

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



February 2020





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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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Test Passes

Congratulations this month to car member

Bill Moore

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

January Cover Picture

After the difficult December picture I thought I would give a much easier one to start the New Year. The location was, of course, the A2 Warren Road from Donaghadee to Groomsport with the water tower at Orlock prominent in the background. Congratulations to Annie McFarland, Guy Thomson, Bruce Steele, Norman Shearer, Gareth Hughes, Bill Moore and Angela Bell.

Can you identify this month's cover? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer.

Dates for your diary

25 February	STAC 2 - IPSGA - information, position, speed, gear, acceleration
3 March	STAC 3 - Core driving skills
10 March	Group Night - Speaker Valerie Millington
24 March	STAC 4 - Bends and cornering
31 March	STAC 5 - Roundabouts and junctions
7 April	Group Night - Visit to private cinema
28 April	STAC 6 - Overtaking
5 May	STAC 7 - Motorways and dual carriageways
12 May	Group Night - Bikes in the car-park postponed - to be decided
26 May	STAC 8 - Manoeuvring
2 June	Test preparation and driving practice
9 June*	Group Night - ice cream at the Rhinka, Islandmagee*
23 June	Additional driving practice
30 June	Additional driving practice

* This event may be known as ísbíltúr which is an Icelandic word for driving to get ice-cream!

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.

February Group Night

Our plans for a talk on electric cars fell through when our speaker became ill. We issued an email to all members to let them know that we would still be meeting and would do something. It was a filthy night so it was good to see a good number of Members turned up. And it was worth their while. Guy Thomson our locally based IAM RoadSmart Examiner stepped into the breach at the last minute to do a "Meet the Examiner" session.

For those who don't know Guy, he began with an introduction to his background. He holds a Masters, with Distinction, for both cars and bikes, (Editor's note - his spoken thought is legendary!) He was an NDAM Committee Member, and an active car and bike National Observer with the Group, prior to taking up the position of Examiner, also for cars and bikes, in January 2019. He remains a member of the National Training Team and has assisted with the establishment of an IAM car & bike group in Southern Ireland.



He began by saying that passing the advanced test is not easy, as the expected standard is perceivably higher than that for the DVLA test, but he provided reassurance that the Examiners do their best to put candidates at ease. Guy also mentioned that Examiners are regularly assessed/ quality assured, and so they know what it is like to be scrutinised, having been through the assessment process a number of times from both seats.

Don't apply for your test until the Group says you are ready. This is important, as once the application is made you will be contacted by an Examiner fairly quickly (usually within five working

days) to make arrangements for the conduct of the test, at a time and place mutually convenient. Reasonable adjustments can be made to ensure the test is all-inclusive. With this in mind, Associates are requested to inform HQs when applying for the test, and their Examiner when booking the test, if they have any disability or mobility issues which may require reasonable adjustments to be made; however the actual test standard will be the same for them as for any other candidate.

The Examiner will complete the preliminary paperwork and ask the candidate to complete & sign a declaration form re driving license, insurance MOT etc. and confirm they are fit to drive/ride and assume responsibility for your own driving/riding decisions. They will also carry out an eyesight check (normal number plate at 20m). Candidates will be briefed regarding an outline of the route, how directions will be conveyed and the examiner's expectations (e.g.- the competencies in the candidate's Logbook, summarised by the 4 Ss - **Safe**, **Systematic**, **Smooth**, and **Sensible** progress for the conditions). The examiner will also provide the candidate with the opportunity to ask questions. Advanced tests will invariably be held in daylight, however in the winter months the latter part of the test may extend into the hours of darkness.

