

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



November 2024





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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 2024

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New Members

This month we welcome car member, Gareth McMurray and motorcycle member Neil Anthony. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

Test passes

Congratulations this month to car members

Riaan Maass and John Bell

who both achieved a F1RST pass

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

October Cover Picture

This was the road alongside Doo Lough in Connemara. The famine memorial is included in the picture. Congratulation to David McFall, Michael Gould and Ernie Foster.

This month's picture is closer to home. Do you know where it 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 October2025. 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 plan a varied programme for the Group Nights. All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated.

26 November	STAC 6 - Motorways and dual carriageways
3 December	STAC 7 - Manoeuvring
10 December	Group Night - Christmas dinner, Carnalea Golf Club

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.

November Group Night

This was a return visit to the RNLI inshore lifeboat station in Bangor to see their new lifeboat but when we got there the cupboard was bare! The lifeboat station was undergoing an audit and the crew had taken the boat out as part of that process. It was due back shortly and sure enough it did arrive. Meanwhile we had a talk in their conference room from John and John - confusing?



They talked about the history of the RNLI. It was founded by Isle of Man resident William Hillary and those of you who have been to Douglas will know of the Tower of Refuge which he built in Douglas Bay for mariners wrecked in the area. It contained supplies to keep people alive until rescued. They took us through the types of lifeboats over the years from the early boats that had to be rowed, to the introduction of diesel engines and right up to the present with all weather lifeboats some of which are jet powered rather than having propellers, to the inshore lifeboats and even hovercraft.

We were informed that 90% of rescues are within 10 miles of the shore the RNLI is expected to review its fleet to reflect this, possibly with more emphasis on the inshore boats than the big all-weather boats.

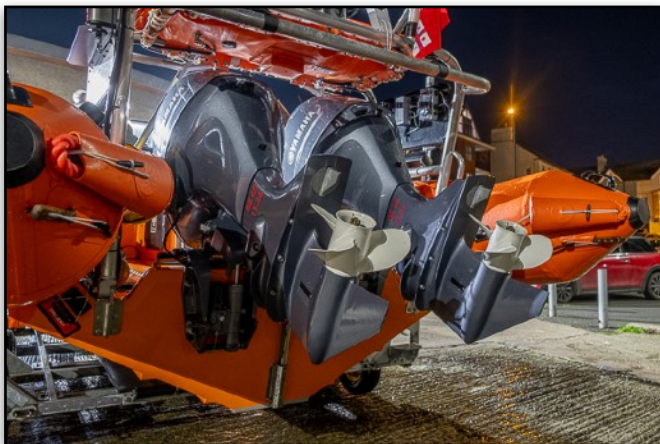
It costs £180m per annum to run the RNLI and if voluntary donations ceased they have reserves to keep the service going for about 9 months. They receive no Government funding so voluntary donations are vital.

The new boat called Ruby Robinson is like the previous one (the Jessie Hillyard which came into service in 2006) - an Atlantic 85 rib (it's 8.5 meters long) but it is a better seaboat. It has 2 - 115hp petrol outboards, has endurance of 3 hours and a maximum speed of 35 knots (40mph). If capsized it will self-right using an inflatable bag. All the electronics and communications equipment are weather sealed to survive such an immersion.



The lifeboat station has a crew of 30 and 12 support staff. It is the RNLI staff not the Coastguard who decide if the boat is to be launched. From the alert on pagers they launch within 6 minutes. The first 4 crew to arrive (which must include a helmsman/woman) get their kit on ready to go. Their kit comprises a one-piece fleece lined suit which is topped by a one-piece waterproof suit (with attached wellies) and sealed at the neck and wrist. This is all topped off by a one-size-fits-all helmet which has an inflatable insert to ensure a snug and comfortable fit. Each crew member's kit costs £3k.

