reference to the water flow **36** for water and debris around the rotor. A plurality of turbine rigid vanes **40** are rigidly attached about and extend from a periphery **42** of the rotor **38**. As herein described, the rigid vanes **40** will be understood to have sufficient flexibility to accommodate passage of debris through the inlet port **32** without blockage, yet sufficiently rigid to accommodate volumes of water moving through the turbine chamber **28** for rotating the rotor **38**. Many materials will come to the mind of those skilled in the art, now having the benefit of the teachings of the present invention. For the embodiment herein described by way of example, a valve element **44** is pivotal about a proximal end **46** of the valve element such that a distal end **48** is movable with respect to distal ends **50** of the turbine vanes **40**. However, the valve element **44** may be flexible and fixed at its proximal end. The valve element **44** may be straight or have an arcuate shape. The valve element **44** is moveable between a first position **52** adjacent the vanes' distal ends **50** during rotation thereof and a second position **54** spaced from the vanes' distal ends and closer to the chamber wall **30** to allow passage of debris pieces of substantial size through the turbine **24**. For the embodiment herein described by way of example, the valve element **44** is contoured creating less pressure on its convex side proximate the vanes **40** when water flows over it, causing the valve element **44** to close a gap between the valve element and the vane distal ends **50** to maximizes power generated by the turbine **24**. The valve element **44** and rotor **38** generally define a preferable opening for the flow passage through the chamber **28**. The turbine **24** provides power to the wheels **14**, **16** through linkages and provides power for steering, both of which occur as water and debris are drawn through the chamber **28** by the action of the suction pump.

(30) The pool cleaner **10** includes a drive assembly **56** which uses the flow of water through the chamber **28** to create the rotary motion of the turbine **24** which is transferred to the wheels **14**, **16** by a drive train **58** as illustrated with continued reference to FIG. **6** and now to FIG. **7**. As is typical for such swimming pool cleaners, the flexible hose **20**, described earlier with reference to FIG. **1**, may be rotatably attached to the hose connector **22** and draws water from beneath the pool cleaner through the inlet port **32**, turbine **24** and outlet port **34** through the hose connector.

(31) As above described, the turbine **24** is the propulsion system of the pool cleaner **10**. In typical pool cleaners, there is always a precise balance in the distance between the turbine and the wall **30** housing the turbine. If the distance is to close, debris will get trapped in between. If the distance is too great the turbine **24** will lose power and will not function as desired. With reference again to FIGS. **5** and **6**, one embodiment of the invention further addresses this problem with the optional self-adjusting valve element **44**. When debris flows through the turbine **24**, it will push the valve element **44** out of the way and as a result the debris will not get trapped. Maximum power is attained without compromising function.

(32) With reference again to FIG. **6**, the drive train **58** operable from the rotor **38** to primary wheel gears **60** of the first and second wheels **14**, **16** provides synchronous rotation to both the first and second wheels for driving the pool cleaner along the surface **18** to be cleaned. The first wheel **14** comprises the primary wheel gear **60** radially spaced from a secondary wheel gear **62** opposing one another on an inside peripheral surface of the wheel **14**. The second wheel comprises the primary wheel gear **60** on an inside surface of the wheel **16**, as illustrated with reference to FIGS. **8-11**. Commercially, both wheels **14**, **16** may comprise the primary and secondary wheel gears **60**, **62** to accommodate replacement parts and efficiency in manufacturing, both wheels can be used to maneuver the cleaner in the rerouting process. For the embodiment herein illustrated with reference to FIGS. **6**, **10** and **11**, only the first wheel **14** is used in the rerouting process. As later described, an alternate embodiment includes independent driving and steering of each of the two wheels. Such a

