Transceivers and Repeaters Meeting the EIA RS-485 Interface Standard

INTRODUCTION

The Electronics Industries Association (EIA), in 1983, approved a new balanced transmission standard called RS-485. The TIA/EIA-485-A (current revision) standard addresses the problem of data transmission, where a balanced transmission line is used in a party-line configuration. It is similar in many respects to the popular RS-422 (TIA/EIA-422-B) standard; in fact RS-485 may be considered the outcome of expanding the scope of RS-422 to allow multipoint — multiple drivers and receivers sharing the same line — data transmission. The RS-485 standard, like the RS-422 standard, specifies only the electrical characteristics of the driver and the receiver to be used at the line interface; it does not specify or recommend any protocol. The protocol is left to the user.

The EIA RS-485 standard has found widespread acceptance and usage since its ratification. Users are now able to configure inexpensive local area networks and multi-drop communication links using twisted pair wire and the protocol of their choice. They also have the flexibility to match cable quality, signalling rate and distance to the specific application and thus obtain the best tradeoff between cost and performance. The acceptance of the RS-485 standard is also reflected by the fact that other standards refer to it when specifying multipoint data links. The ANSI (American National Standards Institute) standards IPI (Intelligent Peripheral Interface) and SCSI (Small Computer Systems Interface) have used the RS-485 standard as the basis for their voltage mode differential interface class. The IPI standard specifies the interface between disc drive controllers and host adapters and requires a data rate of 2.5 megabaud over a 50 meters NRZ data link. The SCSI (SCSI-1) standard specifies the interface between personal computers, disc drives and printers at data rates up to a maximum of 4 megabaud over 25 meters.

It is not possible to use standard gate structures and meet the requirements of RS-485. The modifications necessary to comply with the DC requirements of the standard, tend to exact a heavy toll on speed and other AC characteristics like skew. However, it is possible to vastly improve the ac performance by employing special design techniques. The DS3695 family of chips made by National Semiconductor meets all the requirements of EIA RS-485, and still provides ac performance comparable with most existing RS-422 devices. The chip set consists of three devices; they are the DS3695/DS3696 transceivers and the DS3697 repeater. National's RS-485 devices incorporate several features in addition to those specified by the RS-485 standard. These features provide greater versatility, easier use and much superior performance. This article discusses the requirements of a multi-point system, and the way in which RS-485 addresses these requirements. It also explains the characteristics necessary and desirable in the multi-point drivers and receivers, so that these may provide high performance and comply with generally accepted precepts of data transmission practice.

WHY RS-485?

Until the introduction of the RS-485 standard, the RS-422 standard was the most widely accepted interface standard for balanced data transmission. The RS-422 drivers and receivers were intended for use in the configuration shown in *Figure 1*. The driver is at one end of the line; the termination resistor (equal to 100Ω) and up to 10 receivers reside at the other end of the line. This approach works well in simplex (unidirectional) data transmission applications, but creates problems when data has to be transmitted back and forth between several pieces of equipment. If several Data Terminal Equipments (DTEs) have to communicate with one another over long distances using RS-422 links, two such balanced lines have to be established between each pair of DTEs. The hardware cost associated with such a solution would normally be unacceptable.
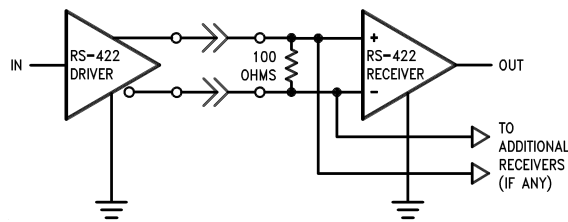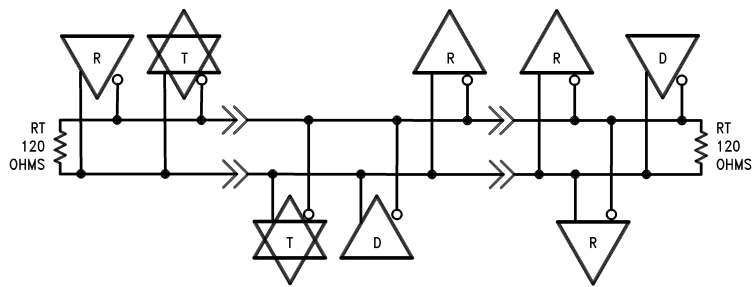

