56 A voltage monitor for a 12 V power supply

Introduction

If for any reason, the stabilisation of your main 12 volt power supply unit (PSU) breaks down, it is possible that a voltage much higher then the nominal 13.8 V will be applied to your precious equipment. If you would like to know the instant that this occurred, and hence be able to switch things off before it was too late, then this circuit is what you need. It will give audible *and* visual indications if the voltage rises above 14.4 V, and a visual indication only if the voltage is reduced.

The circuit

The circuit uses three ICs and is shown in **Figure 1**. The circuit is powered by the PSU whose output is being monitored, and the circuit's immunity to supply line variations is secured by the 6 volt regulator, IC1. The heart of the circuit is IC2, an LM3914; it is a *bargraph driver*, which operates ten LEDs in a display resembling a thermometer – the string of lit LEDs increases in length as the voltage on pin 5 increases.

The input voltage range on pin 5 is 1.2 V maximum, making each LED correspond to one-tenth of this, which is 0.12 V, the *step size*. R1 and R2 act as a voltage divider, so that voltages of up to the maximum of 14.4 V may be applied to R1 without exceeding 1.2 V at pin 5. R3 sets the brightness of the LEDs and R4 determines the step size.

IC3 is an *opto-isolator*, a device containing an LED and a phototransistor in one package. This enables the piezoelectric sounder to operate without affecting the operation of the bargraph driver. The input to IC3 is provided by the voltage on D8, so that if any of the LEDs at or above D8 are lit, the

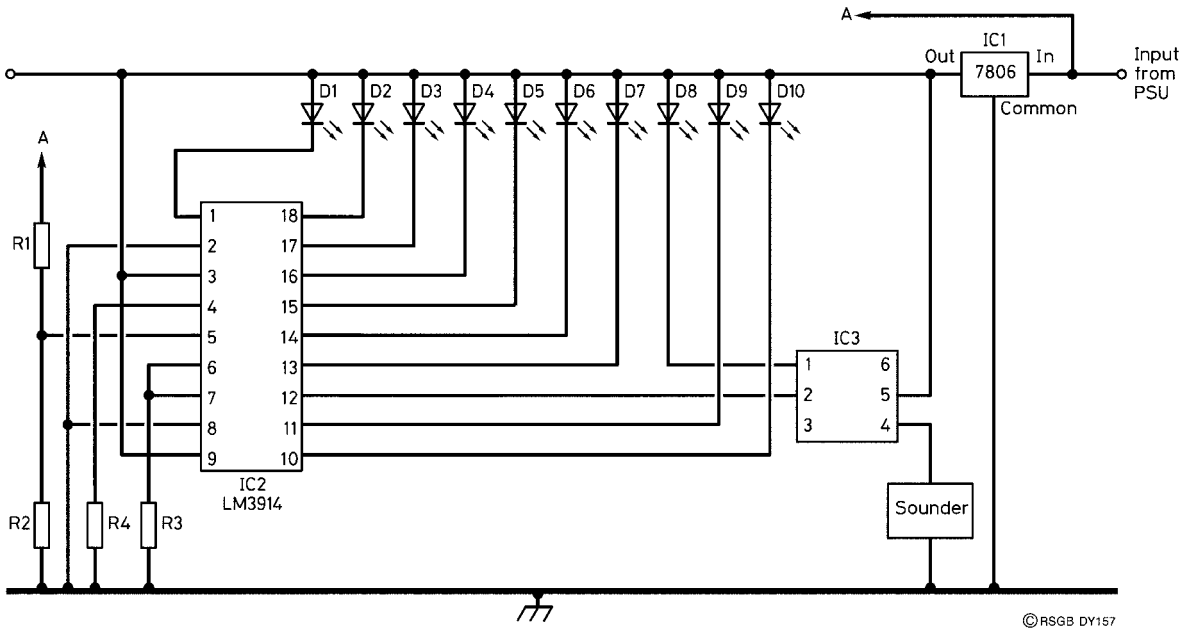

Figure 1 PSU monitor, circuit diagram

sounder will operate, indicating overvoltage. Despite the fact that some of your other equipment might be damaged by this overvoltage, the monitor circuit itself is unaffected.

Construction

The prototype was built on two pieces of Veroboard of the copper-strip variety. The main (circuit) board measured 15 strips by 25 holes, and the display (LED) board measured 4 strips by 30 holes. Track cuts are necessary in each board. The correct places are shown for the main board in **Figure 2**, but there is sufficient flexibility in the layout of the display board for a prescriptive layout not to be needed. All the anodes of the LEDs are connected to the same strip, which makes things comparatively simple!

For the main board, insert the Veropins and the wire links first, and solder them to the copper strips. Then fit the IC holders and the resistors. Fit the IC holders with their notches towards the top of the board. When fitting the voltage regulator, IC1, note than the centre lead (the 'common' lead in Figure 1) does *not* go to position A3; the track should be cut at A3, and the common lead soldered at B3. This is indicated in Figure 2.

