

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



May 2026





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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

May 2026

<https://ndam.org.uk/>

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

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Test passes

Congratulations this month to car Member

Andy Blair

who achieved a F1RST pass

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

Cover picture

I thought the April cover picture would have been easy but only 3 Members got it correct. Congratulations to David McFall, James O'Brien and Peter Hamill. The answer was the roundabout at the end of the Belfast Road as you come into Downpatrick.

Do you know where this month's picture was taken? Again this is a location that many Members will have passed on multiple occasions. There is 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 2026. Submit your answers to: 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.

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|---------|---|
| 26 May | STAC 8 |
| 2 June | Additional driving practice |
| 9 June | Drive/ride to the Rinkha for ice-cream. (Details to follow) |
| 23 June | Additional driving practice |

All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated or notified by email.

STAC - Short Term Associate Course. Car 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. **And remember to bring your logbook with you.**

May Group night

NDAM: The Road Ahead Celebrating Our Members & Our Future

May's Group Night marked a genuine milestone for North Down Advanced Motorists, and judging by the turnout at the Groomsport Boathouse, members clearly felt the same way.

For the first time ever in Northern Ireland, an NDAM event brought together both the car and bike sections in one room for a shared evening focused not just on road safety, but on community, recognition, and the future of the group. The Boathouse was packed to capacity, creating a fantastic atmosphere from the moment members began arriving. It was exactly the kind of evening many had hoped for: relaxed, sociable, informative, and above all, inclusive.

The idea behind NDAM: The Road Ahead – Celebrating Our Members & Our Future was simple. Too often, members only see the visible side of the group: observed runs, STAC nights, ride-outs, meetings, and events. What they don't always see are the many people quietly working away in the background to keep the organisation running smoothly. The evening was designed to shine a light on that work, recognise achievements, and begin building a stronger club atmosphere across the entire group.

Ivan opened the evening with a thoughtful speech reflecting on NDAM's journey so far and the people who helped shape it. He spoke warmly about the contribution of long-serving volunteers and committee members, acknowledging the countless unseen hours that go into keeping the group active and thriving.



One of the evening's highlights came when David Harcourt was recognised for his many years of service to the group. David, who chaired NDAM for over 12 years and steered the organisation



through the difficult Covid years, appeared genuinely surprised by the recognition he received. It was a fitting moment for someone who has quietly given so much to the group over the years, and the applause from members said it all.

We also had the pleasure of welcoming Bruce Steele, IAM RoadSmart's Road Safety Manager for Northern Ireland. Bruce spoke at the close of the evening to thank the NDAM group for its continued efforts in promoting road safety and advanced driving standards. In particular, he paid warm tribute to David Harcourt, praising both his dedication to the group over many years and the strong working relationship they had built together. It was a heartfelt moment and a reminder of the respect David commands both within NDAM and across the wider IAM RoadSmart community.



We also recognised the achievements of members who had recently passed Advanced and Masters tests, alongside those who had progressed to National Observer status. The room reflected the depth of talent and dedication within NDAM, with many members pushing themselves beyond their comfort zones to become safer, more skilled drivers and riders.

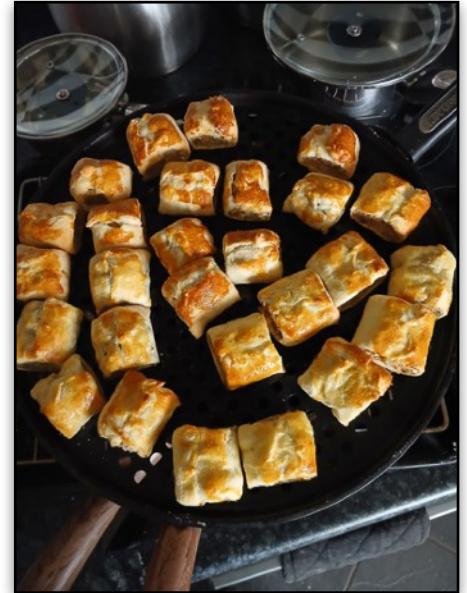
The evening wasn't only about looking back. It was also about looking ahead.

