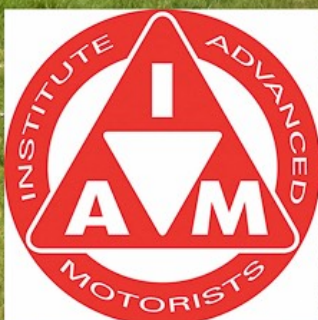
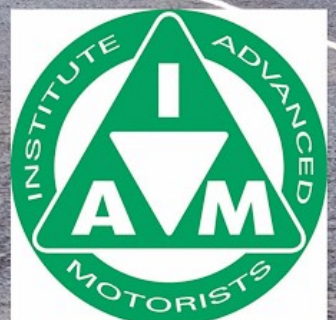


The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



August 2019





The Road Observer

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

August 2019

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

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New Members

This month we welcome to the Group car members Caoimhe Gallen and Paedar Murphy. 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

Congratulations this month to bike members

Brian Gillies

Harold Clay

and to car members

Justin Patty

David McCann

Gareth Stewart

Brian, Justin and Gareth achieved a F1RST pass.

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

Summer edition cover picture

This was far too easy. The location was the Belmont Road in Belfast at it's junction with Massey Avenue. Congratulations to Shaun McKittrick, Angela Bell, Gareth Hughes, Ralph Magee, Annie McFarland, Peter Hazlett, Alistair Gillespie and Norman Shearer. Can you identify the location of this month's cover which is local (especially if you have had or given an observed drive in the North Down area). No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and of course a mention in the next Road Observer.

Dates for your diary

- 27 August - Observer training - **for existing Observers and trainee Observers**
- 3 September- STAC 1 Human Factors
- 10 September - Group Night - speaker Ross Davidson, serious motorcycle crash survivor
- 24 September - STAC 2 - IPSGA (Information, Position, Speed, Gear, Acceleration)
- 1 October - STAC 3 - Core driving skills
- 8 October - Group Night - AGM - speaker Davy Mulligan - Cornerstone Off-Road Motorcycling
- 22 October - STAC 4 Bends and cornering
- 29 October - STAC 5 - Roundabouts and junctions
- 5 November - STAC 6 - Overtaking
- 12 November - Group Night - to be confirmed
- 26 November - STAC 7 - Motorways and dual carriageways
- 3 December - STAC 8 - Manoeuvring
- 10 December - Group Night - Christmas dinner, Carnalea Golf Club.

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.

In praise of older vehicles by David Harcourt

Modern cars are too good. They're smooth and comfortable, and an incredibly safe place to be in the event of a collision. They tolerate and compensate for bad gear changes, they're loaded with electronics to assist traction, braking and stability, and we often measure how good a car is by how little perception of speed it delivers – “this car is really comfortable and it feels like you're hardly moving”. This is for the most part good, but I think we've lost part of the driving experience along the way. I learned to drive in older vehicles with clunky gearboxes, manual steering, weak brakes which varied with the vehicle load, and no fancy electronics – you needed a friend or a lot of iterations just to adjust the passenger mirror by hand. The battery was often weak so in cold weather there was one shot at starting, and I learned to use the clutch to take gearbox load off the starter motor when the oil was cold and thick. I learned to park on a hill, and I learned you probably can't bump start a vehicle on a hill in a heavy frost.

My dad had a coal business and I spent a lot of after school time in the lorry with him, where I developed an interest in driving. I was manoeuvring lorries in the yard from an early age, and later as a teenager I did a lot of farm work for my cousin. Most of the vehicles I drove had non-synchro gearboxes so I learned to double declutch, and the brakes were feeble so I relied heavily on engine braking. Powered steering was a luxury I'd never even heard of, so low-speed manoeuvres were performed at a crawl as it's not physically possible for a normal human to turn the wheel in a stationary loaded lorry. I learned to plan each step of my manoeuvres to maximise the available space and minimise the effort, and even today I creep the car during manoeuvres to ease the strain on the steering and tyres even though my powered steering would happily let me spin lock to scrub up the tarmac.

The family car was a Peugeot 504 Family Estate – we were a large family and this was well before Renault invented the People Carrier. The Peugeot was long and without powered steering, and my dad insisted I took my driving lessons (3 in total) and did my test in this car as there was no value in

learning to pass the test in the instructor's Fiesta if I would never drive it again. I was very pleased to achieve the "turn the vehicle" in the desired three points, and when I drove the car several years later after getting used to powered steering I was amazed at my achievement, and I think I would struggle to repeat it today.

