

# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



May 2025





## The Road Observer

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

Congratulations this month to Motorcycle Member

**Graham Florence**

Also to

**Campbell English** (car)

and

**Ralph Magee** (Bike)

on passing their National Observer assessments.

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

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### Cover picture

The April cover picture was of Main Street, Castlewellan. Congratulations to William McAteer, Stewart Campbell, David McFall, Richard Walker, James O'Brien, Don McQuillan, David Hall, Peter Hamill, Carl Allen and Norman Shearer. I knew it was too easy!

This month's cover picture might be one more for the motorcyclists. Do you know where the 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@googlemail.com](mailto:leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.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.

27 May	STAC 8 - Manoeuvring
3 June	Additional driving practice
10 June	Group night - Drive/ride to The Rhinka for ice-cream. Summer break
12 August	Car section enrolment night - demonstration drives
2 September	STAC 1 - Human factors and IPSGA

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.

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## May Group night

The October Group night was the Group AGM but this was completely overshadowed by our speakers from K9 Search and Rescue NI (K9 as shorthand) and their search and rescue dog called Sadie. At the end of the meeting they said that they would be happy to come back in the brighter evenings to see search dogs in action.

Fortunately the May Group Night was in the middle of a period of exceptionally sunny and warm spring weather. Paul and Abby gave us a talk about the work of K9 before heading out to see dogs in action. The aim of K9 is to search for people who are missing in urban, rural areas or in the case of a disaster. A missing person search could involve any of the following:

- Alzheimer/dementia patient who has wandered away
- A missing or lost child
- An overdue hiker
- A despondent person
- A lost child with Autism
- Locating live victim(s) after a man-made or natural disaster eg Turkey earthquake, Creeslough explosion.



Essentially there are 3 types of searches:

**Live air-scenting.** This is where the dog searches for an individual and stops and barks to alert the handler that someone has been found. The dog can cover a very wide area much faster than a human searcher. Sometimes people don't want to be found and will either try to ignore the dog and try to chase it away. In such circumstance the dog will back off but continue to bark to alert the handler.

**Trailing dogs.** This is where the dog follows the scent of an individual. In training they have to do this 2 hours later and for up to 5km.

**Cadaver dogs.** These are trained to identify bodies and can do so even if the body is underwater.

K9 is a non-profit charity and all the staff are volunteers. They have to pay for their own dog's training, feeding, vet expenses, travel and equipment. Training takes 12 to 18 months and can cost £8-9k. The dogs are externally assessed over a period of 3 days and have to be re-assessed every year.

We then went outside and were introduced to Betsy. One of the team (Aleesa) had hidden and Betsy's job was to find her. As soon as there harness was put on Betsy she was full of energy because she knew she had a job to do. Off she went scanning the area looking for scent and

eventually found Aleesa hiding down the steps at the end of the harbour. Aleesa had her head covered and gave the impression that she didn't want to be found. Betsy didn't approach down the steps but stood at the top and barked until Abbey arrived.



Paul then got Nemo for a second demonstration. Christine and Paul's 6 year old child were in hiding together. Nemo set off and searched the harbour without success He then went in to the boat park. Having searched around the boat park Nemo found them hiding on the other side of a wall.







It was fascinating to watch the dogs working and our thanks to the whole team for giving up their time to give us a demonstration.

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## Driving in the rain after a dry spell

We have had an unusually long period of dry, sunny weather. Driving during or after rainfall can always be challenging, but it becomes especially hazardous when rain follows a long dry spell. Many drivers underestimate the increased danger that these conditions create. Understanding the reasons behind this increased risk and taking proper precautions can significantly reduce the chances of accidents.

When it hasn't rained for an extended period, roads accumulate a layer of oil, grease, dirt, brake dust and debris. This buildup is not usually visible to drivers and poses little immediate threat when the roads remain dry. However, the first rain loosens and mixes these substances into a slick, greasy film that coats the road surface. This is particularly dangerous shortly after the rain has started as the water mixes with the pollutants but hasn't yet washed them away. The result is a road surface with drastically reduced traction, comparable to driving on ice in certain conditions.

Reduced traction is a serious problem for drivers. Vehicles rely on tyre grip to safely accelerate, decelerate, and turn. On slippery roads, tyres lose their ability to maintain firm contact with the surface, leading to longer stopping distances, reduced steering control, and a higher risk of skidding. This is especially dangerous when drivers do not adjust their habits and speeds to reflect the changed conditions.

