

# Review: Accelerometer Development for Use in Gravitational Wave-Detection Interferometers

by Riccardo DeSalvo

**Abstract** Accelerometers were and are being developed to instrument the seismic attenuation chains of gravitational wave (GW) interferometric detectors. The main requirements of these instruments are strong directionality ( $> 10^3$  rejection of signal from orthogonal directions for feedback) and vacuum compatibility as well as high low-frequency sensitivity. Because of the directionality requirements, GW accelerometers tend to be more specialized for sensing of different degrees of freedom (horizontal, vertical, and tilt) than the classical geophysics seismometers but share several characteristics with these. The initial design of GW-dedicated accelerometers was inspired by geophysics instruments. Techniques developed for the GW field are now starting to spill over back into the geophysics field.

## Introduction

The interferometric gravitational wave (GW) detector community has a long history of developing ultra high vacuum (UHV) compatible accelerometers.

The development started in the early 1980s when Virgo was considering a stage of active preattenuation of its superattenuators (Losurdo, 2001). UHV compatible instruments were developed instead of using commercial instruments in order to avoid the risk associated with possible leaks from pressurized tanks containing commercial units. Operation under UHV may allow for better performance as the air-friction losses in the test mass motion are eliminated. In addition, UHV operation may allow for lower thermal fluctuations and no acoustic coupling. Custom accelerometer design was also desirable because of the requirement that each instrument be sensitive only and uniquely to a well-defined degree of freedom, to simplify the control matrix. A signal built with the vectorial sum of multiple sensors may have a frequency dependent directional sensitivity and lead to complex controls. There were also concerns about the stability over time of the signal mixing matrix.

These considerations led to the development of separate horizontal, vertical, and tilt accelerometers. Yaw sensitivity was simply extracted from the pinwheel configuration of horizontal accelerometers, and no yaw sensor was ever developed.

The development of active attenuation in Virgo was abandoned in 1995 when it was realized that the swing-tilt effect fundamentally limits the effectiveness of active attenuation. The equivalence principle dictates that a horizontal accelerometer mounted on a swing cannot detect the motion of a swing because the swing's ropes only apply forces perpendicular to the swing's seat where the accelerometer would reside. The amplitude of the swing motion only appears (at

the second order) on the signal of vertical accelerometers and on tiltmeters. In other words, a horizontal accelerometer in the Earth's gravitational field cannot distinguish between a tilt and a horizontal acceleration.

Initially, development of suitable tiltmeters was pursued to complement the horizontal accelerometer signal and to disentangle the horizontal from the tilt signals.

The problem of preisolation was solved with the introduction of the low-frequency inverted pendulum (IP) table, which acts like a horizontal accelerometer test mass. After that, the development of active preisolation in the Virgo superattenuators was halted.

The development of accelerometers was not halted though. It was realized that the chain of seismic filters hanging down from the preisolator had unwanted resonances and that feedback from suitable accelerometers on the preattenuation stage would be the ideal way to dampen those resonances without reintroducing noise from the seismically active ground (inertial damping). Even this reduced scope would not have been achievable with accelerometers because of the swing effect if it had not been for the specific design of the Virgo preattenuator.

The Virgo preattenuator is an IP table followed by a low-frequency vertical filter. The IP table is constrained to motions in a well-defined surface close to the horizontal plane<sup>1</sup>,

<sup>1</sup>The IP table moves rigorously in the horizontal plane only if its legs have the same length and are mounted parallel, and its base platform is horizontal. These conditions can be mechanically achieved within one or few parts in  $10^4$ . The residual deviations from the horizontal plane are unequivocally position dependent (for example, if the IP legs are mounted in a convergent geometry, the IP table would move along a sphere, and knowledge of the transversal coordinate would give the local tilt), and tilt effects can easily be subtracted.

and horizontal accelerometers mounted on that table are practically immune from the swing effect, thus allowing the use of horizontal accelerometers without the aid of matching tiltmeters.

Vertical accelerometers were also used in the Virgo superattenuators mounted on the preattenuation filter for inertial damping of resonances.

The successful IP plus horizontal accelerometer configuration was later adopted by the TAMA GW interferometer (located in TAMA, Japan) and used as a baseline design of the Large-Scale Cryogenic Gravitational Wave Telescope interferometer.

After installation on the superattenuator in 2000, Virgo stopped all accelerometer developments. The design of UHV-compatible horizontal and vertical accelerometers continued at the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO), University of Pisa and TAMA, for use in future GW detectors.