Advanced Driver/Rider test report

iAM RoadSmart

Candidate information

Surname: _____ First Name: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Associate No: _____

Advanced test ☐ Members re-assessment ☐ Declaration ☐ Eyesight test ☐

Vehicle information (tick and delete as required)

Car ☐ Motorcycle ☐ Commercial (Heavy/Medium/Light) ☐ Bus/Coach/Minibus (with trailer) ☐

Reg no: _____ Make: _____ Manual ☐ Automatic ☐

This must be brought to the attention of the Driver
• As the driver you are deemed to be in control of your vehicle at all times including responsibility for safety

Competence Levels: 1 = Commended 2 = Satisfactory 3 = Requires Development

Safety and legality	Gear changing	Cornering
System	Use of gearbox	Overtaking
Observation	Acceleration/sense	Restraint/progress
Planning & hazard management	Mirrors/rear observation	Human factors & concentration
Anticipation	Steering	Courtesy
Vehicle sympathy & eco-driving	Braking	Slow manoeuvring
Positioning	Signals	Smoothness
Spoken thought	Knowledge	OVERALL RESULT

Comments

Examiner's test report form

Examiner name: _____ Number: _____

Signature: _____

For car drivers you will be encouraged to provide spoken thought at some point during the test. The examiner is looking for you to say what you see and what you will do about it, in a way which does not slow down the drive or compromise concentration. The important point is to explain the drive and the application of the System (**IPSGA**) in advance of the identified and prioritised hazards - rather than as history.

Obviously spoken thought does not apply to a bike test, but some Examiners may offer a 'receive only' radio link, if the candidate wishes to use it, to receive route directions from the Examiner during the test. Should the rider decline to use a radio, the Examiner will brief the candidate regarding the initial part of the route, and more frequent stops will be made as necessary to provide further route directions in sections that will be easier for the candidate to remember. Briefing for riders will also include how signals will be provided by the examiner *en route* and arrangements will also be made in the event the examiner and rider get separated etc.

The Examiner may ask questions after the test but the result will be given immediately and a debrief will be given if the candidate wants one.

Guy went on to cover some specific areas where there may be confusions. You will have been shown how to do pre-drive and pre-ride checks and also a moving brake test. You will not necessarily be asked to do these on your test. However, an Examiner has the right to refuse a test if the vehicle is deemed to be unsafe, unhygienic (cars) or illegal.

Is it necessary to **select neutral if stopped in traffic**? It depends - if you are likely to be moving again in a few seconds then no. However, if traffic lights have just changed to red and there are also pedestrians waiting to cross then yes. He reminded Members of the need to be able to see tyres on tarmac when stopped behind another vehicle. Riders should generally only have one foot on the ground when stationary – however very gusty or slippery conditions may necessitate placing both feet on the ground. The discussion of these matters brought up the question of what to do with automatic transmission for cars and technology such as DCT for bikes (Dual Clutch Transmission – or automated clutch and gear shift). As there are many different types of automatic systems

associates should be guided by what the manufacturer recommends in the handbook. Also, on the subject of automatics you should be fully familiar with the different functions of your system (including sports mode etc.) and when it is appropriate to use them e.g. when descending a steep hill.

On the subject of **slow manoeuvres**, examiners will suggest that candidates pick an appropriate place (i.e. somewhere safe, convenient and legal) to turn in the road or reverse park etc. Examiners expect good decision-making regarding where to conduct the manoeuvre, effective all round observation throughout the manoeuvre, while maintaining full control of the vehicle. Provided the Associate holds the steering wheel in a way which maintains full and accurate range of movement, and simultaneously retains the ability to operate necessary auxiliary controls, it may be permissible for one hand to be on the steering wheel while conducting a reversing manoeuvre.



Many newer cars are full of **technology aids** such as sat navs, blind spot assistance, cruise control, adaptive cruise control, parking sensors, cameras etc. Associates may use these on test but need to be able to explain and/or demonstrate their effective use and they should not be reliant on them. Driver aids and technology should be used as a supplement to the Associate's observation and driving skills – such as demonstrating smooth acceleration sense. You may use your sat-nav on-test but base your speed on what your speedometer tells you not the sat-nav. Your sat-nav should not be a distraction.



Undertaking is a perennial issue. When can you do it? The example of catching up on a vehicle doing 50- 60mph while travelling in light traffic in lane 2 of a two lane unrestricted (70 mph) dual-carriageway or motorway comes up time and time again. The simple answer is give them a long (2-3 seconds) flash of your headlights to alert them to your presence – and hopefully they should move into lane 1. (By checking their rear view mirrors you should be able to detect if they have seen you by their head movement.) If they don't respond by moving into lane 1 and traffic in lane 1 is moving more slowly, it may be preferable to remain in lane 2 – but at an appropriate safe distance behind the vehicle in question.

