

THE ROAD OBSERVER



**The Newsletter of the
North Down Advanced Motorists Group
OCTOBER 2026 VOL. 26.9**





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

Stay in touch

Our website and Facebook page carry group news, photographs and reports from recent events. Please check WhatsApp group messages for changes to meeting arrangements and motorcycle run plans, especially as the weather becomes less predictable.

Website	https://ndam.org.uk/
Facebook	https://www.facebook.com/NorthDownGroupIAM
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Newsletter & Group Enquiries	info@ndam.org.uk
Membership Enquiries	ndammembership@outlook.com
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Cover picture

The cover picture in the September issue was the A25 taken from the top of the hill at Castlewellan looking towards Annsborough at the bottom of the hill and on towards Clough.

Congratulations to Don McQuillan, Billy Hirst, Ralph Magee, Jim O'Brien.

Do you know where this month's picture was taken? 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 2027. Submit your answers to info@ndam.org.uk

Eleven covers and eleven correct answers

Congratulations to Jim O'Brien, our cover competition winner. His perfect score earns him a free year's subscription to the Group. Jim has the distinction of identifying all eleven cover locations correctly, a perfect score and a splendid example of observation in action. The rest of us may have to pay a little more attention to the scenery!

A welcome to our members

Whether you're working towards your advanced test, developing your observer skills or simply enjoying the company on a group night or bike run, we hope you're making the most of your membership. Our observers continue to support associates through STAC evenings and individual observed drives, and we wish everyone approaching a test the very best of luck.

Test passes

No test passes to report this month.

New members

No new members to report this month.

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. Meetings take place at the Boathouse, Groomsport Harbour car park, unless another venue is announced. Check group communications for start times and any changes before setting out.

Making the most of STAC

STAC is our Short Term Associate Course for car associates. Before each evening, read the relevant section of your Associate Handbook and bring your logbook. Preparing beforehand helps you get more from the theory session and your observed drive.

Date	Programme
Tuesday 27 October	STAC 5 Overtaking
Tuesday 3 November	STAC 6 Motorways and dual carriageways
Tuesday 10 November	Group Night Book signing – An evening with Stephen Davison
Tuesday 24 November	STAC 7 Manoeuvring
Tuesday 1 December	Additional driving practice
Tuesday 8 December	Group Night Christmas dinner at Bridewell, Donaghadee

Motorcycle runs

Our motorcycle programme now includes runs on the first Sunday and third Saturday of the month, weather permitting. Routes, meeting arrangements and any cancellations are notified through WhatsApp. If you would like to lead a run or help with sweeping, speak to the motorcycle team.



October bike run

After a spring and summer of brilliant bike runs around County Down, today was a welcome opportunity to head north, with Brian organising and leading another great ride through County Antrim.

Our route took us from Templepatrick towards Broughshane, down through spectacular Glenariff to the coast, and onwards through Cushendall and Glenann. With glorious autumn sunshine, stunning scenery, challenging bends, cambers and the occasional generous contribution of agricultural debris, there was certainly plenty to keep our advanced riding skills sharp!

Brunch was at Nicco's in Ballymoney, a hidden gem tucked away behind a factory, which prompted Ralph's wonderfully understated review:

"Never have I been found at the back of a factory in Ballymoney and enjoyed myself that much!" 😂

The return journey took us cross-country towards Randalstown before we finally surrendered to the motorway for the last stretch home.

As Ralph summed it up: "Cracking run in cracking weather on cracking roads. Great craic too!" Hard to argue with that!

Huge thanks to Brian for organising and leading, and to everyone who came along for another brilliant day out.

Next ride: Sunday 1 November. Watch the usual places for details.

Sunday run to Rostrevor

Sunday 4 October 2026

Eight members of the motorcycle section gathered at the usual starting point, McDonald's in Newtownards, for the first Sunday run of October. Jim led the group towards Rostrevor, with a refreshment stop at the appropriately named Roast Trevor. At least nobody could claim the destination was difficult to remember.