In the last few years, the University of Salerno took over refining the design of the horizontal accelerometers developed for TAMA for use both in GW detectors and for seismology. The use of similar accelerometers was foreseen in 2006 as an option and as a supplement to the performance of the passive seismic attenuators developed for advanced LIGO (Stochino, 2008).

The design of tiltmeters, abandoned with the introduction of the IP, resumed in 2007 at Virgo with the realization that ground tilt generated by sea and wind activity could generate part of the residual motion of the superattenuator chain. Almost coincidentally, development of tiltmeters was resumed at LIGO to reduce the swing effect problem in the advanced LIGO active seismic attenuation system (Robertson, 2004).

### The Virgo Accelerometers: Common Design Features

All of the Virgo accelerometers are force feedback sensors, using voice coil actuation and linear variable differential transformers (LVDTs) as position sensors. All of their readout electronics were located outside the vacuum enclosures for added reliability, to avoid producing waste heat inside vacuum, and for thermal stability.

The voice coil is the most convenient actuation method because of its linearity, ease of construction, and low power dissipation. For these reasons it is used in many commercial and scientific instruments. It is easily made UHV compatible as it only comprises a Kapton insulated wire coil wound on a glass, ceramic, or a polyetheretherketone spool, a small permanent magnet, and soft iron for the yoke.

The LVDT (Tariq, 2002) is a particularly convenient position sensor for reliable UHV operation because it is made of three simple coils and because its inductive signal, transported via twisted pairs, tolerates long cable lengths without degradation. Therefore, its preamplifier can be located out-

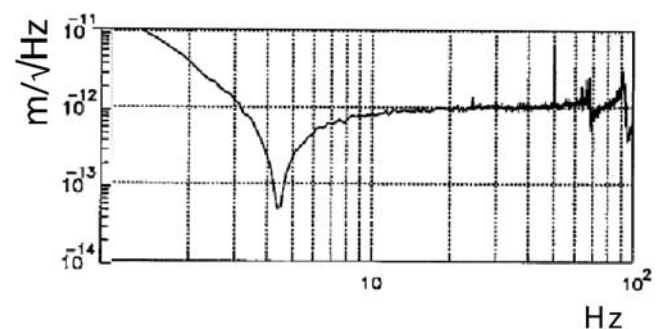
side the vacuum tank. The LVDT resolution is typically of the order of a newton meter for centimeter long strokes, but in the case of force feedback accelerometers, its sensitivity is pushed well below the picometer (Fig. 1) at the expense of a reduced sensitivity range. The LVDT linearity within the sensitivity range is not affected. Both LVDTs and actuators generate negligible heat.

The vertical accelerometers implemented in Virgo (developed from 1996 to 1998) are built on the Lacoste principle (Fig. 2). The test mass is constrained to move in the vertical direction by a pair of leaf flexures. A spring at roughly 45° provides preloading force. The vertical component of this force counters the force of gravity and allows the mass to float at the LVDT zero voltage working point. The horizontal component compresses the two flexures and brings them close to collapse, thus reducing the vertical resonant frequency.

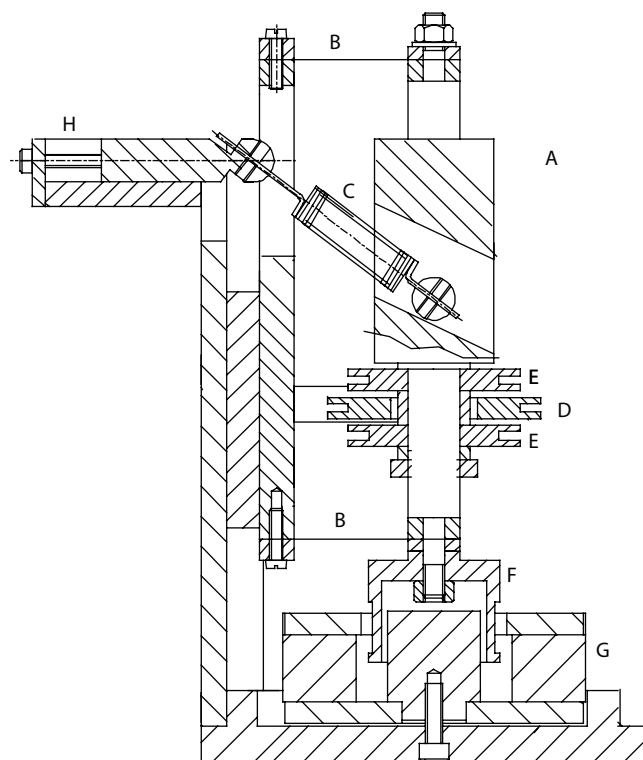
The accelerometer is mechanically tuned by vertical and horizontal micropositioning of the grounded end of the spring. The flexures, etched from a thin foil of copper beryllium, can have a double hourglass profile for optimal compliance, uniform stress distribution, and rigidity in the orthogonal degrees of freedom. The bobbin of the voice coil actuator is part of the test mass and coaxial with it. Its performance is illustrated in Figure 3.