However, if lane 1 is clear (and faster moving traffic is approaching you from the rear and possibly now impinging on your safety) then consideration can be given to moving into lane 1, while maintaining the appropriate distance behind and away from the blind spot of the vehicle in lane 2. This will keep you safer from the faster moving following traffic and avoid inappropriate undertaking.

However where there are two lanes of slow-moving traffic and lane 1 is moving faster than lane 2 then 'undertaking' may be acceptable (but must be done carefully as a vehicle in lane 2 may suddenly try to move to lane 1 – so again avoid sitting in that vehicle's near-side blindspot) and look for early clues as to a possible lane change, such as head movement or wheels moving towards the lane dividers etc..

Guy then turned to 2 issues - **off-siding and straight-lining**. Off-siding is crossing of the centre line/hazard line, (or in the absence of such lines, the centre of the carriageway) in order to extend a view. This is not acceptable on a two-way carriageway and the IAM discourages this practice which is therefore not acceptable on test.

Straight-lining a set of open bends is acceptable provided there is good forward vision across the bends and good rear observations have taken place. However it must not be carried out if there is a risk of conflict with other road users, or where it will inconvenience, confuse or cause alarm or distress, to others or encourage them to follow suit. The use of spoken thoughts will let the Examiner know whether these points have been considered and that the straight-lining is not simply a lazy approach to the bends. Examiners will be familiar with the acronym SLAP:-



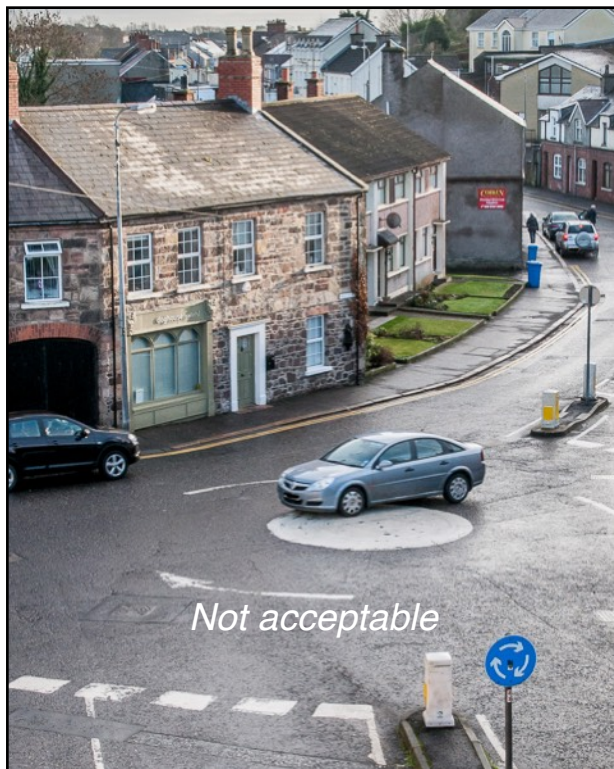
Safe – is it safe to do so? (Considering the view available and any hazards)

Legal – Is it legal to do it? (Road markings)

Achieve – Does it actually achieve something? (Or are you just show-boating)

Perception – What is the perception of another road user of your actions?

These points apply equally to straight-lining roundabouts. If the driver compromises their own or any other road user's safety while straight-lining they will fail the test.



Mini-roundabouts – you **MUST** not drive over the white spot – unless your vehicle is so large that it is not otherwise capable of negotiating the junction

Speed limits and overtaking. If you have to plan exceed the speed limit to complete an overtake then the overtake should not take place. This is emphasised several times in the Associate's logbook – including in the Appendix '*The Test – what to Expect*'. Finally, on the issue of speed, Guy alerted us to the fact that speed cameras can now see in the dark – but as advanced drivers/riders he suggested that this development shouldn't impact on us!

