

# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North-Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



November 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

November 2025

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

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

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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.

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### New Members

This month we welcome new car Associate member Zachary Murray. 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.

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### Cover picture

The September cover picture was Comber looking in the direction of the square which isn't visible (that would have made it too easy). Congratulations to James O'Brien, Ralph Magee, Michael Gould, David McFall, Norman Shearer, David Harcourt and Billy Hirst.

Do you know where this month's picture was taken? Its a bit further afield than Comber. 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@googlegmail.com](mailto:leslie.ashe.LA@googlegmail.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.

- 25 November STAC 7 - Manoeuvring
- 2 December Additional driving practice
- 9 December Group Night - Christmas Dinner

### 2026

- 13 January STAC enrolment - introductions for new car members and demonstration drives
- 3 February STAC 1
- 10 February Group Night - Road Traffic policing
- 24 February STAC 2
- 3 March STAC 3
- 10 March Group Night - Guy Thomson "The Northern Isles"
- 24 March STAC 4
- 31 March STAC 5
- 7 April No Meeting - Easter Tuesday
- 14 April Group Night - TBA

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.**

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## November Group Night

On this Tuesday evening the room was buzzing with ideas, laughs, local insight, and the kind of unfiltered candour you only get from someone who *really* knows their stuff. This month, NDAM had the pleasure of hosting Bruce Steele, Regional Road Safety Manager for Northern Ireland, at our monthly speaker night in the wonderfully atmospheric Groomsport Boathouse.

Bruce brought a full evening of discussion, reflection, and strategic insight into how IAM RoadSmart is working across Northern Ireland to raise the profile of advanced driving and riding, engage new audiences, and connect local groups under one collective umbrella.



## **A Mission to Unite and Represent**

Bruce opened with a clear mission: *get Northern Ireland fully integrated into the wider IAM RoadSmart movement*. He acknowledged that for too long, NI has felt like a forgotten outpost — often overlooked, under-resourced, and operating in isolation. His role, as he sees it, is not only to promote road safety but to rebuild a sense of unity, voice and visibility for every group, from Lisburn to Londonderry.

Having been a long-time member of both Lisburn and North Down groups (and now Chair of Lisburn Advanced Motorcyclists), Bruce understands the value of local connection. But he's equally focused on something bigger: ensuring that when media, policymakers, or the public talk about road safety, IAM RoadSmart is top of mind — not just the AA or the RAC.

## **The Human Side of the Stats**

From the tragic statistics of motorcyclist fatalities on the Ards Peninsula to the frustration of trying to access resources on the newly digital volunteer hub, Bruce didn't shy away from the honest realities, and neither did we.

He shared the latest data: four motorbike fatalities in Northern Ireland between January and July 2025, many occurring on roads right in our own backyard. He reminded us that every IAM course delivered, every observed ride completed, every STAC chapter discussed is a step toward reducing those numbers. And that's why what we do matters.

## **Volunteers Make the Wheels Turn**

Bruce praised the commitment of IAM's 5,000 volunteers UK-wide, the boots on the ground who make up the beating heart of the organisation. In Northern Ireland, with only around 1,500 IAM members and a small pool of volunteers spread across several groups, the impact each Observer makes is amplified. "You're making a real difference — and it shows," he told the room.

He spoke fondly of meeting young driver Niamh Watson, who passed her Advanced Driving Test at just 18, a success story he's eager to replicate across NI. For an organisation with a national average member age of 60+, recruiting the next generation is a top priority.

## **Building Media Presence and Partnerships**

From meetings with the PSNI and Department for Infrastructure to his regular radio appearances and efforts to connect IAM with local media, Bruce is on a mission to raise our profile. He wants IAM RoadSmart to become the go-to voice for road safety stories in Northern Ireland, and he's working to make sure we're in the room when policy decisions are being made.

He's also pushing to evolve our relationship with BikeSafe, noting that while the initiative is great for introducing riders to safety, it lacks the follow-through of IAM's unlimited support model. He encouraged groups to promote IAM at BikeSafe events and capitalise on the moment when riders are most open to further training.

## **On Insurance, Incentives, and the Paperless Push**

No NDAM event would be complete without a lively discussion about insurance, and Bruce didn't disappoint. The room nodded knowingly as we shared our own frustrations with the lack of meaningful IAM-related discounts from providers like Cornmarket. It's an issue he agrees is long overdue for reform and one he's keen to champion through direct discussions.



He also tackled IAM HQ's push toward going digital, something not every member is thrilled about. From printable observer handbooks to STAC materials, Bruce acknowledged the need for balance between environmental responsibility and usability, especially for members who prefer hard copies.

## **A Night to Remember**

Bruce's visit was a reminder of the shared mission we're all part of. Whether you're an Observer, an Associate, a long-time member, or brand new to the group, we all play a part in creating safer roads across Northern Ireland.

His commitment, energy, and sense of humour left a lasting impression, as did his trusty sidekick Robbie, the IAM RoadSmart mascot, who now accompanies him to all events (yes, even rugby matches... long story).

We're grateful to Bruce for making the trip to join us, and even more grateful for his efforts to connect, listen, and advocate on behalf of us all. *Thanks to Tina for the report and pictures.*

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## Autumn and winter driving

Shorter daylight hours make driving conditions more challenging. Here are some simple, practical tips to help older drivers stay safe and confident on the roads this autumn and winter.

