

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



August 2025





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The Newsletter of the North Down Advanced Motorists Group (Group 8199)
Helping to Improve the Standard of Driving on the Roads in Northern Ireland and the
advancement of road safety

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Test passes

No test passes to report this month.

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

New Members

This month we welcome new car members Meng Tan, Caleb Hooke, Alister Patterson and Billy Hirst. We hope you not only gain from being a member of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

Cover picture

The summer 2025 cover picture was of Richhill, County Armagh. Congratulations to David McFall and Ralph Magee. Everyone else needs to get out more!

Do you know where this month's picture was taken? There is now a prize to aim for as well as the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, getting a mention in the next Road Observer. The prize is a year's Group membership to the Member who gets the greatest number of correct answers in the year to October 2025. Submit your answers to: leslie.ashe.LA@gmail.com

Dates for your diary

In addition to the regular STAC nights for car Associates and the regular bike runs (notified by email to bike members and also on Facebook) we have a varied programme for the Group Nights. All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated.

- 2 September STAC 1 - Human factors and IPSGA
- 9 September Group Night - to be announced (TBA)
- 23 September STAC 2 - Core driving skills
- 30 September STAC 3 - Bends
- 7 October STAC 4 - Junctions and roundabouts
- 14 October Group Night - Annual General Meeting - Guest Speaker Stephen Sherry, Northern Ireland Chief Examiner
- 28 October STAC 5 - Overtaking
- 4 November STAC 6 - Motorways and dual carriageways
- 11 November Group Night - Speaker Bruce Steele IAM RoadSmart Road Safety Manager (NI)
- 25 November STAC 7 - Manoeuvring
- 2 December Additional driving practice
- 9 December Group Night - Christmas Dinner

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.

August bike run

It was another brilliant Saturday on two wheels – huge thanks to Ralph for organising a great run that combined good roads, good company, and even better craic!

With the sun finally showing up for us (thanks Ralph – apparently he even sorted the weather!), we set off from McDonald's in Ards at 9:30am for a relaxed and purposeful ride. The route was short and simple by design – ideal for getting Ed, our newest Associate, introduced to group riding and the Drop-Off system in action.

The route was Ards > Comber > Killinchy > Downpatrick > Clough > Castlewellan > Newcastle (coffee stop!). We stuck mostly to main roads for familiarity and flow, and it worked perfectly. The pace was gentle, the conversation easy, and there was even chat about bringing out the classic bikes – though starting them proved a bigger challenge than the roads 😊

There were still plenty of road signs up from a local cycling event, giving our riders the perfect opportunity to work on hazard perception, overtaking, and using The System throughout the run. Even with the low-intensity ride, there was real value in the roadcraft practice and the teamwork involved with Drop-Offs – especially for newer riders.

☕ Coffee and craic in Newcastle didn't disappoint – though there was some shock at the price of cheesecake ... let's just say, it tasted expensive!



Here's what some of the crew had to say:

"Thanks for the run today folks! Was great craic!"

"Great run, nice pace. Almost clear of traffic on the way to the ferry – and the dolphins were out again to top it off!"

"Thanks Ralph and Ivan for careful shepherding of the flock!"

Next official run: Saturday 20th September

There's even talk of a wee midweek run in September – so keep an eye on the WhatsApp group for details!

Thanks again to everyone who came out. It was a great day to be on the bikes and an even better day to ride together.

Proposed changes to driving laws

The Westminster government is proposing significant changes to driving laws, with the aim of improving road safety. These changes include mandatory eye tests for older drivers, a lower drink-drive limit, stricter seatbelt rules, and tougher penalties for uninsured drivers. These proposals are part of a broader road safety strategy expected to be published in the autumn:

- Mandatory Eye Tests for Older Drivers:**
 Drivers over 70 could face mandatory eye tests when renewing their licenses. Those who fail the tests may face restrictions or even be banned from driving. This proposal stems from concerns about the eyesight of older drivers and a coroner's criticism of the current licensing system. We raised the issue (amongst others) with Peter McReynolds MLA, Chair of the All Party Group on Road Safety when he visited the Group in February.



