



Applications for an Adjustable IC Power Regulator

National Semiconductor
Application Note 178

A new 3-terminal adjustable IC power regulator solves many of the problems associated with older, fixed regulators. The LM117, a 1.5A IC regulator is adjustable from 1.2V to 40V with only 2 external resistors. Further, improvements are made in performance over older regulators. Load and line regulation are a factor of 10 better than previous regulators. Input voltage range is increased to 40V and output characteristics are fully specified for load of 1.5A. Reliability is improved by new overload protection circuitry as well as 100% burn-in of all parts. The table below summarizes the typical performance of the LM117.

TABLE I

Output Voltage Range	1.25V–40V
Line Regulation	0.01%/V
Load Regulation $I_L = 1.5A$	0.1%
Reference Voltage	1.25V
Adjustment Pin Current	50 μA
Minimum Load Current (Quiescent Current)	3.5 mA
Temperature Stability	0.01%/°C
Current Limit	2.2A
Ripple Rejection	80 dB

The overload protection circuitry on the LM117 includes current limiting, safe-area protection for the internal power transistor and thermal limiting. The current limit is set at 2.2A and, unlike presently available positive regulators, remains relatively constant with temperature. Over a $-55^{\circ}C$ to

$+150^{\circ}C$ temperature range, the current limit only shifts about 10%.

At high input-to-output voltage differentials the safe-area protection decreases the current limit. With the LM117, full output current is available to 15V differential and, even at 40V, about 400 mA is available. With some regulators, the output will shut completely off when the input-to-output differential goes above 30V, possibly causing start-up problems. Finally, the thermal limiting is always active and will protect the device even if the adjustment terminal should become accidentally disconnected.

Since the LM117 is a floating voltage regulator, it sees only the input-to-output voltage differential. This is of benefit, especially at high output voltage. For example, a 30V regulator nominally operating with a 38V input can have 70V input transient before the 40V input-to-output rating of the LM117 is exceeded.

BASIC OPERATION

The operation of how a 3-terminal regulator is adjusted can be easily understood by referring to Figure 1, which shows a functional circuit. An op amp, connected as a unity gain buffer, drives a power Darlington. The op amp and biasing circuitry for the regulator is arranged so that all the quiescent current is delivered to the regulator output (rather than ground) eliminating the need for a separate ground terminal. Further, all the circuitry is designed to operate over the 2V to 40V input-to-output differential of the regulator.

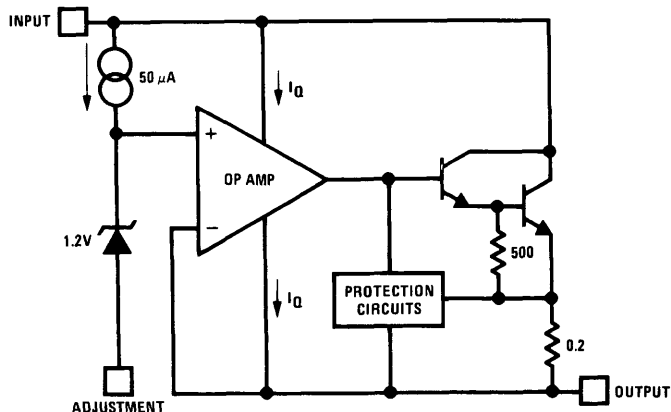


FIGURE 1. Functional Schematic of the LM117

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A 1.2V reference voltage appears inserted between the non-inverting input of the op amp and the adjustment terminal. About 50 μ A is needed to bias the reference and this current comes out of the adjustment terminal. In operation, the output of the regulator is the voltage of the adjustment terminal plus 1.2V. If the adjustment terminal is grounded, the device acts as a 1.2V regulator. For higher output voltages, a divider R1 and R2 is connected from the output to ground as is shown in Figure 2. The 1.2V reference across resistor R1 forces 10 mA of current to flow. This 10 mA then flows through R2, increasing the voltage at the adjustment terminal and therefore the output voltage. The output voltage is given by:

$$V_{OUT} = 1.2V \times \left(1 + \frac{R2}{R1} \right) + 50 \mu A R2$$

The 50 μ A biasing current is small compared to 5 mA and causes only a small error in actual output voltages. Further, it is extremely well regulated against line voltage or load current changes so that it contributes virtually no error to dynamic regulation. Of course, programming currents other than 10 mA can be used depending upon the application.

