

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



April 2019





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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

April 2019

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

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New Members

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

Test Passes

No test passes to report this month.

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

March Cover Picture

The March cover picture was Main Street in Millisle approaching from the south ie from Ballyhalbert direction. Congratulations to Annie McFarland, Shaun McKittrick and Alistair Gillespie. I thought more might have spotted this one.

Can you identify the location of this month's cover? Admittedly there isn't a lot in the background of the picture to help but if you live in North Down you will probably have negotiated this at some time or another. No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer next month.

Dates for your diary

30 April - STAC 6: Overtaking
7 May - STAC 7: Motorways and dual carriageways
14 May - **Group Night** - Visit to Crumlin Road Gaol - details in the covering email
28 May - STAC 8: Manoeuvring
4 June - Test preparation and additional driving practice
11 June - **Group night** - driving to get ice cream!
25 June - Additional driving practice

STAC - Short Term Associate Course. Associate Members should ensure that you are familiar with the relevant section of the "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 - Excelsior Cinema



We met at the Killinchy Road car park so we could group up and travel in the minimum number of cars, because parking is limited at the venue. David H arrived appropriately early to meet and greet and do a roll call. Unfortunately 10 minutes in the car park listening to a CD whilst checking email proved to be more than the Honda car battery could bear. How can this be? My iPhone can play music for more than 14 hours on a single charge, and it fits in my pocket.

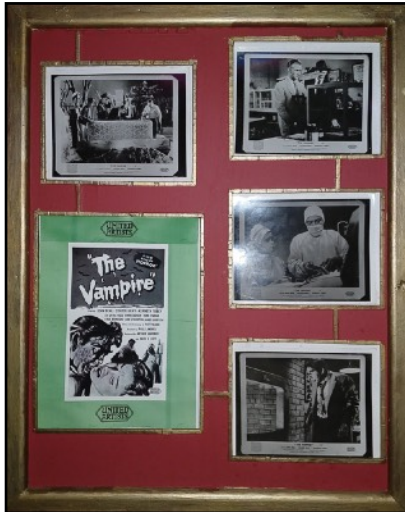
David did a roll call so we could, up to a point at least, take account of who had indicated an intention to attend. Leaving the Honda, we decided to saddle up and move out. We caught sight of Angela as our lead car was leaving the car park, but due to the wonders of mobile technology we were able to let her know we were on our way, so she was able to join us.

At the Excelsior, we were greeted by Roy with uncharacteristic haste, as he quickly explained he was running late for his brother's book launch. Acknowledging that as regular visitors, we pretty much know our way around, he gave David H a crash course in running a cinema and left us to it, but not before getting our Lyon's Maid girl Angela to distribute the choc-pops. Unfortunately David was studying to be a projectionist and missed the photo op. With no time for welcome and introductions, we got straight to the feature... Smokey and the Bandit, our tribute to Burt Reynolds who died last year.



There are few people on this planet who have not seen the movie, in whole or in part, so I hope I'm not spoiling it for anyone with my brief synopsis. At a truck rodeo (yes, these things exist) the Bandit (Bert), a loveable road warrior with a Stetson, is challenged to make a run to Texas (900 miles each way) in a truck for a load of beer. Wealthy Texan Big Enos Burdette is sponsoring a race at the

Atlanta speedway and wants 400 cases of Coors beer to celebrate, and the race is only 28 hours away. Big Enos promises the Bandit \$80 thousand if he makes the delivery, nothing at all if he fails – it's never been done before, and while I still don't understand either the economics or the attraction to Coors beer, it did make for an entertaining plotline. Obviously with the time constraints and illegality of the run (Coors beer was unpasteurised and distribution at the time required multiple permits, so taking it east of the Mississippi was bootlegging), it wasn't going to be straightforward, so the Bandit brought in his friend the Snowman. The Snowman would drive the truck, whilst the Bandit would run blocker – driving a distinctive TransAm, he would distract and frustrate the law enforcement officers en-route.



Life was much simpler in the 70s and this served as a viable plot, along with some country music and a lot of Citizens Band Radio. However there was a further twist when the Bandit picked up a hitchhiker named Carrie, played by Sally Field, who had just abandoned the Sheriff's dimwit son at the altar. Sheriff Bufort T Justice took it personally and stuck with the pursuit (with his dimwit son) even after it left his jurisdiction. There was some pretty darn fancy driving, and needless to say, he came very close to catching the Bandit multiple times, but in scenarios drawn straight from a Roadrunner cartoon, he was thwarted each time, and his car sustained increasingly implausible damage. Being such a likeable road warrior, the Bandit had the full support of his fellow truckers, truck stop operators, and the entire socio-economic culture which exists there – some of the ladies of the road distracted the officers at the appropriate moment (hey, it was the 70s) to ensure the Bandit got a clear run.

Needless to say, the Bandit succeeded, and reaffirmed the Snowman's worth, which had been in doubt for much of the movie. The Bandit and crew made their escape just as the Sheriff and all the law enforcement officers in the Atlanta area got to the race track. The Bandit took one of Big Enos's many Cadillacs for his escape, and in the final moments of the movie accepted another challenge of going to Boston and back in under 18 hours to bring back some clam chowder. He managed to goad and frustrate the sheriff one final time just before the credits ran, setting things up nicely for a sequel or two.

