

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



June 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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New Members and test passes

In view of the current Covid-19 lockdown we have no new members or test passes to report this month.

April Cover Picture

The April cover picture was the A55 Parkway in East Belfast looking towards its junction with the Belmont Road. Congratulations to Bruce Steele, Norman Shearer, Guy Thomson and Angela Bell. Norman even went so far as to identify the dog as Patch going for his walk over the bridge. However, he didn't name the adult or child with the dog. You're slipping Norman! Car Members have to do better - you were outnumbered 3 to 1 in April.

The cover for this issue should be well known. Can you identify where it is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer.

Dates for your diary

The Boathouse has been booked in the hope that we will be able to recommence our activities after the summer. Obviously all of this is dependent on the Government continuing to relax the current social distancing requirements, the Council re-opening it's community facilities and, of course, no resurgence of the virus.

- 11 August - STAC Enrolment - introductions, demonstration drives
- 1 September- STAC 1 Human Factors
- 8 September - Group Night - to be announced
- 22 September - STAC 2 - IPSGA (Information, Position, Speed, Gear, Acceleration)
- 29 September - STAC 3 - Core driving skills
- 6 October - STAC 4 Bends and cornering
- 13 October - Group Night - AGM
- 27 October - STAC 5 - Roundabouts and junctions
- 3 November - STAC 6 - Overtaking
- 10 November - Group Night - to be announced
- 24 November - STAC 7 - Motorways and dual carriageways
- 1 December - STAC 8 - Manoeuvring
- 8 December - Group Night - Christmas dinner - venue to be arranged

COVID-19

Update for Bikes

With the start of the relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions on travel and social distancing IAM RoadSmart has advised that motorcycle training can recommence in NI as from Monday past - 15 June. Advanced motorcycle tests will start again on Monday 6 July in Northern Ireland.

IAM RoadSmart has issued detailed guidelines for groups to ensure the current social distancing rules are followed at all times and coaching is carried out with personal safety in mind. These guidelines are available by clicking on this link: [Motorcycle Guidelines](#)



Credit: IAM RoadSmart

Please note that the reference in the first paragraph to the number of people (6) who can meet together outdoors and socially distanced is the position in England. In Northern Ireland the limit is now 10. NI advice is also that in general you should avoid visiting places such as seaside resorts and popular beauty spots where there is a chance that large numbers of people will converge and crowds form.

IAM RoadSmart have said that the changes open the way to limited commencement of social group rides subject to social distancing requirements but they emphasise that the main focus should be on getting Associate riders back to training.

Observers and Associates can now make mutually convenient arrangements to recommence training bearing in mind that those taking part must agree in advance and that if either party has any concerns the ride should not be carried out.

We will keep you advised if there are any changes, either as a result of further relaxation of the requirements or if there is a resurgence of the virus.

Update for Cars

We have no further information about when we might hear something about training car Associates. The position is likely to be more complex given that Observers and Associates will be sharing a confined space for an extended period. Presumably the Government will issue guidance on driving instruction for learners and I would expect guidance from HQ on car Associate training will follow similar lines.



Hopefully the situation will have been improved sufficiently for car training to recommence for the next STAC in the autumn. As you will have read above, in anticipation of this the Boathouse has been booked for the next STAC with enrolment, demonstration drives etc on 11 August and the STAC training for all car Associates to begin on 1 September.

One again we will keep you updated when we hear more information.

Driving and riding during lockdown

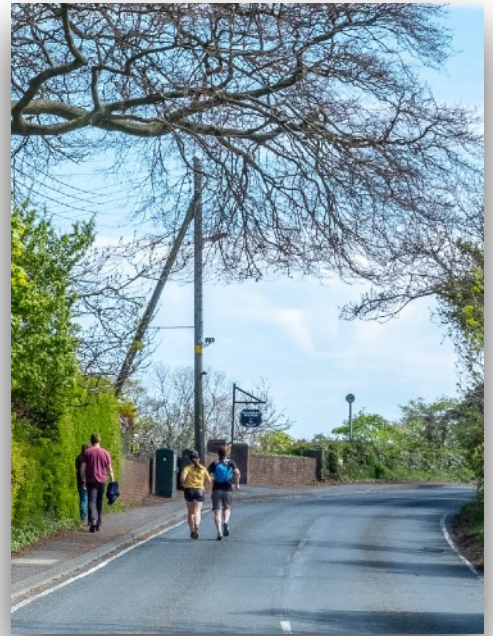
In the last issue we provided some guidance on maintaining your car during lockdown as well as some issues to be aware of while driving or riding during lockdown - click on this link for the April issue: [April 2020](#).

