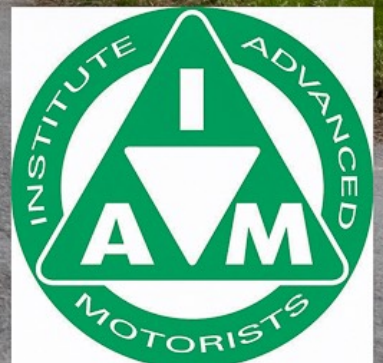


The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



March 2018





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

March 2018

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

Vol 21.3

Group Contact - David Harcourt

Tel No 07760 578444

[e-mail: david.harcourt@gmail.com](mailto:david.harcourt@gmail.com)

Advanced Tests

Congratulations this month to car member

Paul Muir

who achieved two firsts:

the first in our Group to achieve a pass under the "Fellow" arrangements and a F1RST pass as well

and to bike Observer

Simon Beckett

who was doing his car test and also achieved a F1RST pass.

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

See next page for more information about Fellow membership of IAM RoadSmart.

February Cover Picture

The February cover picture was the Donaghadee Road (A48) in Newtownards looking down towards the Bangor Road Roundabout. Congratulations to Annie McFarland, Shaun McKittrick, Guy Thomson and Ivan Greenfield for spotting this one - it was too easy wasn't it?

This month's cover is a bit more difficult. As a clue it's local and has probably featured in some observed drives from the Boathouse. Can you identify it? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and of course a mention in the Road Observer.

Dates for your Diary (to the end of May)

27 March - STAC 4 Bends and cornering

3 April - Easter Tuesday - no meeting

11 April - (Wednesday) Group night - visit to Excelsior Cinema, Comber (Please note date change) - details in covering email.

24 April - STAC 5 - Roundabouts and junctions

1 May - STAC 6 - Overtaking

8 May - Group Night - car detailing

22 May - STAC 7 - Motorways and dual carriageways

29 May - STAC 8 - Manoeuvring

STAC - Short Term Associate Course. Associate Members should ensure that 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.

Fellow Membership

What is Fellow membership?

The new Fellow tier of membership exists to enable you to commit to a regular review and checking of your advanced skills every three years.

The Fellow Entry Test for drivers is solely for current IAM RoadSmart members who passed their most recent Advanced Driver Test over three years ago.

If this matches your own circumstances then the first step to becoming a Fellow is to book and pass the Entry test for drivers. The test is a full advanced test conducted exactly as our usual advanced test by an IAM Examiner.

Once you have passed the entry test we'll award you Fellow membership, issue a new card and certificate and plan to contact you again in three years for your reassessment. You'll also be able to benefit from an enhanced insurance package from IAM Surety including no upper age limit, free legal helpline and free breakdown cover.

Our Fellow level of membership was created as a result of our insurance findings that the longer it has been since you passed the advanced test the more likely you are to be involved in an incident. The aim is to reward members who keep their skills current and refreshed.

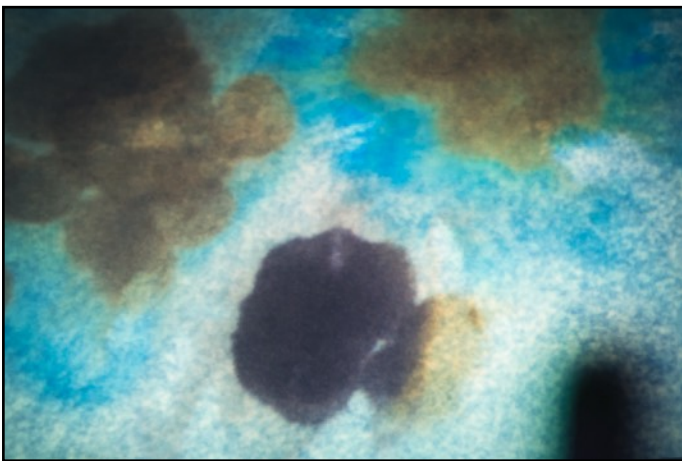
Cathal demonstrated blood identification techniques using a pair of black jeans as an example. There was an obvious blood stain on them but when examined under filtered light a splatter of small blood droplets not readily visible to the eye became apparent.

It is important to identify blood stains because it can provide DNA information which can prove someone had been at a particular location or that a victim's blood is on a suspect's clothing. He pointed out however, that if no convictions arise from a DNA sample it is removed from the DNA database.



Gareth supervising

He went on to demonstrate techniques used to identify bodily fluids of saliva and semen in cases of sexual assault. Using filtered light of different wavelengths he was able to show stains otherwise invisible to the eye (see below). He also showed the techniques for distinguishing between saliva and semen which can lead on to further testing to identify DNA.



To ensure the veracity of their work they are subject to regular audits of their processes. The clean room bays where the detailed analysis is done are cleaned with bleach and then subjected to a forensic examination. If traces of any previous samples or DNA are found the bay is cleaned again and if this happens a third time the bay is closed for a month while the issue is investigated.

The way forensic evidence is analysed comes under scrutiny by defence barristers. Judges have been invited to see how the Service operates and the standards it maintains with the result that challenges to their techniques have reduced.

We finished off with a question and answer session where we were informed that the Forensic Service is entirely independent from the police and that they do not speculate on what might or might not have happened, they present the facts and let others do the rest. Financial pressures are causing delays in processing their samples and we also discovered that they have a database of the patterns of shoe soles which they have compiled themselves from evidence collected and which is supported by regular updates information from shoe manufacturers. At the end Cathal talked about a couple of ways that criminals who are otherwise very careful to cover their tracks make mistakes which can lead to their identification but I'm not going to reveal those here!



Kate, Cathal and Lyndsay

It was a fascinating evening and provided a rare insight into the detailed work that goes on everyday to provide the evidence base to help secure convictions.