The concomitantly developed Virgo horizontal accelerometers (Fig. 4) are of IP design; otherwise, they are very similar to the vertical design and use the same readout electronics. Three of these accelerometers are mounted at 120° on the IP table in a pinwheel configuration and also provide sensing of the yaw angular acceleration. As they sit on a non-vertically attenuated platform, one of the important requirements of this accelerometer is insensitivity to vertical seismic noise obtained from the transversal rigidity of the flexures. Micrometric screw leveling effectively nulls the force of gravity and the vertical sensitivity.

Virgo also developed angular accelerometers of dumbbell design; otherwise, they are very similar to the vertical and horizontal design (Fig. 5) and use the same readout electronics (Luiten, 1997). The angular flexure was a commercial



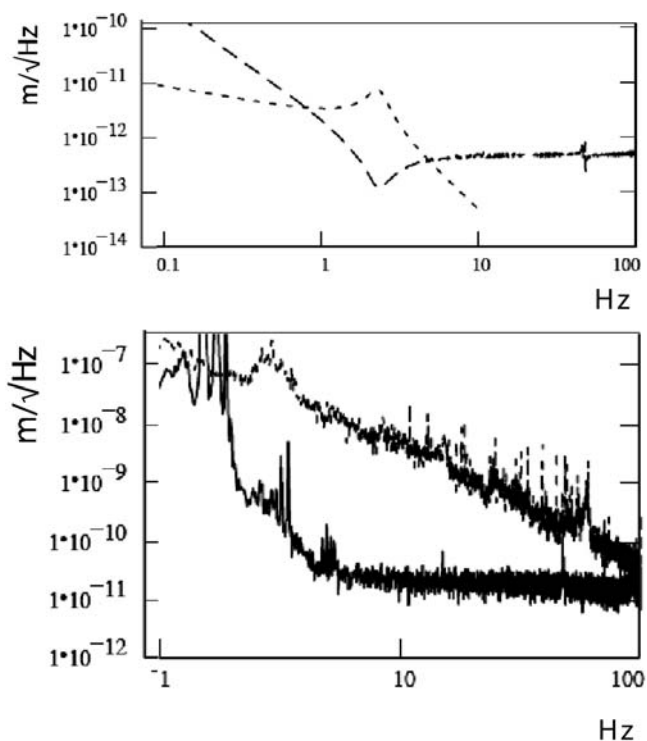
**Figure 1.** Virgo accelerometer's internal LVDT sensitivity (Braccini, 1995).



**Figure 2.** Virgo vertical accelerometer. (A) The test mass is constrained to motion in the vertical degree of freedom by (B) two flexures. The weight of the test mass is supported by the vertical component of (C) the tensioning force of the spring. The LVDT position sensor is made of (D) an excitation coil sandwiched between (E) two oppositely wound receiver coils. (F) The coil and (G) permanent magnet of the actuator and the LVDT excitation coil are coaxially mounted on the test mass. The actuator's permanent magnet and the LVDT secondary coils are solidly mounted on the instrument's case. (H) The tuning screw changes the vertical resonant frequency of the instrument by changing the horizontal compressional force applied on the flexures. The Virgo vertical accelerometers are mounted on the preisolator vertical filter of the superattenuators downstream of the IP seismic preattenuation.

Bendix unit. The tiltmeter presented an excess of low-frequency  $1/f$  noise. Similar excess noise was found in similar instruments previously and subsequently developed, all using the Bendix flexure, in different geometries and readout systems (Speake, 1990; Saulson, 1994; P. Devanney, personal comm., 2008; A. Gennai, personal comm., 2008). Although in some of these instruments there may have been more than one cause contributing to the observed noise, there is evidence that the Bendix flexure was the main source of the excess  $1/f$  noise. Because of the excess noise, this angular accelerometer was never implemented in the Virgo superattenuators while the vertical and horizontal brethren are very successful instruments and are still in continuous and uneventful operation.