I got my first job (not counting newspaper delivery) in the summer of my first year at university, and I got my first car to get me to that first job. It was a 1.3 litre Vauxhall Chevette, carmine red, and it had something no modern hatchback can offer – a perception of speed. It was underpowered by modern standards, probably less than half the power of a 2019 1.3 litre engine. The roadholding wasn't great either, but it was predictable. Relatively light and rear wheel drive, it drifted a bit wide on bends, progressively wider at higher speed, and significantly more in the wet, but always predictable and under control. Driving at 50 – 60mph on a country road was a joy and came with a speed thrill a modern hatchback just cannot deliver.



At one point in its life my Chevette developed an intermittent fault, or as I like to describe it, became possessed. The fault was almost impossible to diagnose because most of the time it was absent, but when it manifested, the symptoms were interesting. The sidelights came on with the brake lights, it wouldn't idle and indeed stalled mid gear change, and when braking and indicating the rear lights

pulsed like Close Encounters. When it stopped, it wouldn't start again until it was ready, which could be anything from a few seconds to a couple of hours.

One day in Edinburgh, I was making a right turn from Mound Place onto The Mound, a very difficult junction with limited visibility and typically heavy traffic. I drove out when there was a break in the traffic, and when I was halfway out, fully blocking the road, my car decided to stop. I was cranking the engine but it wasn't even nearly catching, and then the traffic came – six or eight motorcycle outriders leading an enormous Rolls Royce with royal ensigns on the wings. There I was, blocking the road in my Northern Ireland registered car, with HRH just feet away, stopped because of me. Back home I expect the RUC would have reacted swiftly and decisively to a potential security incident, but the Lothian Constabulary just waited. It was probably only seconds, but it felt much longer, before my car decided it was time to get out of there, and I can only imagine what Prince Philip muttered about me at the time.

The fault was eventually resolved by chance when I was replacing a rear indicator bulb and noticed that the adjacent bulb wasn't right. The dual filament tail and brake bulb wasn't broken completely but the glass bulb was not secured to the cement, so it rotated fractionally and created an earth leak short circuit. The short circuit interfered with the other lights and the needle solenoid on the carburettor, cutting off fuel at idle. Bizarre, intermittent, and impossible to detect in normal operation.

Since then I've had probably 30+ cars, each one a better car in most respects than my Chevette, yet I have a fondness for that car which I've never felt since.

Tell us about your first car, your favourite car or the one you couldn't wait to get rid of.

Bike runs

The July run was to Malin Head (and back!). For many car drivers to do this in a day would be a major undertaking. Not so for the bikes and a total of 10 bikes made the trek there and back. And if you think it was all done on main roads, think again. The bikers like the side-roads.



The August run was a bit shorter but no less enjoyable. Led by Bruce Steel 14 bikes went on a tour of the back roads of County Down.



In the news

Motorcycle News ran a feature called a one gallon challenge and our own Simon Beckett got top billing. A copy of the text is below.

MCN ONE-GALLON CHALLENGE Your brilliant 60-minute blasts

'Stunning views, flowing bends and tight twisties'

MCN reader and IAM Instructor Simon Beckett regularly rides this amazing coastal route

FACTFILE
Banging/Ranger - 60 miles
 If you want to get a taste of the coastal roads of Dorset, this is the route for you. It's a brilliant mix of flowing bends and tight twisties, with stunning views of the sea and the coastline. The route is a mix of A and B roads, with some of the best scenery in Dorset. It's a brilliant mix of flowing bends and tight twisties, with stunning views of the sea and the coastline. The route is a mix of A and B roads, with some of the best scenery in Dorset.

'It's the perfect length for a quick blast around'

TAKING OUR ONE-GALLON CHALLENGE

For the best of your summer holiday, nothing beats a quick blast around the coast. The route is a mix of A and B roads, with some of the best scenery in Dorset. It's a brilliant mix of flowing bends and tight twisties, with stunning views of the sea and the coastline. The route is a mix of A and B roads, with some of the best scenery in Dorset.

KEY
 Look out for these when riding a route around here

- Flowing bends
- Tight twisties
- Stunning views
- Great scenery
- Great roads
- Great weather

MORE AMAZING SHORT ROUTES

THE ROUTE
 @ Lymington
 @ Lymington
 @ Lymington
 @ Lymington

THE ROUTE
 @ Lymington
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The text reads

'It's the perfect length for a quick blast around'

After a day teaching for the IAM, Simon loves to head out on a solo ride to clear his head and this route's one of his favourites.

