

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



October 2018





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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

This month we welcome to the Group car members Paul Bradley, Maureen Cromie and David Hall. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

Test Passes

Congratulations this month to motorcycle member

Ian Cross

who achieved a F1RST pass

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

Cover Picture

The September cover was the A21 in Comber approaching from Ballygowan and looking towards Andrews Mill (now apartments). Congratulations to Shaun McKittrick, Guy Thomson, Angela Bell, Annie McFarland, Bill Moore and Norman Shearer. With apologies to Norman for calling him Norma in last month's issue.

The cover picture for this issue should be an easy one. No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer.

Dates for your diary

23 October - STAC 4
30 October - STAC 5
6 November - STAC 6
13 November - AGM Guest Speaker: Pat Doughty IAM
27 November - STAC 7
4 December - STAC 8
11 December - Christmas Dinner

Please note that the AGM has been moved to November from it's usual October date.

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.

September Group Night

Guest speakers Ian Cross and Gary McKee Paragliding and Paramotoring

Due to unforeseen circumstances in the run up to the October group night, we had to trawl our reserve list of guest speakers at short notice. Until the previous week or so, Ian Cross and Gary McKee probably never even suspected they were on the reserve list, but they kindly agreed to a show and tell, with a slide show. Ian had recently achieved a F1RST in motorcycle via the group, so I'd like to slip in a congratulatory note at this point. Whilst the associate drives were underway, Ian and Gary showed their equipment and demonstrated it to the limited extent possible inside the Boathouse. They were very engaging and enthusiastic over refreshments, to the extent that I worried they might exhaust their material before the talk began. However, I need not have been concerned.

Ian partially unfurled his parawing to show the leading edge, the structure and function of which was illustrated in later slides. Gary had his paramotor on display on a table, and they each had a variety of charts, GPS, altimeters and assorted flying equipment for us to examine. I'm afraid I didn't catch the technical details from Gary, so I hope I'm not doing him a disservice by describing the paramotor as a motorcycle engine with a large wooden propeller, all attached to a sturdy frame and webbing harness so it can be worn on the back.

Ian began his talk with an aerial photo, and explained that we have lots of easily accessible flying locations, and the landing spot, a random location only finalised in the final moments of the flight, is also generally accessible for the friend whose turn it is to provide the lift back home. On the down side, Northern Ireland has not so many good days for flying. A good flying day requires the right amount of wind from the right direction, and maybe a bit of the right type of cloud. The summer of 2018 was remarkably good and gave excellent conditions for cross-country flying.



Ian and Gary were both at pains to point out that paragliding and paramotoring are related, but different disciplines. The sports are regulated by the Ulster Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club (UHPC), affiliated to the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (BHPA), who work with the Civil Aviation Authority to control standards and safety. Flyers have third party insurance via the UHPC. The UHPC has around 65 members, with typically 6 – 10 flyers on any given day.



Ian first took to the air in 1978 when he gained his Hang Glider Elementary Certificate, and he bought his own hang glider in 1981. Any object launched into the air will immediately begin to fall unless energy is added to the system, so all gliders are constantly falling through the air, the aim being to fall as slowly as possible. Streamlined objects with long slender wings such as seabirds use the airflow from forward motion to generate lift, which partly cancels the falling effect – that is gliding. The glide ratio is a measure of efficiency, which for a seabird might be over 20:1, meaning that it travels 20m forward for every 1m it loses in height. A hang glider is a large triangle of fabric on a rigid frame. The pilot controls the hang glider by pushing and pulling the control frame. They are quite fast and agile, with a glide ratio of maybe 15:1, but as Ian indicated they can be a bit twitchy and unforgiving, and around 1983 he gave up his hang glider and decided to keep his feet on the ground.



However, around 2009 he saw a group of paragliders in the air and the urge to fly kicked in again, so (with the approval of his wife) he contacted the club and commenced paraglider training. He gained his pilot status in 2014. Unlike his earlier hang glider, the paraglider does not have a rigid frame, but consists of a parawing and associated rigging and harness. Parawings are available in various performance classes and weight bands. Class A wings are easy to fly, unlikely to go wrong in most flight conditions, and pretty well self-recovering – in the worst case, you can just hang there like a sack of potatoes and it will bring you down safely in a relatively gentle, controlled fall. Class D are more agile and responsive, but much more unforgiving and more difficult to fly, and if something does go wrong you have fractions of a second to recover. Classes B & C are in between.

