
AN-181 3-Terminal Regulator is Adjustable

ABSTRACT

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 1.2 V to 37 V 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.

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1 Introduction

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.

2 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 2 V to 40 V input to output differential of the regulator.

A 1.2 V 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 1.2 V. If the adjustment terminal is grounded, the device acts as a 1.2 V regulator. For higher output voltages, a divider R1 and R2 is connected from the output to ground as is shown in [Figure 2](#). The 1.2 V 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:

$$V_{OUT} = 1.2V \left(1 + \frac{R_2}{R_1} \right) + 50 \mu A R_2 \quad (1)$$

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 5 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 the 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.

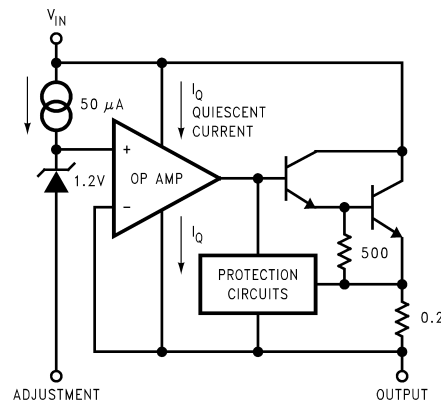
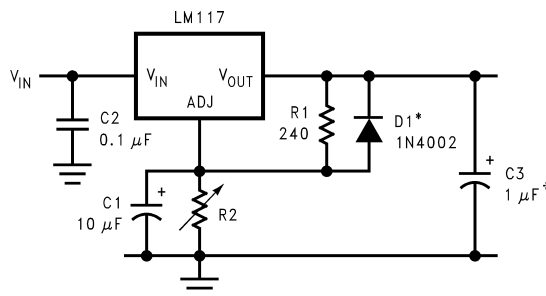


Figure 1. Functional Schematic of the LM117



†Solid tantalum

*Discharges C1 if output is shorted to ground

Figure 2. Adjustable Regulator With Improved Ripple Rejection

3 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 15 V 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.

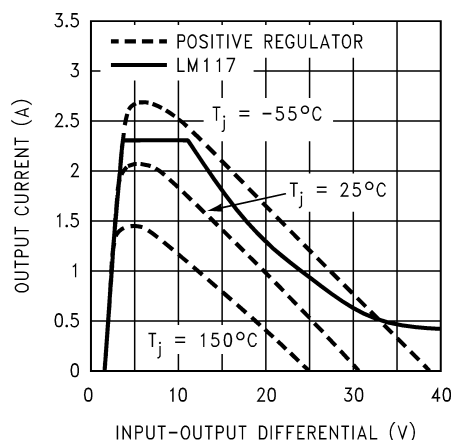


Figure 3. Comparison of LM117 Current Limit With Older Positive Regulator

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 7 V to operate. The LM117 has a new design that is operative down to about 2 V. Further, the thermal limit and current limit circuitry in the LM117 are functional, even if the adjustment terminal should be accidentally disconnected.

4 Operating the LM117

The basic regulator connection for the LM117, as shown in Figure 2, only requires the addition of two resistors and a standard input bypass capacitor. Resistor R2 sets the output voltage while R1 provides the 5 mA programming current. The two 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 μF bypass capacitor, 80 dB ripple rejection is obtainable at any output level. Increases over 10 μF 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 μF solid tantalum (or 25 μF 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 μF 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 discharges 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 20 μF 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 Ω resistor that limits the peak discharge current. No protection is needed for output voltages of 25 V and less than 10 μF capacitance. Figure 4 shows an LM117 with protection diodes included for use with outputs greater than 25 V and high values of output capacitance.

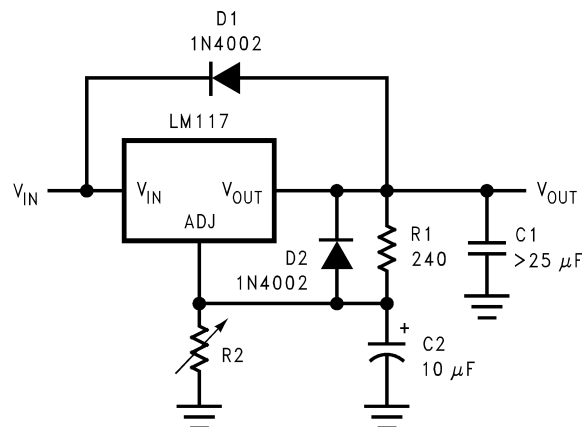


Figure 4. Regulator With Protection Diodes Against Capacitor Discharge

$$V_{\text{OUT}} = 1.25\text{V} \left(1 + \frac{R_2}{R_1} \right) + R_2 * I_{\text{ADJ}}$$

D1 protects against C1 (input shorts)

D2 protects against C2 (output shorts)

(2)

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, two wires should be connected to the output: one for load current and one for resistor R1. The ground of R2 can be returned near the ground of the load to provide remote sensing and improve load regulation.

