

# **Design and Testing of a Quick-Connect Wheelchair Power Add-On Unit**

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(ABSTRACT)

A quick-connect wheelchair power add-on unit (PAU) has been developed at the Human Factors Engineering Center of Virginia Tech. The objective of the invention is to provide an inexpensive, highly portable product which can quickly convert a manual wheelchair into a power-operated wheelchair. This dissertation details the three year research and design effort to develop the new wheelchair PAU. Results are presented from a series of evaluations conducted to identify performance and user-interaction characteristics of the PAU. Interpretation of the results provides a prioritized list of identified design deficiencies along with wheelchair expert and design team suggestions for the next generation of design alterations.

The three evaluations conducted with the second generation PAU prototype include a series of wheelchair expert interviews, a PAU performance evaluation, and a usability evaluation which utilized wheelchair operators as subjects. Also included in the dissertation is an explanation of the need for a new PAU, a description of the most recent design iteration, a literature review containing information about the history of wheelchairs, the condition of the current PAU market, and an analysis of wheelchair PAU consumers.

The new invention was conceived and patented by Dr. John G. Casali of the Industrial and Systems Engineering (ISE) Department at Virginia Tech. This research was supported jointly by Southwestern Applied Technologies, L. C., of Roanoke, Virginia and Virginia's Center for Innovative Technology in Herndon, Virginia.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Table of Contents.....	iv
List of Figures .....	vii
List of Tables.....	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	5
History of Wheelchairs and Power Add-On Units .....	5
Products Currently on the Market .....	6
The Wheelchair Power Add-On Unit Consumer .....	14
United States Wheelchair Market.....	16
Chapter 3: Expert Information Interview Evaluation.....	18
Objective.....	18
Expert Opinion Capture Technique.....	19
Development of Interview Questions .....	19
Interview Questions.....	20
Interview/Demonstration Procedures.....	21
Results and Data Analysis .....	23
Discussion.....	29
Chapter 4: Performance Evaluation of the Power Add-On Unit .....	30
Objective.....	30
Methods.....	30
Maximum Speed.....	31
Grade Climbing Capability.....	33
Dynamic Stability.....	36
Battery Life .....	38
Obstacle Climbing .....	41
Additional Performance Observations.....	43
Chapter 5: Usability Evaluation.....	50
Objective.....	50
Usability Evaluation Tools.....	50
Methods.....	53
Specification of Procedures.....	55
Attachment and Detachment of the Battery.....	61

Attachment and Detachment of the Column.....	62
Transfer to and from the Wheelchair with the PAU Attached.....	63
Switching Column Modes.....	63
Driving Tasks.....	64
Maneuvering Tasks.....	66
Questionnaire.....	66
Pretesting.....	66
Results and Data Analysis.....	67
Evaluation Structure.....	80
Chapter 6: Design Recommendations.....	83
Safety Issues.....	83
Securing Crossbar Instability.....	85
Power Operation in Reverse.....	87
Two-Handed Attachment/Detachment Procedures.....	88
Component Accessibility.....	90
Locations of Wiring Components.....	92
Crossbar/Securing Block Interface.....	94
Column Position and Motion in Transfer Mode.....	96
Controls.....	97
Additional Design Deficiencies.....	99
Reasonably Foreseeable Misuse.....	101
Chapter 7: Conclusion.....	102
References.....	104
Chapter 8: Appendices.....	A-1
Appendix A	
Description of the New Power Add-On Unit.....	A-1
Appendix B	
Wheelchairs Circa 1997.....	B-1
Appendix C	
Patents for Add-On Power Devices.....	C-1
Appendix D	
Assistive Device Consumers.....	D-1
Appendix E	
Wheelchair User Disability Groups.....	E-1
Appendix F	
Expert Interview Questions and Responses.....	F-1

Appendix G	
Expert Interview Informed Consent Form .....	G-1
Appendix H	
ANSI/RESNA Wheelchair Standards Outline .....	H-1
Appendix I	
Motor Sound Level Measurements .....	I-1
Appendix J	
Usability Evaluation Informed Consent Form .....	J-1
Appendix K	
User Evaluation Questionnaire and Subject Responses .....	K-1
Appendix L	
Time Data Statistical Comparisons .....	L-1