We need to be extra vigilant as traffic volumes are increasing with the reading of some of the of lockdown restrictions. Many drivers will be back on the roads after a long break and may have become rusty (or more rusty in some cases!) in terms of their driving skills. In addition their vehicles may not have been properly maintained during that period and with the current extension to MOT certificates some may not have the incentive of the MOT test to keep their vehicles roadworthy.

Schools will not return until the end of the summer and between now and then many parents and children will be continuing to take their exercise walking or cycling. Last month's advice is probably even more relevant in view of increasing traffic volumes.

With lower traffic volumes speeding, particularly in built up areas, has become an issue. When emerging from a junction or entering a roundabout be aware that other vehicles may be travelling at a higher speed than you might have expected. The other side of this is that within Bangor speed traps have been spotted on several occasions in recent weeks and in new locations. Not the Safety Partnership vans, but police officers with hand-held speed detectors. Hopefully those speeding will get the message.

As ever, it is important that we continue our good practice of OAP (**O**bservation, **A**nticipation and **P**lanning).



Summer rain (ie normal service!)

We've been having an exceptionally dry period but can it last? Heavy rain and thunder storms with possible floods are not uncommon during the summer months. Here are some tips for driving in the rain from Richard Gladman, IAM RoadSmart head of driving and riding standards.



Credit: IAM RoadSmart

Heavy rain:

- Heavy rain will affect your visibility, so take it slow. Rule 126 of the Highway Code states that the braking distance between yourself and the vehicle in front of you should be two seconds when driving on a dry road, and at least four seconds in the wet.
- Your windscreen should be clean, wipers effective and the jets positioned correctly and aimed at the screen. It is sensible to clean the windscreen, make any necessary adjustments and remove anything from the main area before you start your journey.



- A good rule of thumb is that if you need windscreen wipers, then you need your headlights. Automatic light settings will not always activate in bad weather conditions, so it is up to you to make a sensible decision as to whether these need to be turned on.

Aquaplaning:

- If the water is standing in puddles on the road surface, your car is at risk of aquaplaning. Aquaplaning is where a wedge of water forms in front of the tyre and lifts it up off the road surface. This is caused by the tread not being able to displace the amount of water present. If there is standing water slow down and pick your route to avoid this happening. To recover from aquaplaning, ease gently off your accelerator, have a firm grip of the steering wheel and be sure not to make any sudden steering actions. The car will eventually regain its grip as the water clears.

Floods:

- First ask yourself - can you take another route? If not, then you need to identify how deep the flood is. If the standing water is more than six inches deep, avoid driving through it. If you are familiar with the road, you can judge the flood in relation to the kerb.
- If heavy rain was not the cause of the flood, then what was? And what impact on the road does it have? For example, if it is a burst water main, the standing water may look like a normal flood but the road surface beneath the water may be completely broken up. If you are unsure how the flood has formed, then avoid it altogether.
- Are there other vehicles similar to yours that are safely driving through? From this, make a judgement call as to whether it is safe to travel through or not.

- If the water is fast flowing, do not attempt to drive through it, as there is a real danger of your car being swept off the road.



- If you have taken everything into consideration and decide to drive through the flood, be sure to do so slowly. The best approach is to press lightly on your clutch and add gentle pressure on your accelerator to increase your engine revs. Do so without increasing your speed, in a similar way to how you would undertake a hill start. This will prevent water from entering your exhaust. If you are in an automatic car, accelerate slightly but control the speed with your brakes. When you have passed the flood, test your brakes to make sure they are dry and working properly.



- If you are in the slightest doubt, then turn around and don't go through the flood. Often modern saloon cars have the air intake in the wheel arch, which may be below the water level. If your engine should take in water, it will immediately hydro lock and the engine will stop.

- Remember to stay alert and avoid splashing pedestrians. If this is done accidentally- even when causing splashed when driving through puddles at the side of the road - you could receive a fixed penalty and three points on your license for driving without due care and attention, or without reasonable consideration for other road users. If deliberately done, it could be a public order offence, a court appearance and a fine.

Richard said: “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 extremes, 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.”

Editor’s notes

After the rain

Bear in mind that after a prolonged spell of dry weather oil, rubber from tyres, dirt, etc haven’t been washed away. When the first rain falls this all mixes with the rain and can form a slick on the roads making them greasy and more slippery. This can be particularly bad on roundabouts, the approach to junctions, traffic lights, sharp bends and on motorway off-slips. Take particular care in the rain immediately after a dry spell - reduce your speed on corners and roundabouts and begin your braking earlier than usual on the approach to hazards.

And finally.....



Credit: David Burett



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