It is worth noting that the University of Western Australia (UWA) group also developed a tiltmeter based on a wire suspended disk sensing with a multiple reflection optical lever system (Zhou, 2001).



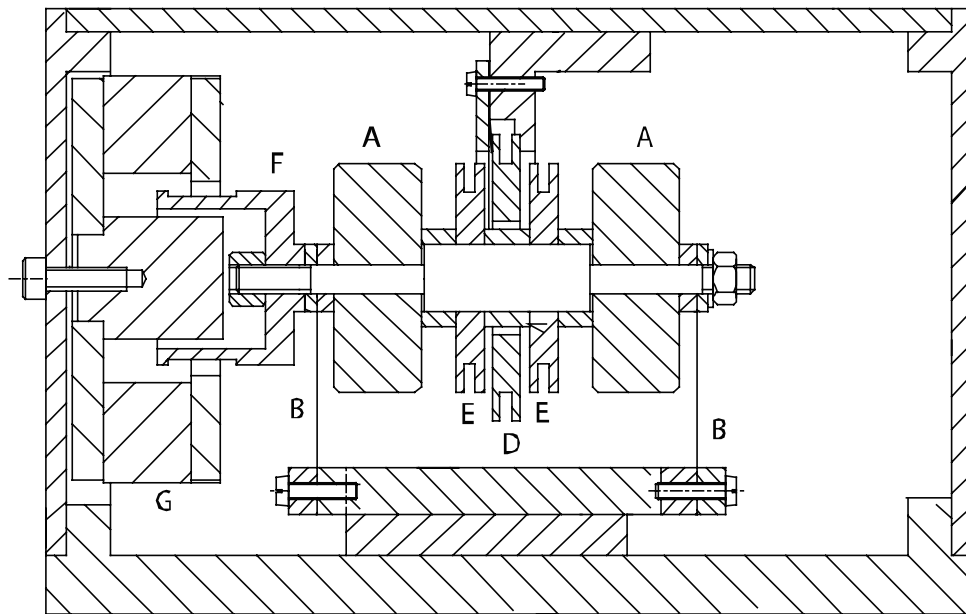
**Figure 3.** Performance of Virgo vertical accelerometer. In the top graph long dashes represent thermal noise (calculated from quality factor and resonant frequency), and short dashes represent position sensor resolution. In the bottom graph performance verification on an underground lab floor is represented with dashes and on a suspended platform represented by a solid line. The measurement is dominated by seismic noise below 2 Hz and may still contain seismic noise above (R. Stanga, personal comm., 2008).

### The LIGO–TAMA Accelerometers

New horizontal accelerometers were designed at LIGO and then used on the TAMA IP preattenuators to eliminate the shortcomings of the initial Virgo design. They were based on the folded pendulum (FP) geometry (Fig. 6), introduced, and used to build a seismometer by the UWA group (Blair, 1994; Liu, 1998) to eliminate, as much as possible, all elastic restoring forces and thus minimize material losses and (presently) hysteresis effects.

An FP test mass is supported by two legs. The leg at one end of the test mass is a normal pendulum with a positive restoring force. The other half of the test mass is supported by an equal length inverted leg contributing a negative restoring force. In this configuration if it were not for the flexure stiffness, the FP would be in indifferent equilibrium with zero resonant frequency. The inverted leg geometry is such that (contrary to other IP design) even its flexures are tensional and contribute very little restoring force. Because of this design, the FP has very low resonant frequency. The resonant frequency can be tuned by loading a little more mass on the inverted leg side.

As rejection of sensitivity to other degrees of freedom require the use of pairs of flexures on either sides of the test