Since the regulator is floating, all the quiescent current must be absorbed by the load. With too light of a load, regulation is impaired. Usually, a 5 mA programming current is sufficient; however, worst case minimum load for commercial grade parts requires a minimum load of 10 mA. The minimum load current can be compared to the quiescent current of standard regulators.

APPLICATIONS

An adjustable lab regulator using the LM117 is shown in Figure 2 and has a 1.2V to 25V output range. A 10 mA program current is set by R1 while the output voltage is set by R2. Capacitor C1 is optional to improve ripple rejection so that 80 dB is obtained at any output voltage. The diode, although not necessary in this circuit since the output is limited to 25V, is needed with outputs over 25V to protect against the capacitors discharging through low current nodes in the LM117 when the input or output is shorted.

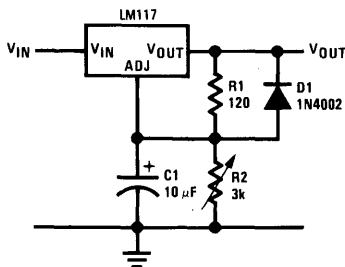


FIGURE 2. Basic Voltage Regulator

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The programming current is constant and can be used to bias other circuitry, while the regulator is used as the power supply for the system. In Figure 3, the LM117 is used as a 15V regulator while the programming current powers an LM129 zener reference. The LM129 is an IC zener with less than 1 Ω dynamic impedance and can operate over a range of 0.5 mA to 15 mA with virtually no change in performance.

Another example of using the programming current is shown in Figure 4 where the output setting resistor is tapped to provide multiple output voltage to op amp buffers. An additional transistor is included as part of the overload protection. When any of the outputs are shorted, the op amp will current limit and a voltage will be developed across its inputs. This will turn "ON" the transistor and pull down the adjustment terminal of the LM117, causing all outputs to decrease, minimizing possible damage to the rest of the circuitry.

Ordinary 3-terminal regulators are not especially attractive for use as precision current regulators. Firstly, the quiescent current can be as high as 10 mA, giving at least 1% error at 1A output currents, and more error at lower currents. Secondly, at least 7V is needed to operate the device. With the LM117, the only error current is 50 μ A from the adjustment terminal, and only 4.2V is needed for operation at 1.5A or 3.2V at 0.5A. A simple 2-terminal current regulator is shown in Figure 5 and is usable anywhere from 10 mA to 1.5A.

Figure 6 shows an adjustable current regulator in conjunction with the voltage regulator from Figure 2 to make constant voltage/constant current lab-type supply. Current sensing is done across R1, a 1 Ω resistor, while R2 sets the current limit point. When the wiper of R2 is connected, the 1 Ω sense resistor current is regulated at 1.2A. As R2 is adjusted, a portion of the 1.2V reference of the LM117 is cancelled by the drop across the pot, decreasing the current limit point. At low output currents, current regulation is degraded since the voltage across the 1 Ω sensing resistor becomes quite low. For example, with 50 mA output current, only 50 mV is dropped across the sense resistor and the supply rejection of the LM117 will limit the current regulation

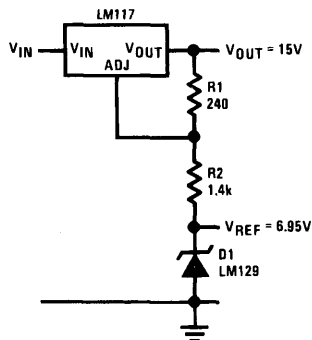


FIGURE 3. Regulator and Voltage Reference

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to about 3% for a 40V change across the device. An alternate current regulator is shown in Figure 7 using an additional LM117 to provide the reference, rather than an LM113 diode. Both current regulators need a negative supply to operate down to ground.

Figure 8 shows a 2-wire current transmitter with 10 mA to 50 mA output current for a 1V input. An LM117 is biased as a 10 mA current source to set the minimum current and provide operating current for the control circuitry. Operating

off the 10 mA is an LM108 and an LM129 zener. The zener provides a common-mode voltage for operation of the LM108 as well as a 6.9V reference, if needed. Input signals are impressed across R3, and the current through R3 is delivered to the output of the regulator by Q1 and Q2. For a 25Ω resistor, this gives a 40 mA current change for a 1V input. This circuit can be used in 4 mA to 20 mA applications, but the LM117 must be selected for low quiescent current. Minimum operating voltage is about 12V.