### ✓ 1. Give yourself a “Driver MOT”

Just like your car needs regular checks, so do you: Eyesight check – make sure your glasses prescription is up to date. You should be able to read a number plate from 20 metres. It's a good idea to have your eyes tested every two years, and if you are over 60, it's free. Hearing check – being aware of sirens, horns or engine sounds is vital. Reaction time – if you notice slower responses, consider adjusting your driving habits (e.g. avoid busy times or tricky junctions). Medication review – some medications affect alertness. Ask your GP or pharmacist if you're unsure.

### 🌙 2. Watch out for headlight glare

Glare from oncoming vehicles can be more noticeable at night. Here's how to reduce the impact: Keep your windscreen clean – inside and out. Dust or smears make glare worse. Check your glasses – some lenses can make glare worse at night. Anti-glare coatings may help. Look slightly to the left of oncoming headlights to avoid direct exposure. Dip your interior mirror – use the night mode to reduce glare from cars behind.



Credit: IAM RoadSmart



### 3. Prepare your car for the season

Check all lights – make sure headlights, brake lights, and indicators are working. Replace wiper blades if they're smearing or skipping. Top up screen wash with winter mix to prevent freezing. Check tyre tread and pressure – good grip is essential on wet or icy roads.


### 4. Plan for shorter, darker days

Avoid rush hour if possible; roads are busier and more stressful at that time. Use well-lit routes – stick to roads you know and avoid unlit rural roads. Allow extra time – give yourself time to drive more slowly in low visibility.

### 5. Know your limits – plan alternatives

Don't feel pressured to drive if you're uncomfortable in low light or poor weather. Consider public transport, lifts from friends/family, or local community transport schemes. If you're unsure about your driving, a refresher lesson with an instructor can boost confidence.



 **Top Tip:** Keep a “Winter Ready” kit in the car including, torch, blanket, water, snacks, phone charger, hi-vis vest, ice scraper and de-icer.

IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy & Standards Nicholas Lyes said: “The clocks going back not only means darker evenings, but they also bring increased risk on the road. Historically, November often sees a spike in the number of collisions as reduced grip and visibility catches out the unprepared driver. Now is a good time to check your car is winter-ready, particularly focusing on tyres, wipers, screen wash and checking your lights are working properly and aimed correctly. Drivers should give extra space to the vehicle in front and allow themselves more time for their journeys, particularly for the evening rush hour as this is the

time of day when collisions are increasingly likely.”

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## **There are road trips... and then there's the Carlisle-to-Glasgow gauntlet.**

**by Tina**

It started off so well. I fancied a spin touching the edge of the Highlands: something scenic and serene. I pictured lochs, hills, maybe a coffee and a smug Instagram post with “#carlife” vibes. What I got instead was a white-knuckle dance of chaos, impatience, and driver behaviour that would make an IAM member flinch.

Let's talk about that stretch from Carlisle to Glasgow. I was in a 40mph zone, clear as day—confirmed by road signs and double-checked by my satnav. So why did I feel like a granny in the outside lane of the Monaco Grand Prix? Cars were hurtling past, easily doing 60. Overtakes on blind bends. Speed limit? What speed limit?

And then a rather “confident” driver came flying up behind me, attempted an overtake on a hill with a bend just ahead, only to be met head-on by not one, but two HGVs cresting the hill like an oncoming stampede. That driver swerved back into place behind me so fast you'd think he'd spotted a speed camera.

I couldn't help but reflect on how my advanced driving training saved the day. IPSGA wasn't just a theory test acronym in that moment—it was my guardian angel. Information, Position, Speed, Gear, Acceleration... and Calm. Lots and lots of Calm.

But wait, there's more!

After surviving the vehicular carnage, I parked in the hotel's tiny car park, relieved to be off the roads. Then came the plot twist: by the time I returned to the car park at the end of the week, someone had driven into my car. There was a nice dent on the front driver-side wing, no note, and of course, not a helpful CCTV in sight. Sainsbury's opposite had a camera—just not pointing at my car. Classic.



My dashcam was useless, because it decided to take a nap that night. Thank goodness for Don (fellow NDAM legend), who pointed me to a bodywork chap in Bangor West. £250 later, the wing is being sanded and repainted, because no dent magician will touch it. And then there's ceramic coating. And that infernal wrap. Again.

Still, there are silver linings: I got to flex my defensive driving skills, found a decent repair guy, and survived a trip that could have starred in a public service announcement for IAM.

Would I do it again? Maybe. But next time, I'll be taking the ferry and a coach. Let someone else do the driving while I sip tea and ponder how many ceramic coatings one car can wear before it qualifies as a Fabergé egg. Tina - Hopefully it is now restored to its former self,

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### **AGM update**

Apologies to Committee Member Don McQuillan. He was omitted from the list of Committee members in last month's Road Observer. Here is the full list:

Chair: Tina Lannin	Secretary: Stephen Patterson
Treasurer: Campbell English	
Committee Members: Leslie Ashe, Ivan Greenfield, Colin Hay, Ralph Magee, Don McQuillan, Leah Taylor	

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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**