

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



March 2021





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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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<https://www.facebook.com/NorthDownGroupIAM>

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New Members

This month we welcome to the Group car member Campbell English. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers once we get back to normal operations and out on the road again. In the meantime we hope you can join us on our virtual meetings.

Test passes

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

February Cover Picture

I had run short of pictures for the cover and I resurrected one which I thought might be a bit obscure. It was of the Ballymorran Road where it skirts along the shore of Strangford Lough. Congratulations to (in order of receipt of correct answers) Ralph Magee, Ronnie Brown, Jim O'Brien, Angela Bell and Frank Robertson. We heard during the week that Frank was in hospital so best wishes from everyone for a speedy recovery.

This month's cover should be dead easy. Do you know where it is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to me: leslie.ashe@btinternet.com

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.

IAM RoadSmart Choices

The IAM RoadSmart eLearning platform, CHOICES, helps drivers and riders learn and refresh both practical driving/riding knowledge as well as driving/riding theory. These on-line modules were made available for Associate members in February and they have now been made available to Observers.

Dates for your Diary

ZOOM STAC programme for car Associates and Observers (also anyone else interested contact me if you wish to take part) and Group nights.

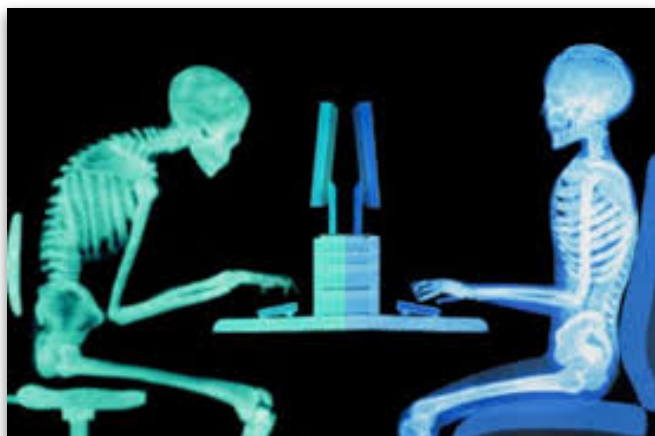
- 23 March - Junctions and roundabouts
- 6 April - no meeting (Easter Tuesday)
- 13 April - Group night - Virtual quiz
- 27 April - Overtaking
- 4 May - Motorways and dual carriageways
- 11 May - Group Night - TBA
- 25 May - Manoeuvring

March Group Night

Dr Grainne Doran, a GP in Bangor Health Centre was our guest speaker on the subject of posture and joint health. She began by reminding us of phrases we all probably had said to us “ Stand up straight”, Don’t slouch”, “sit up properly at the table”. Funny, we don’t generally recognise these habits in ourselves until they are pointed out.

Grainne is a strong advocate for good posture as preventative to help avoid problems developing. She described humans as mechanical beings and that with moving parts and load bearing joints, we are subject to wear and tear. She provided illustrations about how your body supports its own weight, how the various elements of bones, muscles and tendons work together to allow us to move and explained that our weight bearing joints are designed to spread and withstand the forces of gravity through our bones.

She said that if we hold our joints in their optimal position, we will get the best range of movements with the least strain and that poor position leads to imbalance across joints which causes inflexibility in some muscles, inhibited movement leading to weakness in other muscles and this imbalance can lead to increased wear on joint surfaces.



What can we do to help ourselves? (Sitting up straighter as I type this) Grainne listed some of the factors which affect us day and daily - screen time at computers, prolonged sitting at desks..... (pause while I get up and move around)..... slouching over mobile phones and tablets and watching TV in bed.

Posture when standing.

To maintain our position against gravity, our joints need all the help we can give them to reduce fatigue and muscle strain. Grainne then got us involved asking us to stand up with our arms by our sides. She said that shoulders, hips and ankles should be aligned. We had to adopt the superman/ superwoman posture to get our shoulders into the right position which she also called the “boobs up” (yes, men as well as ladies) way of standing. Dropping your hands to your sides without moving your shoulders, the palms of your hands should be facing your thighs and your thumbs facing forward. Then allowing your shoulders to relax into their normal (wrong) position you find that your palms face backwards. Regularly check this when standing and remember to correct it.