Plans and ideas for the future were shared, including picnic runs, more social events, overnight trips, expanded communication through WhatsApp groups, and continued efforts to create a stronger sense of connection between members. The message was clear: road safety remains at the heart of NDAM, but there is also room for friendship, camaraderie, and a more social side to the group.

Of course, no successful NDAM evening would be complete without refreshments, and special thanks must go to Gina, Ivan's wife, whose homemade sausage rolls were legendary. Rumour has it several members were considering a second helping before Ivan had even finished speaking.

Most importantly, the evening succeeded in bringing people together. Car members chatted with bikers, new members met long-standing ones, and plenty of conversations continued long after the formalities had ended. For a first attempt at a combined event of this kind, it could hardly have gone better.

If May's Group Night proved anything, it's that NDAM is more than just a collection of drivers and riders. It's a community, and one with an exciting road ahead.



Prepare for summer driving and riding

Driving

Summer driving in the UK can be an enjoyable experience, with longer days, better weather, and opportunities for holidays and road trips. However, preparing your vehicle properly before setting off is essential for safety, comfort, and reliability. The warmer months bring their own driving challenges, including increased traffic, hot weather, and longer journeys, so motorists should take steps to ensure both they and their vehicles are ready.

One of the first things drivers should do is check their vehicle thoroughly. Tyres are particularly important, as warm road surfaces and long-distance driving can increase wear and the risk of blowouts. Drivers should inspect tyre pressure and tread depth regularly, including the spare tyre if the vehicle has one. UK law requires a minimum tread depth of 1.6 mm, but it's worth replacing tyres before they reach this limit for better grip and braking performance.

Fluid levels should also be checked before travelling. Engine oil, coolant, brake fluid, and screen wash all play vital roles in keeping a car running safely.



Anyone recognise this road?

During summer, engines can overheat more easily, especially in slow-moving traffic, or when you are towing so ensuring the cooling system is functioning correctly is essential. Drivers should also inspect windscreen wipers and clean the windscreen thoroughly to improve visibility during bright conditions.



Torr Head, County Antrim

Planning journeys carefully is another key aspect of summer driving preparation. Roads become busier during school holidays and bank holiday weekends, leading to congestion and delays. Checking traffic reports in advance and allowing extra travel time can help reduce stress. It is also wise to ensure that mobile phones are fully charged and that satellite navigation systems are updated before setting off.

Drivers should prepare themselves as well as their vehicles. Hot weather can cause fatigue and dehydration, particularly on long motorway journeys. Carrying water, snacks, sunglasses, and sunscreen can make travel more comfortable and safer. Sunglasses are especially useful during early morning or evening drives when glare from the sun can reduce visibility significantly.

It is also sensible to keep an emergency kit in the car. Items such as a warning triangle, torch, first aid kit, phone charger, and breakdown contact information can be extremely useful if problems arise. For families travelling with children, entertainment and regular rest stops can help keep journeys calm and enjoyable.

Ultimately, preparing for summer driving is about reducing risks and ensuring a smoother travel experience. By carrying out basic vehicle maintenance, planning journeys carefully, and staying alert behind the wheel, drivers can enjoy safer and more pleasant journeys throughout the summer months.

Riding

Summer is one of the best times to enjoy motorcycling. Before heading out for weekend rides or longer road trips, taking time to prepare your motorcycle properly can improve reliability, comfort and safety.

Start with a thorough clean. Road grime, salt residue and moisture from winter conditions can build up in places that are easy to overlook. Washing the bike allows you to inspect it closely for signs of corrosion, loose fittings, cracked hoses or damaged cables. Pay particular attention to the underside of the frame, around the suspension components and behind the wheels.

Tyres should be one of the first things checked. Inspect tread depth and look for uneven wear, cuts or cracking. UK law requires a minimum tread depth, but summer riding often involves longer distances and higher road temperatures, making tyre condition especially important. Check pressures against the manufacturer's recommendations, as incorrect inflation can affect handling and fuel efficiency.