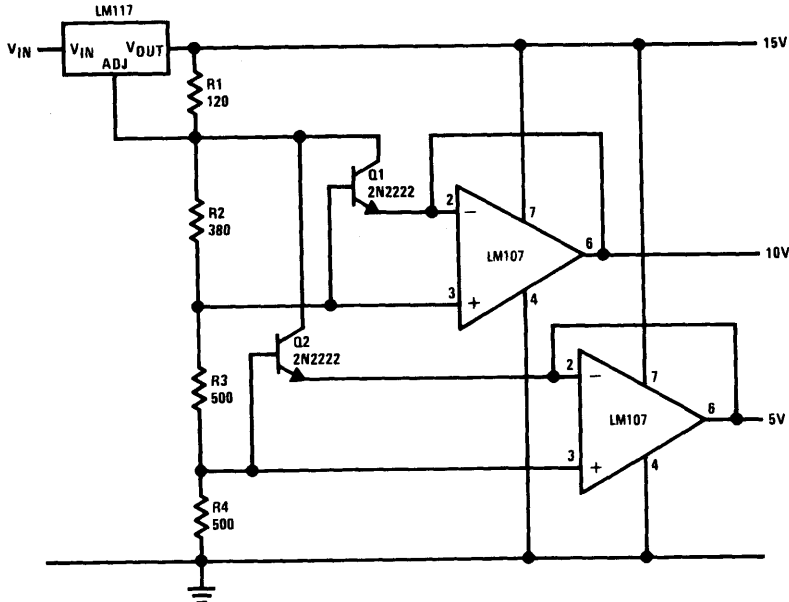
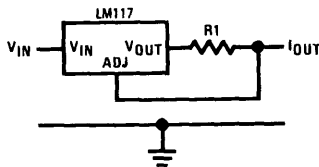


FIGURE 4. Regulator with Multiple Outputs

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$$I_{OUT} = \frac{1.25V}{R1}$$

$$10 \text{ mA} \leq I_{OUT} \leq 1.5A$$

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FIGURE 5. 2-Terminal Current Regulator

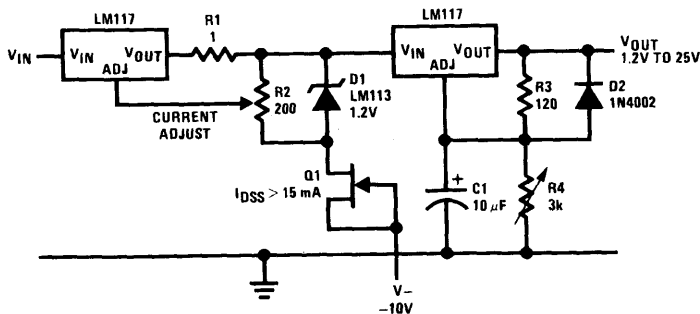


FIGURE 6. Adjustable Regulator. Constant Voltage/Constant Current, 10 mA to 1.2A

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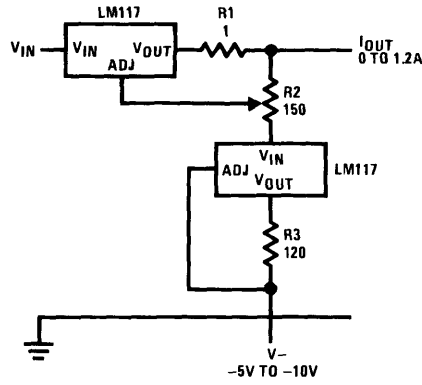


FIGURE 7. Adjustable Current Regulator

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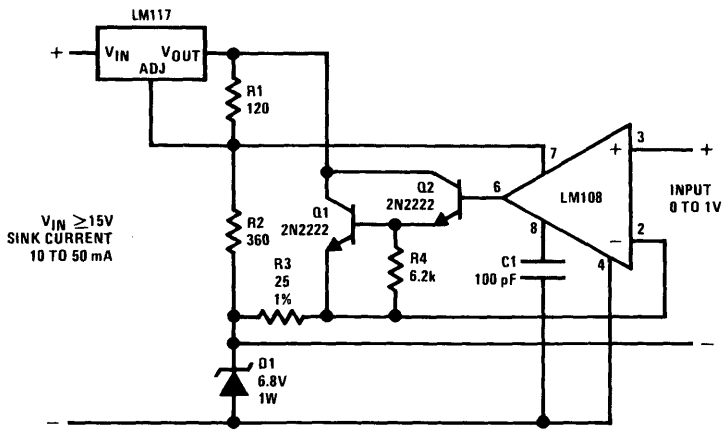


