

# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



February 2021







## 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

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### New Members and test passes

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

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### January Cover Picture

The January cover picture was the Main Street in Dundrum. It was taken beside St Donard's Parish Church. I was surprised that we had only one correct answer - from Bruce Steele. Congratulations Bruce and best wishes for your recent transfer to Lisburn Advanced Motorcyclists.

Unless you make a habit of going down narrow roads you are unlikely to guess the location of this month's cover. To make it a bit easier it's in County Down and yes that's seaweed on the shore. Do you know where it is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer.

## COVID 19 update

In line with government and devolved administration advice, all IAM RoadSmart person to person activities remain suspended until further notice. The position is kept under review both at IAM RoadSmart HQ and by the Group Committee and we will keep you advised of any changes. With the start of the relaxation of restrictions in sight hopefully we will be able to get together again by the summer.

### Group activities

STAC meetings using ZOOM are continuing until such time as we can get back to meeting again in the Boathouse.

We are aiming to keep the monthly Group nights going using ZOOM.

The motorcycle section also held a ZOOM meeting and the consensus was that they were very keen to get back on the road again as part of Group activities.

### IAM RoadSmart Choices

On Friday 12 February 'Associate CHOICES' was launched to all Associates. These focused modules are designed to help Associates refresh their knowledge and prepare for our return to on-road training. The modules originally developed for Commercial clients will ensure the Associate has the best possible preparation for their practical training, and while not specifically aimed at the Advanced Driver or Rider, the modules will ensure an up to date knowledge base.

The launch includes four modules, **Hazard Perception, Speed Awareness, Understanding the effects of alcohol, Winter Driving**, then every two weeks thereafter they will release one more module.

They are also currently developing Observer CHOICES modules which will be available in the near future.

### Dates for your diary

#### ZOOM STAC programme for car Associates and Observers (also anyone else interested) and Group nights

2 March - Bends and cornering

9 March - Group Night - Dr Grainne McCann - Posture and Joint Health: a Maintenance Manual

23 March - Junctions and roundabouts

6 April - no meeting (Easter Tuesday)

13 April - Group night - TBA

27 April - Roundabouts and junctions

4 May - Overtaking

11 May - Group Night - TBA

25 May - Motorways and dual carriageways

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### February Group Night: Is that picture photoshopped?

Acting Secretary and keen photographer for many years Leslie volunteered to give us a ZOOM presentation on processing and manipulation of digital photographs. How many times have you seen a picture and said - that can't be real - it's been photoshopped. So what does photoshopped mean?

While Photoshop is the brand name of image editing software it has become a generic term for any one of a range of similar software. Much in the same way as Hoover has become a generic term for vacuum cleaners.

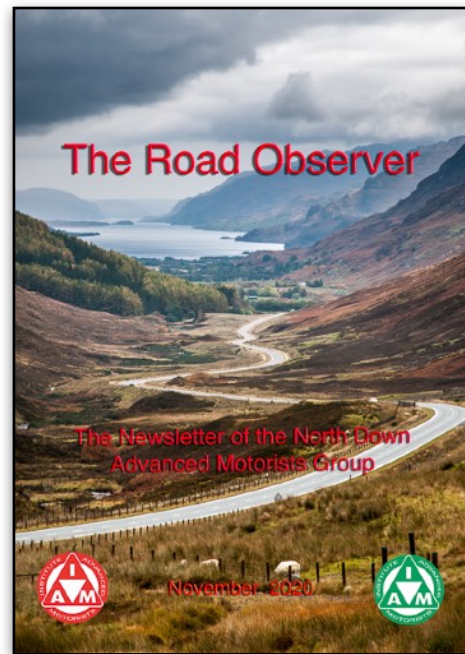


He pointed out that all photographs are processed. Whether they are taken on film where the film has to be developed and printed, or digital where in many cases it is the camera or phone which does the processing to provide a jpeg image which is subject to parameters established by software engineers. The professional photographer or enthusiastic amateur chooses to do much of digital processing in dedicated software to achieve the look they want rather than one dictated to by the software in the camera or phone and so they set their camera or phone to record in raw format. Raw files are much larger and require more storage capacity (3-5 times as much depending on the device) but they allow a much greater range of adjustments.