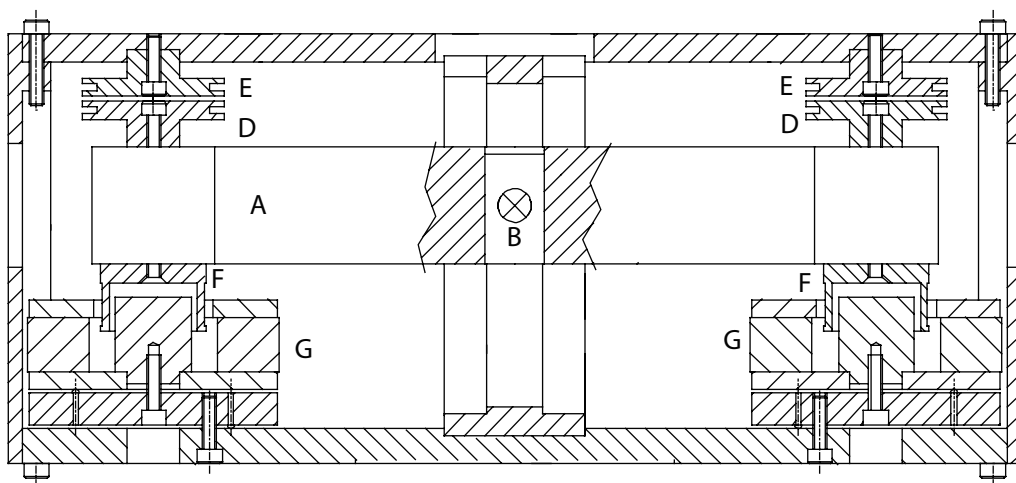
**Figure 4.** Virgo horizontal accelerometer. It is an IP design. The flexures constrain the test mass motion in the horizontal degree of freedom only, and the resonant frequency is tuned by changing the weight of the test mass. The same label descriptions of Figure 2 apply where relevant.

mass, monolithic geometry was introduced to eliminate all assembly-related misalignments. The machining was made with electric discharge machining (EDM), and the flexure surface was electropolished to eliminate all EDM surface residues and to reduce mechanical losses. A quality factor of 300 at 0.5 Hz was achieved. This instrument had a rejection of vertical acceleration better than 80 dB. Differential capacitive sensing was introduced for further sensitivity improvements.

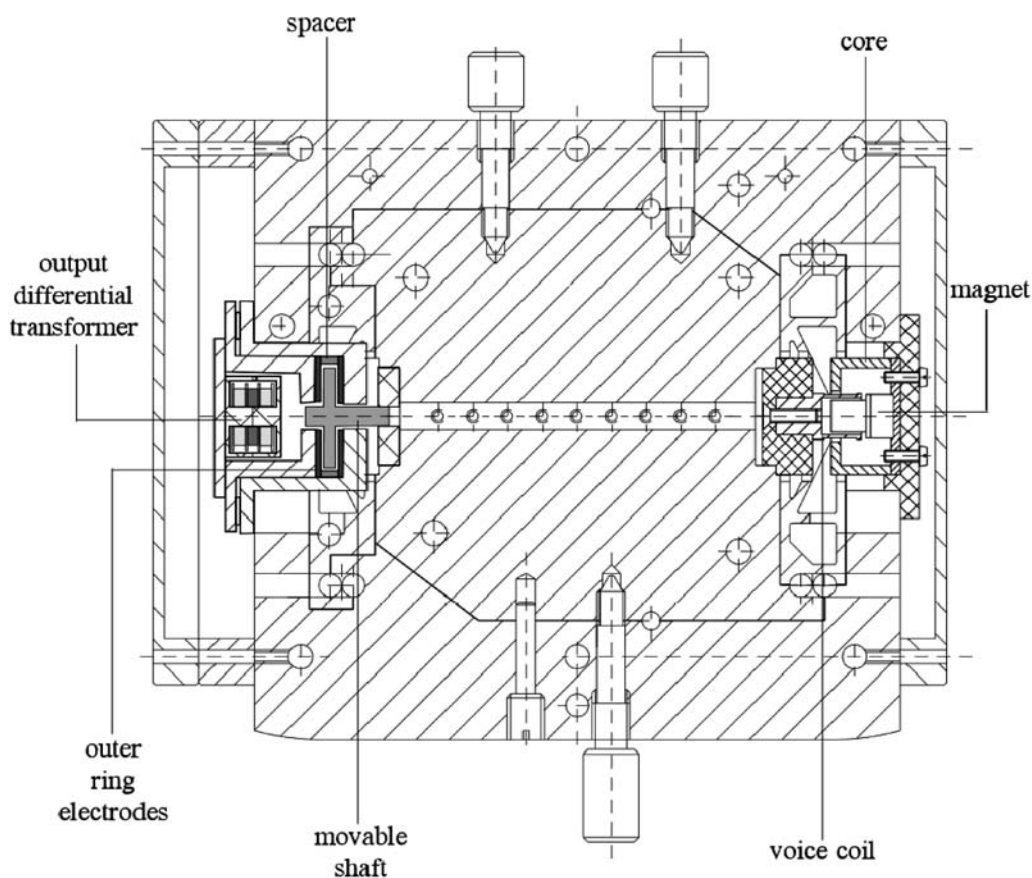
As capacitive sensing normally relies on local preamplifiers to avoid the stray capacitance of cables, a balanced fer-

rite differential transformer was developed and mounted next to the sensing capacitors. The transformer transfers the differential signal from the two capacitances on a single twisted pair and makes the readout immune to the cable length and fluctuating capacitance effects. An external electronics readout of this sensor was thus allowed without loss of sensitivity (Fig. 7; Bertolini, *et al.*, 2006a,b,c).