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FIGURE 1. An RS-422 Configuration

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D — Driver
R — Receiver
T — Transceiver

FIGURE 2. A Typical RS-485 Party-Line Configuration

A party line is the most economical solution to the above problem. RS-422 hardware could conceivably be used to implement a party line if the driver is provided with TRI-STATE® capability, but such an implementation would be subjected to severe restrictions because of inadequacies in the electrical characteristics of the driver. The biggest problem is caused by ground voltage differences. The common mode voltage on a balanced line is established by the enabled driver. The common mode voltage at the receiver is the sum of the driver offset voltage and the ground voltage difference between the driver and the receiver. In simplex systems only the receiver need have a wide common mode range. Receiver designs that provide a wide common mode range are fairly straightforward. In a party-line network several hundred feet long, in which each piece of equipment is earthed at a local ac outlet, the ground voltage difference between two DTEs could be as much as a few volts. In such a case both the receiver and the driver must have a wide common mode range. Most RS-422 drivers are not designed to remain in the high impedance state over a wide enough common mode range, to make them immune to even small ground drops.

Classical line drivers are vulnerable to ground drops because of their output stage designs. A typical output stage is shown in *Figure 3*. Two such stages driven by complementary input signals, may be used to provide the complementary outputs of a differential line driver. Transistors Q1 and Q4 form a Darlington pull up for the totem pole output stage; Q2 is the pull down transistor. The phase splitter Q3 switches current between the upper and lower transistors to obtain the desired output state. DSUB is the diode formed by the collector of Q2 and the grounded substrate of the inte-

grated circuit. The output in *Figure 3* can be put into the high impedance state by pulling down the bases of transistors Q3 and Q4. Unfortunately, the high impedance state cannot be maintained if the output is pulled above the power supply voltage or below ground voltage. In party-line applications, where ground voltage differences of a few volts will be common, it is essential that the drivers be able to hold the high impedance state while their outputs are taken above V_{CC} and below ground.

The output in *Figure 3* can be taken high until the emitter-base junction of Q1 breaks down. Thereafter, the output will be clamped to a zener voltage plus a base-collector diode voltage above V_{CC}; V_{CC} could be zero if the device is powered off. If the output is taken below ground, it will cause the substrate diode, DSUB, associated with Q2 to turn on and clamp the output voltage at a diode drop below ground. If a disabled driver turns on and clamps the line, the signal put out by the active driver will get clipped and distorted. It is also possible for ground drops to cause dangerously large substrate currents to flow and damage the devices as illustrated in *Figure 4*. *Figure 4* depicts two drivers A and B; it shows the pull down transistors (Q2A and Q2B) and their associated substrate diodes (DSUB-A and DSUB-B) for the two drivers A and B. Here driver A is ON in the low output state; driver B is disabled, and therefore, should neither source nor sink current. The ground of driver A is 3 volts lower than that of driver B. Consequently, the substrate diode DSUB-B sees a forward bias voltage of about 2.7V (the collector-emitter voltage of Q2A will be about 0.3V), which causes hundreds of milliamperes of current to flow out of it.
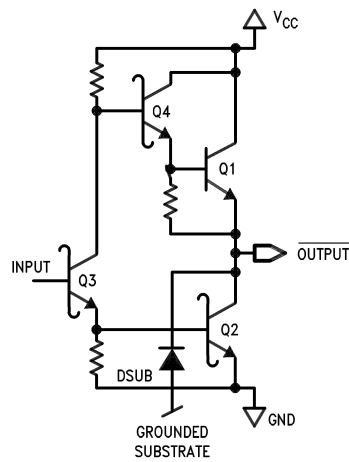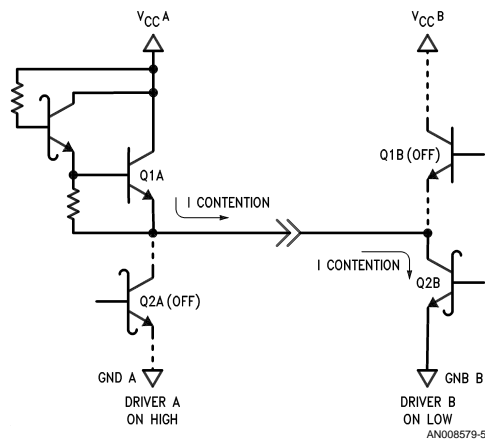
FIGURE 3. Driver Output Stage
(not RS-485)
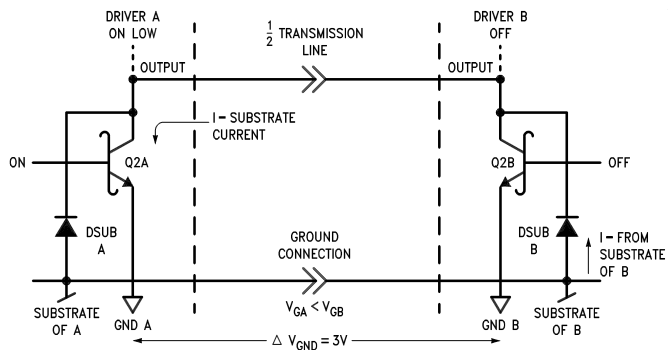
FIGURE 4. Two DCEs Separated by a Ground Drop