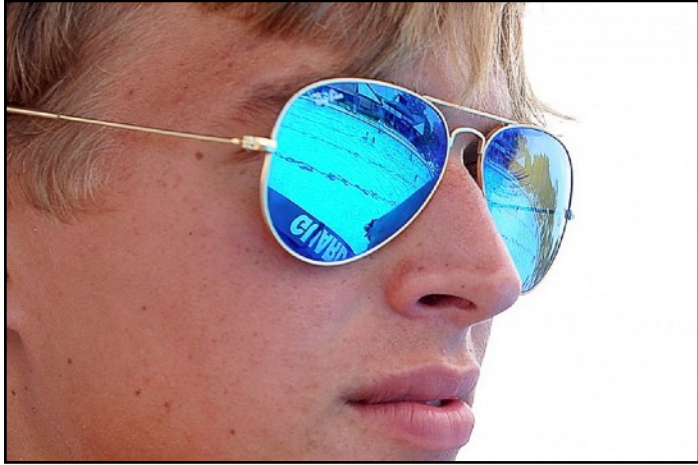
The evening's entertainment was not over entirely as David H's car was sitting in Comber with a flat battery. There were many offers of assistance, some genuinely helpful, others less so. The car is an automatic so cannot be tow-started, and even the heavy duty battery in Jim O'Brien's Land Rover failed to get it going, so we locked it and left it, and it was revived to full health the following day with a battery transplant. Thanks to David H for the report.



Sunglasses

The sky's blue, sun is shining and the snow, fog and rain are a distant memory. It's time to get the top down, the shades on and celebrate the spring with some open-air motoring. But hold on a minute - those shades might make you look cooler than an ice box, but are they OK for driving? Are sunglasses a boon or burden for the safe driver?

Tim Shallcross, IAM RoadSmart's head of technical policy and advice, has put together a set of tips outlining key information that you should be aware of.









Did you know about the EU standards for sunglasses?

- As a matter of fact, there is an EU standard for sunglasses, ensuring the frames are reasonably strong and sweat resistant and the lenses are shatterproof, scratch resistant and give good protection against harmful ultra-violet light.
- Any which show the CE mark (and any sold in the EU should have it) should come up to the standards, but they are also graded into five categories - 0 to 4 - to show how dark the tint is, or more specifically, how much visible light they let through.

What categories of sunglasses are there?

- Category 0 specs allow 80% to 100% of visible light through and are fine for driving at any time.
- Categories 1, 2 and 3 are progressively darker tints, shielding against brighter levels of sunshine, and while they are all fine for daylight driving, none of them should be worn if you're driving at night.
- The darkest is category 4, which lets just 3% to 8% of the light through. These are very dark, like ski goggles. They are so dark that they should not be used for driving at any time, and category 4 sunglasses must be labelled as unsuitable for driving.

| Category | Description | Use | Driving | Symbol | |
|----------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|--|---|
| 0 | Light Tint | Indoors or Cloudy Day | Any time |  | |
| 1 | Light tint | Moderate Sun | Day only, not for night driving |  | |
| 2 | General Purpose Sunglasses | Medium Sun | Day only, not for night driving |  | |
| 3 | General Purpose Sunglasses | Bright Sun | Day only, not for night driving |  | |
| 4 | Very dark | Very Bright Sun/High Glare | Not for driving at any time |  |  |

Where can I find this information?

Seems simple enough. Sunglasses on sale in shops such as chemists or opticians do have the label and are marked with the category - normally on the arm. However, online shoppers beware; a look through several shopping websites revealed that very few sellers display the tint category or any symbol, so you have no way of telling whether the glasses are suitable for driving until they arrive. A few are advertised as category 4 and suggested as being good for cyclists, although the official standard states they are "not suitable for driving and road use", and common sense would say that if they're too dark for driving, they're too dark for cycling.

Photochromic glasses aren't marked but they should be fine for most cars because they respond to ultraviolet light to darken. Car windows block UV light, so the glasses will stay more or less clear. Watch out if you drive a convertible though, because once the roof's down the glasses will darken, but at their darkest they still allow about 20% of light through, putting them around category 2 or 3. Just be aware that they will stay dark for quite a while if you drive into a tunnel or underpass or a long stretch of shadows.

So, while the sun stays shining, check the tint number before you drive and make sure your shades keep you safe as well as cool.

New Roundabout Layout in Newtownards

You need to be on your toes when negotiating roundabouts in Newtownards. Two roundabouts in particular can cause confusion - the Castlebawn roundabout at Tesco's and the one at the junction of Frances Street, Zion Place and Georges Street. They are fine if you know them but you need to watch for a vehicle driven by someone unfamiliar with the area and who might decide to change lanes at the wrong moment after finding they are in the wrong lane.

There have been some changes to the road markings for the roundabout at the junction of the Bangor Road, Donaghadee Road, Zion Place and East Street.

Entering the roundabout from the Donaghadee Road to take the 2nd exit (East Street) or the 3rd exit (Bangor Road) there is now only one lane around the roundabout with hatched areas on the left and right. The Newtownards Road exit is now one lane instead of two.



Post Brexit Requirements

Sorry to inflict any mention of Brexit on members but just to remind you that, if Brexit happens and you are planning a driving holiday in Europe, you will need an international driving permit which is available from many post offices. For details of the requirements for the permit and the post offices where they are available see <https://www.postoffice.co.uk/international-driving-permit>. If you are taking your own car you will also need a green card from your insurance company (available on request from your company) if they haven't sent one automatically.



And finally.....

Saw this example of parking in a village in Provence. Not to be attempted after a couple of glasses of vin rouge!



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.