- **Lower Drink-Drive Limit:**
The current drink-drive limit may be reduced in England and Wales to align with Scotland's lower limit. This change aims to further deter drunk driving and improve road safety.
- **Stricter Seatbelt Rules:**
The government is considering giving penalty points for not wearing a seatbelt, extending the responsibility to all adults in the vehicle. Currently, only the driver is legally responsible for ensuring passengers under 14 are properly restrained.
- **Tougher Penalties for Uninsured Drivers:**
The government is also looking at increasing penalties for driving without insurance.
- **Road Safety Strategy:**
These proposed changes are part of a comprehensive road safety strategy that the government is expected to release in the autumn.



Credit: Irish Examiner

Responding to this IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy and Standards Nicholas Lyes said: “Given progress on reducing fatal and serious collisions has stalled in recent years, we welcome the UK Government’s ambition to publish an updated road safety strategy with the reported measures being a step in the right direction. While many drivers over the age of 70 are safe and competent, health issues and confidence can have an impact on driving abilities, so it is sensible to review whether changes need to be made. We would also support reducing the drink drive limit in England and Wales alongside measures to target drug driving, however these would require significantly more backing for roads policing teams to effectively enforce new laws.”

These all look like sensible changes but the question is: when will our Assembly follow suit?

Geraldine Transport Museum By Ralph Magee

On a recent road trip around the South Island in New Zealand, my trusted copy of the Lonely Planet guide recommended visiting the vintage transport museum in Geraldine, a small town set in the rural landscape of South Canterbury, north of Timaru.

The resulting visit left us hugely grateful for the recommendation, but also in awe of the achievements of the volunteers that run the museum. My goodness, what an absolute gem! For those just curious and needing a break from the road, to those with more in-depth knowledge, maybe working experience, of just about any kind of machinery on the planet, this place is a treasure trove.

Collections of chainsaws, single engines for powering tools, bicycles, motorcycles, cars, vans, lorries and tractors fill some 8 sheds. A biplane even graces the roof of one and arrays of household appliances add some domestic colour to the naturally more dominant agricultural machinery.

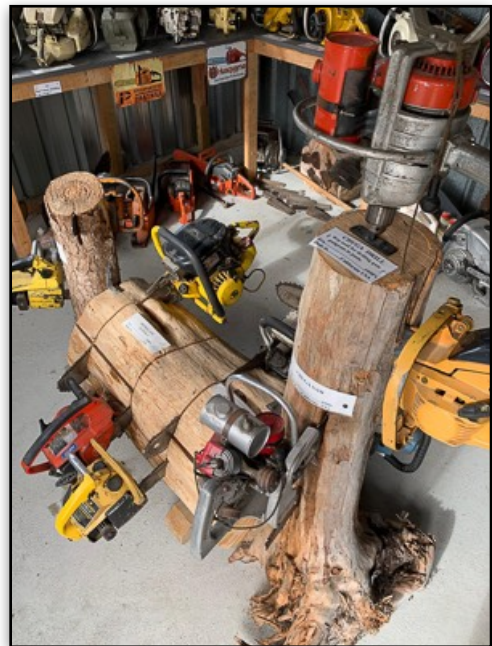
The collection has the feel of ‘we’ll take anything, we actually care about machinery of any kind’ - a place powered by collective enthusiasm and ambition for preservation; run by volunteers who respect the history of mechanical innovation.

As a genuine community enterprise and therefore even more important to support, I thoroughly recommend the museum to anyone on route 79 heading towards route 1 and on to Christchurch. Going ‘the other way’, you’re heading towards countryside famous for dark skies and incredible stargazing experiences. Geraldine will not disappoint! Pictures of a remarkable collection below:



Austin Maxi





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