You can see Scotland and the Isle of Man as the road takes you onto the peninsular, and as you head to Kearnay the road rises up to capture views of Mourne Mountains.

"I like any road with fast, flowing bends and this route has several sections where you start with fast turns, then end up with tight twisties towards the bottom of the peninsula.

"My favourite stretch of the route is from Glastray to Cloughey; flowing bends all the way, and with no shortage of petrol stations on the route you're not going to end up stranded. And the view entering Portaferry and seeing the narrows of Strangford Lough is superb."

There are several biker-friendly cafés along the route. The Court Yard in Portaferry, Morrelli's Ice Cream Shop or The Yard Bistro are stand-out ones. There are plenty of tea stops, too. Harrisons of Greyabbey has a fantastic choice of food and great deserts. You can sit outside and look across Strangford Lough to the Mourne Mountains and Scrabo Tower in Newtownards on a good day.

The **Belfast Newsletter's** Duncan Elder had the privilege of having Angela assess his driving. His report which was positive appeared in the newsletter together with a picture of Angela. This was useful publicity for all the IAM Groups in NI. The article is reproduced below.

Is it time you brushed up your driving skills?

Duncan Elder gets behind the wheel alongside Angela Bell from IAM RoadSmart to chat about the national charity's ongoing drive to improve people's motoring skills

I have to admit I was slightly nervous getting behind the wheel with a qualified driving assessor sitting in my passenger seat. It was a mild panic I haven't felt since I turned up at the test centre in Larne 25 years ago.

Thankfully, just like when I was a fresh-faced 17-year-old learner, I managed to hold it together and get a positive outcome.

This time I didn't need to worry about answering questions on the Highway Code – although she did throw in some road-sign trivia just for fun – or whether or not I might clip the kerb while reversing around a corner. This time it was about trying to hide all the bad habits I've picked up over the years. It was about thinking about the things we should all be doing every time we get behind the wheel – getting the basics right.

I needn't have worried. My assessor, Angela Bell, IAM RoadSmart's regional groups coordinator for Northern Ireland, put me at ease before we set off, assuring me that it wouldn't be as intense as the driving test.

Angela, who five years ago passed her Masters test – the top qualification a civilian driver can attain – is a member of North Down Advanced Motorists, which meets in Groomsport, and a qualified driving assessor.

She had been driving for seven years when she decided to take her advanced test and join IAM in 1996.

"I had an interest in driving and it was a personal challenge for myself," she said.

"I also thought it would be fun and interesting to meet some other new people of a similar mindset."

Angela explained that there are currently seven local IAM RoadSmart groups in Northern Ireland with a total membership of around 1,000 people.

As well as her group in North Down there are others in Belfast, Lisburn, Ballymena, Limavady, Mid Ulster and Enniskillen.

With group meetings involving talks, trips out, autotests and other events and activities, she said being a member of a volunteer group is "quite a sociable thing as well as about learning."

Angela, who works as a civil servant, explained that IAM RoadSmart offers a wide range of courses and assessments for drivers and motorcyclists.

Encouraging people to find out more about what the charity has to offer, she said: "People can do the courses as a one-off to get a taste for it, but obviously our hope is that they will be interested enough to think more about their driving, and whether that means they come to us or just develop their own skills is entirely up to them."

"We are just very interested in encouraging people to think a bit more about their driving because the tendency is people pass their test when they are 17 and never sit another test and are never assessed again."

Throughout our 20-minute journey around north Belfast Angela offered advice and encouraged me to talk aloud about my observations of the road ahead and any hazards I could see.

And despite my concerns about what I might do wrong, I only got told off twice – for being a little too heavy with my right foot in a 30mph zone and not applying my handbrake as often as I should.

Much to my relief, her overall verdict was "really good – not very much to pick up there at all."

Admittedly I was quite pleased with myself, but not totally convinced that she wasn't just being polite, as my wife often derides my "terrible" driving.

Stressing that being a good driver is "an ongoing process" that everyone – including advanced motorists – need to keep working at, Angela said: "We want to learn as much as we can ourselves. I always say it is an ongoing process. Every time you are out driving you see something new, something you haven't seen before."

Urging the Province's drivers to keep brushing up their skills behind the wheel, her top tips for road users are: always "observe, anticipate and plan" and use "the correct and appropriate speed."

"It is a matter of getting experience on the road and learning what to look for," she added.

According to IAM RoadSmart, many of those who complete its Advanced Driver course benefit from not only being a more confident and safer driver, but also reduced insurance premiums – something we could all do with.