Credit: Easy-Peasy.AI

Next, examine all fluid levels. Engine oil should be clean and at the correct level, and coolant should be topped up if your bike is liquid-cooled. Brake fluid should appear clear rather than dark or cloudy. If fluids have not been changed according to the service schedule, summer is a good time to complete routine maintenance.

The battery also deserves attention, particularly if the motorcycle has been stored or ridden infrequently. Check for corrosion around terminals and ensure the battery holds charge properly. Test all lights, indicators and the horn to confirm they are functioning correctly.



Credit: Wikimedia Commons

Chain maintenance is another essential task. Clean the chain thoroughly, lubricate it and check the tension. A neglected chain can wear quickly and affect smooth power delivery. Riders with shaft or belt drive systems should still inspect for wear and follow maintenance guidance.

Brakes should be tested carefully before longer journeys. Inspect brake pads for wear and make sure braking feels consistent and responsive. Suspension should also be checked for leaks or unusual movement.

Also think beyond the motorcycle itself. Inspect riding gear, including helmet, gloves and textiles, ensuring ventilation and protection are suitable for warmer weather.

Preparing your motorcycle for summer takes relatively little time but can make every ride safer, smoother and more enjoyable throughout the season.

General advice for cars and bikes

Our summers are famously changeable. One hour you're proceeding under blue skies, the next you're threading through a fine drizzle that slicks manhole covers and makes spilt diesel like an ice-rink. You'll see more loose gravel from roadworks and tar bleed on hot afternoons—those shiny black patches can be treacherous for bikes mid-corner. Preparing for both possibilities is the hallmark of a good UK summer ride or drive.

Rural routes invite progress, but summer also fills them with cyclists, horses, sheep, and walkers emerging from hedgerows; smooth, courteous passes keep everyone safe and preserve the goodwill that makes these roads a pleasure to share.



NDAM May Bike Run

After what has felt, by Northern Ireland standards, like a suspiciously generous spell of fantastic weather, there was a slight air of caution as the NDAM bikers gathered for the May Saturday run, because we all know how this usually goes: the sun shines for more than forty-eight hours, everyone gets optimistic, and then the sky remembers its job description.

Thankfully, the weather behaved itself, presumably after realising it was dealing with determined motorcyclists who had already committed to getting out, and 11 riders turned up to enjoy a cracking run through South-East Down, with dry roads, good visibility, and the sort of route that reminds you exactly why we bother polishing visors, checking tyre pressures, and pretending we weren't checking the forecast every ten minutes beforehand.



The group headed out via Comber, Killyleagh, Strangford, Ardglass, Downpatrick and Newcastle, taking in a lovely mix of coastal roads, sweeping bends and countryside views, with just enough variety to keep everyone happy and not enough drama to require anyone to start telling heroic tales in the car park afterwards.

Brunch at Niki's Kitchen Café in Newcastle was, as always, delicious, and by this stage it has become less of a casual café stop and more of an established NDAM refuelling ritual, because while the bikes may run on petrol, the riders are clearly powered by coffee, cooked breakfasts and the firm belief that calories consumed on a bike run don't count.

The run home took in a favourite route via Castlewellan, Spa, Ballynahinch and Saintfield, giving everyone a very pleasant finish to the day with full stomachs, dry kit and enough good roads behind them to feel quietly smug, though naturally in a dignified and advanced-rider sort of way.

A big thank you to everyone who came along and made it such an enjoyable run, and to those who weren't able to make it this time, we hope to see you on the next one, where there will almost certainly be more good roads, more chat, and, if we're very lucky, weather that continues this confusing new hobby of being pleasant.

Our next bike run will be on Sunday 7th June, with details posted in the usual places for members. Anyone interested in joining us as a guest is very welcome to get in touch through the website (or email us at info@ndam.org.uk) and we will come back to you with the details. Safe riding, everyone.

Thanks to everyone who provided text and pictures for this issue.

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