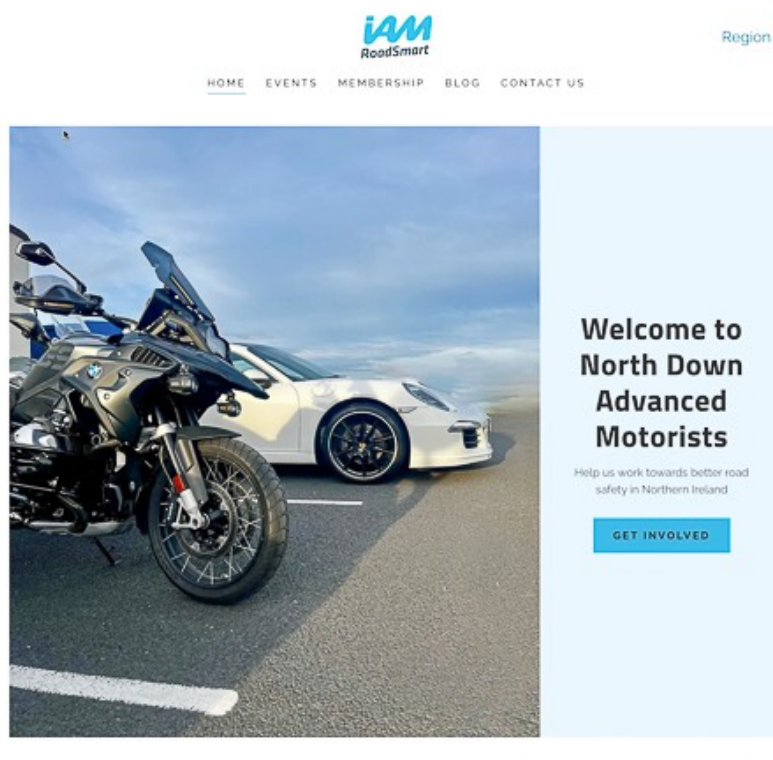
Unfortunately we were unable to visit the kit room because by this time the lifeboat had returned and crew members needed to get changed. We moved outside and had the opportunity to get aboard the lifeboat sitting on its cradle at the top of the slipway prior to it getting washed before returning to the boathouse.



It was a very enjoyable and informative visit so our thanks go to the two Johns as well as to all the crew that volunteer to keep the rest of us safe whether on the water or around the coast.

New Website

In case you haven't noticed, we have a new website. Here is what you will see on the opening page:



Information is listed under the following headings: Home, Events, Membership, Blog, and Contact us. It is a much cleaner and fresh design than the old website which will not longer be updated. You can visit us by clicking on this link: <https://ndam.org.uk/>. Please have a look and let us know what you think.

Many thanks to our Chair Tina for her work in designing it and putting it on the web.

NDAM Bike Run - November 2024

A quick change to our regular schedule this month saw our group run take place on the 3rd Sunday, due to our members volunteering at the IAM stand at the Donaghadee Bike Show on Friday and Saturday. More about that later, but first, let's talk about the ride!

Despite a forecast of rain, which is typical for Northern Ireland, we knew we could handle whatever came our way. Fortunately, the rain only appeared as a light drizzle, and for most of the ride, we were lucky to avoid it altogether. Even better!

Five riders set off from the M2 Applegreen, heading towards Kilrea, with stops in Antrim, Randalstown, and Portglenone along the way. Unfortunately, our planned coffee stop in Kilrea and Garvagh had to be scrapped—both cafés were closed (despite their websites claiming otherwise!). But no worries, we quickly made our way to the Bushtown Hotel on the outskirts of Coleraine, where we were treated to excellent coffee and delicious scones.

The journey home took us via Castleroe, Kilrea, and Cullybackey, before following the A26 and M2 back to Belfast. The roads were clear of the usual autumn hazards, which made for a smooth ride all around, compared to the less-



travelled areas of County Down. And yes, the potholes were thankfully few and far between!

A huge thanks to all the bikers who joined us for the run, keeping our mission alive of at least one monthly ride for the bike section. Our next scheduled outing is on Saturday, December 21st. Let's hope for great weather and an even bigger turnout for the pre-Christmas run. Details will be shared soon on WhatsApp and our new website.

NDAM IAM RoadSmart at the Donaghadee Bike Show

Promoting Safer Roads and Smarter Riders

In mid-November North Down Advanced Motorists had the pleasure of attending the Motorbike Show in Donaghadee Parish Church Hall. The event was a vibrant gathering of motorbike enthusiasts, from seasoned riders to newcomers eager to learn more about the world of motorcycling and to see some vintage motorcycles. It was an excellent opportunity for us to engage with the local biking community and share the invaluable benefits of becoming an advanced rider.



Throughout the event, we were thrilled to meet so many passionate motorbike enthusiasts who were keen to discuss all things bikes and safety. Our team was on hand to talk to attendees about how becoming an advanced rider can not only enhance their riding skills but also significantly contribute to safer roads for everyone.

We spoke with riders about the various benefits of advanced motorcycle training, including improved hazard perception, smoother and more efficient riding techniques, and the confidence to handle complex road conditions safely. By upgrading their riding skills through the IAM RoadSmart Advanced Rider course, motorcyclists can lower their risk of accidents and make our roads safer.

The Motorbike Show also marked the beginning of Road Safety Week, which ran from November 17th to 24th. This important initiative aims to raise awareness about road safety and the steps we can all take to make our roads safer. At NDAM IAM RoadSmart, we are committed to supporting this cause, and events like this provide the perfect platform to share our message of safer, smarter riding.