The route used back roads to avoid the usual bottlenecks and traffic lights, keeping clear of the main towns until Castlewellan. From there, the group continued through Hilltown and on to Rostrevor, enjoying a good run in the company of familiar faces.

After refreshments, most of the riders returned to North Down through Newcastle, Downpatrick and Killyleagh. Thanks go to Jim for planning and leading the outing and to Neil for once again taking on tail-end duties. The comments afterwards left little doubt that the route had gone down well.



These outings continue to be a popular part of the NDAM programme, and the growing number of members willing to lead them helps keep the calendar active.



Annual General Meeting

Left-Right

Stevie Sherry
Area Service Delivery Manager

Tina Lannin
Chair

Bruce Steele
Regional Road Safety Manager NI



At our AGM on Tuesday 13 October, we looked back on a busy year for NDAM and recognised the people whose time and enthusiasm made it all possible.

Tina's review of her second year as Chair highlighted the growth of the motorcycle section and the achievements of associates and observers across the group.

A growing motorcycle section

A programme that once centred on a monthly ride-out has expanded to first Sunday and third Saturday runs, with more members volunteering to lead and support them. New riders and associates have helped bring fresh energy to the section, alongside the experience of our established observers.

Bruce Steele's support has helped encourage rider development and closer working between IAM RoadSmart groups in Northern Ireland. Thanks also go to Ralph, Don, the motorcycle observers, run leaders and tail-end riders who make these outings possible. Ivan Greenfield deserves particular recognition for his sterling efforts in organising events, encouraging participation and keeping new ideas coming.

Our annual roll of honour

Congratulations to all nine successful candidates, seven of whom achieved a F1rst, and to the observers who supported them. Our three new National Observers are Leah Taylor and Peter Hamill in the car section, and Jim O'Brien in the motorcycle section.

Section	Member	Result
Advanced Driver	Desmond Garland	Pass
Advanced Driver	Anna McCrea	F1rst
Advanced Driver	Ian Wilkinson	F1rst
Advanced Driver	Andrew Blair	F1rst
Advanced Driver	Caleb Hooke	F1rst
Advanced Rider	Andrew Donovan	Pass
Advanced Rider	Carla Schofield	F1rst
Advanced Rider	James Davidson	F1rst
Advanced Rider	Martin Griffiths	F1rst

Membership

Leah presented the membership report. The IAM RoadSmart database (DARTS) shows that we have 94 members. We have a lot of inactive members, and would love to see more members attending group nights.

Finances

Our finances remain stable and the detailed figures were covered in Campbell's Treasurer's Report.

Committee

The Committee for the coming year was elected and membership is as follows:

Role	Member	Role	Member
Chair	Tina Lannin	Bikes Section	Ralph Magee
Secretary	Brian Ewart	Bikes Section	Ivan Greenfield
Treasurer	Campbell English	Committee Member	Neil Anthony
Membership Officer	Leah Taylor	Committee Member	Carla Schofield
IT Support	Stephen Patterson	Committee Member	Peter Hamill

Thank you to our volunteers

With several important changes to the committee this autumn, we thank those who have contributed so much to NDAM over the years.

Leslie Ashe and sixteen years of service

Leslie has stepped down after an extraordinary sixteen years on the committee. Readers will know his work through Road Observer, which he has produced and edited with care, attention to detail and a steady supply of articles and photographs. His contribution also spans observing, events and membership communications, and his knowledge of the group has been invaluable. We owe him a very considerable thank you.

Stephen Patterson and Colin Hay

Stephen has stepped down as Secretary after five years, having kept on top of agendas, minutes, correspondence and the many administrative tasks that a voluntary group needs. His patience and good humour have been much appreciated, and he will continue to support the NDAM committee with his technical expertise.

Colin has stepped down from the committee and his Chief Observer responsibilities as he moves into his examiner role. His work with associates and observers has helped maintain our training standards, including during the transition to National Observer qualifications. We thank him for that commitment and wish him well in his new role.

