

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



April 2021





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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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<https://www.facebook.com/NorthDownGroupIAM>

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New Members

This month we welcome to the Group former Group member David Hughes and existing motorcycle member Ian Crawford. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers once we get back to normal operations and out on the road again. In the meantime we hope you can join us on our virtual meetings.

Test passes

With the ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19 we have no test passes to report.

March Cover Picture

The March cover picture was High Street in Donaghadee looking towards the Moat which is currently covered in scaffolding. It was a really easy one as I have not been out and about much to get anything to challenge you due to the Covid restrictions.

Congratulations (in order of receipt) to Norman Shearer, Ivan McStea (of the Belfast Advanced Motorists Group), Guy Thomson, David Harcourt, Ivan Greenfield, Annie McFarland and Alistair Gillespie.

This month's cover should also be dead easy. Do you know where it is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to: secretaryndam@gmail.com

Covid-19 Update

IAM RoadSmart has written to all Northern Ireland Groups to say that there can be no IAM RoadSmart activity for cars or bikes until the guidance from the Executive changes. It is due to be reviewed by the Executive on 13 May so hopefully the restrictions will be eased to allow us to get back on the road as soon as safely possible. In the meantime stay safe.

Dates for your Diary

ZOOM STAC programme for car Associates and Observers (also anyone else interested contact me if you wish to take part) and Group nights.

4 May - Motorways and dual carriageways

11 May - Group Night - Video demonstration of the bike drop-off system of ensuring nobody gets lost or left behind on runs

25 May - Manoeuvring

June - we are hopeful that we can get out on the roads again so car Associates and Observers should keep Tuesday evenings available throughout the month.

Depending on restrictions in place at the time we are hoping that on the Group night on Tuesday 11 June we will get a joint run/drive with bike and car members to somewhere for ice-cream.

Car Observers

In anticipation of some relaxation of the Covid restrictions in the coming weeks the Committee is considering organising car Observer refresher sessions before we restart observed drives. We will keep you informed about dates and the likely arrangements.

IAM RoadSmart Member E-newsletter and The Road Observer

Regular readers of "The Road Observer" will be aware that each month we have included a section on helpful tips, some of which were taken from the IAM RoadSmart website on the basis that not many Members would be visiting their site on a regular basis to have access to them. Because the information on their website is aimed at a wider audience rather than just IAM Members I made some changes to make them more relevant to advanced drivers and riders, to circumstances in Northern Ireland and to include relevant pictures.

Recently IAM RoadSmart have begun to issue a monthly Member E-newsletter to all Members which contains links to these tips, blogs, press releases, survey results etc. I am seeking views on whether the Road Observer should continue to include a selection of these as I don't wish to be providing material which you might regard as repetitive. I would be grateful for any views on this to secretaryndam@gmail.com

April Group Night

This was quiz night through the medium of ZOOM organised by our Supreme Leader (aka Chairman David). 8 rounds of 10 questions in each round and the evening flew by. We had thought that we might have been able to score it electronically but as not everyone had access to the relevant software it was marked individually as a pencil and paper exercise. As well as Group Members we had some guests, including Colin from Mid-Ulster Group and so our guests might have been at a bit of a disadvantage with the road sign and Road Observer questions.

All the questions were multiple choice so that if you didn't know the answer or couldn't deduce it you could guess, as I had to for a number of questions.

The rounds were:

- If it walks like a duck
- Road sign identification
- Collective nouns for groups of animals
- Road Observer cover pictures
- Abbreviations and acronyms
- Where in the world
- Who said this - quotations
- National animals

Having set the Road Observer cover questions I had to sit that one out.

We had some creative answers and supreme leader David awarded or removed points at his discretion! So it was a gamble as to whether the creative answer would gain or lose points. In the end it didn't really matter as there were no prizes and it was all a bit of fun.

Can you tell the difference between a red squirrel and a grey squirrel. Not as easy as it sounds because in winter the reds have grey colouring. The main identifier in winter is that the red has tufts on the top of its ears. More mature members will recall the ROSPA Tufty Club teaching children about road safety. Surprise, Tufty is still on the go. In 2018 Tufty featured in a ROSPA keeping kids safe pack.

