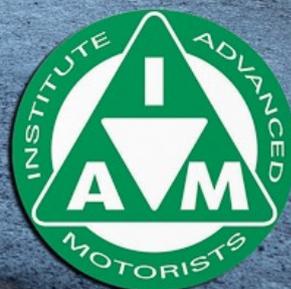


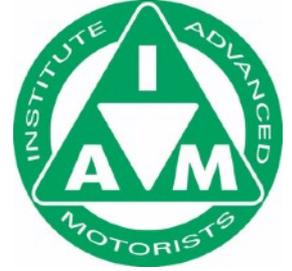
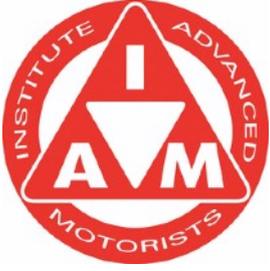
# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



February 2024





## 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

February 2024

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

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### Test Passes

No test passes to report this month.

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

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### New Members

This month we welcome new motorcycle member Rex Bermon. We hope you not only gain from being a member of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

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### January Cover Picture

For anyone resident in North Down this was too easy. It was the approach into Crawfordsburn Village from the Ballyrobert direction.

Congratulations this month (in order of receipt of answers) Stewart Campbell, Mark Patterson, Ralph Magee, Jo-Anne Crooks, Ivan Greenfield, Gareth Hughes, David Harcourt and Norman Shearer.

Do you know where this months picture was taken? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and of course, you will get a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to: [leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com](mailto:leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com)

## Dates for your diary

In addition to the regular STAC nights for car Associates and the regular bike runs (notified by email to bike members and also on Facebook) we plan a varied programme for the Group Nights. All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated

27 February	STAC session 2
5 March	STAC session 3
12 March	Group Night - Talk on archery by Ivan Greenfield
26 March	STAC session 4
2 April	Easter Tuesday - no meeting
9 April	Group Night - to be announced
23 April	STAC session 5
30 April	STAC session 6
7 May	STAC session 7
14 May	Group Night - to be announced
28 May	STAC session 8
4 June	Additional driving practice
11 June	Visit to the Ulster Aviation Society

The Committee is in the process of putting together the programme for the first half of 2024 and further details will be available when Group night activities are confirmed.

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.

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## Potholes



A familiar sight along many roads, some deep enough to cause serious tyre and wheel damage. One of the problems is that repairs get carried out to fill in the potholes but with rain and frost they reappear in a short space of time and the repairs have to be repaired.

Examples of damage suffered by NDAM members:



Hopefully a recent announcement by the Infrastructure Minister John O'Dowd will begin the process of sorting this out. The Minister said:

*"I recently addressed the Assembly to announce the allocation of an extra £1million to target areas of highest priority with small scale resurfacing schemes, designed to repair areas that have suffered the most and where localised repairs are less effective.*

*"I am now in a position to announce an additional £8.1million of funding for my Department's Structural Maintenance Programme to deliver additional resurfacing schemes and continue to address the poor condition of our road network.*

*"This investment has been made possible through a combination of additional funding from the Executive supplemented by a reallocation within my Department.*

*"Work will start immediately on the planning and delivery of these new schemes. This represents a significant additional investment in our road network, and as the Minister for Infrastructure, I am committed to improving this vital asset for the benefit of our citizens, our communities and our economy."*

### **Increase in course costs and IAM membership**

From 2 April the cost of the Advanced Driving Course will be £200 and the Advanced Rider Course which will be £215. The Masters Driver Course will be £325 and the Masters Rider Course will be £345.

**If you know anyone who is considering doing an advanced course tell them to apply before April to take advantage of the current costs (£175 for either course)**

The cost of your IAM membership is also increasing:

	2023/24	2024/25
<b>Members</b>		
Direct debit	£43	£47
Cheque, bank transfer or debit/credit card	£48	£52
<b>Fellow Members</b>		
Direct debit	£61	£65
Cheque, bank transfer or debit/credit card	£66	£70

Fellow membership is open to all current full IAM RoadSmart members. It provides you with enhanced recognition in return for your commitment to keep your advanced skills up to date by retesting every three years (the test cost is included).

## Poor car rental experience

I am a fairly seasoned business traveller, having rented cars all over North America and Europe since the start of the millennium, and a few holiday rentals on top. I have travelled much less since the pandemic, and my latest rental was quite different. Up to now, my experience of rental cars has been that they are typically under 18 months old with relatively low mileage, and I've even been upgraded on occasion to keep the original offering under 16 thousand miles. With seniority and loyalty points, I have graduated from a compact (eg Nissan Micra) to a mid-range (eg Nissan Juke). While the Micra is a fine car, it does not fit me, so the extra legroom and headroom in a mid-range is welcome, but I have yet to drive a rental which I would willingly park in my own driveway.

My most recent rental was an MG HS, which I picked up in the dark from one of the main rental chains at Heathrow Airport. With a work rental, I am required to decline all insurance options on the rental paperwork, and sign the section where I accept full liability up to the replacement value of the vehicle. I dutifully checked the paperwork and noted a scuffed alloy and a scrape on the driver's door. However, my walk-round revealed four scuffed alloys, significant bumper damage front and rear, a broken front grille, and an enormous crack in the rear spoiler, in addition to multiple minor dents and stone chips. I highlighted all this to the attendant, who said they were trivial, using a pound coin as the reference for whether it should be noted.