At the show, our volunteers worked tirelessly to engage with the public, provide information on the benefits of advanced training, and answer any



questions about how riders can join the NDAM IAM RoadSmart community. It was inspiring to see so many people eager to take steps to improve their riding, and we were encouraged by the interest in our programmes.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who stopped by our stand at the Donaghadee Motorbike Show, as well as all of our members and volunteers who helped make the event a success. We look forward to seeing many of you on the road, riding smarter and safer.

Exploring Scotland's Beauty: Tina Lannin's NC500 Adventure

I recently returned from an exhilarating road trip along Scotland's iconic North Coast 500 in my 20 year-old Porsche Boxster. Clocking in at an impressive 1,527 miles. I started from Groomsport and embarked on the journey in a clockwise direction from Glasgow, with a few scenic drives around the Isle of Skye and the Fife Coastal Route thrown in for good measure.



The NC500 is renowned for its breath-taking scenery, and my drive was no exception. One of the standout moments of my trip was crossing the Bealach Na Ba, the famous mountain pass at Applecross. There was little to view from the summit as heavy fog had descended, but luckily the ice from the previous week had melted by the time I arrived.

The autumn was an ideal time to visit as the landscape was ablaze with warm colours. I relished the chance to immerse myself in nature, admiring the vibrant hues while navigating the winding roads—when visibility was clear, that is! The west coast of Scotland captivated me with its rugged beauty and dramatic cliffs, and I enjoyed the challenge of driving along the single-track roads whilst avoiding numerous potholes and navigating blind corners, a good test of skill and precision.

Throughout my journey, I enjoyed a variety of overnight stays, ranging from charming hotels to cosy holiday homes. One particular highlight was staying in a very snug shepherd's hut in Lochinver - a unique retreat after a long day of driving.

The trip wasn't without its challenges. As I approached Durness, heavy fog and rain rolled in, greatly reducing visibility on the mountain roads. Navigating narrow roads riddled with potholes through thick fog reminded me of the importance of caution and safety on the roads. I was very thankful for my IAM training which gave me more confidence as a driver on very different terrain than I was used to.



I saw one poor tourist, a lady on her own, had a flat tyre as it started to get dark one evening – at the top of The Old Man of Storr on the Isle of Skye; she had to leave her car there. I hit a huge wheel-sized pothole entering Portree one day as I craned my neck at the view and thought from the noise that my tyre had blown, but luckily all was well.

I was told of local traffic jams and egos – it's fascinating how a single person's ego can create chaos on the roads. I was told this story from a friend on the Isle of Skye that perfectly illustrates this point.

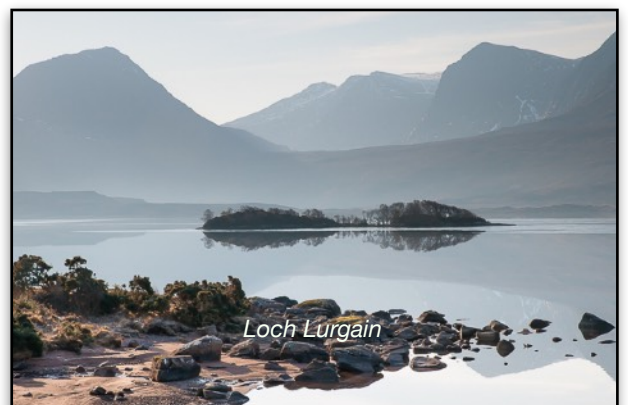
It all started at the local ferry terminal, where passengers were lining up to board. One individual, intent on being the first to board the ferry, decided to push ahead of everyone else in the queue. In his eagerness, he blocked the path for others trying to disembark. This created a frustrating standstill, as those behind him found themselves unable to reverse or manoeuvre around the blockage.

The result? A massive traffic jam that lasted for five long hours! The ferry and all the drivers in the queue couldn't move until the situation was resolved by one person untangling them. If only everyone could remember that a little patience and consideration for others can go a long way in keeping things moving smoothly!

Reflecting on my adventure, while driving the NC500 in my Boxster was a thrilling experience, it would undoubtedly be a different, perhaps easier, journey on a motorcycle. The freedom of two wheels could provide an entirely new perspective on the stunning roads of Scotland. It would probably be easier to avoid all those potholes!

Editor's note

If you find yourself doing the NC500 take this alternative option. To the north of Ullapool on the A835 turn left on the road signed Achiltibuie. You will be treated to a fabulous single track road along the side of Loch Lurgain. After about 8 miles take the junction right signed for Lochinver and you will be treated to a further 12 miles of fabulous single track road known locally as "The wee mad road". On reaching Lochinver you will need sustenance and there is better place than the Lochinver Larder known simply as "the pie shop".



Sample pictures of The Wee Mad Road:



And finally.....Spotted on your editor's recent trip to Scotland



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