FIGURE 5. Bus Contention

Another problem is line contention, i.e. two drivers being "ON" simultaneously. Even if the protocol does not allow two drivers to be on at the same time, such a contingency could arise as a result of a fault condition. A line contention situation, where two drivers are on at the same time, is illustrated in *Figure 5*. Here, drivers A and B are "ON" simultaneously; driver A is trying to force a high level on the line whereas driver B is trying to force a low level. Transistors Q1A and Q2B are "ON" while transistors Q2A and Q1B are "OFF". As a result, a large current is sourced by Q1A and sunk by Q2B; the magnitude of this current is limited only by the parasitic resistances of the two devices and the line. The problem is compounded by any ground drop that may exist between the two contending drivers. This large contention current can cause damage to one or both of the contending drivers. Most RS-422 drivers are not designed to handle line contention.

A multi-point driver should also be capable of providing more drive than a RS-422 driver. The RS-422 driver is only required to drive one 100Ω termination resistor, and ten receivers each with an input impedance no smaller than 4 kΩ. A party-line, however, would have to be terminated at both ends; it should also be able to drive more devices to be useful and economical.

Because of the above limitations, it is quite impractical to use RS-422 hardware to interconnect systems on a party-line. Clearly, a new standard had to be generated to meet the more stringent hardware requirements of muti-point data links.

THE RS-485 STANDARD

The RS-485 standard specifies the electrical characteristics of drivers and receivers that could be used to implement a balanced multi-point transmission line (party-line). A data exchange network using these devices will operate properly in the presence of reasonable ground drops, withstand line contention situations and carry 32 or more drivers and receivers on the line. The intended transmission medium is a 120Ω twisted pair line terminated at both ends in its characteristic impedance. The drivers and receivers can be distributed between the termination resistors as shown in *Figure 2*.

The effects of ground voltage differences are mitigated by expanding the common mode voltage (V_{CM}) range of the driver and the receiver to $-7V < V_{CM} < +12V$. A driver forced into the high impedance state, should be able to have its output taken to any voltage in the common mode range and still remain in the high impedance state, whether powered on or powered off. The receiver should respond properly to a 200 mV differential signal super-imposed on any common mode voltage in this range. With a 5V power supply, the common mode voltage range specified by RS-485 has a 7V spread from either supply terminal. The system will therefore perform properly in the presence of ground drops and longitudinally coupled extraneous noise, provided that the sum of these is less than 7 volts.