As the already recorded scrape on the driver's door was by far the least serious of the external damage, I wondered if the criteria on return might be different, so I photographed and recorded everything, and added that the carpet was worn through.



I got in and adjusted the seat, mirrors and controls, and attempted to start it. It was keyless ignition with button start, but I needed the torch on my phone to find the button. Once started, I realised the windscreen was heavily fogged – not just misted up, but with beads of water on the inside like a tropical greenhouse. The heater controls are touchscreen driven, which is a terrible innovation. There were a number of physical buttons below the panel, one of which seemed to set the options for demist, but then wouldn't cancel. In the absence of any screen cloth, I mopped the windscreen with a pack of tissues and began my journey.

I found the sat nav to be less than intuitive to code, and it announced it would begin guiding me when I joined the main road, but it wouldn't give me any assistance in finding the road. On my own

sat nav, the view zooms in as you approach a junction, then out for the big view, and it gives the next three directions in advance at the side of the screen. Not so the MG – it offered a fixed view, zoomed in so far that there was no advance visibility of the road ahead. On the road, the heater occasionally spat water on the windscreen, which explained the heavy misting and ineffectiveness of the demister. This particular MG HS had clearly had a tough life, 68 thousand miles over about three years, and in this instance the HS in the name does not stand for High Speed. The steering was a bit vague, the car unresponsive, but it got me to the hotel.

The low point of the trip came on the Wednesday morning when the car would not unlock. Suspecting the key-fob battery, I popped it open and used the concealed key to lever off the lock cover and manually unlock. However, the entire car was dead and unresponsive, so I called the rental company, who sent the AA. The van arrived within 40 minutes, and he boost started it and advised me to drive it for 20 minutes, but I was 500m from the office and already late. He said the rental companies do minimal maintenance, and showed me the oil filler cap as evidence – the oil had probably never been changed since new. I left it idling for a while with the security man, and it did start later in the day when I needed to return to the airport. Overall, not a great experience, and it joins a long list of vehicles I'm glad I've tried, but even more glad that I don't own.

Many thanks to David Harcourt for this report.

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## February Group Night

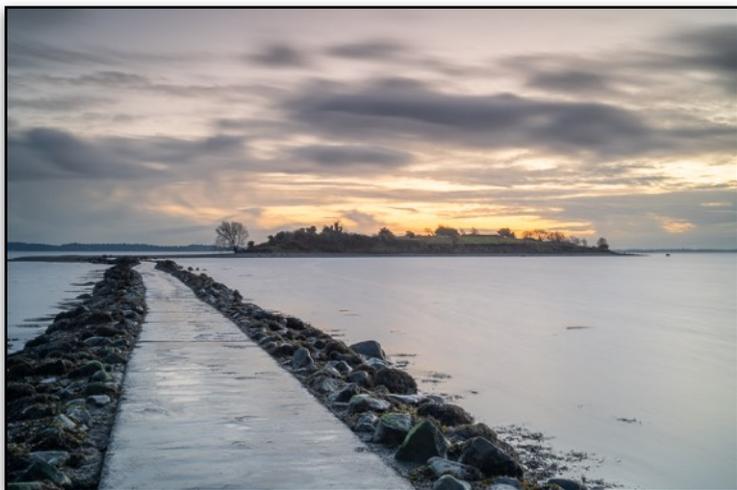
This was a presentation by your humble Editor about my photographic journey from my very first pictures in 1971 taken with a basic Kodak camera borrowed from my brother. There were examples of pictures taken through 20 years of photographing rally cars, many of which were published in motor sport magazines.



As well as an interest in rallying, I showed a selection of pictures taken while walking in mountains in Ireland, Scotland, and on multi-day trips to the Austrian Alps, the Pyrenees and the Dolomites.



Retirement provided the opportunity to develop (no pun intended) my long-time love of landscape photography which has resulted in some minor successes in international landscape photography competitions and I showed a selection of pictures illustrating the wide range of genres covered by the term landscape - big vistas, seascapes and intimate landscapes (no not what you are thinking) - pictures without sky or of small details that most would walk by without noticing.



More pictures are available on my website: [lesashephotography.com](http://lesashephotography.com)

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## Bike runs

Poor weather has meant that some of the regular bike runs have had to be cancelled, sometimes at short notice. With spring just around the corner the group is hoping to get back to more regular runs. In recent weeks Ivan Greenfield has been going out with just a couple of others on non-formal Group organised runs around County Down just to keep up interest and skills.

Last week' was a roundabout run using the Strangford Ferry and back roads to Downpatrick and on to Clough and French's Cafe. Returning via Annacloy, Kilmore, Crossgar, Derryboye, Killinchy, Comber and Ards in what appeared to be good conditions. Attendance was less than it might otherwise have been because of a clash with an open day at BMW Motorad at Hursts.

Ivan has established a WhatsApp group for the bikers and through this, emails and Facebook you can keep up to date on what runs are being planned. Hopefully, with the better weather we can get back to the sort of numbers in recent times - see picture below.



*Credit: Amy Schofield*

**And finally.....** the understatement of the year:

**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**