"dual wheel drive" may be more desirable for maneuvering the pool cleaner in a rerouting process.
(33) With continued reference to FIG. **6**, the drive train **58** is operable with both the primary wheel gears **60** of the first and second wheels **14**, **16** for driving the pool cleaner **10** in a first or forward direction **64** along the submerged surface **18** of the pool, as illustrated with reference again to FIG. **1**. The drive train **58** includes a drive shaft **66** having one end **68** moveable between a driving position **70** when operable with the primary wheel gears **60** of the first and second wheels **14**, **16** through pinion gears **72** at ends thereof and the steering position **74** when the drive shaft **66** contacts a lesser radius portion **76** of a cam **78**, as illustrated with reference again to FIGS. **9-11**. Such forward and reverse wheel gears **60**, **62** are radially spaced from one another by a distance in excess of the diameter of the pinion gear **72** which alternately engages such gears on the one drive wheel **14**. As illustrated with reference to FIGS. **10**, **11** and **12**, a driveshaft contactor **80** contacts the cam **78** and the driveshaft one end **68** for movement of the one end of the driveshaft into and out of contact with the primary and secondary wheel gears **60**, **62**.
(34) As above described with reference to FIG. **6**, the drive train **58** is operable with both the primary wheel gears **60** of the first and second wheels **14**, **16** for driving the pool cleaner **10** in a first or forward direction **64** along the submerged surface **18** of the pool, as illustrated with reference again to FIG. **1**.
(35) In an alternate embodiment, now described with reference to FIGS. **7**A, **10**A and **11**A, the drive shaft **66** earlier described may be split between a left shaft portion **66** and a right shaft portion **66**A employing bearings **66**C that enable each portion of the split drive shaft to be manipulated independently and synchronously driven as desired. The drive gears **58** are driven by the turbine and in turn drive the drive shaft portions **66**, **66**A communicating through the bearings **66**C. The left and right reductions gears **84**, **84**A control rotation of the cams **78**, **78**A rotate, wherein each cam (Left and right) manipulates bearings in the drive shaft contactors **80**, **80**A which in turn move the drive shafts **66**, **66**A forwards and backwards engaging the teeth on the inner and outer wheel gears **60**, **62**. The drive shaft **66**, **66**A has both ends **68**, **68**A moveable between the driving position **70** when operable with the primary wheel gears **60** of the first and second wheels **14**, **16** through pinion gears **72**, **72**A at ends thereof and the steering position **74** when the drive shaft **66**, **66**A contacts a lesser radius portion **76** of a cam **78**, as illustrated with reference again to FIGS. **10**, **10**A, **11**, and **11**A. Such forward and reverse wheel gears **60**, **62** are radially spaced from one another by a distance in excess of the diameter of the pinion gears **72**, **72**A which alternately engage such gears on now drive wheels **14**, **16**. as may be desired. As illustrated with reference to FIGS. **10** and **11**, and again with reference to FIGS. **7**A, **10**A and **11**A, the driveshaft contactors **80**, **80**A contact the cam **78**, **78**A and the driveshaft ends **68**, **68**A for movement of ends of the driveshaft into and out of contact with the primary and secondary wheel gears **60**, **62**.
(36) It will be understood by those of skill in the art that coordination of the driving functions of the two wheels will be arranged to avoid any undesirable combinations of driving and steering. Rotation of the cams **78**, **78**A and contacting of the pinion gears **72**, **72**A will be such to provide a desired driving and interrupted steering of each wheel **14**, **16** without the operation of one wheel detrimental to the operation of the second wheel.
(37) As will be appreciated by those of ordinary skill in the art, the direction of travel **64** of the pool cleaner **10** will change during the intermittent periods of a reverse rotation of the one wheel **14** by the drive shaft one end **68** driving the secondary gear **62**. This steering function, together with the power provided by wheel drive provides a desired cleaning coverage of underwater pool surfaces. The dual drive embodiment drives the first and second wheels **14**, **16** in a similar manner, thus effectively enabling the pool cleaner to rotate in both directions (left & right) and also travel forward and reverse.
(38) The cams **78**, **78**A have portions of greater **82** and the lesser **76** radii and are rotatable by the rotor **38** of the turbine **24** through use of reduction gears **84**, **84**A. The drive shaft contactors **80**, **80**A extend from the cams **78**, **78**A to appropriate operable wheels **14**, **16** and intermittently

interrupt rotation of the wheels and reverses direction of rotation to thus cause a change in direction of movement of the pool cleaner **10**.

(39) Operation of the driving and steering mechanisms are similar for each wheel **14**, **16** depending upon the embodiment of interest, whether using a single wheel for steering the pool cleaner of both wheels. By way of example, and with reference again to FIGS. **8**, **9** and **13**, a contact roller **86** (**86**A for the embodiment of FIGS. **10**A and **11**A) at one end of the drive shaft contactor **80** engages the cam **78** which determines driving and steering positions **70**, **74** to provide forward or reverse movement of the wheels **14**, **16**. The drive shaft contactor **80** is biased into frictional engagement with the cam **78** using springs **81**, as illustrated with reference to FIG. **11** (or optionally FIGS. **11**A) and **13**. The pinion gear **72** engages the primary wheel gear **60** of the one wheel **14** in a forward moving of the pool cleaner **10**, and in a steering movement, the pinion gear engages the secondary wheel gear **62** which results in reverse rotation of the one wheel **14**. As above described, optionally, it may be desirable to provide steering using a reversing of both wheels.