The output drive capability of the driver and the input impedance of the receiver are increased to accommodate two termination resistors and several devices (drivers, receivers and transceivers) on the line. The RS-485 standard defines a "unit load" so that the load presented to the line by each device can be expressed in terms of unit loads (a 12 kΩ resistor, with one end tied to any voltage between ground and $V_{CC}/2$, will satisfy the requirements of a unit load). It was anticipated that most manufacturers would design their drivers and receivers such that the combined load of one receiver and one disabled driver would be less than one unit load. This would require the RS-485 receiver to have three times

the input resistance of a RS-422 receiver. The required receiver sensitivity is ±200 mV — the same as for RS-422. The driver is required to provide at least 1.5V across its outputs when tied to a terminated line populated with 32 transceivers. Although this output voltage is smaller than the 2.0V specified for RS-422, a careful design of the driver, with special regard to ac performance, can allow the user to operate a multi-point network at data rates and distances comparable to RS-422.

RS-485 has additional specifications to guarantee device safety in the event of line contention or short circuits. An enabled driver whose output is directly shorted to any voltage in the common mode range, is required to limit its current output to ±250 mA. Even with such a current limit, it is possible for a device to dissipate as much as 3 Watts (if the device draws 250 mA while shorted to 12 volts). Power dissipation of such a magnitude will damage most ICs; therefore, the standard requires that manufacturers include some additional safeguard(s) to protect the devices in such situations.

The ±250 mA current limit also serves another purpose. If a contending driver is abruptly turned off, a voltage transient, of magnitude $I_C Z/2$, is reflected along the line as the line discharges its stored energy (I_C is the contention current and Z is the characteristic impedance of the line). This voltage transient must be small enough to avoid breaking down the output transistors of the drivers on the line. If the contention current is limited to 250 mA, the magnitude of this voltage transient, on a 120Ω line, is limited to 15V, a value that is a good compromise between transistor breakdown voltage and speed.

AC PERFORMANCE

To achieve reliable transmission at high data rates over long distances, the driver should have optimum ac characteristics. The response should be fast and the output transients sharp and symmetrical.

(1) **Propagation Delay:** The propagation delay through the driver should be small compared to the bit interval so that the data stream does not encounter a bottle-neck at the driver. If the propagation delay is comparable to the bit interval, the driver will not have time to reach the full voltage swing it is capable of. In lines a few hundred feet long, the line delay would impose greater limits on data throughput than the driver propagation delay. However, a fast driver would be desirable for short haul networks such as those in automobile vehicles or disc drives; in the latter case high data throughput would be essential. Driver propagation delays less than 20 ns would be very good for a wide range of applications.

(2) **Transition Time:** For distortion free data transmission, the signal at the farthest receiver must have rise and fall times much smaller than the bit interval. Signal distortion results from driver imbalance, receiver threshold offset and skew. RS-485 limits the DC imbalance in the driver output to ±0.2V i.e., 13% of worst-case signal amplitude. Usually, the greatest distortion is caused by offset in the receiver threshold. In a long line in which a 1.5V driver output signal amplitude is attenuated by the loop resistance to about 0.4V, a 200 mV offset in the receiver threshold can cause severe pulse width distortion if the rise time is comparable to the bit interval. For lines longer than about five hundred feet, the rise time would be dominated by the line and not the driver. In short-haul networks, the transient response of the driver can significantly affect signal distortion; a faster transient creates less distortion and hence permits a

smaller bit interval and a higher baud rate. A rise time less than 20 ns will be a good target spec., for it will permit a baud rate of 10 Meg over 50' of standard twisted pair wire with less than 5% distortion.