Celebrating Success and Looking Ahead

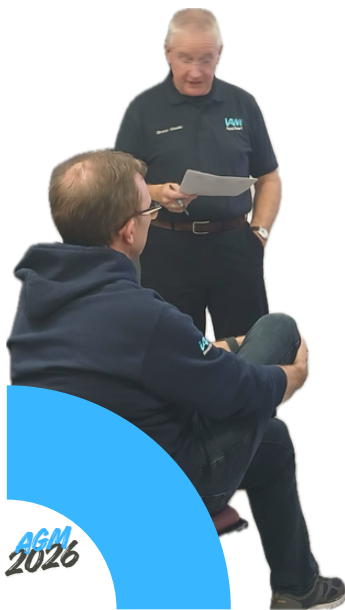
We were delighted to welcome Stevie Sherry, Area Service Delivery Manager, and Bruce Steele, Regional Road Safety Manager for Northern Ireland, as our guest speakers at this year's NDAM Annual General Meeting.

Both Stevie and Bruce are enthusiastic supporters of advanced driving and riding, and their engaging presentations provided a valuable insight into the progress being made across the IAM RoadSmart network, both locally and nationally.

Drawing on the latest Network and Knowledge meeting, they highlighted two particularly important priorities for IAM RoadSmart: recognising and giving back to volunteers, and growing the IAM RoadSmart family.

Volunteers are the backbone of local groups, giving countless hours of their time to coaching associates, organising events, supporting training and encouraging safer driving and riding. Stevie and Bruce acknowledged the enormous contribution made by these volunteers and the importance of ensuring that their efforts are recognised, supported and valued.





Another key theme was membership engagement and growth. They discussed the importance of attracting new members, encouraging existing members to become more involved and strengthening connections between local groups, the wider Northern Ireland network and IAM RoadSmart nationally. Building a thriving organisation means recruiting new associates but also creating a welcoming community where members feel involved, appreciated and motivated to continue developing their skills.

Road safety and training achievements were also central to the presentations. Stevie and Bruce shared a very positive overview of Advanced Driver, Advanced Rider and Masters test results, highlighting the impressive achievements of members throughout Northern Ireland.

These successes reflect not only the dedication and ability of those taking their tests but also the expertise and commitment of the observers and mentors who support them. Every successful candidate represents another driver or rider who has demonstrated an advanced standard of roadcraft, contributing to the wider aim of improving road safety.

The presentations also reinforced the value of collaboration between groups, sharing knowledge, supporting regional activities and learning from one another. With continued enthusiasm for advanced driving and riding across Northern Ireland, there are encouraging opportunities to build on these achievements and introduce more people to the benefits of IAM RoadSmart.

For NDAM, these messages were particularly relevant as we reflect on a year of growing motorcycle participation, successful test results and continued development of our observer team.

Our sincere thanks go to Stevie and Bruce for their time, enthusiasm and continued support of NDAM. Their presentations provided an informative and encouraging conclusion to our AGM, reminding us that while individual test passes are worth celebrating, the real strength of IAM RoadSmart lies in its people, its volunteers and its shared commitment to making our roads safer for everyone.

Continuing support and new responsibilities

David Harcourt's contribution remains part of the group long after his years as Chair and, later, acting Membership Secretary. His advice and experience continue to be a valued source of support. Brian has joined the committee and agreed to take on the Secretary's responsibilities, while Leah has taken on the considerable task of managing membership and renewals.

We welcomed new committee members Neil Anthony, Peter Hamill, and Carla Schofield.

We are very grateful to the whole committee and every observer who gives up evenings and weekends to help others improve.



2025/2026: Our year in numbers

Our 2025/2026 programme will focus on providing a stronger future-ready member experience

2025/2026			2024/2025			2023/2024		
Members	2000	2000	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500
Family	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
Volunteers	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Events	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Training	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Members	2000	2000	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500	1500
Family	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
Volunteers	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Events	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Training	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Advanced Rider Course

Powered by
North Down Advanced
Motorists

Looking ahead together

The past year's programme has included the Members and Family Night organised by Ivan in May, social drives and rides, regional activities and a well-attended PSNI Road Policing presentation in September. These occasions give members opportunities to learn and enjoy each other's company beyond training sessions.

