

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



September 2026





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

September 2026

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

Vol 26.8

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

Group Contact: Tel No 07760 578444

Email: secretaryndam@gmail.com

Test Passes

Congratulations this month to motorcycle member

Carla Schofield

who achieved a F1RST pass.

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

Congratulations also to our Chief Observer **Colin Hay** who is taking on a new role as an IAM RoadSmart Examiner. Many thanks to Colin for all his work with Associates, Observers and the Group over many years and we wish him well in his new role.

New Members

This month we welcome new motorcycle member Paul McCarthy. 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

The cover picture in the August issue was the approach to the mini roundabout in Greyabbey, photographed from the road to Newtownards. Congratulations to Billy Hirst, Ralph Magee, James O'Brien and David McFall.

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 2026. Submit your answers to: leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com

Dates for your diary

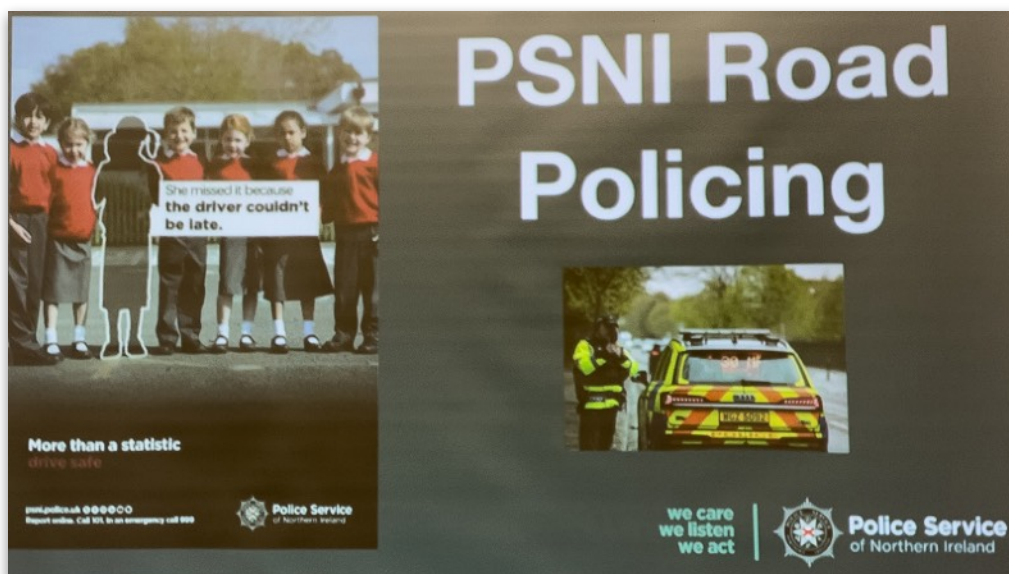
In addition to the regular STAC nights for car Associates and the regular bike runs (notified by email to bike members and also on Facebook) we have a varied programme for the Group Nights

22 September	STAC 2 - Core driving skills
29 September	STAC 3 - Bends
6 October	STAC 4 - Junctions and roundabouts
13 October	Group Night - AGM
27 October	STAC 5 - Overtaking
3 November	STAC 6 - Motorways and dual carriageways
10 November	Group Night - TBA
24 November	STAC 7 - Manoeuvring
1 December	Additional driving practice
8 December	Group Night - Christmas dinner

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.**

September Group Night



PSNI Road Policing Unit

What a great start to the new session. We had a big turnout for a presentation by Mark Dumigan of the PSNI Road Policing Unit. Amongst his many roles during his time with the PSNI, he spent 10 years as a police driving instructor in cars, bikes, Land Rovers and water cannons. He has also

spent time with police interceptors and has been first on the scene after collisions and described in detail an example of what he had to deal with.

Fatalities from NI RTCs:

Calendar years	
2021	50
2022	55
2023	71
2024	69
2025	56
2026 to 13 September	48

Most people regard an incident on the road as an accident, but because human error is the main or a contributory factor, they are called collisions rather than accidents.

We hear accident statistics for people killed or seriously injured. Mark said that “seriously injured” meant a life-changing injury, e.g. being confined to a wheelchair. And on the subject of statistics, he showed a graph of accidents against age, showing that the likelihood of an accident is highest amongst the young (aged 17–24) and those over the age of 80.

In the case of the young, he referred to the change to a graduated driving licence system from **1 October 2026**. The outline details are shown on this slide, and more detail can be found by clicking on this link to the DfI website: [Graduated Driving Licence](#)

NI to become first in the UK to introduce graduated driving licences

2024 - 164 KSI caused by 17-24 yr old
24% of KSI despite holding 8% of licences

- 6 months as a provisional
- 14 training modules
- R plate 24 months (6 month different colour)
- First 6 months drivers up to 24 yrs old : 1 passenger (14-20 yrs)
2300 - 0600. Excludes family or over 21 with licence 3yrs and front seat
- Learner on motorway with ADI
- Posted speed limits > test. 45mph restriction removed



Police Service
of Northern Ireland

He went on to describe the Fatal 5 factors which contribute to accidents.