A lot of people think photoshop is a way of changing a photograph either to add things, take things away, to change skies, or in the case of fashion to make models look slimmer or to remove skin blemishes and yes that is done. But it is not new. Leslie provided examples of manipulation from the earliest days of photography for example one of Abraham Lincoln where Lincoln's head was superimposed on the body of another person, some from the WWII era where people who were no longer in favour were deleted from photographs. This was all done pre-digital. In the digital era it is now widespread and Leslie provided some amusement by showing examples from advertising where it was badly done. For copyright reasons we cannot reproduce these here.

Photoshop can be quite complex and while he does use it occasionally Leslie went on to talk about his processing using Adobe Photoshop Lightroom. He explained how with a little knowledge and practice you can do some similar things, even on your phone, and improve the look of your photographs. His use of Photoshop that you will have seen is the cover picture for the Road Observer. He does some adjustments to the photograph in Lightroom and takes it into Photoshop to add the titles. In case you hadn't noticed, the titles now have a 3 dimensional look as well as a shadow - all easily achieved in Photoshop.

Before and after - Photoshop used only to include the titles.



There are two main types of adjustment that can be made - global eg affecting all the picture and local that is affecting only specific parts. Using some examples he indicated how the exposure adjustment either brightens or darkens everything in a scene. Using exposure adjustments you can brighten the shadow areas but lose the highlights or vice versa. However, making local adjustments to the highlights and shadows separately can make a huge difference to the way a photograph appears.

Leslie provided examples of situations where the light fooled the camera but with adjustments to the highlights and shadows a reasonable photograph was produced.



The classic example of this is where you photograph someone with bright light behind them eg sky or snow, with the result that their face is in shadow. Boosting the shadow detail solves this problem.

In all the images below the first is before and the second after.

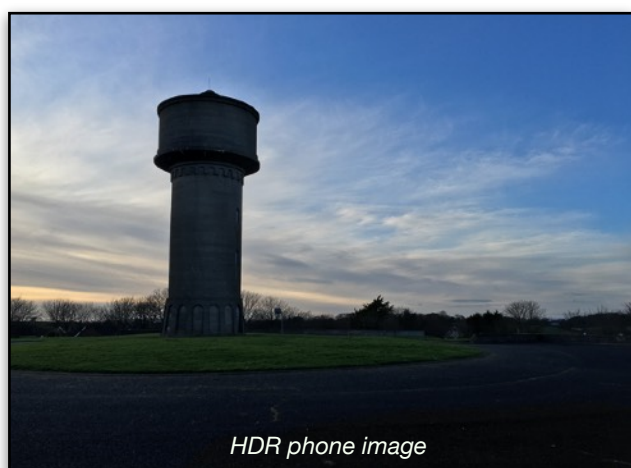


Mobile phones are the camera of choice for many people these days and with many having a minimum of 12 megapixel cameras high quality pictures can be produced. He showed an A3 print of a phone image to illustrate how good they have become.

He then went on to show how these sort of adjustments can be done on your phone. In these examples the first is the jpeg as taken on a phone and the second is the same image with the shadows and highlights adjusted on the phone. It's an improvement but there still isn't a lot of detail in the shadows.



If you can remember to click on HDR before you take the picture your phone will do some of this for you by taking 2 or more pictures and combining them. HDR has its limitations and you may have to do some more adjustments yourself to get a satisfactory image. In this HDR image further adjustments to the highlights and shadows provides a much better image as below.



Leslie said that there were some important things you can do before you even press the button to take a picture. Things like making sure

- your finger isn't obscuring part of the lens;
- your phone is level to avoid the horizon being tilted and the sea running downhill;
- whether holding the phone horizontally rather than vertically would suit the picture better;
- there's nothing distracting in the background like a telephone pole etc growing out of someone's head.