(40) By way of further example, and with reference again to FIGS. **8**, **9** and **13**, a contact roller **86** at one end of the drive shaft contactor **80** engages the cam **78** which determines driving and steering positions **70**, **74** to provide forward or reverse movement of the wheels **14**, **16**. The drive shaft contactor **80** is biased into frictional engagement with the cam **78** using springs **81**, as illustrated with reference to FIGS. **11** and **13**. The pinion gear **72** engages the primary wheel gear **60** of the second wheel **16** in a forward moving of the pool cleaner **10**, and in a steering movement, the pinion gear engages the secondary wheel gear **62** which results in reverse rotation of the second wheel **16**. The intermittent movement of the drive shaft contactor **80** moves the drive shaft one end **68** and its pinion gear **72** which interrupts the synchronized rotation of the drive wheels **14**, **16** and causes a turning of the pool cleaner **10**. The cam **78** is rotatably supported on an extension of the rotor **38**, as are the reduction gears **84** used for reducing rotational speed such that the cam **78** turns at a slower rate and provide the intermittent movement for a desirable period.

(41) In a similar fashion, as above described with reference to FIGS. **10**A and **11**A for an alternate embodiment, the intermittent movement of the drive shaft contactor **80**A moves the drive shaft one end **68**A and its pinion gear **72**A which interrupts the synchronized rotation of the drive wheel **16** and causes a turning of the pool cleaner **10**. The cam **78**A is rotatably supported on an extension of the rotor **38**, as are the reduction gears **84**A used for reducing rotational speed such that the cam **78**A turns at a slower rate and provides the intermittent movement for a desirable preset period. Those of skill in the art will appreciate that the drive and steering mechanism for one wheel is generally a mirror image of that of the second wheel.

(42) A tread element **88** is carried about the periphery of the drive wheels **14**, **16** to provide traction on the pool surface **18** being cleaned. The tread element **88** in combination with the size of the drive wheels **14**, **16** is larger in diameter than the housing **12** is high. This allows the pool cleaner **10** to ride over commonly encountered impediments and obstacles in a swimming pool.

(43) With reference again to FIGS. **1** and **5**, a protrusion **90** is affixed at a portion of the tread element **88** of each wheel **14**, **16** and provides additional traction for dislodgement of the pool cleaner. The large wide wheels with one protrusion on each help dislodge the pool cleaner **10** in the event it gets stuck on objects in a pool. It has been found that when the pool cleaner is equipped with the independent wheel steering, it is likely that the protrusion **90** will not be necessary in some pool configurations, thus allowing the pool cleaner to transition and traverse the submerged surface of the pool with less interruption, and thus an improved performance.

(44) With reference again to FIGS. **1** and **2** and now to FIGS. **4**A and **5**A, by way of example, a first roller **100** is positioned on a forward bottom portion **102** of the housing **12** forward the inlet port **32**, The first roller, herein a forward roller **100** is moveable about a first axle **104** carried between opposing side wall portions **106**, **108** of the housing **12** for retracting within a perimeter **110** defined by radial outermost portions of the at least two wheels **14**, **16**, as further described with reference to FIG. **5**B.

