

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



August 2020





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

Helping to Improve the Standard of Driving and Riding on the Roads in Northern Ireland and the advancement of road safety

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New Members and test passes

This month we welcome to the Group motorcycle members Neil Geoghegan and Philip Wray. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

In view of the current Covid-19 lockdown we have no test passes to report this month.

June Cover Picture

The location was the A20 in Kircubbin. Congratulations to Bruce Steele, Norman Shearer, Guy Thomson and Jim O'Brien. And to answer Guy's question, yes it was taken before lockdown. All the correct answers came from the bike side. Car Members either have to get out more or improve their observation!

The cover for this issue should be well known. Can you identify where it is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer. To allay any fears, no photographers were harmed in making this image from the middle of the road!

COVID-19 update

IAM RoadSmart subscription renewals for Associate members.

IAM RoadSmart has advised that the free six month extension to membership for Associates who have been unable to complete their coaching or take their test due to COVID-19 can only be applied at the point of renewal. **Seeking an extension is the responsibility of each Associate, when they receive their renewal notice.** Groups have been asked to refer Associates to contact the Customer Care team at support@iam.org.uk or call 0300 303 1134 to arrange their extension at the time of renewal.

All arrangements for car and motorcycle observing are subject to availability of Observers and Associates and also to local restrictions that may be put in place. Clear guidelines devised by IAM RoadSmart are in place for the delivery of all our services and personal safety remains our top priority. These guidelines can be accessed by following these links:

[Cars](#)

[Motorcycles](#)

Both documents start with the guidance for Observers and each has an appendix which is the guidance for Associates.

We recognise some members will be hesitant about returning to group activity or volunteering, in cars and on bikes. All activity must only resume when you feel it is safe to do so, according to individual circumstances. If you have any concerns, an observed drive, ride or test must not be carried out.

NDAM Motorcycle training has resumed in a socially distanced format in line with the above guidance. The motorcycle side has resumed its monthly runs - keep checking [Facebook](#) and watch your emails for details.

Resumption of NDAM car training

IAM RoadSmart has given Northern Ireland Groups the go-ahead to re-start advanced driver training from 15 September with the period from 1 to 15 September for refresher training for Observers.

However, this is subject to:

1. no further Covid 19 restrictions being imposed; and
2. the agreement of individual Observers and Associate members to taking part.

Currently the Boathouse is not open (in line with other Council Community Facilities) and the latest information we have is that the Council will be meeting around 10 September to discuss the re-opening of all Council buildings. This decision may depend on how the current increases in Covid-19 cases is managed.

The Committee (meeting through Zoom) is considering how best to re-start in terms of the availability of Observers, timing and how we actually progress to in-car observing either through the STAC system at the Boathouse or on a one-to-one basis and we will keep Associate members advised on how we plan to proceed. **However, given the likely availability of Observers, Associates should be aware that resumption of car observed drives is likely to be with a much reduced capacity.**

Forward Programme

Until we know we can get access to the Boathouse (see above) we are unable to put our forward programme together. Again we will let you know as soon as decisions are taken.

Personal assessment and reflection

It's almost 6 months since Group activities were suspended. Hopefully the autumn and winter will not bring about a second wave of the virus and we can get back to as near normal Group activities.

Passing the advanced test involves a high level of skill and many of us use observing as a way of keeping those skills at a high standard. Despite the lack of Group activities it is incumbent on each of us to ensure that we maintain those standards. It's a good idea to refresh our knowledge of advanced driving and riding skills, consciously putting these into practice every time we are on the road, together with keeping our knowledge of the Highway Code and traffic signs up to date.



Basic driving tips

Richard Gladman IAM RoadSmart's Head of Driving and Riding Standards, has reported that our driving habits start being set from the moment we venture out alone after passing our driving test,

Here are some tips from Richard, to help all of us develop safer driving habits for life. These tips could also help save you some money on things such as insurance, wear and tear of the car and building your No Claims discount. Please share these with family members, especially those who may have recently passed their basic test.

1. Safe speed

One of the best pieces of advice I was ever given about driving was 'have the confidence to drive slowly'. It's easy to get carried away speeding or feeling like you need to speed, especially if you are in rush, but the last thing you want is to be involved in collisions or accumulating unnecessary points on your licence. It's important to keep an eye on your speedometer and always look out for speed limit signs, as they can change based on your surroundings. Staying at a slow, steady speed when driving around built up areas, where there are pedestrians around is important, this aids in anticipation and helps you react to situations better.



2. Smooth Acceleration

Different cars have different temperaments when it comes to accelerating, but generally being easy on the right foot does the trick, business-like when required but always smooth. This tip is beneficial as it will ease pressure on your speed when approaching pedestrian crossings, traffic build-up and traffic lights. And as a bonus, you will save on fuel.

3. Gentle braking

It's always good to rein in bad braking habits from the start, you don't want to be giving yourself or your passengers a scare by braking suddenly and harshly. Instead, try to plan and give yourself time to change your speed. If you know you are approaching your destination, built up areas, crossings etc., lower your speed and gently cover your brake pedal with your foot until you need to stop.

4. Keep your distance

Were you ever told by your instructor to always keep your distance? This was to ensure you have some space to react to what the car in front of you is doing, in case they decide to emergency or harshly brake. Remember only a fool breaks the two second rule, and this is an absolute minimum.

5. Comfortable cornering

It can be tough mastering corners and the last thing you want is to get into collision with another car when turning or going around a corner, especially if it has a blind spot - quite common on country lanes. Slowing down before approaching a corner helps you avoid unwanted situations and hazards and can also enable you to take the corner accurately without panicking or emergency braking.



6. Phone Distraction

Our phones are used for everything these days and many find it hard to navigate without them, but they are such a big distraction when driving. Ideally your phone should be put away out of sight and on silent make the glovebox your phone box when you drive. If calls need to be made, you should park up and switch the engine off before doing so.

7. Stay focused

Often, we can encounter road works, collisions and other obstacles along our journey and on routes we know well. So, it's important to stay alert and level-headed when these situations occur. Often, we also travel with passengers, where we can easily be distracted. When in these situations, it is very important to let your passengers know politely that they will have to keep the noise down or behave appropriately for you to keep your focus throughout the journey.

8. Review your journey

Once you have completed your journey, it can be good to review and reflect. Like you would have done with your instructor.

Richard said: “Even now - a good few years into a driving career - I still hear the voice of various instructors and mentors offering advice. When I hear that voice in my head, I know to press the reset button and revert to what I was taught. This can help you anticipate situations and analyse your driving, pushing you to investigate improving the way you use the road and give you the added patience.”

Electric scooters



We've become accustomed to different hazards on the roads - recently the increase in cyclists as a result Covid-19, but in the last couple of weeks I came across someone riding an electric scooter on the dual carriageway between Newtownards and Bangor. For now I won't get into the legality of riding one of these on the public road. However, I'll give him a point for wearing a crash helmet but I'll take away lots of points for being dressed entirely in black, no hi-viz vest and no flashing LED lights as used by cyclists.

These electric scooters have tiny wheels - I shudder to think what happens when he meets a pothole! The possibility of meeting one is just something else to be aware of - give it the same sort of space that you would give a cyclist - at least 1.5m

Group activities

Many of us are missing the Group get-togethers and it's good that at least the bikes are getting out again. For now the monthly Group nights remain suspended but here is a small selection of pictures to remind you of some of the things we have done BC (before Covid):





And finally.....



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The views expressed in the “Road Observer” are not necessarily those of the Editor, the North Down Advanced Motorists Group or IAM RoadSmart