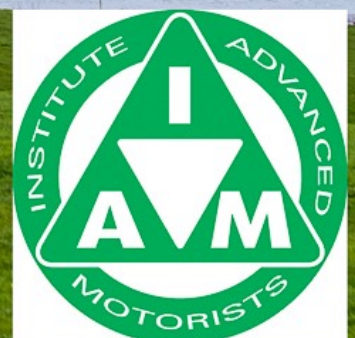


The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



April 2017





Official Provider

The Road Observer

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

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

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New Members

This month we would like to welcome to the Group existing car member Peter Hazletts who is to prepare for the second category bike test. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

Advanced Tests

Congratulations this month go to motorcycle member

Kyle Thompson

who achieved F1RST pass

Good luck and safe driving or riding to any Associates approaching their test.

Cover picture

The March cover picture was Tillysburn at the end of the Sydenham By-pass. Congratulations to John Barry, Annie McFarland, Alistair Gillespie and Guy Thomson. The last couple have been too close to home and too easy so I thought I would give you an unusual one to identify for April. No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer.

Dates for your diary

2 May - STAC 6

9 May - Group Night - Table-top rally

23 May - STAC 7

30 May - STAC 8

6 June - Group Night - (note date change) Visit to interesting car collection - details to follow

13 June - Additional driving practice

STAC - Short Term Associate Course. Associate Members should ensure that are familiar with either "How to be a better driver" or the new "Associate Handbook" before each STAC night so that you can get the most benefit from the theory session as well as your observed drive.

April Group Night - a night at the races

No, not what you would expect from that title. The races in this case were the RAC Tourist Trophy races which took place on the Dundonald - Newtownards - Comber circuit between 1928 and 1936. A small (but clearly very select) group visited Roy Spence's private cinema "Excelsior" to watch a feature length documentary film of the races put together by Roy and Noel Spence.



Following the supply of choc ices from the usherette we settled down to watch a piece of local motoring history. (Is it my imagination or is the usherette the same one as last year - I think I heard someone call her Angela.)



The film interspersed footage from a variety of sources, including rare footage from the races from various vantage points around the course, with interviews with people recalling the races and also with the current owners of some of the cars that took part, some of which were in local hands at the time the film was made.

Why was the race held in Northern Ireland? We are unique in the UK in that roads can be closed for motorsport. (For the pedants reading this, roads can also be closed in the Isle of Man but it is a Crown Dependency and not part of the UK.)

Hugh numbers of spectators attended and special trains were run to enable people to get to various parts of the course. A temporary station and footbridge were erected at the level crossing before Comber, so that spectators were able to change trains to get to the other parts of the course.

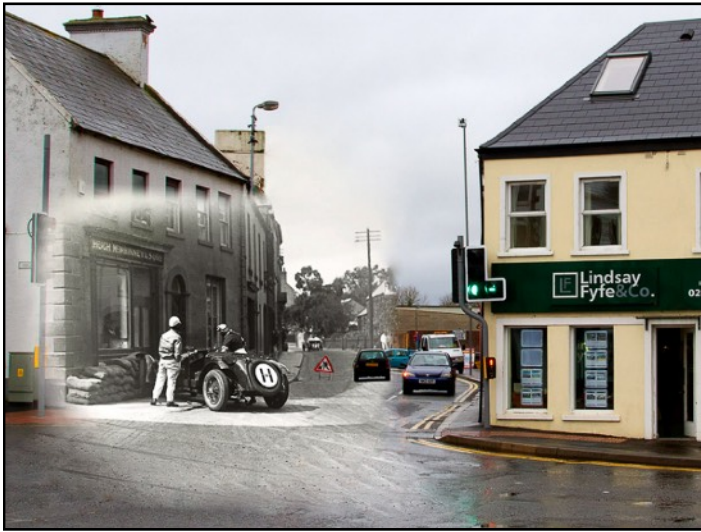
Cars taking part over the years included some very famous names eg Lea-Francis, Frazer Nash, Lagonda, Bugatti, Alfa-Romeo, Bentley, Mercedes Benz, Talbot, MG Midget, Maserati, Singer, and Delahaye. Tazio Nuvalari (right) won twice - in 1930 in an Alfa Romeo and again in 1933 in an MG Magnette.