FIGURE 8. 10 mA to 50 mA 2-Wire Current Transmitter

TL/H/7334-8

3-Terminal Regulator is Adjustable

National Semiconductor
Application Note 181



AN-181

INTRODUCTION

Until now, all of the 3-terminal power IC voltage regulators have a fixed output voltage. In spite of this limitation, their ease of use, low cost, and full on-chip overload protection have generated wide acceptance. Now, with the introduction of the LM117, it is possible to use a single regulator for any output voltage from 1.2V to 37V at 1.5A. Selecting close-tolerance output voltage parts or designing discrete regulators for particular applications is no longer necessary since the output voltage can be adjusted. Further, only one regulator type need be stocked for a wide range of applications. Additionally, an adjustable regulator is more versatile, lending itself to many applications not suitable for fixed output devices.

In addition to adjustability, the new regulator features performance a factor of 10 better than fixed output regulators. Line regulation is 0.01%/V and load regulation is only 0.1%. It is packaged in standard TO-3 transistor packages so that heat sinking is easily accomplished with standard heat sinks. Besides higher performance, overload protection circuitry is improved, increasing reliability.

ADJUSTABLE REGULATOR CIRCUIT

The adjustment of a 3-terminal regulator can be easily understood by referring to *Figure 1*, which shows a functional circuit. An op amp, connected as a unity gain buffer, drives a power Darlington. The op amp and biasing circuitry for the regulator are arranged so that all the quiescent current is delivered to the regulator output (rather than ground) eliminating the need for a separate ground terminal. Further, all the circuitry is designed to operate over the 2V to 40V input to output differential of the regulator.

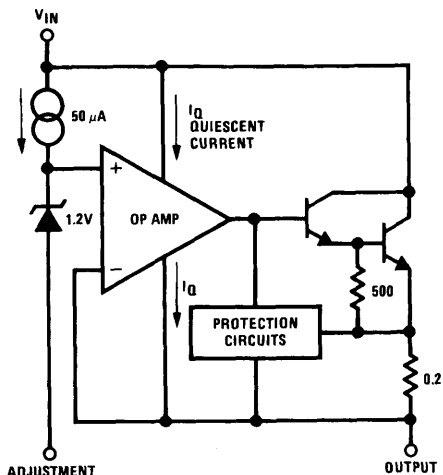


FIGURE 1. Functional Schematic of the LM117

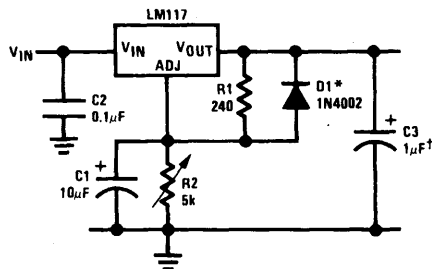
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A 1.2V reference voltage appears inserted between the non-inverting input of the op amp and the adjustment terminal. About 50 μA is needed to bias the reference and this current comes out of the adjustment terminal. In operation, the output of the regulator is the voltage of the adjustment terminal plus 1.2V. If the adjustment terminal is grounded, the device acts as a 1.2V regulator. For higher output voltages, a divider R1 and R2 is connected from the output to ground as is shown in *Figure 2*. The 1.2V reference across resistor R1 forces 5 mA of current to flow. This 5 mA then flows through R2, increasing the voltage at the adjustment terminal and therefore the output voltage. The output voltage is given by:

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† Solid tantalum
*Discharges C1 if output is shorted to ground

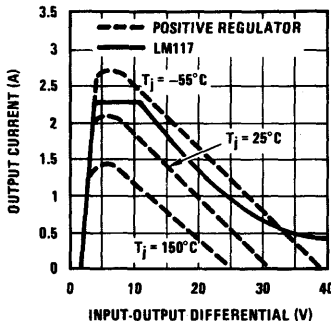
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FIGURE 2. Adjustable Regulator with Improved Ripple Rejection

OVERLOAD PROTECTION CIRCUITRY

An important advancement in the LM117 is improved current limit circuitry. Current limit is set internally at about 2.2A and the current limit remains constant with temperature. Older devices such as the LM309 or LM7800 regulators use the turn-on of an emitter-base junction of a transistor to set the current limit. This causes current limit to typically change by a factor of 2 over a -55°C to $+150^{\circ}\text{C}$ temperature range. Further, to insure adequate output current at 150°C the current limit is relatively high at 25°C , which can cause problems by overloading the input supply.