There are limitations on what adjustments phone software can do and Leslie found that the mobile version of Adobe Lightroom provides a bigger range of adjustments. This is software that is available free for both Apple and Android devices (and no he doesn't get paid for this endorsement!):

Lightroom Mobile available free for Apple devices at

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/adobe-lightroom-photo-editor/id878783582>

Lightroom Mobile available free for Android devices on Google Play at

[https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.adobe.lrmobile&hl=en\\_GB&gl=US](https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.adobe.lrmobile&hl=en_GB&gl=US)

Just be careful you don't sign up for any of the paid Adobe apps.

There are many others including Instagram, Snapspeed, VSCO, Pixlr etc. Check out "best phone editing software" on Google for more information on what each can do.

Leslie's advice was to take a few pictures with your phone and play around with the settings for exposure, highlights, shadows and even try changing the colour temperature eg to warm up tones in sunset pictures or cool down tones (towards blue) with a winter picture without sunlight. If your colours appear muted you can try adding some vibrance which affects subtle tones or saturation which affects all tones but be careful as it's easy to overdo it and end up with a gaudy image. You want to end up with a picture that is natural looking. And if you have ended up with a wonky horizon or a building leaning like the Leaning Tower of Pisa you can adjust that as well. The water tower pictures above could do with a bit of straightening!

Since the presentation Leslie has discovered a separate camera app to use instead of the camera app on his phone. It's called ProCamera and it allows a greater range of control but, more importantly, it allows raw images if you want to do a bit more processing. Again it's not for everyone. If all you do with your pictures is keep them on your phone then do not use raw as you will quickly run out of storage!

Photo processing isn't for everyone but if you know some of the basics you may find that you can save a photograph that otherwise only deserved to be deleted. Give it a try - you might surprise yourself.

And in answer to the question posed at the beginning - yes all photographs are processed (photoshopped in its generic sense) to some degree.

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## **Keep your distance**

While we must all remain off the road as much as possible at the moment due to coronavirus restrictions and social distancing, for those who do need to drive or ride on essential journeys the risk of an incident remains. Richard Gladman, head of driving and riding at IAM RoadSmart, therefore offers these practical tips on stopping distances, to help reduce the risk of collision.

Whether you're a new driver or a seasoned old hand with many years of experience, there are times when you may be guilty of driving or riding too fast for the conditions, or too close to the other vehicles around you.





Following too closely to other cars or vehicles, known as tailgating, is a frequent factor in road traffic incidents in the UK. So, it's important to make sure you reduce your risk of collision by leaving enough distance between you and the vehicle in front. Then you can make the most of the benefits such as;

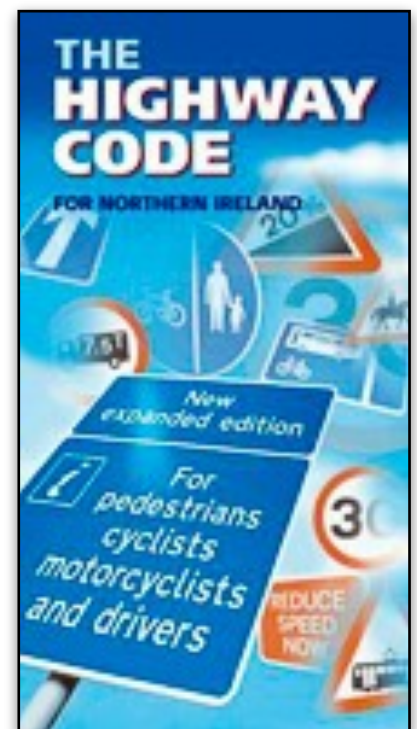
- Having time to react and stop in time if cars ahead suddenly brake
- Allowing you a better view of the road ahead to plan your drive or ride
- Reducing your fuel consumption – your driving will become smoother and you won't be required to apply the brakes every time the vehicle in front of you slows down

### The Highway Code

The Highway Code details stopping distances in Rule 126 where it describes the two components which make up your overall stopping distance:

Thinking distance: this is the distance you travel while you are deciding how to react to a situation. The Highway Code has given a simple formula to calculate this of 1 foot (0.3m) per mph, which means that at 30mph you would travel 30ft while thinking through how to react. This applies to an alert experienced driver and equates to a 0.7s reaction time. However, various real-life studies have indicated that, in a measurement of time, this can be as much as 1.5 seconds. This would mean the thinking distance in most cases would be over double than that stated in The Highway Code, and it's possible that at 70 mph a driver or rider would be covering over 200 feet (over 60m) before they even applied the brakes.