## List of Figures

Figure 1. New power add-on unit attached to a manual wheelchair .....	2
Figure 2. Side view of manual and power operating modes.....	4
Figure 3. Fortress 1000FS add-on power attachment.....	8
Figure 4. Damaco D90 power attachment .....	8
Figure 5. Roll-Aid add-on power drive .....	9
Figure 6. Redman add-on power devices .....	9
Figure 7. Damaco Electro-Lite transportable wheelchair.....	13
Figure 8. Fortress Commuter transportable wheelchair.....	14
Figure 9. U-shaped release mechanism replacement suggestion .....	24
Figure 10. Two-bar grip release mechanism replacement suggestion.....	24
Figure 11. Battery voltage measurement versus trial (distance traveled).....	40
Figure 12. Wheelchair motor and ambient sound spectrums.....	49
Figure 13. Critical incident tool.....	61
Figure 14. The driving and maneuvering task course .....	65
Figure 15. Suggestion for lower crossbar release mechanism .....	77
Figure 16. Forward/reverse control suggestion .....	78
Figure 17. Ease of operation questionnaire results .....	79
Figure 18. Collar solution for pinch point problem .....	84
Figure 19. Column motions resulting from the ground reaction force.....	86
Figure 20. Column unit angle of approach for attachment.....	89
Figure A-1. Attachment of securing crossbars to wheelchair frame .....	A-2
Figure A-2. Compression spring housing .....	A-3
Figure A-3. Exploded view of the drivetrain assembly.....	A-4
Figure A-4. Crossbar securing block (blocks 1 and 2 of 10).....	A-5
Figure A-5. Crossbar securing block (blocks 3 and 4 of 10).....	A-5
Figure A-6. Crossbar securing block (blocks 5 and 6 of 10).....	A-5
Figure A-7. Crossbar securing block (blocks 7 and 8 of 10).....	A-5
Figure A-8. Crossbar securing block (blocks 9 and 10 of 10).....	A-5
Figure A-9. Steering bar.....	A-5
Figure A-10. Steering bar cover.....	A-5
Figure A-11. Handle.....	A-5
Figure A-12. Slip-ring cover.....	A-5
Figure A-13. Inner column tube.....	A-5
Figure A-14. Outer column tube.....	A-5

Figure A-15. Crossbar.....	A-5
Figure A-16. Crossbar poppit inserts.....	A-5
Figure A-17. Crossbar release finger grip.....	A-5
Figure A-18. Column/crossbar attachment block (pieces 1 and 2 of 4).....	A-5
Figure A-19. Column/crossbar attachment block (piece 3 of 4).....	A-5
Figure A-20. Column/crossbar attachment block (piece 4 of 4).....	A-5
Figure A-21. Wheel support side plate.....	A-5
Figure A-22. Wheel support top plate.....	A-5
Figure A-23. Inner column tube support block.....	A-5
Figure A-24. Gearbox.....	A-5
Figure A-25. Gearbox cover.....	A-5
Figure A-26. Motor cover (piece 1 of 2).....	A-5
Figure A-27. Motor cover (piece 2 of 2).....	A-6
Figure A-28. Motor locking support.....	A-6
Figure A-29. Motor ring support.....	A-6
Figure A-30. Axle augmentation.....	A-6
Figure A-31. Cloth pattern for battery sling.....	A-6
Figure B-1. Folding manual wheelchair .....	B-1
Figure B-2. Straight-through and drop-down wheelchair frame types .....	B-3



## **List of Tables**

Table 1. Power Add-On Units.....	7
Table 2. Transportable Power Wheelchairs .....	12
Table 3. Results from the Maximum Speed Performance Evaluation .....	32
Table 4. Results from the Grade Climbing Performance Evaluation.....	35
Table 5. Results from the Battery Life Performance Evaluation.....	39
Table 6. Results from the Obstacle Climbing Performance Evaluation.....	43
Table 7. Time Data Collection Sheet.....	58
Table 8. Critical Incident Data .....	61
Table 9. Time to Complete User Performance Tasks .....	68
Table 10. Pre-Task Time Willing to Spend Estimates.....	70
Table 11. Post-Task Time Willing to Spend Estimates.....	70
Table 12. Problems Identified by Critical Incident Analysis.....	75
Table 13. Problems Identified by Critical Observation Analysis. ....	75
Table B-1. Wheelchair Sizes Available From Major Manufacturers .....	B-3
Table C-1. Patents for Add-On Power Devices.....	C-1