The driver should provide the above risetime and propagation delay numbers while driving a reasonable capacitance, say 100 pF from each output, in addition to the maximum resistive load of 54Ω. A properly terminated transmission line appears purely resistive to the driver. Most manufacturers take this into account and specify their driver delays with 15 pF loads. However, if any disabled transceivers are situated close to the driver (such that the round trip delay is less than the rise time), the input capacitances of these transceivers will appear as lumped circuit loads to the driver. The driver output rise time will then be affected by all other devices in such close proximity. In the case of high speed short-haul networks, where rise time and propagation delay are critical, several devices could be clustered in a short span. In such an instance, specifying propagation delays with 15 pF loads is quite meaningless. A 100 pFcapacitive load is more reasonable; even if we allocate a generous 20 pF per transceiver, it allows up to six transceivers to be clustered together in an eight foot span (the eight foot span is the approximate round trip distance travelled by the wavefront in one rise time of 20 ns).

(3) **Skew:** The ideal differential driver will have the following waveform characteristics: the propagation delay times from the input to the high and low output states will be equal; the rise and fall times of the complementary outputs will be equal and the output waveforms will be perfectly symmetrical.

If the propagation delay to the low output state is different from the propagation delay to the high output state,

there is said to be "propagation skew" between output states. If a square wave input is fed into a driver with such skew, the output will be distorted in that it will no longer have a 50% duty cycle.

If the mid-points of the waveforms from the two complementary driver outputs are not identical, there is said to be SKEW between the complementary outputs. This type of skew is undesirable because it impairs the noise immunity of the system and increases the amount of electromagnetic emission.

Figure 6 shows the differential signal from a driver that has no skew. *Figure 7* shows the case when there is 80 ns of skew. The first signal makes its transition uniformly and passes rapidly through 0V. The second waveform flattens out for tens of nanoseconds near 0V. Unfortunately, this flat region occurs near the receiver threshold. A common mode noise spike hitting the inputs of a slightly unbalanced receiver would create a small differential noise pulse at the receiver inputs. If this noise pulse occurs when the driver transition is flat near 0V, there will be a glitch at the receiver output. A glitch could also occur if a line reflection reaches the receiver input when the driver transition is temporarily flat. Skew is insidious in that it can cause erroneous outputs to occur at random. It can also increase the amount of electromagnetic interference (EMI) generated by the transmission system. If the complementary outputs are perfectly symmetrical, and the twisted pair medium is perfectly balanced, the radiation from one wire is cancelled exactly by the radiation from the other wire. If there is skew between the outputs, there will be net radiation proportional to the skew.
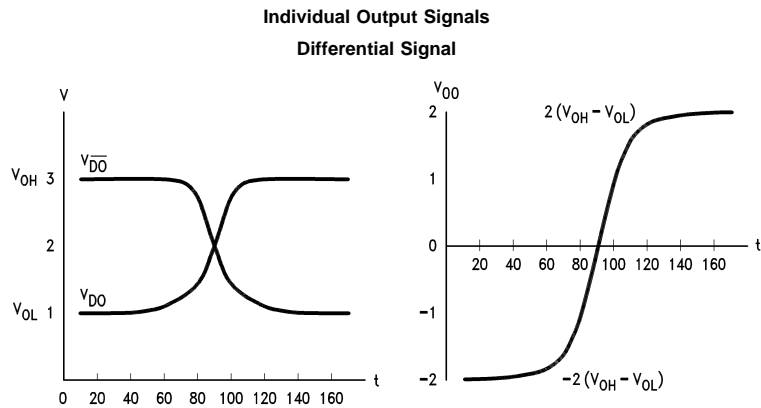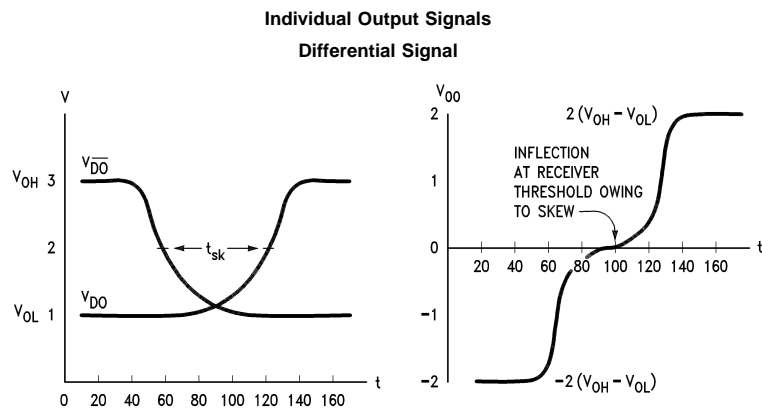
Individual Output Signals