Ian showed a diagram illustrating how moderate wind hitting a ridge is forced to rise, generating “ridge lift”. This is perfect for learners, as they can fly back and forth just in front of a clearly defined ridge to catch the lift – all the time you’re in the air, you’re falling, but if you can fall at one metre per second in air which is rising at 3 metres per second, you will gain altitude. If you can gain altitude, you gain time in the air, and if you can gain time in the air with direction, you gain distance.

Another source of rising air is thermals – these occur when a patch of ground such as a ploughed field has absorbed heat from the sun and the air above it rises. Birds are particularly adept at finding this, so paragliders do their bird-watching from the air. Those rising thermals carry water vapour upwards, where it condenses to form a cloud, so the right-type of white fluffy cloud is a good indicator of a thermal. Big clouds can offer enormous, but unforgiving lift, so it’s important to stay on the edge and not get sucked in. He showed a shot of the coast from Benone to Castlerock – on the right day, the clean (non-turbulent) sea air flows towards land and is forced up by the cliff, giving perfect flying conditions all day.

At this point Gary stepped in to say that as a paramotor pilot, he does pretty much the opposite of EVERYTHING Ian had just told us. EVERYTHING! – he said it twice! Having a motor on his back to put in energy and gain altitude, he doesn’t care so much about wind direction. He cares not for flying as the wind takes you. When Ian flies, it’s a mystery tour and he’ll end up in a random field-at the mercy of the prevailing wind. Gary likes to know where he’s going. He doesn’t have to follow the clouds and indeed tries to avoid them because they’re a bit bumpy. He can drive out, fly for a couple of hours, land back again right next to his car, and be home for dinner.

This mild banter about knowing in advance where you’re going to land led to the topic of airspace. Many of the good flying areas, the traditional routes so to speak, have been usurped by the authorities at Aldergrove, but may still be flown under a letter of agreement – the paragliders must inform air traffic control of their plans in those areas on a particular day, so that in the event of a high cloud base enabling them to get more altitude, airspace will be clear for them and they won’t feature on the evening news.



Paramotor

Once a year the club runs a Cross Country Flying competition judged by straight line distance. These guys rely totally on finding air which is rising faster than they are falling in order to get altitude.

Ian wouldn’t want me to overlook, and is rightfully proud of his achievement, that he flew this summer from Big Collin (Larne) to Ballycastle. That’s already an achievement, but when he got to Ballycastle,

he still had altitude and kept going. The next waypoints don't do justice to his accomplishment with regard to how we like to think the crow flies, but he continued to Ballintoy and on to White Park Bay (without significantly increasing his straight-line distance, it must be said). This should not be understated in that it's just about as far as it's possible to go from that launch site, whilst remaining on the island.