Also included is safe-area protection for the pass transistor to decrease the current limit as input-to-output voltage differential increases. The safe area protection circuit in the LM117 allows full output current at 15V differential and does not allow the current limit to drop to zero at high input-to-output differential voltages, thus preventing start up problems with high input voltages. Figure 3 compares the current limit of the LM117 to an LM340 regulator.



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FIGURE 3. Comparison of LM117 Current Limit with Older Positive Regulator

Thermal overload protection, included on the chip, turns the regulator OFF when the chip temperature exceeds about 170°C , preventing destruction due to excessive heating. Previously, the thermal limit circuitry required about 7V to operate. The LM117 has a new design that is operative down to about 2V. Further, the thermal limit and current limit circuitry in the LM117 are functional, even if the adjustment terminal should be accidentally disconnected.

OPERATING THE LM117

The basic regulator connection for the LM117, as shown in Figure 2, only requires the addition of 2 resistors and a standard input bypass capacitor. Resistor R2 sets the output voltage while R1 provides the 5 mA programming current. The 2 capacitors on the adjustment and output terminals are optional for improved performance.

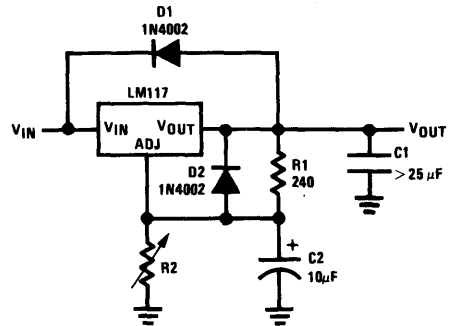
Bypassing the adjustment terminal to ground improves ripple rejection. This bypass capacitor prevents ripple from being amplified as the output voltage is increased. With a $10\ \mu\text{F}$ bypass capacitor, 80 dB ripple rejection is obtainable at any output level. Increases over $10\ \mu\text{F}$ do not appreciably improve the ripple rejection at 120 Hz. If a bypass capacitor is used, it is sometimes necessary to include protection

diodes as discussed later, to prevent the capacitor from discharging through internal low current paths in the LM117 and damaging the device.

Although the LM117 is stable with no output capacitors, like any feedback circuit, certain values of external capacitance can cause excessive ringing. This occurs with values between 500 pF and 5000 pF. A $1\ \mu\text{F}$ solid tantalum (or $25\ \mu\text{F}$ aluminum electrolytic) on the output swamps this effect and insures stability. When external capacitors are used with any IC regulator, it is sometimes necessary to add protection diodes to prevent the capacitors from discharging through low current points into the regulator. Most $10\ \mu\text{F}$ capacitors have low enough internal series resistance to deliver 20A spikes when shorted. Although the surge is short, there is enough energy to damage parts of the IC.

When an output capacitor is connected to a regulator and the input is shorted, the output capacitor will discharge into the output of the regulator. The discharge current depends on the value of the capacitor, the output voltage of the regulator, and the rate of decrease of V_{IN} . In the LM117, this discharge path is through a large junction that is able to sustain a 20A surge with no problem. This is not true of other types of positive regulators. For output capacitors of $25\ \mu\text{F}$ or less, there is no need to use diodes.

The bypass capacitor on the adjustment terminal (C2) can discharge through a low current junction. Discharge occurs when either the input or output is shorted. Internal to the LM117 is a $50\ \Omega$ resistor which limits the peak discharge current. No protection is needed for output voltages of 25V and less than $10\ \mu\text{F}$ capacitance. Figure 4 shows an LM117 with protection diodes included for use with outputs greater than 25V and high values of output capacitance.



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$$V_{OUT} = 1.25V \left(1 + \frac{R2}{R1} \right) + R2 \cdot I_{ADJ}$$

D1 protects against C1 (input shorts)

D2 protects against C2 (output shorts)

FIGURE 4. Regulator with Protection Diodes Against Capacitor Discharge

Some care should be taken in making connection to the LM117 to achieve the best load regulation. Series resistance between the output of the regulator and programming resistor R1 should be minimized. Any voltage drop due to load current through this series resistance appears as a change in the reference voltage and degrades regulation. If possible, 2 wires should be connected to the output—1 for load current and 1 for resistor R1. The ground of R2 can

be returned near the ground of the load to provide remote sensing and improve load regulation.

APPLICATIONS

Figure 5 shows a 0V to 25V general purpose lab supply. Operation of the LM317 down to 0V output requires the addition of a negative supply so that the adjustment terminal can be driven to -1.2V. An LM329 6.9V reference is used to provide a regulated -1.2V reference to the bottom of adjustment pot R2. The LM329 is an IC zener which has exceptionally low dynamic impedance so the negative supply need not be well regulated. Note that a 10 mA programming current is used since lab supplies are often used with no-load, and the LM317 requires a worst-case minimum load of 10 mA.

