



The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down Advanced Motorists (Group 8199)

Helping to Improve The Standard of Driving and Riding on the Roads in Northern Ireland and the Advancement of Road Safety



September 2009

<http://www.amni.org.uk/>

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**Congratulations this month go to -
Adam Nesbitt and Don McQuillan
on becoming Members of the Institute.
Good luck and safe driving to any Associate(s)
approaching their test.**

This month we would like to welcome, as new members, Stephen Boyd, David Cartmill, Tony Devlin and Alan Hamill. We hope that they will not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers. We usually meet (unless otherwise stated) at the Boathouse, which is situated in the harbour carpark, at Groomsport at 7.00pm on the second Tuesday of each month (except July). For more details of our programme please see the section entitled "Dates for Your Diary".

If anyone has recently done their test, don't forget to contact John (07967 010443) for a debrief. Observers, please keep John acquainted with the progress of your Associate(s).

September Group Meeting

8th September, 2009

The guest speaker this month was Helen Black of the PSNI. She started off by explaining what had happened to the old 'Traffic Branch'. It now has three distinct divisions, each with its own responsibilities.

- 1 Road Policing using marked and unmarked vehicles.
- 2 The Road Management Division work with the Roads Service in respect of road layout and planning.
- 3 Education – this is Helen's role in the PSNI, and activities include daytime liaison with schools, targeting Year 13 & 14 pupils who are learning to drive or have recently qualified. The emphasis is on accident prevention. Other activities include the Roadsafes Roadshow, a hard-hitting dramatisation of the aftermath of an accident presented to schools around 15 times a year by real police officers, firemen, paramedics and a wheelchair-bound victim. There is also a PSNI Traffic Education presence at the BikeSafe events (<http://www.bikesafe.co.uk/>) and they are willing to engage other groups in promoting road safety and awareness.

She then went on to what happens to an offender and how the police and courts deal with them.

Helen asked the floor for examples of factors contributing to death and serious injury on the road. These turned out to be - Excessive speed, alcohol/drugs (prescription and non-prescription), tiredness, inattention, make-up/shaving, music/distractions, failure to observe traffic lights and failure to wear seat belts or correctly adjust them.

Helen was keen to point out the distraction of talking on a mobile, which tests have shown requires much more concentration than conversation with a passenger – concentration which should be devoted to driving!

We then entered the audience participation stage of the talk when Graham and Nicky took their seats at the front. The inappropriate use of fog-lights on Graham's imaginary Clio first drew the attention of officers, and but as they drew alongside he was nodding to the thumping music beat from his impressive stereo and clearly not paying attention to the road. Having already earned two tickets from this he was very polite in his response to the officer, but his failure to wear a seatbelt, bald tyres, expired MOT, vehicle mods not declared on insurance and excessively tinted front windows earned a few more, on top of which he got another £30 ticket for failing to ensure the minor in the rear seat was properly secured. Lesson learned, Graham resolved to become a better driver and attend an advanced driving course. On the plus side, they each got a free pen to ease the pain of the virtual convictions.

Helen briefly outlined the standard required of police drivers, stating that for many drivers their perceived ability exceeds true ability. Prospective police drivers follow a three week intensive driving course leading to a standard test, and if this is passed the officer has the opportunity to train for response driving with lights and sirens. Only the higher ability drivers progress to the specialised training with the higher performance cars. Helen was keen to point out that at this stage the emphasis is on safety, smoothness, observation and planning rather than speed. The similarity to the IAM System of Advanced Car Control was immediately evident.

Barbara and Kat then volunteered to be fitted with Helen's "PSNI Beer Goggles" which simulate the effects of extreme intoxication. They were asked to walk about ten steps and pick up a model horse from the

floor. Much hilarity and nausea later, both declared what we already knew – simple tasks are next to impossible in that condition so don't even think about getting behind the wheel.

Helen then requested the assistance of someone who thought they were a really good driver, and in the few seconds of silence which followed we nominated Angela. Angela was despatched to the rear of the room to practise driving a toy remote control tractor, suitable for ages 3 and above! Meanwhile we listed country road hazards - wildlife/animals, road surface/roadworks, slow and wide vehicles/agricultural work (hedge trimming), concealed entrances, weather and road users (pedestrians, cyclists)

Now proficient, Angela brought her tractor to the front of the hall where Helen had laid a hazard trail of model horses, cattle and fences. She negotiated the course and returned successfully to the start point with no accidents or injuries. She then put on the "PSNI Beer Goggles" for a second run of the course, and after a surprisingly good start in which the cattle were spared, the drive finished abruptly with a fence collision. Keen to see the men in the group properly represented, Matthew took a turn which led to absolute carnage for the toy animals.

Unfortunately as the audience participation was really getting started, our time was running out and Helen opened the floor for questions. Helen offered a few leaflets to address questions about penalty points and child seats, and recommended the resources on the PSNI website <http://www.psni.police.uk/>.

(Many thanks to David for this excellent report - Ed)

Check Your Tyres Frequently says IAM

11th August, 2009

According to the IAM around 10% of cars on the road have at least one tyre with an illegal tread depth. This reduces braking effectiveness, increases risk of collision, and could lead to a hefty fine and points on your licence.

The IAM's Head of Technical Advice, Tim Shallcross, says: "As tyres have only the area of the sole of your shoe in touch with the road at any one time, it's a safety 'no-brainer' to keep them in top condition - extra care is needed in autumn when sudden heavy showers can profoundly affect tyre performance".

Stopping distances double on wet roads and the risk of a skid can be trebled if the tread depth is only at the legal minimum of 1.6 mm. This risk increases seven-fold when the tread depth is less than 0.5mm. And if you have to brake hard on one of the 10 per cent of road surfaces with below average skid resistance, the skid risk rises by around 50%.

IAM tyre advice - Inspect

* Check the general state of the tyre for cuts, bumps and uneven wear: worn shoulders indicate under-inflation; if worn in the centre indicates over inflation and wear on one side indicates wheel misalignment

* Check the tyre air pressure (an IAM survey found that only 18 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women check tyre pressures weekly)

* Under-inflated tyres affect road grip, increase fuel consumption and tyre wear, and in hot weather they're more likely to suffer a 'blow out'

Adjust the tyre pressure

* Check that your tyres are correctly inflated (ideally when they're cold). Know the law

* The penalty for driving with one illegal tyre is a fine of up to £2,500 and three points on your licence.

* While the legal minimum tread depth is 1.6mm, consider replacing the tyres soon after the tread depth reaches 3mm, and always replace them once the tread is down to 2mm

Fitting new tyres

* When replacing two worn tyres, the new ones should be fitted to the same axle

* Also make sure the tyres are suitable for the vehicle and the wheels they are being fitted to.

Dates for Your Diary

6th Oct, 2009	STAC 18/4 Classroom and Driving Practice Session
13th Oct, 2009	Group Night - Annual General Meeting - Guest Mervyn Bates
17th Oct, 2009	Marie Curie Ladies Driving Challenge - Kirkistown
27th Oct, 2009	STAC 18/5 Classroom and Driving Practice Session
3rd Nov, 2009	STAC 18/6 Classroom and Driving Practice Session
10th Nov, 2009	Group Night - Talk from Motorcycle Racing Support Doctor
24th Nov, 2009	STAC 18/7 Classroom and Driving Practice Session

The views expressed in the 'Road Observer' are not necessarily those of the Editor, the Group or the Institute of Advanced Motorists