

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



April 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

April 2026

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Test passes

Congratulations this month to motorcyclist Member

Andrew Donovan

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

New Members

This month we welcome new motorcycle Member Carla Schofield and car Members Desmond Garland and Kai Wardlow. 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.

Cover picture

Apologies to David McFall the only Member who got last month's cover picture. Unfortunately I got his name wrong so he didn't get the credit at the right time.

The March cover was the centre of Magherafelt. Congratulations to Ivan Greenfield, and James O'Brien.

Do you know where this month's picture was taken? Not so far away as Magherafelt. 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

28 April	STAC 6
5 May	STAC 7
12 May	Group Night - NDAM Members Celebration and Information Evening
26 May	STAC 8
2 June	Additional driving practice
9 June	Drive/ride to the Rinkha for ice-cream

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.**

April Group Night

Tuesday 14 April was a drive/ride out to Millbrook Lodge, Ballynahinch. It was a damp night but at least the longer evenings meant that we got there in daylight. Given the wet conditions 18 was a good turn-out for tea/coffee and biscuits and a chat. A few started from Groomsport and of the bikers I think there was only the one who braved the elements and came on his bike.



Ian brought a Caterham and afterwards Leah decided she would like a short run in it. Many thanks to William who provided a cloth to dry the passenger seat before Leah got in. David was next and Ian drove him home to Newtownards. David said he was too tall and he protruded into the slipstream. Because he didn't have a coat he was cold and wet by the time he got home. He found the car a tight fit and said that it convinced him his F1 ambitions were over.

This was a rental car and if anyone is interested in having a go details are on this link: [Caterham](#)

NDAM Scotland Day Trip – 12 April

What do you get when six hardy bikers ignore a dodgy forecast, drag themselves out in the small hours, and head for Scotland anyway? A cracking day out, that's what.

A few dropped out at the last minute, no doubt put off by the forecast and, in one case, a poorly child, but the remaining six pressed on regardless. Special mention has to go to Ivan, who was still lying on his garage floor after 2am trying to fix his bike, yet somehow still turned up on time on his trusty VFR, the legendary Yellow Peril. That alone deserves respect.

After rolling off the ferry at Cairnryan, we were greeted by the rare and suspicious sight of sunshine and dry roads. We enjoyed it while we could, because this was Scotland after all, and sure enough it didn't last.



With Brian leading, we headed towards Girvan and followed much the same route as last year, using Ross's waypoints for the lunch stop at Wanlockhead. The roads were a good mix of A and B roads, with plenty of bends, decent stretches of tarmac, and more potholes than anyone had ordered. The road up to Wanlockhead had definitely worsened since last year, and just to keep things interesting, the weather also took a turn for the worse, with heavy hail arriving right as we reached the pub. After lunch, we headed east through the hills towards the M74 and picked up the A702, a brilliant biking road full of twists, bends, potholes, and the odd suicidal pheasant launched in for extra



drama. These feathered lunatics were out in force again this year, only harder to spot in the rain. We stopped in St John's Town of Dalry for fuel for both bikes and riders, where guest rider Ken kindly treated us all to a brew. Proper gentleman.

With time marching on, the decision was made to skip the run out to Port William, and Ralph took over the final leg into Stranraer for a haggis supper, which may or may not have been his plan from the very beginning.

The final run back to the ferry was, in fairness, less of a gentle return and more of a tactical scramble. With only ten minutes to spare, Neil led off and briefly appeared to think he was driving an HGV, taking Ralph and Andy out of Stranraer on the lorry route. Meanwhile Brian, in full arm-waving mode, turned off onto the coast road, followed by Ivan and Ken.

Thankfully, everyone made it back before the gates closed, got boarded, and settled in for the trip home, swapping stories from the day while Andy kindly appeared with snacks from Stena Plus for the rest of us peasants.

All in all, it was a brilliant day out, full of laughs, weather, potholes, pheasants and good company. Just how a proper bike run should be. Roll on the next one.

Brian Gillies made a video of parts of the day and is available on Youtube: [Scotland run](#). The pictures above are from Brian's video. Many thanks to Brian.

Tyre pressure monitoring

Tyre Pressure Monitoring Systems (TPMS) have become a standard safety feature in vehicles across the UK, driven largely by European safety regulations and increasing awareness of road safety and fuel efficiency. These systems are designed to monitor the air pressure inside tyres and alert the driver when pressure falls below the recommended level.

In the UK, TPMS became mandatory for all new passenger cars sold from November 2014, following EU legislation. Even after Brexit, these safety standards have largely been retained in UK law. Additionally, TPMS functionality is now part of the MOT test for vehicles first registered after this date. If the system is faulty or indicates a problem, the vehicle can fail its MOT, reinforcing the importance of maintaining a working system.