Stopping distance: this is the time it takes for your vehicle to stop when you apply the brakes. Using the formula adopted by The Highway Code, it takes almost four times longer to stop a vehicle from 60 mph than from 30 mph. So, this means a vehicle travelling at 60 mph would need 240 feet (73m) in total to stop.



The Highway Code advises that when driving and riding in wet conditions you should double your following distance. It also suggests that in snow and icy conditions it can take up to 10 times the regular distance to stop. So, remember to leave a much larger following gap in the wet or when it's cold enough to freeze.

### “Only a fool breaks the two-second rule”

The well-known two-second rule is a handy technique for judging safe stopping distances: this should be the minimum separation gap between you and the vehicle in front. However, when driving and



riding at 70mph it's worth remembering that you will cover 205 feet (62m) every two seconds and you may need 315 feet or 96 metres to stop, so three-seconds will be preferable.

To ascertain what a two or three-second gap looks like, pick a fixed point on the road and count after the vehicle in front goes past it and make sure you don't go past it within two seconds. This will help ensure you are keeping a safe distance.

### Factors that impact the stopping distance

Remember that any form of distraction might detract from your ability to react and will lengthen the overall time it takes you to stop. So, it's important to maintain your concentration at all times when driving or riding.

Weather, condition of the road surface, type of vehicle and the condition of your brakes and tyres can also affect the time it takes your vehicle to stop safely, so all should be considered for every journey you make, enabling you to make adjustments where necessary.

Richard said: "Keeping your distance will make for a less stressful journey, not only for you, but also for your passengers and for the traffic in front. It's sensible to reduce the gap in slow-moving traffic to assist in traffic flow, but when moving at speed the gap should really be equivalent to the overall stopping distance or a minimum of 2 to 3 seconds, or whichever is greater in the dry. The larger the vehicle in front, the bigger the gap you will need to be able to see beyond it."

"A larger following gap will allow traffic to move in and out of the space in front allowing you to react smoothly and without the need for constant braking."



### Potholes

The recent cold snap with below zero temperature and also snow has led to a rash of potholes on our roads. I should say even more potholes than usual. What happens is that water penetrates cracks in the road surface and when the water freezes it expands causing the surface to break up. What can start off as minor damage to the road is made worse with the passage of traffic, especially HGVs. And so often the repair is only a temporary job to patch up previous patches and which doesn't last!

Hitting a pothole can cause significant damage to your tyres, wheels and suspension. Even if there is no obvious visible damage you may



*Damage to the inside of the rim*



find that your wheel alignment is out and if you have gone into one hard it's best to get it checked - many places do it for free and only charge if they have to reset it. Fail to do this and you could find yourself with uneven tyre wear and having to replace tyres long before you would have expected them to last. If you hear unusual noises after hitting a pothole or suffer unusual vibrations you should get the car checked for damage.

#### Advice on potholes

- Good forward observation is the key to avoiding potholes
- As discussed above keeping your distance from the vehicle in front will give you a better chance of seeing potholes.
- Puddles at the side of the road can hide deep potholes so avoid them if possible.



- If there is evidence of potholes on a road reduce your speed - the next one could be lying in wait for you just round a corner or over the brow of a hill (as an advanced driver or rider you should always be able to stop in the distance you can see to be clear on your side of the road).



- If you see a pothole ahead and can't avoid it get your braking done before you hit it. If you are still on the brakes as you go into a pothole your front suspension will already be compressed with the likelihood of causing even greater damage.
- Be watchful of cyclists who may swerve out to avoid broken surface at the side of the road.

If you have suffered damage from a pothole you can attempt to claim compensation:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/how-claim-compensation-due-road-or-street-problem>

#### And finally.....

If you have got 2 minutes 45 seconds to spare watch this Youtube video of Citroen Dyane 6 rallying - travel sickness tablets not included!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zizysN8-6C4>

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