Differential Signal

FIGURE 6. Transients with no Skew

Individual Output Signals

Differential Signal

$2(V_{OH} - V_{OL})$

INFLECTION AT RECEIVER THRESHOLD OWING TO SKEW →

$-2(V_{OH} - V_{OL})$

V_{OH} 3 $V_{\overline{DO}}$

t_{sk}

V_{OL} 1 V_{DO}

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FIGURE 7. Skewed Transients

(4) **Balance:** The impedance seen looking into each of the complementary inputs of the transceiver should be identical. If there is any imbalance at these nodes, the common mode rejection will be degraded. Any DC imbalance, due to a mismatch in the receiver input resistances, will manifest itself as an offset in the receiver threshold, and can be easily detected during testing. AC imbalance is more difficult to detect, but it can hurt noise immunity at high frequencies. A sharp common mode noise spike striking an unbalanced receiver will cause a spurious differential signal. If the receiver is fast enough (as it is bound to be in most cases), it will respond to this noise signal. It is best to keep the imbalance below 4 pF. This number is reasonable to achieve; in addition, the combined imbalance of 32 transceivers will still provide sufficient immunity from h.f. interference.

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

The driver poses the greatest design challenge. Its speed, drive and common mode voltage requirements are best met using a bipolar process. National Semiconductor uses an established Schottky process with a 5μ deep epitaxial layer. NPN transistors are fabricated with LVCEO values greater than 15V to satisfy the breakdown requirements. It will be seen that lateral PNP transistors are crucial to the driver. The 5μ EPI process provides adequate lateral PNP transistors, and NPN transistors of sufficient speed.

Figure 8 shows the driver output circuit used by National. It is a standard totem pole output circuit modified to provide a common mode range that exceeds the supply limits. If the driver output is to be taken to −7V while the driver is in

TRI-STATE, precautions must be taken to prevent the substrate diodes from turning on. This is achieved in the lower output transistor Q1 by including Schottky diode S1 in series. The only way to isolate the upper half of the totem pole from the substrate is by using a lateral PNP transistor. In *Figure 8*, a lateral PNP transistor is used to realize current source IG. Lateral PNP transistors are, however, notoriously slow; the trick therefore is not to use the PNP transistor in the switching path. In the circuit shown, the PNP transistor is a current source which feeds NPN transistor Q2 and therefore, does not participate in the switching function. This allows National's driver to have 15 ns propagation delays and 10 ns rise times. A Darlington stage cannot be used instead of Q2 because it would reduce the voltage swing below the 1.5V specification. Consequently, the rise time is bound to be significantly larger than the fall time, resulting in a large skew. National's driver uses a patented circuit with a plurality of discharge paths, to slow down the fall time so that it matches the rise time, and to keep the two transition times on track over temperature. This keeps the skew small (2 ns typical at 25°C) over the entire operating temperature range. The symmetry of the complementary outputs of National's DS3695 driver can be seen from the photographs in *Figure 9*. The lateral PNP transistor which has been kept out of the switching path has nevertheless got to be turned on or off when the driver is respectively enabled or disabled. Another patented circuit is used to hasten turn-on and turn-off of the lateral PNP transistors so that these switch in 25 ns instead of in 100 ns. Consequently, the driver can be enabled or disabled in 35 ns.
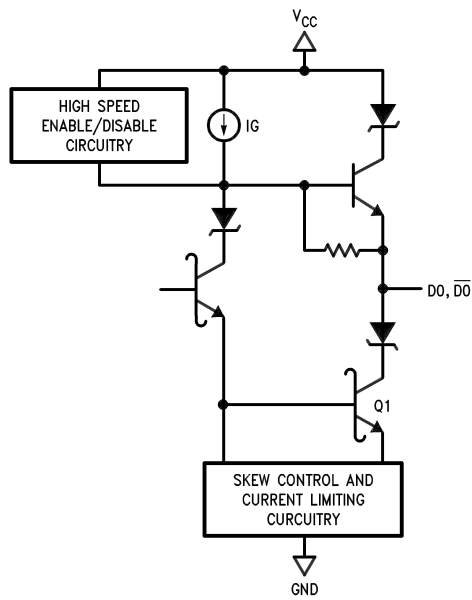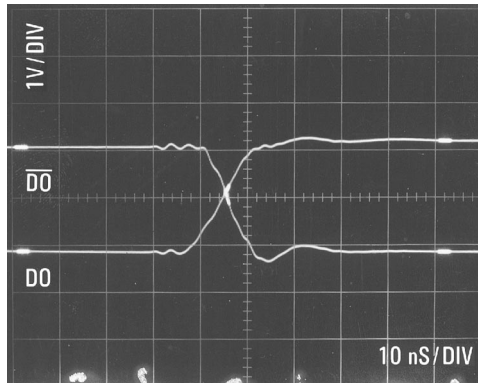
FIGURE 8.