5 Applications

Figure 5 shows a 0 V to 25 V general purpose lab supply. Operation of the LM317 down to 0 V output requires the addition of a negative supply so that the adjustment terminal can be driven to -1.2 V. An LM329 6.9 V reference is used to provide a regulated -1.2 V reference to the bottom of adjustment pot R2. The LM329 is an IC Zener that 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 1.2 V minimum output of the LM117 makes it easy to design power supplies with electrical shut-down. At 1.2 V, 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 1.2 V. If true zero output is desired, the adjustment can be driven to -1.2 V; 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 $\pm 5\%$ 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 $50 \mu\text{A}$ 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 4 V, 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.

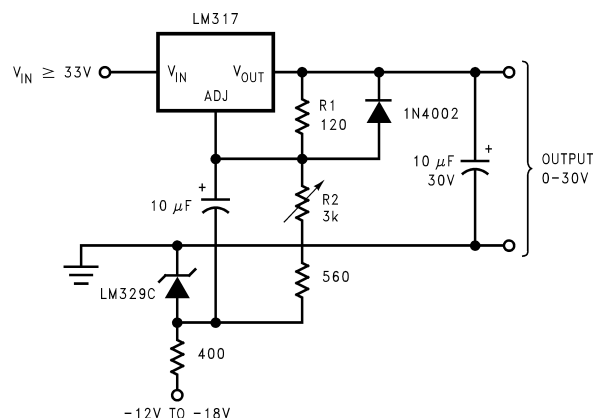
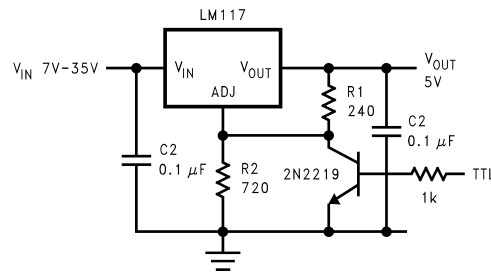
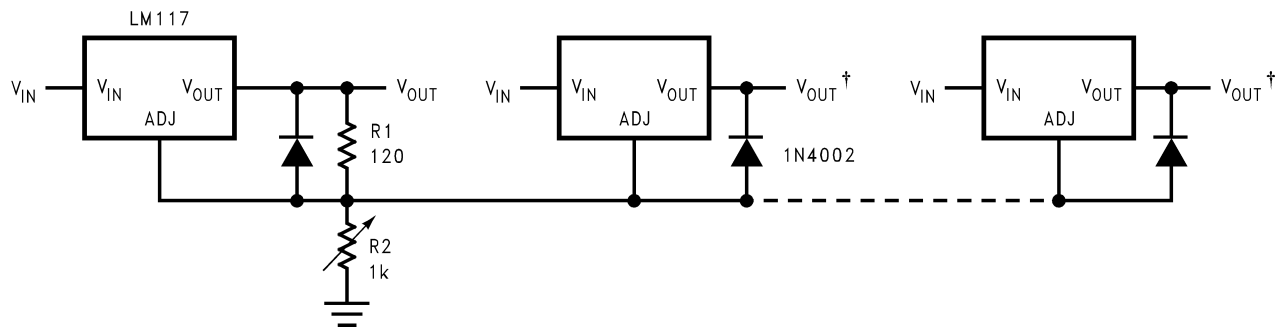


Figure 5. General Purpose 0 V – 30 V Power Supply



*Min output ≈ 1.2 V

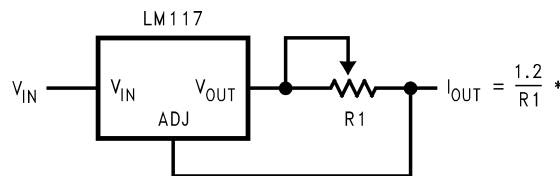
Figure 6. 5 V Logic Regulator With Electronic Shutdown*



*All outputs within ± 100 mV

†Minimum load ~ 10 mA

Figure 7. Adjusting Multiple On-Card Regulators With Single Control*



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

Figure 8. Precision Current Limiter

Negative 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 that acts as an NPN transistor with overload protection. Included on the LM395 are current limiting, safe-area protection and thermal overload protection making the device virtually immune to any type of overload.