Angela Bell, regional groups coordinator for IAM RoadSmart in Northern Ireland, is a qualified advanced driving assessor

More about IAM RoadSmart

IAM RoadSmart – formerly the Institute of Advanced Motorists – is a charity set up in 1965 with the aim of improving the standard of driving on UK roads.

It has more than 85,000 members across around 190 volunteer groups throughout the UK, Ireland and one in Turkey.

The charity prepares drivers for their advanced test, which is run by IAM through a network of retired emergency services drivers.

IAM RoadSmart offers a range of courses for drivers and motorcyclists, including a Younger Driver Assessment, a Mature Driver Review, Advanced Driver/Rider courses and specialist courses for commercial drivers.

One of the major benefits of having completed an advanced driver course is the possibility of cheaper vehicle insurance, with some companies offering sizeable discounts for advanced drivers/riders.

For more information log on to www.iamroadsmart.com

Rain

IAM RoadSmart's head of driving and riding standards Richard Gladman advises a few ways to keep safe in heavy rain and floods.

Heavy rain

- Driving in heavy rain will affect your visibility, so take it slow. Rule 126 of the Highway Code states that the braking distance between yourself and another car on a dry road surface should be at least two seconds, and at least four seconds when driving in the rain.
- Ensure your windscreen wipers are working correctly, and that the windscreen is clean – using your wipers when you have a dirty windscreen will just smear and make your visibility even worse.
- Turn your headlights on. Many of us now have automated headlights, but often they will not come on in adverse weather conditions; ensure they are on so you're visible to other road users. A good rule of thumb is that if you need your wipers on, then you need your headlights on too.



Credit: Oregon Department of Transport

Aquaplaning

Is your car aquaplaning? Here are some signs that you could be:

- Your engine may become louder if the driving wheels have lost grip
- It will feel as though you've dropped down in the gears causing revs to increase
- The steering may become lighter and unresponsive.

If you experience any of this, try not to panic. Follow these tips:

- Ease off the accelerator or cancel the cruise control
- Hold the steering wheel straight and firm
- Do not hit your brakes hard
- When your car gains traction you can slowly begin to use the brake and slow down.

How to avoid aquaplaning

If it's been raining and you're about to drive, there are things that you can do to help prevent your car from aquaplaning. Standing water as shallow as 2.5mm can cause an aquaplaning effect at speed so be sure to follow the steps below:

- Check your tyres – they can have a massive impact on how your car will handle in the wet. Watch this video by TyreSafe for more info: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxuYOI_uruU
- Reduce your speed; problems occur when the tyres can no longer clear the standing water as they rotate. Going slower will allow time for the tread to do its job
- Be alert for flood warnings on the road and if you can see any water in the distance, be sure to slow down and prepare to go around it
- Avoid using cruise control in extreme conditions.

Floods

- If there are floods you need to consider other routes to keep you safe. If the water is standing more than six inches deep, avoid driving through it. You can judge the depth in relation to the kerb
- If there are similar vehicles driving safely through, then you can make a judgement call on whether it's safe to do so yourself.
- If the water is fast flowing, do not attempt to drive through it. There is a real danger of your car being swept away



If you have decided to drive through a flood take the following precautions:

- Go slowly and take it easy
- Press lightly on the clutch and add gentle pressure to the accelerator to increase engine revs but do so without speed. Do this in a similar way to how you do hill starts, this will prevent water from entering your exhaust. If you're in an automatic, accelerate lightly but control the speed with your brakes

- If you have any doubt, turn back. Often modern saloon cars have an air intake in the wheel arch and could be below water level if going through a flood. If your engine takes in any water, it will immediately hydro lock and the engine will stop

Remember to stay alert and avoid splashing pedestrians. If this is done accidentally you can still receive a fixed penalty and three points on your license for driving without due care and attention. If done deliberately it could be a public order offence, a court appearance, or a fine.

Richard says “With the British weather the way it is, we should all be well practised at driving in the rain. Keeping your car maintained and the rubber (wipers and tyres) in good condition will help you stay safe. In The recent extreme weather, we have seen that standing water and floods are becoming more commonplace, so take extra care and if possible, avoid driving through standing water. If you’re in any doubt about the depth or surface underneath a flood, then it’s best not to take any chances.”



And finally.....Parking Iceland style



Not really. Having driven 200 metres after picking up the hire car this unfortunate visitor swerved to avoid an oncoming truck and this was the result.

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