There is more to do in welcoming younger drivers and riders, and sharing the work among more volunteers. Please support our group nights, suggest activities and consider where you could help.

As we begin another year, members' ideas and involvement will help shape the programme and keep NDAM as relevant as possible to our group members.

Annual NDAM awards



The trophies were presented by Bruce Steele, Regional Road Safety Manager NI, and Stevie Sherry, Area Service Delivery Manager.

Congratulations go to

- Motorcycle Member of the Year : Brian Ewart
- Annie McFarland trophy : Leslie Ashe
- Mervyn Bates trophy : Gareth Hunter



Bruce congratulates Brian Ewart



Bruce congratulates Leslie Ashe

Trophies were also given to Leslie Ashe and Colin Hay to thank them for their long-standing service to the committee and NDAM.



Bruce thanks Leslie Ashe



Stevie thanks Colin Hay

Carla celebrates a F1rst

Member interview with Carla Schofield

Carla Schofield has achieved a F1rst in her IAM RoadSmart Advanced Rider test. Her achievement is an encouraging example for other associates working towards their own advanced test.



What do you ride and how did you get into motorcycling?

I currently ride a Kawasaki Z650. Motorbikes have always been a part of my life as both of my parents were bikers. I can remember being picked up from school on the back of my dad's bike, and I'll always remember my mum's bright green Kawasaki ZX-6. I think the love of bikes was probably always there because of them, so getting my own licence and riding myself felt quite natural. Once I started, I was hooked.

What made you join NDAM and take the advanced course?

I wanted to become a better and safer rider. I'm quite hard on myself and always want to improve, so the advanced course seemed like the natural next step. I wanted to understand more about positioning, planning and reading the road properly, rather than just relying on the skills I'd learnt to pass my normal bike test.

What was the most useful lesson from your training?

One of the biggest things for me was learning about the limit point and how to use it to judge the severity of a bend and adjust my speed accordingly. Positioning was another huge one. Learning where to place the bike to improve my view while still keeping a good safety margin completely changed the way I approach corners. Those two things together made my riding feel much smoother, safer and more controlled.

Was there a skill you found particularly challenging?

Positioning was probably one of the things that took the most thought initially. Learning that the "right" position is constantly changing depending on the road, view, hazards and other traffic took a while to become natural. Once it clicked, though, it made a massive difference.

How did the test go and how did it feel to earn a F1rst?

I was definitely nervous going into the test because I'd put a lot of work into it and really wanted to do well. Earning a F1rst was an amazing feeling and something I was genuinely really proud of. I was even more surprised afterwards when I was encouraged to go on and do both my Masters and Observer training. It gave me a real confidence boost and made me want to see how far I could take my riding.

What would you say to a rider thinking about joining?

Do it. I think some people hear "advanced riding" and assume it's going to be intimidating or that you already need to be an amazing rider, but that isn't the case. You're there to learn. It's not about riding faster, it's about becoming safer, smoother, more observant and more confident. I genuinely ride differently now because of it.

What is next for you and is there anyone you want to thank?

My next goal is to work towards my Masters. After that, I'd like to continue with Observer training and eventually be able to mentor other riders and pass on what I've learned. I was encouraged to do both after my test, which was a huge compliment and has given me something else to work towards.

I'd especially like to thank Don, who trained me, for all the time, patience and advice he gave me throughout the course. He really helped me develop my riding and get to the standard I needed for the test. I'd also like to thank everyone at NDAM who supported me along the way.

Contribute to The Road Observer



Have you a photograph from a run, a motoring story, an idea for a group night or a road safety topic you would like us to cover? Please get in touch with us through the group's email info@ndam.org.uk. A newsletter benefits from contributions across the membership, and a few words from the people who were there are always welcome.



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