The 1.2V minimum output of the LM117 makes it easy to design power supplies with electrical shut-down. At 1.2V, most circuits draw only a small fraction of their normal operating current. In Figure 6 a TTL input signal causes Q1 to ground the adjustment terminal decreasing the output to 1.2V. If true zero output is desired, the adjustment can be driven to -1.2V; however, this does require a separate negative supply.

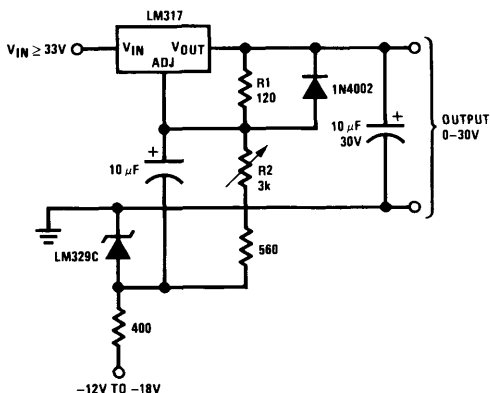
When fixed output voltage regulators are used as on-card regulator for multiple cards, the normal output voltage tolerance of ±5% between regulators can cause as much as 10% difference in operating voltage between cards.

This can cause operating speed differences in digital circuitry, interfacing problems or decrease noise margins.

Figure 7 shows a method of adjusting multiple on-card regulators so that all outputs track within ±100 mV. The adjustment terminals of all devices are tied together and a single divider is used to set the outputs. Programming current is set at 10 mA to minimize the effects of the 50 μA biasing current of the regulators and should further be increased if many LM117's are used. Diodes connected across each regulator insure that all outputs will decrease if 1 regulator is shorted.

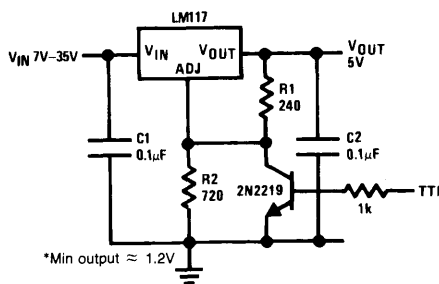
Two terminal current regulators can be made with fixed-output regulators; however, their high output voltage and high quiescent current limit their accuracy. With the LM117 as shown in Figure 8, a high performance current source useful from 10 mA to 1.5A can be made. Current regulation is typically 0.01%/V even at low currents since the quiescent current does not cause an error. Minimum operating voltage is less than 4V, so it is also useful as an in-line adjustable current limiter for protection of other circuitry.

Low cost adjustable switching regulators can be made using an LM317 as the control element. Figure 9 shows the simplest configuration. A power PNP is used as the switch driving an L-C filter. Positive feedback for hysteresis is applied to the LM317 through R6. When the PNP switches, a small square wave is generated across R5. This is level shifted and applied to the adjustment terminal of the regulator by R4 and C2, causing it to switch ON or OFF. Negative



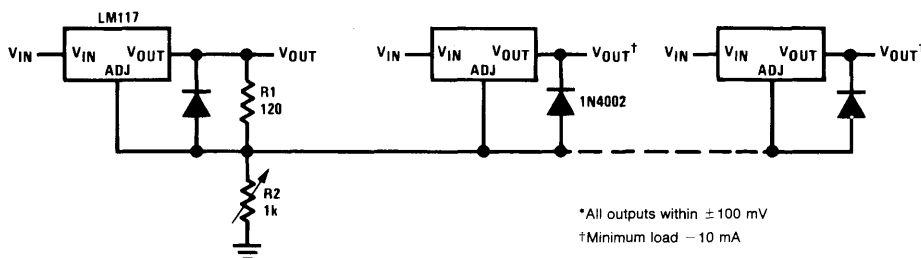
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FIGURE 5. General Purpose 0-30V Power Supply



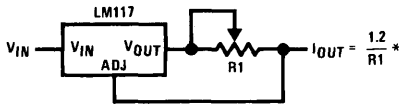
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FIGURE 6. 5V Logic Regulator with Electronic Shutdown*



TL/H/1532-7

FIGURE 7. Adjusting Multiple On-Card Regulators with Single Control*



$$*0.8\Omega \leq R1 \leq 120\Omega$$

TL/H/1532-8

FIGURE 8. Precision Current Limiter

feedback is taken from the output through R3, making the circuit oscillate. Capacitor C3 acts as a speed-up, increasing switching speed, while R2 limits the peak drive current to Q1.

