

# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



March 2025







## 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

March 2025

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

Vol 25.3

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

Group Contact - David Harcourt

Tel No 07760 578444

[e-mail: david.harcourt@gmail.com](mailto:david.harcourt@gmail.com)

---

### Test passes

Congratulations this month to motorcycle member

**Neil Anthony**

and also to **Stephen Patterson**

on passing his National Observer (car) assessment

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

---

### New Members

This month we welcome new Motorcycle members Edward Halleron and Newland McKelvey as well as car members from the now closed Belfast Group - Eugenie Angelone, Ivan Campbell and Malcolm Robinson. 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.

---

### February Cover Picture

This was the roundabout at the House of Sport on the Malone Road, Belfast. Congratulations to Mark Patterson, Colin Hay, Michael Gould, Ernie Foster, David Harcourt, Norman Shearer, James O'Brien, David McFall, Davie Hall and Ivan Greenfield. This one was easier than I thought it would be.

Do you know where the months cover picture 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 October 2025. Submit your answers to: [leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com](mailto:leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com)

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 March	STAC 4 - Bends
1 April	STAC 5 - Junctions and roundabouts
8 April	Group Night - Talk by Ross Cameron
22 April	Easter Tuesday - No meeting
29 April	STAC 6 - Overtaking
6 May	STAC 7 - Motorways and dual carriageways
13 May	Group Night - Return visit by K9 Rescue (practical demonstration)
27 May	STAC 8 - Manoeuvring
3 June	Additional driving practice
10 June	Group night - Drive/ride to The Rhinka for ice-cream.

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.

---

### March Group Night

Our intended speaker from CRASH accident Management Services didn't turn up (for reasons we have yet to ascertain) and it was very fortunate that Guy Thomson attended and was able to give us a talk/discussion with a loose title of "Meet the Examiner". Guy was active in the Group, is a Masters in car and bike, a Masters Mentor for both. Since being elevated to the role of Examiner he



remains a member of the Group but separates his examining activities from the preparation of our car and bike Associates for their Advanced tests. He can also carry out the tests for National Observer.

Guy covered a wide range of topics. One of the key issues at present is the requirement for all Observers to qualify as National Observers. By way of background, for many years we have operated on the basis of Local Observers and National Observers. Local Observers were qualified within the Group by Local Observer Assessors and National Observers were qualified externally by Examiners.

From 1 April all Observers have to be National Observers and recently we have had two more qualified by Examiners to bring our number of active National Observers up to 4. Existing Local Observers who are registered as training to be National Observers can continue to act as Observers beyond 1 April as part of their training. From the time a full member is first registered as training for National Observer you have a year to achieve the standard. We have several more members who are registered to take part in the training.

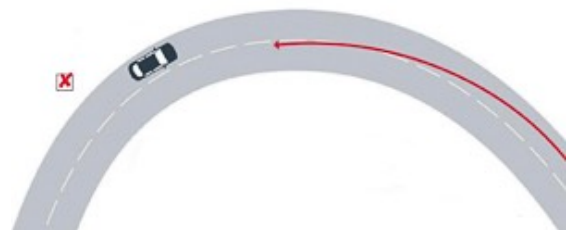
Candidates for the National Observer test are expected to have a good working knowledge of the Advanced Driver/Rider Course material, the Highway Code and Roadcraft and to be able to drive/ride at a higher standard than the advanced test. One of the key aspects when being assessed as a National Observer is the ability to engage the Associate by asking questions rather than “teaching”. The mnemonic 5WH may be useful in this regard i.e. “**Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?**”.

Guy explained that the main syllabus for the advanced test is the Associate logbook, including its appendices and the competency sheets underscoring each of the expanded competency statements. It is on this content that the Associate is examined. There is also an expectation that an Associate will have a good knowledge of the Highway Code. The latest version has been updated to include the hierarchy of road users - but make sure it is the NI version!