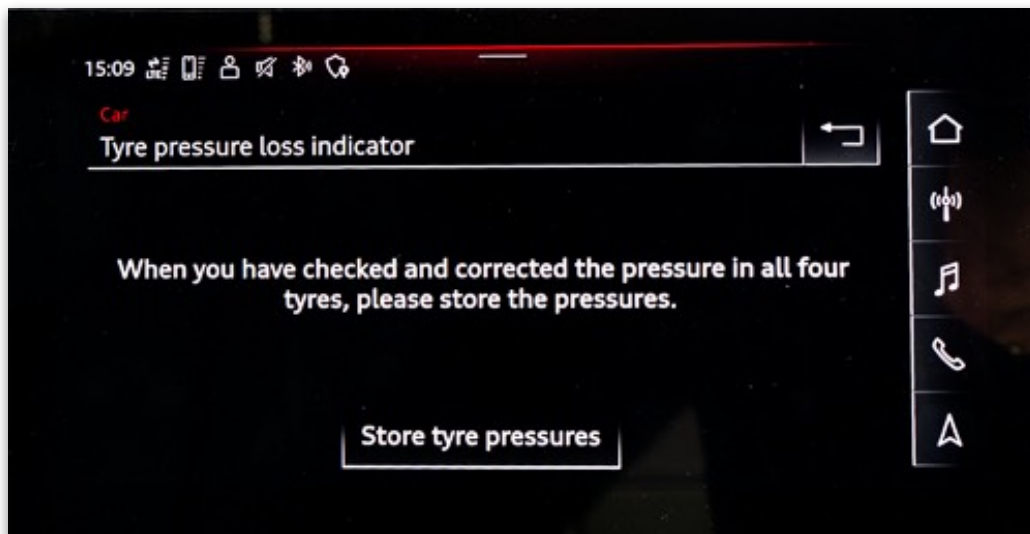
There are two main types of TPMS used in vehicles: direct and indirect systems. Direct TPMS uses sensors mounted inside each tyre, typically attached to the valve stem. These sensors measure the actual air pressure in real time and transmit the data to the vehicle's onboard computer. This type is more accurate and provides precise readings for each individual tyre. However, it can be more expensive to maintain, as sensors have batteries that eventually need replacing and the sensors can be damaged during tyre changes.

Indirect TPMS, on the other hand, does not measure tyre pressure directly. Instead, it uses the vehicle's anti-lock braking system (ABS) to monitor wheel speed. When a tyre is under-inflated, its diameter decreases slightly, causing it to rotate faster than properly inflated tyres. The system detects this difference and triggers a warning. While indirect systems are generally cheaper and require less maintenance, they are less precise and may not detect gradual pressure loss as effectively.

The benefits of TPMS are significant. Properly inflated tyres improve fuel efficiency, reduce carbon emissions, and extend tyre lifespan. More importantly, they enhance road safety by improving vehicle handling and reducing the risk of tyre blowouts. Under-inflated tyres are a common factor in road accidents, making TPMS a valuable preventative tool.



There is a temptation to rely on TPMS and perhaps that is OK with the direct system. But I discovered recently after recovering from ill health that is not the case with the indirect system. I hadn't checked the tyre pressures for a while and when I eventually did I discovered that all 4 tyres had deflated more or less equally and the system hadn't picked this up. So even if you have indirect TPMS you do need to check the tyres regularly. And don't forget to update the TPMS system to the new pressures.



Indirect TPMS will also alert you to increased pressure. What? I hear you ask. How can tyres increase in pressure enough to trigger an alert? It happened a few years ago to your editor. Driving up the M2 between the Applegreen service area and the Templepatrick exit I got the alert on the dashboard. Rather than try to sort it out at the side of the motorway I exited to Templepatrick. Found a convenient place to stop and got my trusty pressure gauge from the boot. I started with the rear passenger side tyre and went round them in a clockwise direction. By the time I reached the back drivers side I didn't need to put the gauge on it to find out this was where the problem was. The tyre was not under-inflated but over-inflated. I could feel the heat from the brakes from about a foot away. The brake was binding and the heat generated had caused the pressure in the tyre to increase. (Boyles law - amazed that I can remember this from my physics class some 60+ years ago). A couple of really firm applications of the brakes cleared the immediate problem. Fortunately, very shortly afterwards it was time for new brake pads so the calipers got cleaned up and the problem never recurred.

It's not a bad idea to carry a pressure gauge in the car and you may also want to consider a portable tyre compressor which will run off the car's 12v system. Also available are cordless systems which you recharge at home. Either could get you home or to a tyre fitter to get the issue sorted.

Saturday bike run 18 April

On Saturday, April 18th, seven members of the NDAM group met at the Ards Shopping Centre for their monthly motorcycle run. This gathering was notable as several members were also participating in a Skills Day at Nutts Corner.

After the usual briefing, which included details on the drop-off system, group riding for safety and cohesion, the planned route, and the identification of the Tail End Charlie, the group departed for The Scenic Inn, located near Armoy.



The initial part of the journey involved a swift ride up the dual carriageway to Ballyrainey Road a more engaging road than usual Messines Road to the Comber Road and the subsequent dual carriageway. From there, the group proceeded to Ballygowan. Although the original plan was to go via Moneyreagh, a change of plan led them towards Saintfield. This detour proved to be a good one, while they bypassed Lisburn and headed towards the International Airport, continuing on to Antrim and through Randalstown, Portglenone, and towards Armoyn, traversing some of the most picturesque landscapes Antrim has to offer. After navigating a few short stretches between junctions, they arrived at The Scenic Inn. The venue was highly praised for its first-class food, welcoming staff, and beautiful, unexpected surroundings for a remote country setting.



Following refreshments, some members departed for prior commitments. The remaining group continued their ride to Armoyn and then to the Dark Hedges, a notable site that a new member to Northern Ireland had not yet visited. The return journey, while it incorporated more dual carriageway and fewer scenic country roads was a pleasant ride home. The entire round trip covered a distance of 170 miles.

Motorcycle control day

There was a good turnout and a huge success for the Machine Handling and Control Day in Northern Ireland organised by IAM RoadSmart.

Attendees had the opportunity to sharpen their skills, build confidence and learn the capabilities of their motorcycle. Many thanks to Don and Ralph from NDAM (in the back row) who attended to help out.



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