The circuit in *Figure 9* provides no protection for Q1 in case of an overload. A blow-out proof switching regulator is shown in *Figure 10*. The PNP transistor has been replaced by a PNP-NPN combination with LM395's used as the NPN transistors. The LM395 is an IC which acts as an NPN transistor with overload protection. Included on the LM395 is current limiting, safe-area protection and thermal overload protection making the device virtually immune to any type of overload.

Efficiency for the regulators ranges from 65% to 85%, depending on output voltage. At low output voltages, fixed power losses are a greater percentage of the total output power so efficiency is lowest. Operating frequency is about 30 kHz and ripple is about 150 mV, depending upon input voltage. Load regulation is about 50 mV and line regulation about 1% for a 10V input change.

One of the more unique applications for these switching regulators is as a tracking pre-regulator. The only DC connection to ground on either regulator is through the 100Ω resistor (R5 or R8) that sets the hysteresis. Instead of tying this resistor to ground, it can be connected to the output of

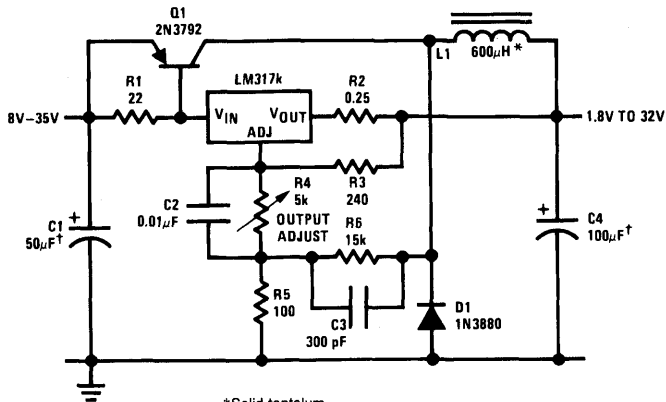
a linear regulator so that the switching regulator maintains a constant input-to-output differential on the linear regulator. The switching regulator would typically be set to hold the input voltage to the linear regulator about 3V higher than the output.

Battery charging is another application uniquely suited for the LM117. Since battery voltage is dependent on electrochemical reactions, the charger must be designed specifically for the battery type and number of cells. Ni-Cads are easily charged with the constant current sources shown previously. For float chargers on lead-acid type batteries all that is necessary is to set the output of the LM117 at the float voltage and connect it to the battery. An adjustable regulator is mandatory since, for long battery life the float voltage must be precisely controlled. The output voltage temperature coefficient can be matched to the battery by inserting diodes in series with the adjustment resistor for the regulator and coupling the diodes to the battery.

A high performance charger for gelled electrolyte lead-acid batteries is shown in *Figure 11*. This charger is designed to quickly recharge a battery and shut off at full charge.

Initially, the charging current is limited to 2A by the internal current limit of the LM117. As the battery voltage rises, current to the battery decreases and when the current has decreased to 150 mA, the charger switches to a lower float voltage preventing overcharge. With a discharged battery, the start switch is not needed since the charger will start by itself; however, it is included to allow topping off even slightly discharged batteries.

When the start switch is pushed, the output of the charger goes to 14.5V set by R1, R2 and R3. Output current is sensed across R6 and compared to a fraction of the 1.2V