Taking advantage of the sensitivity to tilt of the horizontal accelerometers, the design of the FP accelerometer was later used by Takamori to develop a small (4 cm length) bore-hole tiltmeter with optical fiber bundle sensing (Takamori,

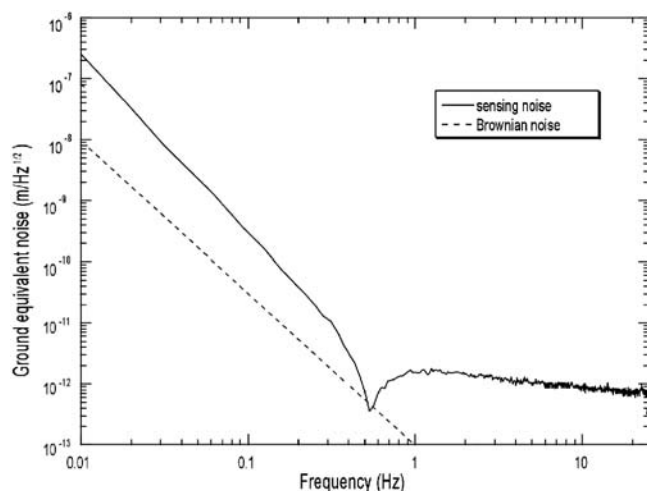


**Figure 5.** Virgo angular tilt accelerometer. The Virgo tilt accelerometer is a dumbbell design; the dumbbell test mass (A) balances on a Bendix flexure. Two identical actuators coiled with opposite polarity and mounted below the end masses of the dumbbell provide the control forces. The LVDT design has been modified. The excitation coils have been doubled into two identical ones (D) wired with the same polarity. They face two identical received coils wired with opposed polarity. This LVDT is sensitive to torque and insensitive to all other degrees of freedom. All other label descriptions of Figure 2 apply where relevant.

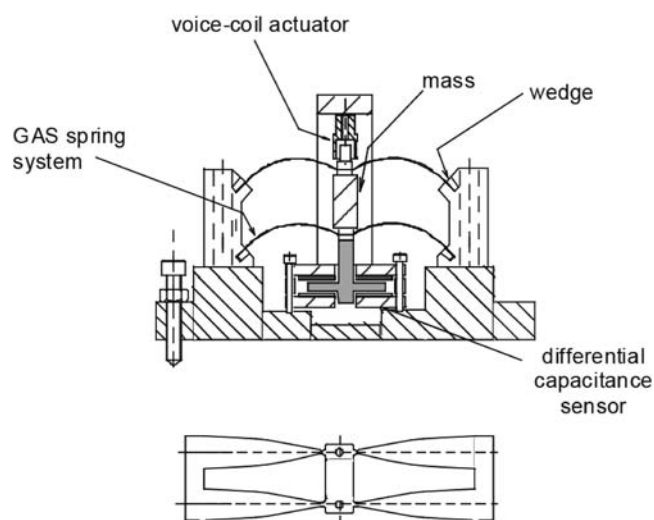


**Figure 6.** TAMA FP accelerometer. The test mass (polygon at the center), the pendulum legs, and the case are carved from a single block of aluminum or copper beryllium. The test mass is suspended by a pendulum leg on the right and supported by an equal length IP leg on the left. A voice coil actuator is mounted on the pendulum leg side and electrostatic position sensing is mounted on the IP leg end of the test mass. A local differential radio frequency transformer allows remote preamplifier operation.

2007) The design of the FP accelerometer was then refined by Acernese *et al.* (2008) for both geophysics and GW applications, introducing an elliptical flex joint in place of the more fragile circular cross section used at TAMA and testing an optical lever sensing. The softer joint resulted in a resonance quality factor improvement of 2.4 with respect to the



**Figure 7.** FP accelerometer estimated sensitivity curve.



**Figure 8.** Vertical accelerometer based on two superimposed sets of twin geometric antisprings (GASs). The geometry constrains the movement to the vertical direction, thus making it insensitive to orthogonal movements.