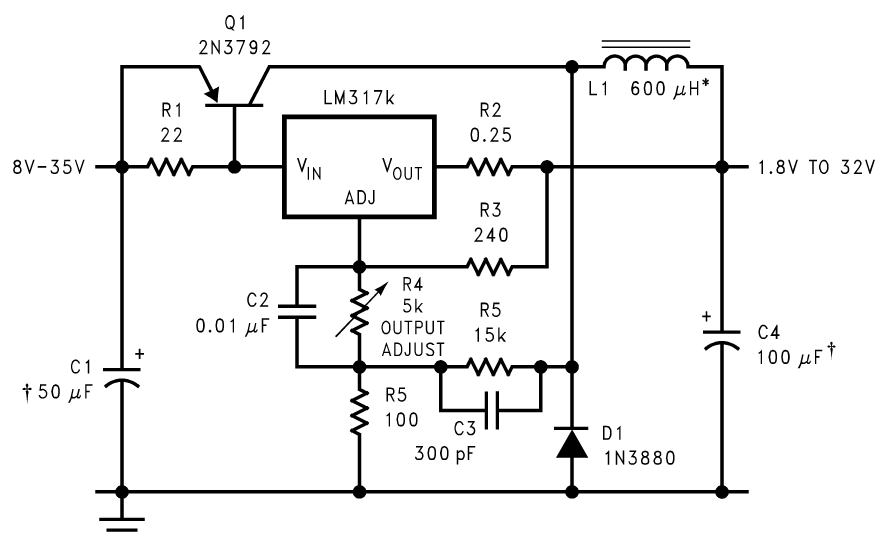
Efficiency for the regulators ranges from 65% to 85%, depending on output voltage. At low output voltages, fixed power losses are a greater percentage of the total output power so efficiency is lowest. Operating frequency is about 30 kHz and ripple is about 150 mV, depending upon input voltage. Load regulation is about 50 mV and line regulation about 1% for a 10 V 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 3 V higher than the output.

Battery charging is another application uniquely suited for the LM117. Since battery voltage is dependent on electro-chemical 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.

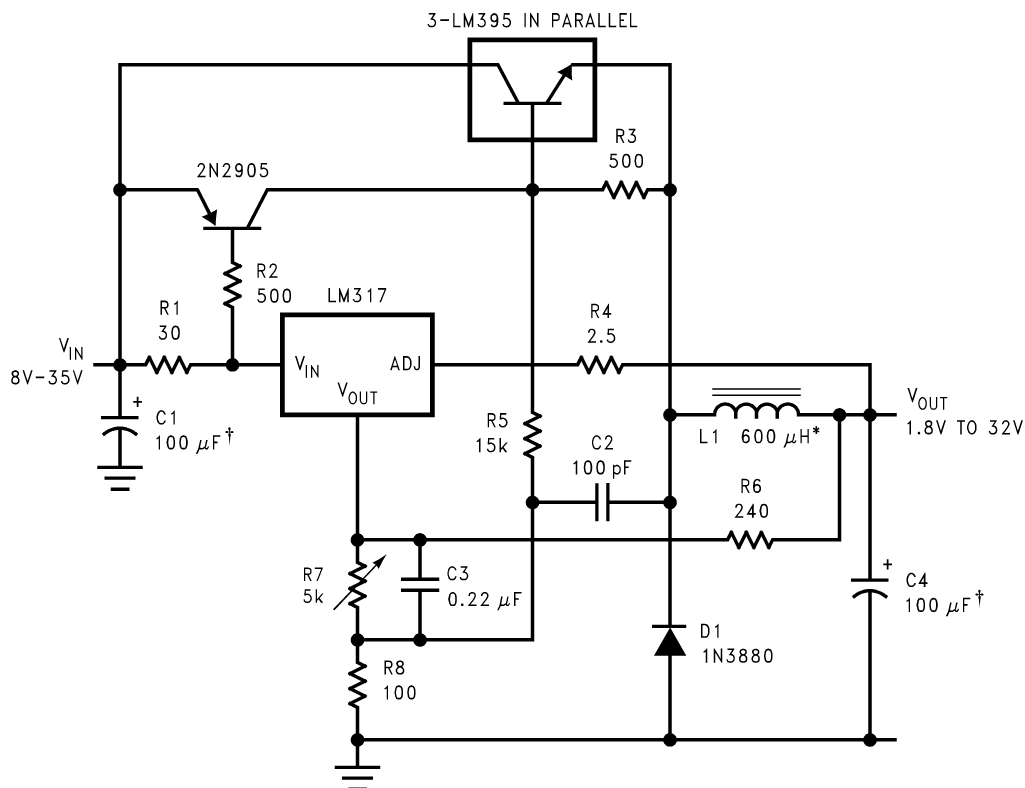
Initially, the charging current is limited to 2A by the internal current limit of the LM117. As the battery voltage rises, current to the battery decreases and when the current has decreased to 150 mA, the charger switches to a lower float voltage preventing overcharge. With a discharged battery, the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