Wire up the LED board with its ten LEDs and 11 connecting wires, each about 10 cm long. This length depends on how far away from the main

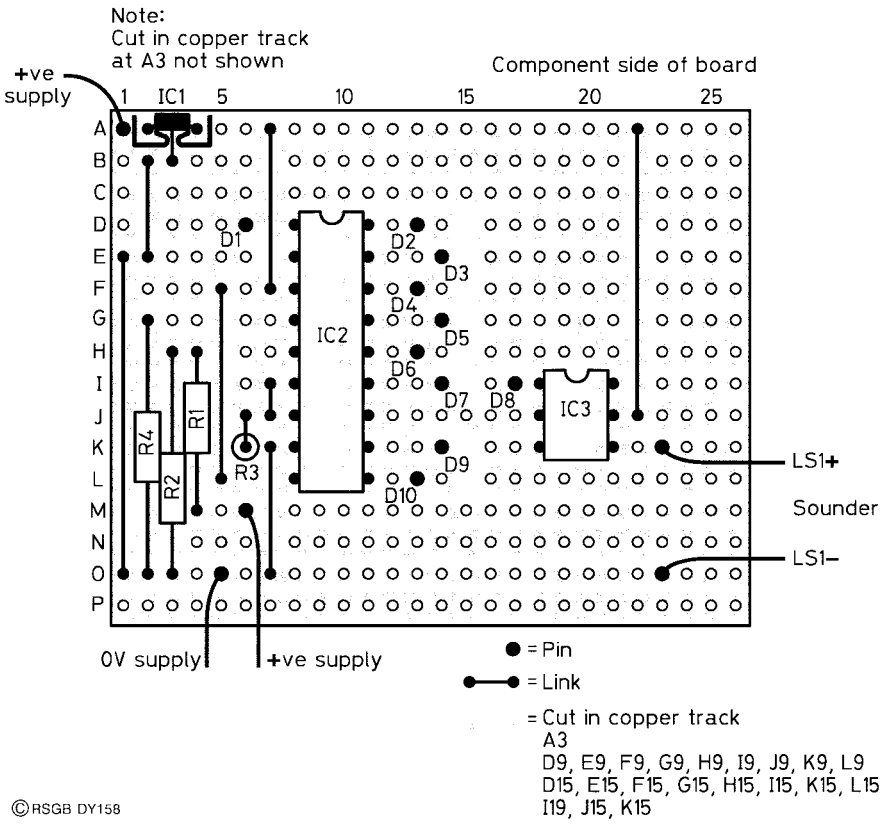

Figure 2 PSU monitor, PCB layout

board you are planning to mount the display. The LEDs should have different colours: three orange, four green and three red, to indicate 'low', 'medium' and 'high' voltage.

Now solder the other ends of these leads to the Veropins on the main board, making sure that the order is correct. Finally, connect the piezoelectric sounder to the main board; the polarity is important, so make sure the red lead goes to pin 4 of IC3 and the black lead to the ground rail. If you were careful to fit the IC holders with their notches in the correct positions, match these up with the notches on the ICs before pushing home the ICs *gently*. Check your circuit for solder bridges and unwanted pieces of copper swarf before screwing the small heat sink to the voltage regulator, IC1.

Testing

(a) **With a variable-voltage PSU**. Set the PSU for 10 V, connect the circuit and switch on. Increase the voltage slowly, and check that each LED lights up after the one before it. As the voltage exceeds about 14.4 V, the

first red LED should light and the sounder should operate. If an LED does not illuminate, you should immediately suspect either a dry joint or an incorrect LED polarity. The voltage at which the first red LED lights can be adjusted by varying R1; increase R1 if the LED comes on too early; decrease R1 if the LED comes on too late.

(b) **Without a variable-voltage PSU**. For your 'variable supply', you can use several AA-type 1.5 V cells (or 1.2 V NiCad cells) in series. The voltages produced by a range of cells is shown in **Table 1** – because of the lower voltage of NiCad cells, more of them are needed to produce a given voltage.

Once the operation of the circuit has been checked, it can be fitted into a plastic or metal box. Only two connections are needed for the PSU. You may want to drill some holes in the case to increase the apparent loudness of the sounder.

Table 1 Test voltages available from batteries in series

No. of batteries	*Voltage, nicads*	*Voltage, dry cells*
7	8.4	10.5
8	9.6	12
9	10.8	13.5
10	12	15
11	13.2	–
12	14.4	–
13	15.6	–

Parts list

Resistors: all 0.25 watt, 5% tolerance

R1	11 kilohms (kΩ) – see text
R2	1 kilohm (kΩ)
R3	1.2 kilohms (kΩ)
R4	18 kilohms (kΩ)

Semiconductors

IC1	L7806
IC2	LM3914
IC3	Opto-isolator – Maplin code WL35Q
D1–D3	3 mm LED, orange
D4–D7	3 mm LED, green
D8–D10	3 mm LED, red

Additional items

LS1	Piezoelectric sounder, wire leads
	6-pin DIL socket for IC3
	18-pin DIL socket for IC2
	Veroboard – two pieces for main and display boards, see text for sizes
	Veropins
	Heat sink for IC1
	Single-core insulated wire for links
	Insulated stranded wire for interconnecting the boards
	Case as required