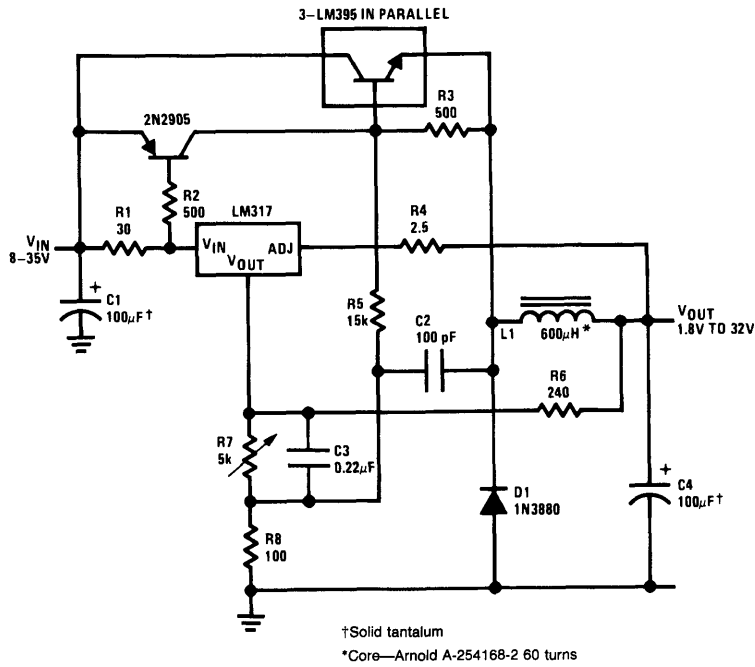


†Solid tantalum

*Core—Arnold A-254168-2 60 turns

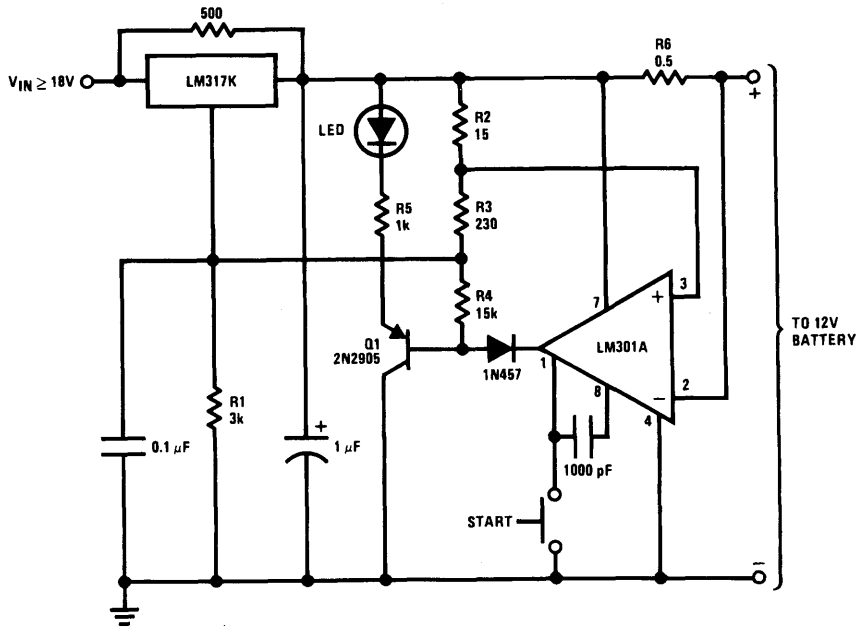
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FIGURE 9. Low Cost 3A Switching Regulator



TL/H/1532-10

FIGURE 10. 4A Switching Regulator with Overload Protection



TL/H/1532-11

FIGURE 11. 12V Battery Charger

reference (across R2) by an LM301A op amp. As the voltage across R6 decreases below the voltage across R2, the output of the LM101A goes low shunting R1 with R4. This decreases the output voltage from 14.5V to about 12.5V terminating the charging. Transistor Q1 then lights the LED as a visual indication of full charge.

The LM117 can even be used as a peak clipping AC voltage regulator. Two regulators are used, 1 for each polarity of the input as shown in *Figure 12*. Internal to the LM117 is a diode from input-to-output which conducts the current around the device when the opposite regulator is active. Since each regulator is operating independently, the positive and negative peaks must be set separately for a symmetrical output.

CONCLUSIONS

A new IC power voltage regulator has been developed which is significantly more versatile than older devices. The output voltage is adjustable, in addition to improved regulation specifications. Further, reliability is increased in 2 fashions. Overload protection circuitry has been improved to make the device less susceptible to fault conditions and under short circuit conditions, minimum stress is transmitted back to the input power supply. Secondly, the device is 100% burned-in under short circuit conditions at the time of manufacture. Finally, the LM117 is made with a standard IC production process and packaged in a standard TO-3 power package, keeping costs low.

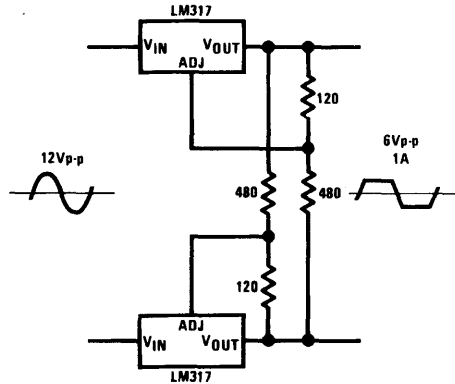


FIGURE 12. AC Voltage Regulator

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