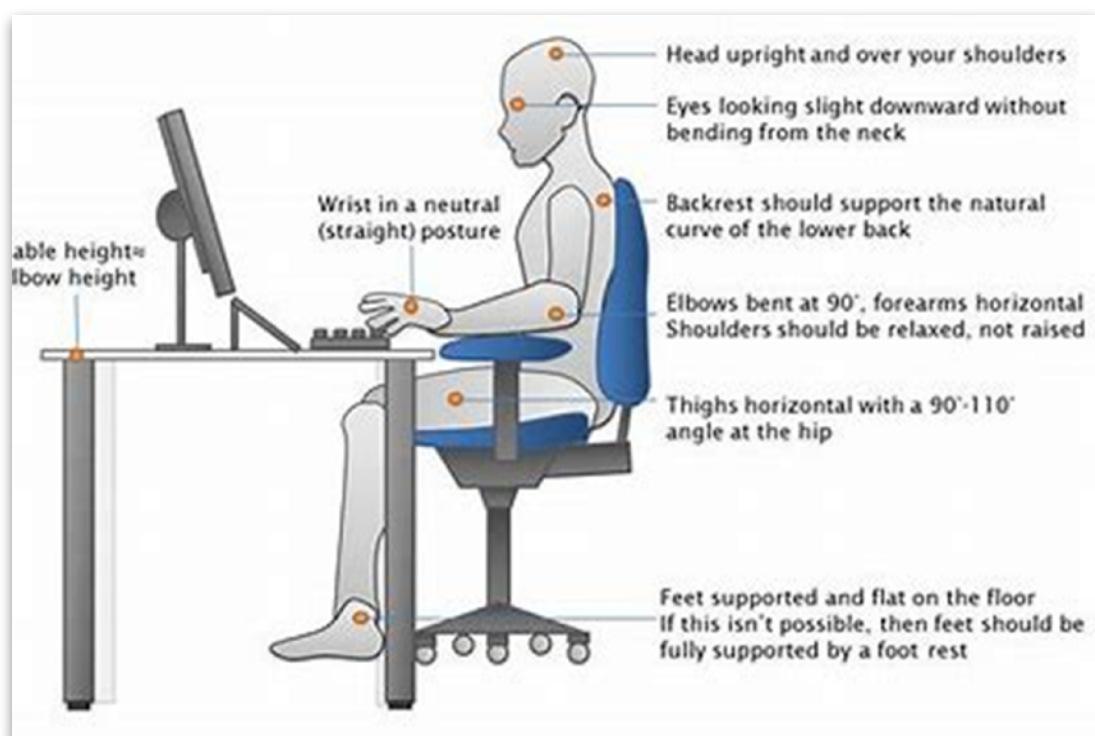
Credits
Supergirl: Fair use, [https—
en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45600572](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=45600572)

Superman: Helgi Hall (CC BY-SA 2.0)



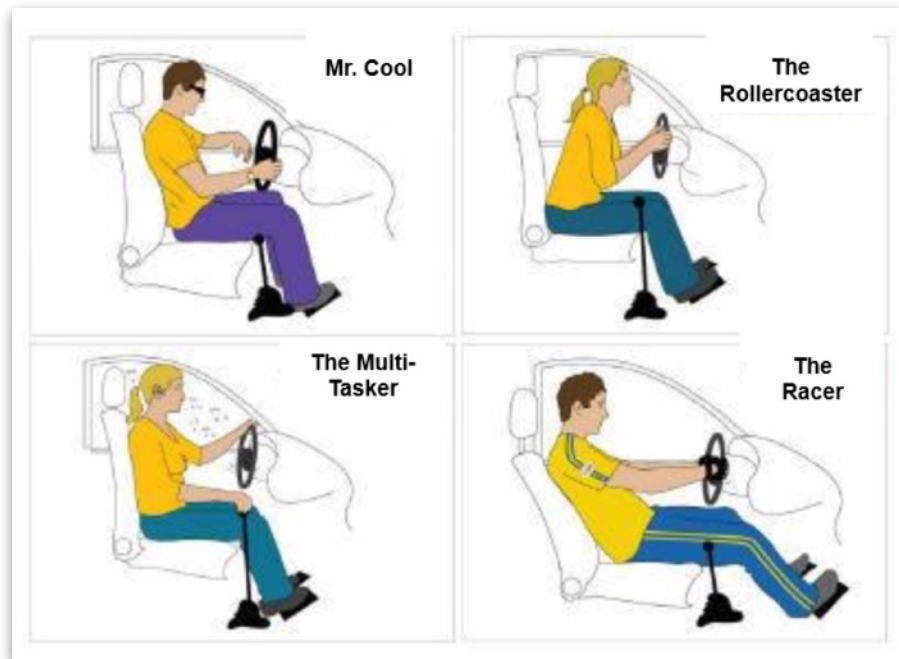
Posture when sitting

Your head should be facing forward with eyes able to gaze down, your back should be in its natural curve with relaxed shoulders and your knees bent at a right angle.



Driving

We often see people sitting in a less than optimal position when they are driving. Here are some examples.



Your leg position sitting in a car is different from sitting at a desk as you are actively using your feet and your upper body and shoulder position is just as important to avoid strain, especially on long journeys.

Your seat should be as high as it can comfortably go provided:

- You can sustain complete vision of the road
- Your head does not hit the roof
- Your feet can comfortably reach the pedals.

The advantage of a high seat position is that it allows you to position your pelvis in the correct neutral position. If it is too low, it will cause you to slouch at the pelvis, round the lower back and result in a hunched posture which we are trying to avoid.