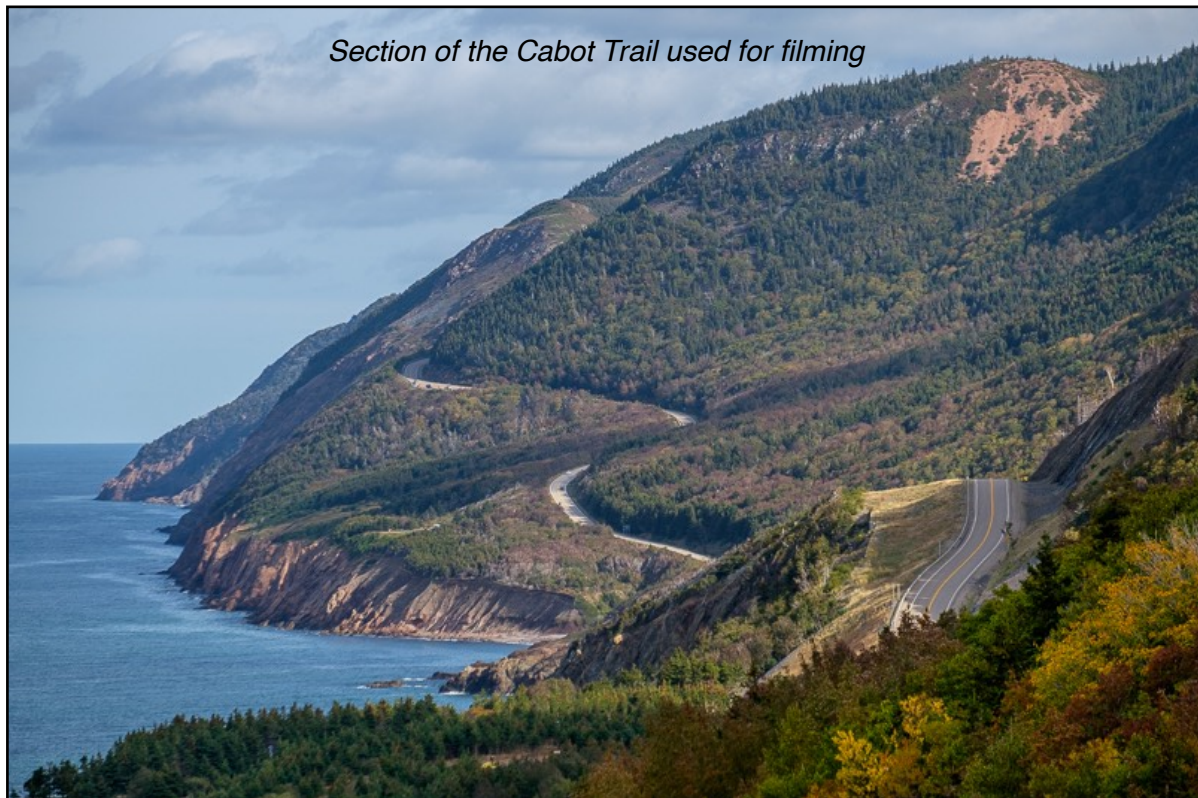
Unfortunately, we ran out of time all too soon. At 10pm I reluctantly announced that time was up and we commenced wind-down. It was a very informative evening. (Many thanks to Chairman David for this report while I was on holiday).

Nissan cars

This is in two parts and both relate to my recent trip to Nova Scotia. The first part is about seeing the filming of a commercial for the latest Nissan Qashqai which is to be launched in Canada in November and the second part is my experience of driving a Nissan Sentra.

New Qashqai

Nissan had arranged to film the car on a 5 mile stretch of a particularly scenic part of the Cabot Trail in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park. This is on Cape Breton Island which is the northern part of Nova Scotia.



They weren't able to close the road but held up traffic for periods of 20-30 minutes at a time so that filming could be done. It was bit frustrating because we hadn't scheduled to being locked into viewpoints for several periods. We visited one viewpoint in the middle and managed to get out just before the traffic was held up for another filming run. We drove the the end of the run and waited to see what it was was being filmed.

We didn't get much of a chance as the entourage simply drove into the parking area, swept round without stopping and back along the same route. Interestingly the car being filmed (in a "nitro lime" paint job) wasn't actually on the road - it was on a low trailer with a lighting and camera rig mounted on the back of the tow truck. They were filming the 4 smiling occupants of the car as it "drove along".



The bonnet had been removed. I presume this was to avoid the lights reflecting the green colour of the paintwork into the car's interior. Running alongside the Nissan was a Mercedes 4x4 with a large camera boom mounted on the roof rack. Not sure what pictures it was getting other than a view of the cabin with the background passing. They certainly didn't want footage of the fact that the car was on a trailer.





Nissan Sentra

Without spending an absolute fortune by specifying a particular rental car it can be a bit of a lottery as to what you will get and this time it was a metallic white Nissan Sentra. At least it wasn't a North American make of car - I've had some of those in the past and didn't like them one bit. Cars I've been allocated in the past included a couple of Mazda 6s and a Kia Optima and found them very acceptable. So I assumed the Nissan would at least be better than any North American model.

For the first day it seemed fairly acceptable except that it beeped the horn every time it was locked which became a bit irksome and I couldn't find anyway of switching it off. It blinked the flashers as well so I couldn't see the need for the horn beep. More about locking later.

Once I had got used to driving on the wrong side of the road and things like being able to turn right on a red light and negotiating 3- and 4-way stops I was able to focus a bit more on the car and its performance (or lack of performance). It's a reasonable sized car - length wise it is between a Ford Focus and Mondeo, the cabin is spacious and comfortable and the boot is a reasonable size, albeit with intrusive rear wheel arches.