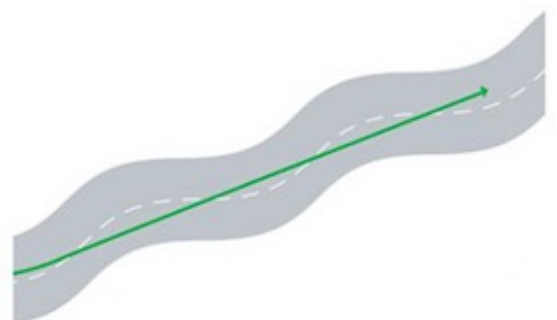
Examiners are looking for a drive/ride which is **Safe, Smooth, Systematic** (using IPSGA), and with the correct **Speed** for the conditions, where restraint is balanced with sensible progress; allowing the drive/ride to ‘flow’ - (the 4 **S**’s).

Guy went on to talk about some specific issues:

**Off-siding bends and corners.** This is the crossing of the centre line/hazard warning line (or in the absence of such a line, the centre of the carriageway) in order to extend a view round a bend or corner. On carriageways with two way traffic experience has shown that this causes Associates to put themselves in danger and IAM RoadSmart actively discourages this. It is therefore not acceptable on test.



In contrast, **straight-lining** or trimming a bend may be acceptable where a view permits, and appropriate rear observations have been conducted. When appropriately carried out this can help smooth out a series of slight bends, making for a more comfortable and stable drive for passengers. For bikes, which are at their most stable when travelling upright, at a constant speed and in a straight line, it has the advantage of allowing the machine to remain more upright - contributing to stability.



Trimming or straight-lining a set of open bends whilst acceptable on test must not be carried out if there is a risk of conflict with other road users or where it will inconvenience, confuse or cause alarm or distress, to others or encourage them to follow suit. Remember quiet efficiency is the hallmark of an expert.

If the Candidate compromises their own or any other road user's safety they will not be recommended for full membership.

When one is considering straightening out a corner and using the other side of the road, **but never 'offsiding'**, remember the acronym SLAP:-

- **SAFE** – is it safe to do so? (Considering the view available and any hazards)
- **LEGAL** – Is it legal to do it? (Road markings)
- **ACHIEVE** – Does it actually achieve something? (Or are you just showboating)
- **PERCEPTION** – What is the perception of another road user of your actions?

In summary, offsiding is not mentioned in either the car or motorcycle Roadcraft manuals, neither is it included in the Associate's Logbook, it is actively and unequivocally discouraged by IAM RoadSmart and should therefore not form part of any Associate's test preparation.

### **Roundabouts – 'Straight lining'/'Trimming' – clarification**

'Trimming' or 'Straight lining' roundabouts is often encouraged to enhance safety, stability & progress. This is correct if the situation is appropriate. A straight line may be taken through the roundabout if it is safe to do so and no other road users [including pedestrians] are present. (Highway Code Appendix on roundabouts, p137) The risk from traffic approaching from the rear is also a serious consideration in the decision as to whether to 'straighten' a roundabout.

Again if the driver/rider compromises their own or any other road user's safety they will not be recommended for full membership.

**Automatic gearboxes.** Do you need to engage neutral in stationary traffic? These days there are different types of auto transmission systems coupled with hold-assist systems so it is important that Associates read and understand the manual for their vehicle to see what is recommended. If stopped at traffic lights take into consideration how long it will take for the lights to go through their sequence. Trainee and substantive observers should take every opportunity to become fully familiar with a wide range of vehicles; particularly those driven or ridden by associates within their group.

During the advanced test or observer assessment the Examiner may ask the candidate about the different functions of their auto gearbox (eg drive, manual, sport, eco), particularly if the candidate hasn't made use of them on their drive/ride, or already explained when they would use them at the start of the test/assessment.

**Joining motorways.** Does it have to be lane 1 for a short distance? Is it ok to move immediately across to lanes 2 or 3? The answer is no (to the first question) and yes (to the second)! Provided your decision is based on good observation, early anticipation and is evidenced by an accurately planned manoeuvre, if progress can appropriately be made into lane 2 or 3 safely it should be done.