†Solid tantalum

*Core—Arnold A-254168-2 60 turns

Figure 9. Low Cost 3A Switching Regulator



†Solid tantalum

*Core—Arnold A-254168-2 60 turns

Figure 10. 4A Switching Regulator With Overload Protection

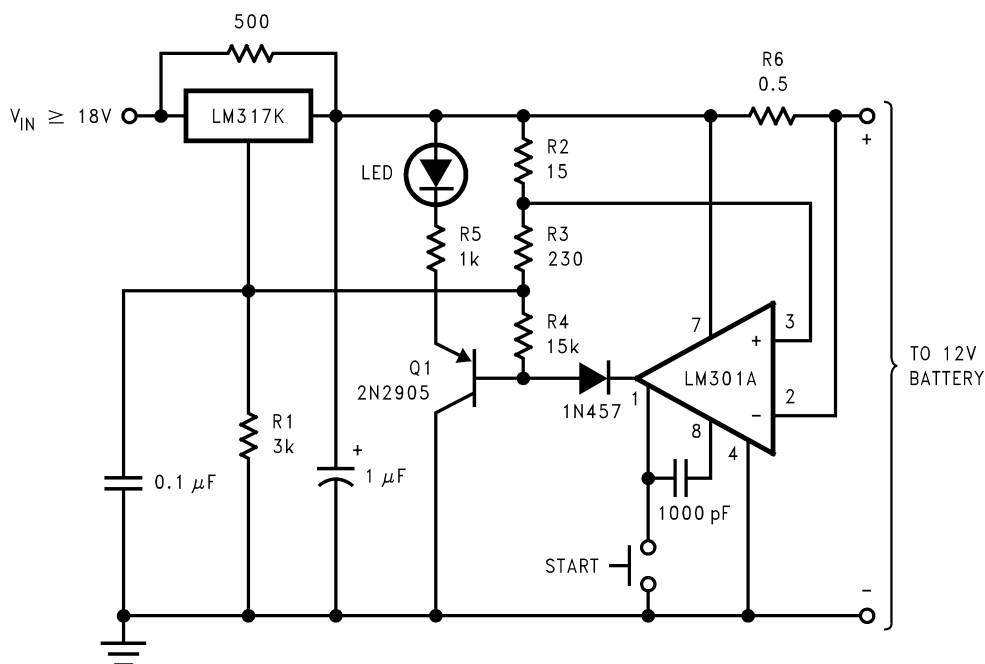


Figure 11. 12 V Battery Charger

When the start switch is pushed, the output of the charger goes to 14.5 V set by R1, R2 and R3. Output current is sensed across R6 and compared to a fraction of the 1.2 V reference (across R2) by an LM301A op amp. As the voltage across R8 decreases below the voltage across R2, the output of the LM301A goes low shunting R1 with R4. This decreases the output voltage from 14.5 V to about 12.5 V 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 that 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.

6 Conclusions

A new IC power voltage regulator has been developed that is significantly more versatile than older devices. The output voltage is adjustable, in addition to improved regulation specifications. Further, reliability is increased in two 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.

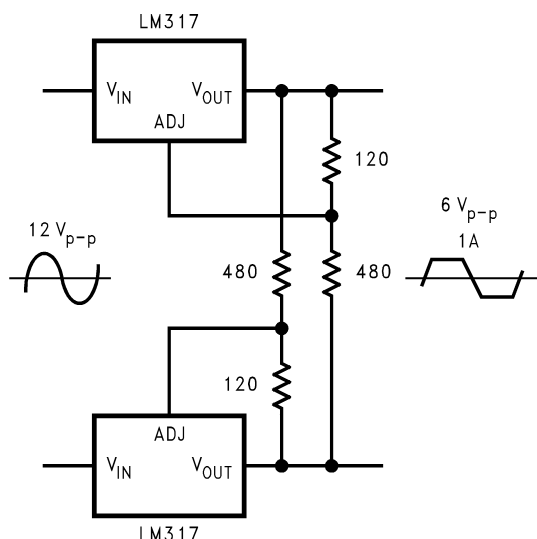


Figure 12. AC Voltage Regulator

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