The seat should be positioned within a reasonable distance to the foot pedals, pulled far enough forward so that you can fully extend the clutch pedal while maintaining a slight bend in the knee - 120-135 degrees. Tilt the backrest back ever so slightly so that when turning the steering wheel your shoulders should remain in contact with the seat (not hunched forward). We recommend that the wheel should be adjusted so that when your arm is extended your wrist (not your hand) should be able to rest on the top of the wheel.

The centre of the headrest should be in line with your ears. Any lower and it could act as a fulcrum for extension of the neck. Any higher and it may push your head down.



You should adjust the lumbar support (if fitted) to preserve the natural curve of your back. If you don't have lumbar support consider a rolled up towel or small pillow instead or a purpose made lumbar support. But make sure you are not over-pronouncing the curve of your lumbar arch.

Your elbows should be kept low and closer to your body - don't let them flare out. And don't place your elbow on the edge of the window or the centre armrest as these will cause your shoulders to hunch and result in bad posture.

Much of this advice is in accord with IAM principles for your driving position but it's useful to have it set out in such detail and to have had the health benefits explained.

Other more general advice

- Don't sit up to read or watch TV in bed. Your bed is designed to accommodate your weight while lying not sitting.
- Don't sit in the same seat at home all the time.
- When sitting at a desk you should try to move about every 20 minutes or so - even if it is just to stand up. And make a point of looking into the distance regularly - your eyes will thank you for it.
- A standing desk is good if used properly but you should try a combination of both.

Look after your feet. If you suffer from back pain get someone to look at your feet, use good shoe shops. If you have callouses on your feet there is something not right. If you have problems a good chiropodist can make custom orthotic insoles to correct problems with your feet.

We had a large number of questions and a good discussion at the end of her presentation. One question which was raised by one of our motorcycle members was what is the best position in which to sit on a bike. Not surprising was that it is when you are sitting with your back upright with your shoulders relaxed above your hips. Hunching your shoulders forward can cause discomfort in the neck and upper back. The upright position places the least strain on joints and has the spine in its natural position. Of course if you ride a sport bike than the position is a bit different in that it is a more forward position which can put pressure on your back. It may be possible to change your seat and pegs but get good specialist advice when choosing your bike.

Many thanks to Grainne for an interesting and entertaining presentation. I for one have been trying to improve my posture ever since but suffering from TMB (too many birthdays) it may take some time for it to become second nature.

Motorsport losses

In the last month we lost two motorsport greats in Sabine Schmitz and Hannu Mikkola.

Sabine was known as the Queen of the Nurburgring. She drove the "ring taxi", a BMW M5, if you dared sit with her for a quick lap. She won the Nurburgring 24 hours twice, in 1996 and 1997. She reckoned she had driven the 13 mile circuit in the region of 20,000 times! Those who watch Top Gear will remember her as a presenter for a period of time and also for her attempt to drive the "Ring" in a diesel Transit van (passing much quicker vehicles on the way) to beat Jeremy Clarkson's time in a diesel Jaguar S type. She missed it by 9 seconds. Here is a link to that https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5KiC03_wVjc



Hannu Mikkola, was World Rally Champion in 1983 in an Audi Quattro and previous to that was runner up in 1979 in a Ford Escort. I saw and photographed him in action many times here in Ireland and in the RAC and Scottish rallies. A quiet gentleman who brought 4 wheel drive it's early success in rallying in the form of the Audi Quattro.



1984 RAC Rally, Castle O'er stage

Halfords logo

If you have ever looked at the Halfords logo have you wondered why the letter O is tilted to the right? I presume it is to give the impression of movement. But where did it come from?



French photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue photographed the French Grand Prix in 1912 and one of his best known images is below. Was this the inspiration for the Halfords logo? This effect was



caused by using a large format camera (you know the sort - where you have a black cloth over your head while using the camera) with a rolling focal plane shutter. For an explanation and an animation of how this happens see:-

<https://www.largeformatphotography.info/forum/showthread.php?31903-Jacques-Henri-Lartigue-and-his-camera>

OK I admit it - I'm a bit of a nerd.

Towing

In the United States the engine of a 2021 Jeep Wrangler Rubicon has been destroyed after the off-roader was improperly towed.

This particular Wrangler was towed behind the owner's recreational vehicle (RV). The problem? The off-roader had been left in 4-Low and in first gear.

It was revealed that the Wrangler has a crawl ratio of 84.13:1 when in first gear and low range. Had the RV been towing the Jeep at 60 mph (96 km/h), the Wrangler's wheels would have forced the engine to spin at over 54,000 rpm, well over eight times more than the 6,600 rpm redline.

The damage caused is shocking. The crankshaft has been ripped off and two pistons and rods have been sent through the engine block. The clutch and flywheel also destroyed the transmission's bell housing and tore off the input shaft.



It has been estimated that the cost of replacement parts to fix the Wrangler to be about \$30,000 not including labour. (Credit: Carscoops)

And the moral of the story: cars are much more complex that they used to be so read the vehicle manual and especially before towing, push starting and jump starting.

And finally.....

For some of the ZOOM meetings we had a well known visitor photo-bombing our own Supreme Leader:



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