The race was handicapped by class so the fastest car didn't necessarily win. For example in 1931 the race was won in an MG with an average speed of 67.70mph while the 2nd placed Alfa Romeo had an average speed of 79.05mph. The record lap was held by Sir Henry Birkin in an Alfa Romeo with an average speed of **83.2** mph. Look at the skinny rims on the cars in the pictures and try to imagine setting those average speeds.

Obviously parts of the course look different now - the start/finish is now a dual carriageway, Quarry corner is now a junction, and no longer in existence are the railway bridge over Church Street in Newtownards, the level crossing before Comber, the railway bridge exiting Comber, and the water pump and trough at the Elk Inn. Of course Conway Square is no longer open for traffic.

Much of the Course still very recognisable - the climb up from Quarry Corner, Bradshaws Brae, Conway Square, the butchers shop corner in Comber where they turned right out of the square still has a butchers shop in the same place.



PRONI D3911/16

In the early years, being touring cars, they had to do the first lap with the roof up, calling into the pits to put the roof down for the rest of the race. Also they had what is called a Le Mans start where the drivers had to run across the road to their car to start it. This was later abandoned for safety reasons.



PRONI D3911/6.



Refuelling

Refuelling was interesting (and dangerous). Fuel was in containers resembling milk churns; a huge funnel was inserted into the fuel filler and the content of the churn dumped into the funnel. Needless to say fuel sloshed everywhere and a number of scenes saw cars with pools of fuel on the ground at the pit stop. With hot exhausts and brakes it was not unusual for fires to occur.

Tragedy struck during the 1936 race in Newtownards when Belfast driver Jack Chambers crashed into a crowd of spectators in Church Street in Newtownards. The Belfast Newsletter reported the accident as follows:

Chambers had been travelling at a speed of over 100 miles per hour in his Riley car as he "shot" under the railway bridge which led him onto Church Street. He was forced to "hug" a tight left bend but in a split second the car was off its straight course and was careering "madly" for horrified spectators on the far side of the 40 foot wide roadway. They stood no chance. First Chambers smashed into a lamp post snapping it "like a piece of matchwood" before careering along the footpath for about 20 yards knocking down scores of helpless spectators. Eight spectators were left dead more than 25 injured, 10 of them seriously.

The race was never run again

Interesting was a short clip of a race on the Bangor Crawfordsburn circuit showing cars passing what is now the Maxol filling station on the Bryansburn Road approaching what is now the roundabout at the junction of the Bryansburn and Brunswick Road. I for one never knew about this race but was able to track references to it taking place in 1935 and 36.

This was a film about a fascinating bit of motorsport history on our own doorstep and on a course the majority of which can be driven today. Some of the pictures are stills taken from the film and I have included some images held by the Public Record Office NI including a couple combining photographs taken during the race and merged with what the location looks like today.



PRONI D3911/9



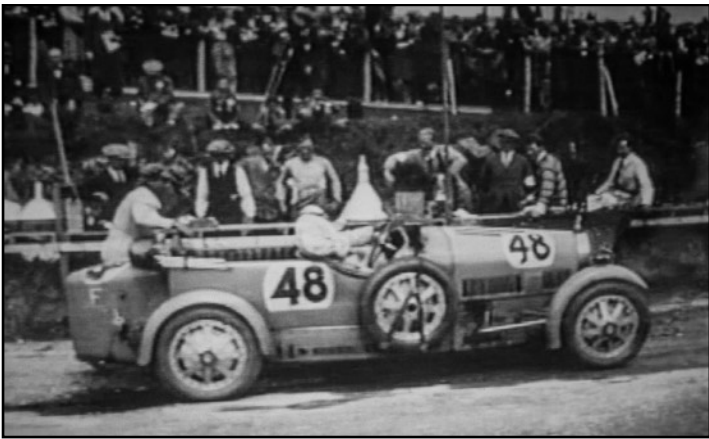
PRONI D3911/10



PRONI D3911/4



PRONI D3911/2



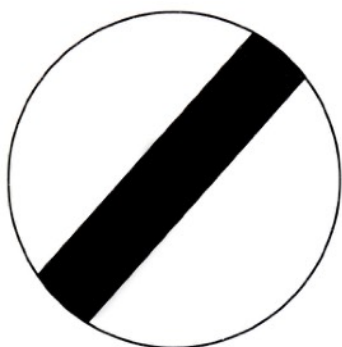
Butcher's shop corner

Pump at the Elk Inn (note the safety features)