**Mini-roundabouts.** Do you have to adopt the same signalling as on a normal roundabout? Depending on the road layout it can be difficult to get all your signals in (e.g. the 2<sup>nd</sup> roundabout at the bottom of the Bangor/Ards dual carriageway, which has a left hand junction almost immediately after the roundabout (Upper Movilla Street)). Remember **TUG** (Take, Use, Give) and signal where it will be of benefit for other road users and will not cause confusion.





**Masters.** Guy who is a bike and car Masters Mentor then turned his attention to talk about the Masters qualification. This is IAM RoadSmart's flagship qualification, and the highest civilian driving/riding qualification available. It is virtually equivalent to an Advanced Police drive/ride but obviously without exemptions for speed limits, traffic signs etc.

A suitable Masters candidate is already expected to be at a competent advanced standard. To enroll on a Masters course members must already have passed the advanced test, and Guy said that it is an advantage to have achieved a F1RST in that test, as the Masters test is set at a level where candidates are required to display a far higher degree of skill in all areas of their drive/ride. Roadcraft is your go-to manual for Masters.



The Masters is expensive - at £325 for car and £345 for bike. For that you will get the full course with 6 mentored 2 hour sessions provided by a dedicated mentor, a personal logbook to document your Masters journey, and ultimately the 90 minute test with an extensive written report and feedback.

The test takes place in an area which is not local to the candidate so that you are being tested over roads you are unlikely to know. The qualification lasts 5 years and lapses unless you take a re-test (£165). Anyone interested in having a go?

Many thanks to Guy for stepping in at the last minute and giving us very comprehensive advice which is relevant to both Associate Members and Full Members.

---

### **NDAM Bike Section Monthly Run – Saturday, 15th March**

A huge shoutout to Andy for organising an absolutely cracking run around the stunning Ards Peninsula and beyond to the Mourne Mountains.



Our route took us through some of the best roads Northern Ireland has to offer:

- Ards → Greyabbey → Kirkubbin → Portaferry
- Ferry across to Strangford → Downpatrick → Clough
- Through the Mournes scenic route to Kilkeel
- Coastal run past Cranfield Beach → Rostrevor
- A well-earned lunch stop at Garden Café before heading home.

There were plenty of road signs for a cycling event around the peninsula, which gave our advanced riders the perfect opportunity to hone their roadcraft skills – from hazard perception to smooth overtaking.



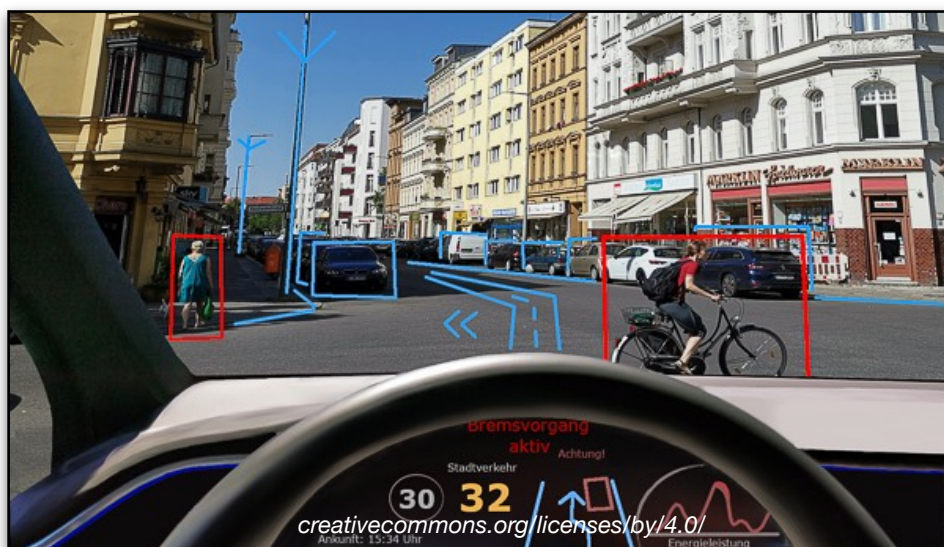
Of course, it wouldn't be an NDAM ride without great craic, a stop for elevenses, and the best part? We all made it home dry! Even the weather was spot on.