Road sign identification should have been an easy one but when I asked IAM members how many didn't get 10/10 there were no responses. Draw your own conclusions!

As an example - what do these signs mean:



Answers to this one on the final page.

On the collective nouns for animals a flutter of butterflies seemed too obvious but was correct whereas who would have known a sounder of boars.

In the round called "Where in the world" we had to identify the location of pictures. We had Eiffel Towers in Paris, Tokyo and Las Vegas, we had city halls in Belfast NI, Belfast Pennsylvania, Belfast Main and Belfast Price Edward Island and a Statue of Liberty that wasn't in New York!

Quotes. Do you know who said "Never host a meeting with more people than can be fed with two pizzas". Was it Steve Jobs, The 14th Dalai Lama, Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos. In fact out of the 10 questions on quotes the Dalai Lama was one of the options on 5 occasions!

National animals. In this round we were shown the flag of a country and asked to identify the national animal. We had two questions on flags that were green, white and gold (or orange if you prefer) and so you had first to identify which was Ireland and which was the Ivory Coast and then figure out the national animal. One of the final questions was what is the national animal of Northern Ireland to which the answer is we don't have one but it should be the red squirrel (I suspect Becky Harcourt had some input to this suggestion!).

Where did almost two hours go to? It was an entertaining evening with some interesting discussions (I hesitate to use the word disagreement) about some of the answers but David was holding a firm line and pushing things too far could mean the deduction of a point. However, as we were self marking did it matter? Thanks to everyone who took part and entered into the spirit of the quiz and didn't take it too seriously. Thanks again to Simon Beckett for the use of his ZOOM account to enable us to organise our meetings.

EARLY CAR and DRIVING EXPERIENCE

By Ivan Greenfield

Most of us can remember doing our driving test and I bet remember at least one incident during the test, maybe two or even three that stick in our minds. Others, either didn't do a test as there was none or simply passed it off as a necessary step to a driving licence. What ever way things went this was, for most people, their first introduction to cars and driving.

Fact Time: - compulsory testing was brought in on 1 June 1935 for all drivers and riders who started driving on or after 1 April 1934.

1934 was also the year the Minister of Transport, Leslie Hore-Belisha (1893–1957) added flashing beacons to pedestrian crossings, hence the name Belisha Beacon.

I passed my test in August 1969 driving a Triumph Herald, the last production saloon to have a separate chassis and body. With it's amazing turning circle of 22ft (6.7m) curb to curb or 24ft (7.3m) wall to wall, I remember being asked at the top of Old Movilla Road to stop at the side of the road and



turn the car to face in the opposite direction. I knew what was expected, a 3 point turn, I said "I can do a U turn." the reply was "I'm sure you could, but just use forward and reverse gears please." When I completed the manoeuvre the examiner said he thought I was going to do a U turn despite what had been asked.

The test started with me super confident, until I put my backside in the drivers seat. Suddenly I couldn't start the car. I panicked, pumped the throttle and pulled out the choke, great move, that flooded the engine; a choke, yes one of those things that gave the driver control over how the engine was fuelled.

Thankfully the examiner told me to turn off the ignition and start again. My experience with working on cars kicked in and I pushed the choke in, put my foot on the throttle and turned the ignition to the starter position. After turning over for 3 or 4 seconds I was able to release the throttle and the engine fired up; time to breathe again. The test centre was in John Street, Newtownards and I started off towards South Street, a cross roads into Court Street. No traffic lights at that time, dare I say that job lots of traffic lights were not available and the driver had to make their own decision to cross junctions

when it was safe. Imagine being given the authority to decide for yourself if it were safe. I remember crossing with a lorry coming from my right. Plenty of time to cross. Then the doubt hit me that the examiner might not have been so relaxed. He looked relaxed enough, staring, straight ahead. No sharp intake of breath or slight whimper as we crossed the road, though it did look a bit like the 1000yd stare. However, that was when I decided to make the remainder of the test so good he would *have* to pass me. Great idea until he asked me to pull into the side of the road again. “Now I would like you to continue the test using hand signals” came the instruction. Brilliant, it had just started to rain; and *no* electric windows in those days. Anyway, I passed but would prefer not to *need* to do it again. I have since thought that I passed because he was afraid I would come back.