This turned out to be one of the most interactive sessions on a Group Night that I can remember. Guy thought he was winding-up after about an hour but the questions just kept coming and before we knew where we were it was almost throwing out time! Many thanks to Guy for stepping into the breach at the last minute and providing such a

wealth of information for Observers and Associates to digest. He said that there was more material he could cover and offered to do another session at a later date.

In-car Technology

In-car technology have proven to be a controversial topic of conversation, with car manufacturers increasingly offering more advanced driving systems to motorists that aren't always aware of how the technology should be used. IAM RoadSmart's road safety expert, Tim Shallcross, explains his concerns about the impact that this technology can have on a motorist's ability to drive safely.

A study carried out by Thatcham Research has found one in five British motorists believe that a car marked as being capable of automatic steering, braking and acceleration allows them to "sit back and relax and let the car do the driving". 71% of drivers also think they can purchase a self-driving car right now.

The study that surveyed more than 1,500 motorists found that misunderstandings about driver assistance systems is dangerously confusing motorists into thinking they have an autonomous vehicle.

There are six levels of vehicle automation generally accepted by the motor industry, starting with level 0: no automation at all. That was pretty much every vehicle until about seven or eight years ago. Cruise control doesn't count as automation, nor does Automatic Braking Systems (ABS) because the driver has to do the steering and braking all the time. Level 5 is full automation, where there doesn't need to be a steering wheel at all, but that is a long way off, both in time and technology.



Level 1 automation is where some cars currently qualify. The driver still has to be in charge all the time and ready to take full control instantly if necessary, but systems such as Adaptive Cruise Control (ACC) will brake and accelerate, Lane Keeping Assistance (LKA) can help guide the steering, automated parking takes the stress out of parallel parking and Automatic Emergency Braking (AEB) slams the brakes on if an inattentive driver fails to spot cars slowing or stopped in front. These are all driver assistance systems.

The car can do the steering when parking, but the driver must control forward and backward movement. The car can brake and accelerate and nudge the steering wheel as a lane keeping reminder, but the driver must keep their hands on the steering wheel and steer.



The most advanced level of automation currently on the road is still only Level 2 and appears in some Tesla models. Although often given the nickname "hands off" that's extremely misleading; the system – and the law – requires the driver to be fully in control, which does mean having hold of the steering wheel, paying full attention to what's going on and ready to take over at a moment's notice when anything untoward might happen.

The name "Autopilot" is also very misleading and marketing departments really need to be

much more careful with the names they give new technology to avoid deluding drivers into believing a car is capable of things it is not designed to do.

Level 3 automation will be the first stage at which the “driver” will be able to engage in some other activity such as watching a film but will still have to be awake and available to take over when the car determines that he or she must.

To be clear, no manufacturer currently has a level 3 car available for ordinary drivers to use on a public road. At least for the next few years, whenever any of us get behind the steering wheel of a vehicle, we are in charge of it and responsible for remaining fully alert, staying in control and driving it in a safe and legal manner.

For more information about autonomous vehicles, [click here](#).

And finally.....Tyres: Two tales of what you are up against on the roads:

1. William McAteer reports that one of his young staff members had been driving around with this attached to his ford fiesta for a couple of months. Whatever mechanic he goes to fitted this part worn tyre. He was lucky not to have had an accident or been noticed by the police. He suspects it was defective long before it was fitted on his car. In fairness, he went straight to a tyre depot and got a new tyre as soon as the defects were pointed out to him. This is his first car and he is a bit naive, or stupid not to have noticed before. Sadly there's many like him who could do with taking more interest in the safety of their motors.



Credit: William McAteer

We have strongly recommended that he takes his car somewhere different.



2. On a recent trip to the Mournes I came across this car near the top of the Slievenaman Road. The picture shows some slush/ice on the side of the road mid-afternoon when I drove past and I suspect the car had gone off the road much earlier when the road was probably covered in snow. The stretch of road is downhill and is straight where this took place. The back nearside tyre is just in contact with the road and the driver was lucky that the car didn't roll. With the Road Observer in mind I stopped to take pictures and on closer inspection the front tyres were right down to the minimum 1.6mm tread depth as shown by the tread

wear indicators. If ever there was a reason for checking your tyres and changing them well before you reach this point this is surely it.