Another brilliant run in the books! Stay tuned for the April run!

## Majority of drivers are missing out on technology that can make their journeys safer

By IAM RoadSmart

- Only a quarter are regularly using driver assistance aids which may reduce collisions and improve driving comfort
- Younger drivers and those travelling more than 10,000 miles a year are more likely to embrace vehicle technology



Millions of drivers could be missing out on the benefits of potentially lifesaving in-vehicle assistance aids when they're behind the wheel with new research\* showing that a third (33%) of drivers never use them.



Out of six of the most prominent driving assistance aids in modern vehicles – including collision warnings and cruise control - and among those whose vehicles have these technologies, only a quarter (25%) say they regularly or often use them. In contrast, one-in-five (19%) rarely use these aids or have used them only once. A worrying third (33%) say they never use the technology. Just over a fifth of drivers (22%) state their vehicle doesn't have the technology, but this varies depending on individual assistance features. The findings were based on a survey of 2,008 drivers for road safety charity IAM RoadSmart's 2024 Road Safety Report.

Speed warnings on the dashboard is the most frequently enabled aid, with 28% regularly using this, followed by cruise control with 27% often using this technology. However, cruise control (as well as adaptive cruise control) also has the highest proportion of people never using them (34%) despite the vehicle having this system. Just 23% of drivers regularly use collision warning assistance, with more drivers (25%) saying their vehicle does not have it installed.

There are significant differences in frequency of use depending on age and gender. Drivers aged 17-34 are around twice as likely to use driver assistance systems compared to someone aged 70 or over, while their use is also higher among male drivers. Those travelling at least 10,000 miles or more a year are also far more likely to be engaged with this technology, primarily because they may use it for work journeys.

Driver assistance systems have become far more prevalent on newer vehicles over the last decade, with many now including adaptive cruise control, intelligent speed assist, lane departure warnings and emergency braking systems among many others. More advanced systems such as drowsy driver warnings and automated lane keeping systems are providing even greater protection for those on the road, but there is concern that many of these benefits are not being used by drivers, potentially endangering themselves and others in the process.

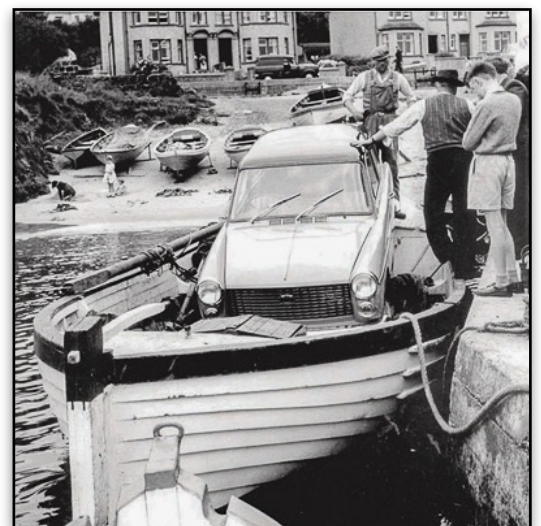
IAM RoadSmart Director of Policy and Standards Nicholas Lyes said: "It's ironic that so many rely on technology on a day-to-day basis, yet within their vehicles, drivers at best seem ambivalent about using technology systems that could save their lives if these were engaged. Part of the issue is likely to be a lack of understanding of how each of these systems can benefit them. Many might switch off certain systems because the alarm might be irritating or because they don't like the feel of the steering wheel autocorrecting to keep the vehicle in a lane. Manufacturers are consistently improving the technology, but this will take time. There's potentially an exercise for both individuals and fleet managers to ensure drivers and colleagues learn more about these systems, as well as advisories being added into the next round of Highway Code changes."

"While we need more consumer awareness of how these aids work, it's important to remember that driver assistance systems should always compliment safe driving rather than a replacement for it."

---

### And finally....

A new car (Austin A40) for Rathlin Island Nurse Mary McQuilkin being loaded on to Mr T McCuaig's boat. Ballycastle. 24/7/1959.  
(Belfast Telegraph) (Northern Ireland Historical Photographic Society)



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