Editor's notes

1. In the early 1970s I worked in Bangor and lived in Belfast. My boss at one time owned a Triumph Herald and I was driving behind her travelling up to Belfast over Craigantlet. The Triumph Herald was famous famous for it's swing axle rear suspension and as the car went over the crests on the road I was amazed to see the angle of the rear wheels when it was at the top of the suspension travel. It looked decidedly unsafe! The picture below illustrates this. It's a Triumph Spitfire but the back axle was the same design.



Swing axles date back to 1903 and for more information about them and the cars that used them visit <https://driventowrite.com/2016/03/21/theme-suspension-swinging-on-a-star/>

The other notable thing about the Triumph Herald was that the bonnet and front wings hinged at the front giving great access to the engine and front suspension. Note the saucepan air filter!



2. I lived in the Castlereagh area at the time and some school friends did their driving test in Newtownards because there were no traffic lights. (I did mine in Belfast around the Crumlin, Oldpark Cliftonville area - just saying!). When I was learning I was first in the queue at traffic lights in Bedford Street and stalled. The car behind sounded the horn continuously and the instructor used the dual control brake pedal to make me and him sit through another change of the lights for his trouble!

3. Certain ladies were known to find the choke control a useful thing to hang the handle of their handbag from. I used to think that was an urban myth but a lady I worked with in the late 1960s and drove a Morris Minor did just that! I witnessed it when she gave me a lift home one evening after work.)

4. In the 1970s when car thefts rife I also worked with someone from West Belfast, who drove with the minimum amount of petrol in the tank. She had a mini and put a gallon of petrol into her car everyday on the basis that if the car was stolen the thieves wouldn't get very far!

Thanks Ivan and I suspect there may be some more in future issues.

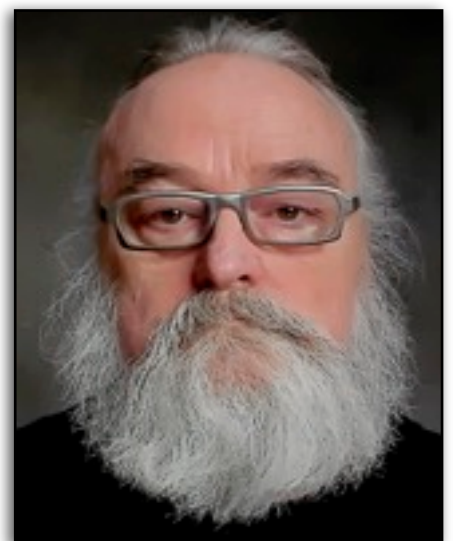
Bike Portrait



This picture was taken by a leading American photographer Jeff Schewe who was involved in the development of Adobe Photoshop. As you can see from the picture it was taken at an altitude of 12,095ft at the summit of Independence Pass in Colorado (reproduced here with his approval).

It was taken on the return trip from Chicago to Los Angeles (now that's a road trip). He says that they stayed the night in Aspen so that they could ride over the pass in daylight and although it was snowing it wasn't lying on the road... but he was careful anyway. Apparently shooting "bike portraits" is something motorcycle riders who are also photographers do all the time.

He went on to say that it was a 1996 R1100 BMW. He traded it in with 96K miles on it but hated the R1200 he got and sold it after 2K miles...



Bike members - let's see photographs of your bikes in interesting places. You must have interesting stories about rides you have done. Can you beat or come near an altitude of 12,095ft? Please send material to secretaryndam@gmail.com

MOT

I took my good lady wife's 18 year old Polo to the MOT centre in Newtownards. It sailed through but if you have an MOT imminent be prepared to stand outside while the car is taken through as there is no shelter provided. While waiting I had the entertainment of a McLaren 570S in front of me. It's not every day you see one of these and it provided a bit of a stir among the guys working in the MOT centre. The one who drove it in had a bit of fun blipping the throttle. I enjoyed the noise but I'm not sure the owner was best pleased.... but what else could he expect!



Answers



No waiting.



No stopping

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