(45) With continued reference to FIGS. **4**A and **5**A, a second roller **112** is positioned at an aft bottom portion **114** of the housing **12** aft the inlet port **32** and generally opposing the first roller **100**. The second roller **112** (herein an aft roller) extends between the opposing side wall portions **106**, **108** and is moveable about a second axle **116**. The second roller **112** is moveable from outside the perimeter **110** for contact with the surface to be cleaned **18** to inside the perimeter, as illustrated with reference again to FIG. **5**B, for permitting the second roller to roll along uneven portions of the submerged surface **18** to be cleaned. The first and second rollers **100**, **112**, in combination with the opposing side wall portions **106**, **108** of the housing **12**, form a plenum **118** for water, where the plenum of water enhances adherence of the pool cleaner to the submerged surface **18**.
(46) With reference again to FIGS. **1**, **2** and **4**A, by way of example, the rollers **100**, **112** comprise multiple roller portions **100** *a, b, c, d* and **112** *a, b, c, d*, wherein each of the multiple roller portions moves independently of one another about the axles **104**, **116**, respectively, for generally conforming to the uneven portions of the surface **18** to be cleaned. Further, rollers **100**, **112** are loosely rotatable about their respective axles **104**, **116**.
(47) With reference again to FIGS. **4**, **5**A and **5**B, a forward partition **120** and an aft partition **122** extend between the opposing side wall portions **106**, **108**. The forward partition **120** is fixed forward the inlet port **32** and the aft partition **122** is fixed aft the inlet port, wherein free ends of the partitions extend toward the perimeter **110** but only extend to inside the perimeter, thus spaced from the perimeter. An outer surface **124** of the first roller **100** continuously forms a fixed gap **126** with an outer surface **128** of the forward partition **120** during movement of the first roller **100** from outside to inside the perimeter **110**, as further illustrated with reference again to FIG. **5**B. As herein illustrated, the outer surface **128** of the forward partition **120** has an arcuate shape extending from the free end **130** of the forward partition toward the forward direction **64** of movement of the pool cleaner. As further illustrated, in one commercial embodiment, the rollers **100**, **112** are formed from tubes having their inner surfaces loosely slidable along their respective axles during rotation. For the first roller **100**, its inner surface **132** is dimensioned to maintain the gap **126** during movement of the first roller from outside the perimeter **110** to inside the perimeter. For providing reinforcement to the first axle **104**, the first axle is formed as a rib having an elongate cross section, as illustrated with continued reference to FIG. **5**A.
(48) As above described with reference to the first and second rollers **100**, **112**, with use of the wiper element **92** instead of the second roller **112**, the side wall portions **106**, **108**, front/first roller **100** and the wiper element **92** create the plenum **118** by essentially forming a skirt around the inlet port **32** enabling the cleaner **10** to have enhanced suction and thus enhanced attachment to the pool surface **18**. Since the rollers **100**, **112** move freely, they are able to retract within the outside perimeter **110** of the wheels **14**, **16** and have little resistance which enables the cleaner **10** to desirably transition into steep or angled walls. As above described, the rollers **100**, **112** having multiple segments moving independently of one another further enable them to conform to uneven surfaces in the pool. This also enables the cleaner **10** to navigate over obstacles such as bottom drains and larger debris. The rollers or roller and wiper in combination with the housing lower side wall portions keep the plenum substantially closed, thus providing a desirable flow and collection of debris from beneath the pool cleaner by a suction action.
(49) As illustrated with reference again to FIGS. **5** and **12**, the wiper element **92** comprises a hinge pin **134** slidable in an aperture **136** in the side wall portions **106**, **108**. The apertures **136**, herein slots **136**, allow the hinge pin **134** and thus the wiper element **92** to move up and down or in and out within and beyond the perimeter **110**. The slot **136** allows the wiper element **92** to be recessed within the perimeter **110** of the wheels **14**, **16**, and thus avoid a locking against the surface **18** being cleaned which would be the case if the wiper element **92** were fixedly hinged. Those of skill in the art will appreciate that the aperture **136** may be an elongate hole, an oval, or the like, now having the benefit of the teachings of the present invention. The wiper element **92** is therefore able to conform to uneven surfaces. The retraction of the wiper element **92** enhances capability of the

cleaner **10** to right itself. When in the process of righting itself, the wiper element **92**, or the second roller **112** above described, will retract within the perimeter **110** of the wheels **14**, **16** allowing the cleaner **10** to upright itself without obstruction. In an alternate embodiment, the wiper element comprises multiple elements operable with the hinge pin **134**, as earlier described for the rollers **110**, **112**.

(50) With continued reference to FIG. **5**, the aft partition **122** is in close proximity to a proximal end of the wiper element, yet preferably not in frictional contact. Further, the outside surface of the roller **100** is in close proximity, yet preferably not in frictional contact with the forward partition **120**, thus desirably maintaining the gap **126**. Such an arrangement creates a sufficient seal for improved performance of the pool cleaner, as above described.