The engine is 1.8 normally aspirated and produces 130 bhp at 6000 rpm and 128 ft/lb of torque at 3600 rpm. Initially it seemed OK around town but once I got used to the traffic and road conditions I started to see its flaws. The car is seriously underpowered: to get any performance out of it required revs well above 3000 and at this point the engine was **very** noisy. The lack of power coupled with the CVT transmission system, which couldn't make up its mind what gear to be in, meant that it was really a car for relaxed city driving (if that's not an oxymoron) or cruising on the highway. Not really for twisty roads and steep climbs and descents (a sport button allowed it to make more noise by increasing the revs at which gear changes occurred without making much difference to performance). The only manual part of the gearbox was a low gear option to hold it back on descents.

For a car of this size and weight I was surprised that although it had ventilated disc brakes on the front, it had drum brakes on the back. However, I didn't find the brakes wanting at any time (probably because it didn't get driven hard).

Then there was the boot (trunk). In the first few days I lost count of the number of times the dashboard showed that it wasn't properly shut but when I checked I found it was closed. It had to be reopened and really slammed shut to get the dashboard warning light to go out. I soon got used to doing this. However, after a couple of days my wife expressed some concern that perhaps it wasn't locked when we left it and when we checked, yes you've guessed, it wasn't locked. No amount of slamming would get it to lock.



That boot

The car had a smart key which allowed it to be started as long as the key was in the car but it didn't automatically unlock the doors - you had to press buttons on the key fob and there was also a button on the key fob which opened the boot. The handbook wasn't any help in figuring why the boot was unlocked.

We eventually discovered that the "not-so-smart" key unlocked the boot (but not the doors) when you were within about 6 feet from the car. What advantage this had eluded me. If your hands were full of shopping you still had to press the key fob to get the boot to open or press the button on the boot lid.

There was more about the boot. When you opened it manually, sometimes it would open fully and other times it would only open halfway which, on one occasion, resulted in a collision between it and my head. It drew blood. My response was to say ouch (or words to that effect).

Night driving wasn't much fun either with glow-worms for headlights and main beam that didn't really offer much more in terms of range. However, this isn't unusual as I've found all cars I've driven in North America had woeful lights. I would hazard a guess that only 10-15% of cars had Xenon or LED lights and I suspect these are only available as optional extras or on more expensive models.

I did 1830 miles in it and overall it was a comfortable enough car for **leisurely cruising** on holiday. It was economical, the dashboard showing fuel consumption of 5.4 l/100km which converts to 52 mpg. However, I wouldn't think about owning one and couldn't recommend it.

PS I had a great holiday, notwithstanding the Nissan Sentra.

Winter is on the way

Although the sun is still shining, the chilly mornings are starting to creep in. Richard Gladman, IAM RoadSmart's head of driving and riding standards, has put together some tips to prepare you for the colder weather that's nearing us.

- It's important to keep the windscreen clean. Try to get scratches, abrasions and chips fixed as colder temperatures can make the damage worse. Keep the windscreen washer topped up with a more concentrated screen wash mix to ensure it doesn't freeze in action. And don't forget your de-icer

- Check your tyres. The legal limit of a tread depth may be 1.6mm but anything under 3mm will see a potential fall off in grip and braking performance. If long-term cold weather is forecast, and you can afford it, invest in a set of winter tyres approved by your car manufacturer. Don't follow urban driver myths of reducing the tyre pressure to get more grip – it simply doesn't work
- Set up a pre-winter check list. List things that need to be checked such as the car battery, bulbs, wiper blades and electrics. You don't want to be stranded in a cold car in the middle of night waiting for the recovery team to get you up and running again.
- Dress appropriately for the weather. It may be surprising but too many drivers dress based on a working car heater. If it breaks or you are stranded you can easily be caught cold
- Start to plan for the really bad weather with a survival kit in the boot. Spare clothes, a torch, mobile phone charger, some emergency rations such as water, chocolate and a tow rope and shovel to help yourself and others.



Richard said: "Winter is unpredictable but salt stocks are being built up and the snow clearing equipment is being brought out of storage. If they are getting ready then why shouldn't you? With a little bit of preparation you can avoid getting stuck and adding to the problems that bad weather can bring."

And finally.....

After coming to power in 1959, Fidel Castro's communist government in Cuba banned imports on both foreign cars and car parts with the result that the streets have many 1950s American cars. A photographer friend has visited and here are a couple of samples. (Credit: Marissa Tabbada)



They don't make 'em like that any more! I'll include some more in future issues.

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.