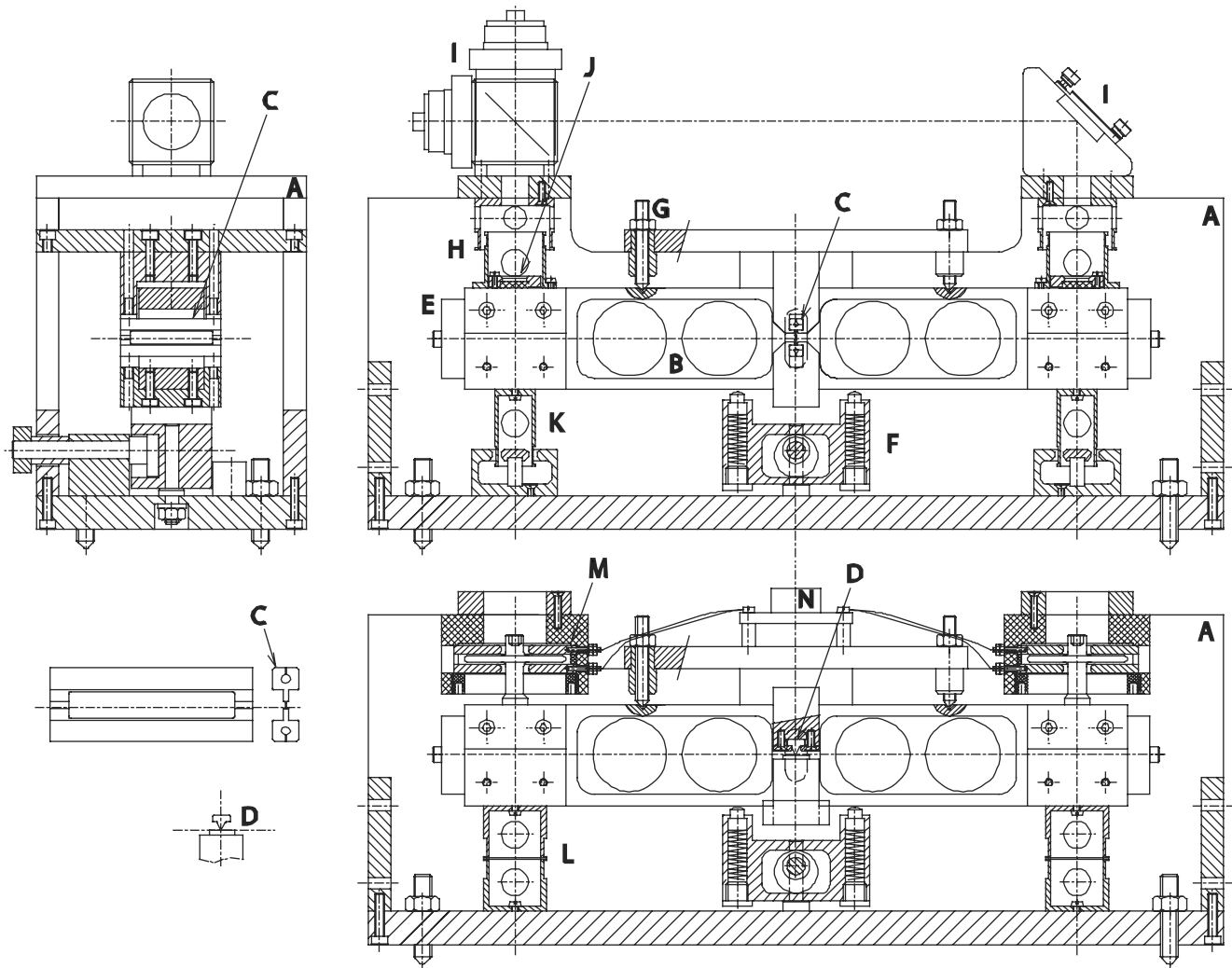
Bertolini design (normalized at the same frequency) and a correspondingly better than expected thermal noise. Equally important, the original flex joints were too rigid in the other degrees of freedom and broke easily. The elliptical flexure resulted in a vastly less fragile instrument suitable for field implementation. Field tests are at the moment limited by the resolution of the optical levers from  $10^{-10}$  m/ $\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$  down to 0.1 Hz. An interferometric sensing (in development) will allow testing of the instrument mechanical quality.