(51) As will come to the mind of those skilled in the art, now having the benefit of the teachings of the present invention, one embodiment of the wiper element **92** may include the aperture as the slot **136** carried within the proximal end of the wiper element **92** and slidable along a fixed hinge pin, as illustrated with reference to FIG. **8**A, wherein the hinge pin may be fixed to the side wall portions **106**, **108** as earlier described.

(52) Typical pool cleaners that are able to transition onto the pool side walls have problems climbing above the water line and therefore suck air which is well known to be detrimental for the pump. The embodiment of the pool cleaner **10**, herein described by way of example, solves this problem by forwardly angling **138** the hose connector **22** relative to an upright position **140** of the pool cleaner during normal operation, as illustrated with reference again to FIGS. **4**C and **5**A. As a result of the forwardly angled **140** hose connector **22**, when the cleaner **10** climbs a side wall, the hose **20** will be placed slightly ahead of the cleaner **10**. Since the hose **20** is full of water during operation of the cleaner **10**, the hose acts as a weight forcing the cleaner to generally stay submerged and below the water surface level of the pool, thus preventing the pool cleaner from adversely sucking air.

(53) As illustrated with reference again to FIGS. **1** and **3**, and now to FIGS. **15**A, **15**B and **16**, the housing **12** comprises a top cover **142** connected to a housing bottom portion **12**A with a front latch **144**, rear tab **146** and slot **148**. The tabs **146** are placed into the slots **148** on the rear portion of the body **12** of the pool cleaner **10**. The cover **142** is then latched at the front end of the pool cleaner **10** using the front latch **144**. As illustrated with continued reference to FIGS. **15**A and **15**B, the latch **144** comprises a hooked portion **144**A at a lower end removably secured to a pin or optional detent **150** fixed to a lower portion **12**A of the housing **12**. An upper portion of the latch **144** comprises a protrusion **144**B that is removably secured to a portion of the cover **142**. A screw **152** may also be used to secure the top cover **142** to the lower housing portion **12**A.

(54) Many modifications and other embodiments of the invention will come to the mind of those skilled in the art now having the benefit of the teachings presented in the foregoing descriptions and associated drawings. Therefore, it is understood that the invention is not to be limited to specific embodiments disclosed, and that modifications and embodiments are intended to be included within the scope of the appended claims.

Claims

1. A pool cleaner comprising: a housing having an inlet port for receiving water and debris, an outlet port, and opposing sidewalls; a turbine within the housing; a first wheel and a second wheel positioned on opposed sides of the housing and operably connected to the turbine in such a way that the turbine drives the first wheel and second wheel, the first wheel and second wheel having an outer diameter defining an outer perimeter thereof; and a flap positioned at a bottom portion of the housing adjacent the inlet port, the flap forming at least a portion of a plenum for water that suctions the pool cleaner to a pool surface to be cleaned, the flap extending between the opposing sidewalls and being retractable within a slot formed in the housing, the flap having a bottom

surface that is moveable from outside the outer perimeter for contact with the pool surface to be cleaned to inside the outer perimeter for permitting the flap to slide along uneven portions of the pool surface to be cleaned by moving up and down within the slot.

2. The pool cleaner of claim 1, further comprising a forward partition and an aft partition extending between the opposing sidewalls, the forward partition being fixed forward the inlet port and the aft partition fixed aft the inlet port, wherein a free end of the forward partition and a free end of the aft partition extend toward the outer perimeter and are spaced therefrom.

3. The pool cleaner of claim 1, wherein the inlet port is located within a recess formed on the bottom portion of the housing, the recess extending between the opposing sidewalls, the recess being defined by a forward partition forward the inlet port and an aft partition aft the inlet port.

4. The pool cleaner of claim 1, wherein the turbine is operable to drive a drivetrain connecting the turbine to the first wheel and second wheel, the drivetrain including a reduction gear that controls rotation of a cam that steers the pool cleaner.