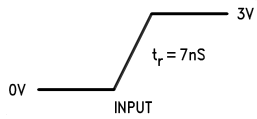**Differential Output of National's RS-485 Driver**
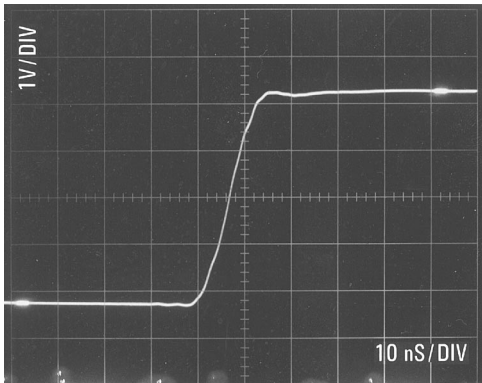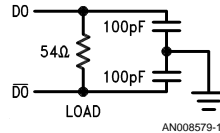

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Complementary Outputs of National's RS-485 Driver

AN008579-10

AN008579-11

AN008579-12

FIGURE 9.

The devices must be protected in fault conditions and contention situations. One way of doing this is by sensing current and voltage to determine power, and then if necessary, turning the device off or limiting its output current to prevent damage. This method has the advantage of fast detection of a fault and rapid recovery from one. However, too many contingencies have to be accounted for; the corresponding circuitry will increase the die size and the cost beyond what

would be acceptable in many low cost applications. National preferred the simpler and inherently more reliable thermal shutdown protection scheme. Here, the device is disabled when the die temperature exceeds a certain value. This method is somewhat slower (order of milliseconds), but fast enough to protect the part. A fault would usually result from a breakdown in network protocol or from a hardware failure. In either case it is immaterial how long the device takes to shut

down or recover as long as it stays undamaged. It would be useful to be notified of the occurrence of a fault in any particular channel, so that remedial action may be taken. The DS3696 provides a fault reporting pin which can flag the processor or drive an alarm LED in the event of a fault. National also decided to make its 369X devices as single transceivers housed in 8 pin mini DIP packages. If thermal shutdown protection is employed, it is pointless to have dual or quad versions because a faulty channel will shut down a good one. Since most RS-485 applications will employ single channel serial data, the 8 pin package will give optimum flexibility, size and economy. Other 485 devices are available from Na-

tional as well (quad drivers, quad transceivers,...), consult the Interface Databook or WEB for the latest product information.

The receiver has 70 mV (typical) hysteresis for improved noise immunity. Hysteresis can contribute some distortion, especially in short lines, if the rise and fall times are different. However, this is more than adequately compensated for by the noise immunity it provides with long lines where rise times are slow. The matched rise and fall times with National's drivers assure low pulse width distortion even at short distances and high data rates.

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2. A critical component in any component of a life support device or system whose failure to perform can be reasonably expected to cause the failure of the life support device or system, or to affect its safety or effectiveness.