Important message from IAM Roadsmart HQ about speed limits

It has recently been fed back to us that some groups have been encouraging a somewhat liberal interpretation of the national speed limit in order to progress overtaking. Can we remind everyone that **we have no legal exemption to exceed the speed limit** in this or any other circumstance. In our training material we make mention of the fact that overtakes may not be possible if the other vehicle is near to the speed limit as they will be outside of legality.

We are sure that most observers are operating within the speed limit and deliberating effective overtakes correctly but it appears that a few are encouraging a 'perceived' exemption to the speed limit and using safety to justify this. We would like to re-iterate: *'Advanced drivers/riders do not plan to exceed the speed limit, so if the other vehicle is travelling at close to this speed, overtaking may not be legal.'* This is a direct lift from our advanced course log book and should be the standard to which we all operate.



Where an examiner sees a deliberate flouting of the law to make an overtake they will have no choice but to record a failure. It is important that our associates are not encouraged down this route as the subsequent failure is embarrassing for all concerned. The combining of safety and legality on the test report is designed to allow latitude in 'exceptional circumstances,' not as a coverall for pre-planned breaches of the speed limit. As a road safety charity we will not be selective in which pieces of the road traffic act we decide to adhere to. Thank you for your support in this. **Richard Gladman IAM RoadSmart head of driving and riding standards.**

Is your car ready for spring and summer?

The clocks have gone forward and days are longer than nights for the next six months; it's time to get your car hale, hearty and 'beach body ready' in preparation for the spring and summer. IAM RoadSmart's head of driving and riding standards Richard Gladman gives tips on getting your car ready for the warmer weather.

- **Lose weight;** clear out those coats, boots, scarves and bags that took up permanent residence during the winter months. They add weight as well as taking up space, and surplus weight means wasted fuel



Summer driving

- **Cut down on the salt;** modern cars are much less prone to rust than their forbearers, but corrosion-causing salt from gritted roads can build up under the wheel arches and the suspension. Use a hose pipe to flush the wheel arches clean; if you have a pressure washer, even better. If not, try washing the arches after driving on wet roads – the mud and grit will have softened. The neighbours might think you're peculiar but you'll reduce the risk of expensive repairs
- **Test your vision;** the demister puts a film of grime from traffic fumes on the inside of the windscreen which can spread bright sunshine into a blinding glare. Get the screen squeaky clean with water and detergent, dry with a microfibre cloth and crystal clear vision will be restored. Don't forget the other windows; clean screens rarely mist up so you'll need the heated rear window far less – another fuel saver
- **Keep hay fever at bay;** most cars have pollen filters, but they need changing periodically to remain efficient. Look in your handbook to find out how to get to the filter and if it looks bad, change it now. Some very good after-market filters are available online, often with a charcoal layer to filter out pollutants as well as pollen
- **Don't get hot and bothered;** air conditioning is a boon as the temperature rises, but it contains a special gas which can slowly leak away. If it gets too low, the aircon will blow warm instead of cold. Test it by turning the heater control to minimum, the heater fan to maximum and make sure the aircon is turned on (i.e., not in "eco" mode). If you don't feel an icy blast after a couple of minutes, the system may need "re-gassing"; a simple job which most garages have the equipment to do



Richard said: "In conjunction with other spring cleaning treat your car, the efforts to wash and polish it will last a bit longer now the winter salt has gone. Now is a good time to spend a therapeutic Saturday morning tinkering."

Take more than a Saturday morning for this one!

And finally.....

How many NDAM members does it take to turn on a digital projector.....?

Answers on a postcard please.

Thanks for the picture Annie.



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