Bertolini also designed a robust, UHV-compatible, vertical accelerometer based on geometric antispring vertical flexures and on the same differential capacitive sensing and control technique of the FP horizontal accelerometer (Fig. 8;

Bertolini, 2004). This sensor was then used on ships to actively stabilize the cable laying booms.

### Tilt Accelerometers

As already mentioned, the development of UHV-compatible tilt accelerometers for use in GW detectors was recently resumed at Virgo and at LIGO. The Virgo specifications are less than  $10^{-9}$  rad/sec<sup>2</sup>/ $\sqrt{\text{Hz}}$  at 100 mHz; the LIGO specifications are an order of magnitude lower. The Virgo group built a larger version of the 1997 tilt accelerometer also based on Bendix flex joints, mostly confirming the well



**Figure 9.** Different versions of the LIGO/Virgo developmental tilt accelerometer. The top assembly illustrates the flexure hinge version with LVDT and interferometric tilt sensing and permanent magnet direct component actuation. The bottom right assembly drawing illustrates the knife-edge hinge with capacitive tilt sensing and amplitude modulated radio frequency (AM-RF) actuation. In the bottom left insert expanded views of the flexure and the knife-edge structure are shown. (A) Instrument case, (B) main balance arm, (C) flexure hinge (in the side view in the insert, the monolithic design ensuring alignment of the two flexures of the hinge), (D) knife-edge hinge, (E) tuning mass, and (F) eccentric locking mechanism acting against the (G) end-stop screws. (H) Twin voice coil tilt sensing, (I) Michelson tilt sensor using mirrors, and (J) mounted on the end masses of the main balance arm. (K) Twin voice coil (permanent magnet) actuators and (L) twin pairs of coils for AM-RF actuation. (M) Capacitive tilt sensing: the four capacitances are mounted in a Wheatstone bridge configuration connected by a (N) transformer to a remote preamplifier.

known low-frequency noise problems, and as already mentioned, exhibiting noise much higher than the desired level.

It is now believed that the low-frequency noise is dominated by the hysteresis in the flexure materials exacerbated by the Bendix geometry. Similar  $1/f$  transmissibility noise has been recently observed in other systems and appears to be linked to the material's static hysteresis (Mantovani *et al.*, 2005; Stochino, 2007).

Ongoing experiments by the author and his collaborators are showing the often-ignored dominating effects of static hysteresis on low-frequency noise (DeSalvo, 2005, 2008). Some of the physics behind these effects, based on self organized criticality of dislocations in metal grains and their fractal behavior, was theoretically studied by Marchesoni (in Cagnoli, 1993).

To minimize the ill effects of hysteresis, a new tiltmeter design based on flexure design studied by Kamp (2005) is now being attempted. The thin vertical blade design allows better flexure loading and is expected to introduce much less mechanical stiffness than the cross-blade Bendix flexure design. This geometry (Fig. 9) is expected to depress the hysteresis (and any other loss) contribution to the noise. Additionally, the volume of material involved in the flexure is much more confined, which should also help reduce noise. Most importantly, the flexure mount is designed to be easily replaceable, to allow the testing of different materials (including non metals) and of surface and thermal treatments of the flexure, all in the same instrument. This will allow us to determine if the required level of sensitivity is possible with metals, to find the best solution, or to implement, if needed, nonmetallic materials like ceramics, monocrystals, and glasses. The flexure hinge of the instrument can also be replaced with a knife-edge hinge, copied from the old precision balances, for comparison.

To evaluate and rule out other possible sources of low-frequency noise, the instrument is designed to use different methods of sensing and actuation. Different requirement levels may require different sensing schemes.

## Conclusions

The requirements for accelerometers and tilt accelerometers for use in GW detectors are quite different from the needs for geophysics measurements, which do not require UHV compatibility and require little depression of sensitivity to signal in orthogonal directions. The different requirements and design criteria spawned a parallel development of seismic sensors, which promises to provide ideas and solutions that may benefit the geophysics seismometer field. Both fields will profit from extended collaboration in the future.

## Data and Resources

Some of the data and schematics shown in this article were provided to the author by various scientists, as refer-

enced. The other data and schematics shown were produced by the author and his collaborators within Virgo and LIGO.

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- LIGO Gravitational Wave Observatories  
California Institute of Technology  
Pasadena, California 91125

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