Vulnerable Road Users

As we make the same commute every day to work and back, we can get used to seeing pedestrians on the streets, motorcyclists on the road and even a few cyclists appearing now that the season is officially changing. But this can sometimes mean we get a little too used to the things around us and may unintentionally stop paying attention to our surroundings. Richard Gladman, IAM RoadSmart's head of driving and riding standards, provides a set of tips to refresh your knowledge on how to manage vulnerable road users.

Note: If you have friends and family who drive, please share these tips with them to help them stay safe on the road.



- Check to see the type of pedestrians around you. Do you see an elderly person crossing the road? They may be walking slowly so ensure they feel safe by reducing your speed. Children can be easily distracted and are unpredictable too, especially when crossing the road, so do all you can to help them out. Drive with care and be vigilant as a few extra seconds added to your day may make all the difference.



- A cycling club will often cycle as a group rather than in single file. This makes it safer for all of us; a simple overtake on a short group is often easier and safer to achieve than 30 overtakes on separate cyclists. Before you overtake them, make sure you have given them enough room as they could adjust their road positioning unexpectedly for a pothole or drain. A few seconds delay is better than a lifetime of regret. It's always good to remember that a young, fit individual on a bike is likely to be more stable than an older person doing their shopping run.

- Take note that there are two types of mobility scooters. Class 2 scooters are only allowed on pavements and have a top speed of 4mph. Class 3 mobility scooters should be registered and are driven on the road with a top speed of 8mph. Bear in mind that this group of road users may have restricted movement, vision or hearing so give them plenty of space and time.

- Have you thought about taking a more scenic route now that the days are getting lighter for longer? You may come across a horse and its rider walking along the side of the road. To avoid scaring the horse, turn the radio down and keep the engine revs low. Slow down and take your time when passing a horse. Keep your car well away from them and proceed with caution. The British Horse Society campaign encourages 'Wide and Slow' which reiterates driving no more than 15mph and leaving at least a car's width gap.

- Who has heard of SMIDSY ("Sorry mate, I didn't see you")? This is a regular acronym in a motorcyclist's dictionary and often our strategy when looking for a culprit! The science behind this is called Saccadic Masking. The simple explanation is that people don't see clearly when their head or eyes are moving, and they don't pick up objects travelling towards them very well. So make sure you have a good look, not just a quick glance. A good tip is that if you're specifically looking for motorcyclists or cyclists, then you are more likely to see them.



Richard said: "The importance of sharing the road space and understanding the needs of other road users cannot be stressed enough. If we are aware of vulnerable road users, we can make provisions to keep us all safe. Remember to treat others how you would like to be treated."

A winter's tale (not David Essex - a tale of winter tyres)

(Your humble Editor's experience)

Why do I want tyres for driving in snow and ice? Apart from the fact that I live up a hill with a tight bend at the bottom so that you can't get a run at the hill when it is icy, I take landscape photographs and I like to get out in winter conditions.

Over the last 4 years I had a set of winter tyres on my car changing from summer to winter and back again in March and November. The last 4 winters here have been relatively mild with very little snow so apart from a couple of winter trips to Scotland for photography the winter tyres didn't see much of the white stuff. Where I was able to drive in snow in Scotland I was very impressed by their capabilities in terms of traction from a start on hard-packed snow and ice on hills, braking and also in relation to cornering. They were a great confidence booster. However, remember, they will get you going and hopefully keep you going but they won't necessarily get you out of trouble if you do something stupid like driving too fast. And they won't get you through snow deeper than your ground clearance. I was also impressed by their road-holding in wet conditions.



Winter tyres really come into their own when temperatures drop below 7 degrees C because the rubber remains pliable and doesn't become stiff as happens to summer tyres (the sort the majority of us drive all year round). Also they have particular tread patterns with additional sipes (grooves) to aid traction.

I kept them on over the summer last year because they were getting a bit long in the tooth. I knew they wouldn't do another winter and I wanted to get some extra value out of them. I found they were fine for summer driving and despite their softer compound didn't seem to wear any more than summer tyres.

Come last October I had to make a decision - buy another set of winter tyres and have to change between winter and summer tyres twice a year or try a set of cross-climate tyres.

What are cross-climate tyres?

Cross climate tyres are summer tyres with winter season capabilities by borrowing the tread structure and compound chemistry from

their winter counterparts. This enables them to receive official winter certification, so they can legally be used during winter in countries that enforce such tyre regulations. The side wall of the tyre will show if it has winter certification with a mountain and snow symbol.



Having read all the reviews I made the decision to try the Michelin Cross-Climates. I can report that in the recent couple of snowy spells this winter they were excellent. I was able to drive round snow-covered roads in the Mourne without it costing me a thought. Traction and braking were excellent even on fairly steep roads and a 2 particular tight, steep, uphill hairpin junctions on hard-packed snow didn't present any difficulties. I am also very pleased with their performance on wet roads.



Michelin Cross Climate Tyres



Clearly they aren't necessary for everyone. However, if you've recently had problems in snow or have journeys that you have to make regularly in winter when there is a risk of snow and have been considering a set, I can recommend them. Other makes are available from Goodyear, Continental, Nokian, Falken, Nexen, Hankook etc.

Cars and Coffee

Another date for your diary: 22 April 10am-12.30, Marks and Spencer carpark at Bloomfields.

This will be a gathering of cars, any cars, sports cars, saloon cars, hot cars, cool cars, classic, historic, restored, modified, Concours d'Elegance cars. Even if you don't have a car you wish to show just turn up to see the collection and chat to their owners. It will be in the covered car park if wet and on the top deck if dry.

In case the motorcyclists are feeling left out bikes will also be made very welcome.



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.