5. The pool cleaner of claim 1, wherein the slot extends though the opposing sidewalls.

6. The pool cleaner of claim 1, wherein the flap is forward the inlet port.

7. A pool cleaner comprising: a housing having an inlet port for receiving water and debris, and an outlet port; at least two wheels carried by the housing for rolling along a submerged surface to be cleaned, wherein an outer diameter of the at least two wheels defines a perimeter thereof; a tubular member positioned on a bottom portion of the housing forward the inlet port, the tubular member defined by an inner surface; a first axle carried between opposing side wall portions of the housing, wherein the inner surface of the tubular member is rotatable about the first axle, and wherein an outside dimension of the first axle is smaller than a diameter of the inner surface thereby permitting a portion of the tubular member to extend beyond the perimeter and retract within the perimeter responsive to movement along the submerged surface; and a retractable element positioned on the bottom portion of the housing aft the inlet port and generally opposing the tubular member, the retractable element extending between the opposing side wall portions and being moveable about a second axle, from outside the perimeter for contact with the submerged surface to be cleaned to inside the perimeter for permitting the retractable element to slide along uneven portions of the submerged surface to be cleaned, wherein the retractable element and the tubular member in combination with the opposing side wall portions of the housing form a plenum for water that enhances adherence of the pool cleaner to the submerged surface to be cleaned.

8. The pool cleaner of claim 7, wherein the at least two wheels comprise only two wheels.

9. The pool cleaner of claim 7, wherein the tubular member includes multiple portions, and wherein each of the multiple portions moves independently of one another about the first axle for generally conforming to the uneven portions of the submerged surface to be cleaned.

10. The pool cleaner of claim 7, further comprising a forward partition and an aft partition extending between the opposing side wall portions, the forward partition being fixed forward the inlet port and the aft partition fixed aft the inlet port, wherein a free end of the forward partition and a free end of the aft partition extend toward the perimeter and are spaced therefrom.

11. The pool cleaner of claim 10, wherein an outer surface of the tubular member is maintained out of contact with the forward partition.

12. The pool cleaner of claim 10, wherein an outer surface of the forward partition includes a concave shape extending from the free end of the forward partition toward a forward direction of movement of the pool cleaner.

13. The pool cleaner of claim 7, wherein the retractable element comprises a flap rotatable about the second axle, and wherein at least one of the second axle and the flap is slidable within slots formed within at least one of the side wall portions and the flap.

14. The pool cleaner according to claim 7, wherein the tubular member includes a roller.

15. The pool cleaner of claim 7, further comprising a turbine providing a driving force to the at least two wheels.

16. A pool cleaner driven by a flow of water therethrough for operation along a submerged surface to be cleaned, the pool cleaner comprising: a housing having an inlet port for receiving water and debris therethrough, and an outlet port; at least two wheels carried by the housing for rolling along a submerged surface to be cleaned, wherein an outer diameter of the at last two wheels defines a perimeter thereof; a first roller positioned on a bottom portion of the housing forward the inlet port, the first roller having a tubular shape defined by an outer surface and an inner surface; a first axle carried between opposing side wall portions of the housing, the inner surface of the first roller being rotatable about the first axle, and wherein an outside dimension of the first axle being smaller than a diameter of the inner surface thereby permitting the first roller to extend beyond the perimeter and to retract within the perimeter responsive to movement along the submerged surface; and a second roller positioned at the bottom portion of the housing aft the inlet port and generally opposing the first roller, the second roller extending between the opposing side wall portions and moveable about a second axle, the second roller moveable from outside the perimeter for contact with the submerged surface to be cleaned to inside the perimeter thereby permitting the second roller to roll along uneven portions of the submerged surface to be cleaned; wherein the first and second rollers, in combination with the opposing side wall portions of the housing, form a plenum for water, the plenum enhancing adherence of the pool cleaner to the submerged surface to be cleaned.

17. The pool cleaner of claim 16, wherein the first roller comprises multiple roller portions, and wherein each of the multiple roller portions moves independently of one another about the first axle for generally conforming to the uneven portions of the submerged surface to be cleaned.

18. The pool cleaner of claim 16, wherein the first axle is attached to the side wall portions.

19. The pool cleaner of claim 16, further comprising a forward partition and an aft partition extending between the opposing side wall portions, the forward partition being fixed forward the inlet port and the aft partition fixed aft the inlet port, wherein respective free ends of the forward partition and aft partition extend toward the perimeter and are spaced therefrom.

20. The pool cleaner of claim 19, wherein the outer surface of the first roller is maintained out of contact with the forward partition during movement thereof.

21. The pool cleaner of claim 19, wherein an outer surface of the forward partition has a concave shape extending from the free end thereof toward a forward direction of movement of the pool cleaner.

22. The pool cleaner of claim 16, wherein the second roller comprises multiple second roller portions independently moveable about the second axle.

23. The pool cleaner of claim 16, wherein the second roller comprises a tubular shape and an inner surface slidable about the second axle.