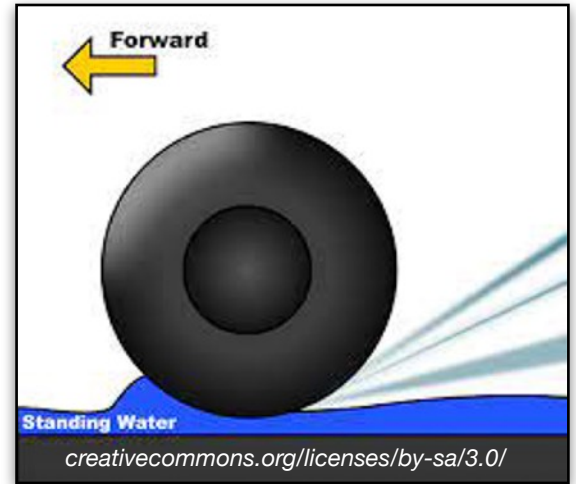
When the ground is very dry rain initially washes off rather than being absorbed. This means that there is a greater likelihood of flooding. Also be alert to the possibility of debris being washed off fields and down laneways onto roads.



## Aquaplaning

Also be alert to the possibility of Aquaplaning. This is when a layer of water builds up between a vehicle's tyres and the surface of the road. The tyres float on a thin film of water causing them to lose contact with the road, meaning that steering, braking and acceleration become less responsive or non-existent. This may be caused by driving too quickly during heavy rain, driving through standing water and especially if you have tyres with insufficient tread depth to channel water away.

If you start to aquaplane don't brake or steer suddenly, ease off the accelerator, steer gently in the direction you want to go and wait for the tyres to regain contact with the road.



## Visibility

Rain can impair your vision, especially if windscreen wipers are worn or if the windscreen is dirty. During rain after a dry period, visibility is often worsened by a mist of oily water thrown up by other vehicles. Headlights and taillights also reflect more harshly off the wet surface, creating glare that can further hinder a driver's ability to see clearly. Use your dipped headlights in rain conditions so that you can be more easily seen.



## How to deal with these conditions

To stay safe, drivers need to adjust their behaviour. Slowing down is critical, as it gives you more time to react and shortens stopping distances. It's also important to increase following distances between vehicles to allow extra space in case sudden braking is necessary. Avoid sudden manoeuvres - gentle steering, braking, and accelerating help maintain control on slippery surfaces. Tyre condition plays a vital role in these conditions. Tyres should have adequate tread depth and be properly inflated. Well worn, bald or incorrectly inflated tyres are significantly less effective at maintaining traction in wet conditions.

In addition to physical precautions, mental preparedness is crucial. Drivers should remain alert and aware of their surroundings, anticipating possible hazards such as vehicles braking suddenly, pedestrians stepping into the road, or debris that has been washed into driving lanes.

In conclusion, the first rain after a long dry period creates deceptively dangerous driving conditions. Recognising the risks—such as reduced traction and visibility—and responding with appropriate caution can help prevent accidents and save lives.



## May's Advanced Motorcyclists' Run – A Trip to Nutts Corner!

For our May Advanced Motorcyclists' run, we had an exciting trip to Nutts Corner, where we met up with the Lisburn Advanced Motorcyclists for their Skills Day. The event was packed with opportunities for both visitors and members to enhance their biking skills.



Participants got to test their slow-riding abilities on a specially designed course, learn valuable first aid for bikers, and even try out a taster session on the road. For those of us in North Down, we decided to focus on a different kind of thrill – a taster session on the legendary Ulster Grand Prix circuit, located just around the corner from Nutts Corner.

Our very own Ivan guided us around the circuit, sharing fascinating insights about the route and past incidents. We took two laps at a slightly slower pace than what you would see at the world's fastest road race circuit, but the thrill was still there!

A big thank you to the Lisburn group for hosting such a fantastic event. A few of us could definitely use more practice around the cones - see article below about the CoBAM Machine Control Day below.



As always, stay safe and enjoy the ride! The weather's been amazing lately, so let's make the most of it while it lasts. If anyone's up for an evening ride out, feel free to reach out through the group WhatsApp.

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### CoBAM machine control day

The Annual City of Belfast Advanced Motorcyclists Machine Control Day will take place on 31 May 2025 at the Belfast Cruise Ship Terminal on Airport Road West (10am to 1pm). This is a free-of-charge event where you will have the opportunity to practice and improve your slow riding skills in a safe and controlled environment. Experienced bikers will be present to give advice and guidance.

You can register for the event at <https://forms.office.com/e/VrUBENPPTd>

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