1. Drink and drugs

Mark opened this section by showing a hard-hitting road safety advert from some 20 years ago. It featured a young footballer scoring a goal and celebrating with his teammates in the bar afterwards. On the subsequent drive, his car veered to the left, touched a kerb and careered into a car coming the other way. The subject's car then rolled through a fence, killing a child playing in the garden. It shows how quickly a celebration can turn into a horror. If you haven't seen it, here is a link to it on YouTube: [Road Safety video](#) (you have to suffer an advert at the beginning).

The current alcohol limits are 35mg/100ml on your breath, 80mg/100ml in your blood and 107mg/100ml in urine. Consideration is being given to reducing these limits, as has been done in Scotland (22, 50 and 67 respectively).

Mark posed the question: how much alcohol will keep you below the limit? Answers ranged from a small glass of wine, a quarter pint of beer, half a pint of beer or a pint. On the latter suggestion, Mark enquired, "Beer?", conjuring up visions of a pint of wine or spirits!

A range of factors can influence (see what I did there!) the absorption of alcohol, such as how much you have had to eat, your physical build and whether you have had enough sleep. Irrespective of these factors, Mark explained that any alcohol in your system will affect your driving.

Your system processes alcohol at a rate of one unit per hour, which means that if you have had several drinks the night before, you are likely to still have alcohol in your system the next morning.



Depending on how much you have taken, it could take until lunchtime to clear. The next morning, you may think you are OK to drive, but Mark made the point that in a collision in which someone is injured, the police will breathalyse both drivers. So, even if you did not cause the collision, you will still be breathalysed.

The penalties are severe – a minimum of 12 months' disqualification and a fine (up to £5,000), plus a driving test before you get your licence back. If you refuse to give a specimen, you may get six months' imprisonment, a fine, 12 months' disqualification and a driving test. Causing death or grievous bodily injury by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs could result in

up to 14 years' imprisonment, an unlimited fine, a two-year ban and an extended driving test before you get your licence back.

On the issue of drugs, the police have a kit which can detect cannabis and cocaine. In the Republic of Ireland, they can detect additional substances, and consideration is being given to something similar here.

2. Speed

Mark opened this section by reminding us that a speed limit is not a target and that we should drive to the conditions. He asked us to guess what the highest speed recorded here was. We had a range of suggestions from 110 to 130. The actual figure is 149 mph. In a 30 limit, the figure is 100 mph and, in a 20 limit, it is 49 mph.

Consider the chance of survival for a pedestrian being hit by a vehicle:

20 mph – 90% chance of survival

30 mph – 50% chance of survival

40 mph – 10% chance of survival

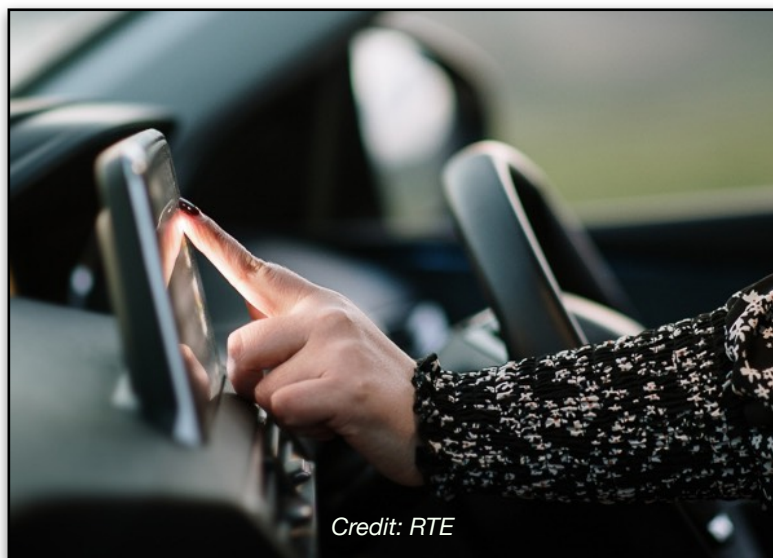
And, of course, there are penalties if you are caught speeding, which range from a speed awareness course to a fixed penalty fine and three points on your licence. For excessive speeds, or if you already have a high number of points, you may have an appearance in court and a fine of up to £1,000 (£2,500 if on a motorway), plus a possible ban or suspension of your licence.

If you get six or more penalty points within two years of passing your test, your licence will be revoked.

3. Careless driving

This carries a penalty of a fixed penalty notice, a £100 fine and three points on your licence. For more serious careless driving, where you end up in court, you are talking about a fine of up to £5,000 and between three and nine points. There is also the potential for disqualification.

Examples of careless driving include tailgating, failing to look, overtaking on the left, turning into the path of another driver, sudden braking and having your attention diverted either inside or outside the vehicle.



We had a bit of a discussion about modern technology in cars and how simple things like changing the temperature can require you to interact with a screen. Mark agreed that this was an issue and was an example of how the pace of technology is faster than the pace of changing the law.

Have you ever been emerging from a side road and had to suddenly stop, saying, “Where did that (car/bike) come from?” Mark gave us some advice in relation to this manoeuvre: look right to the far distance, the middle distance and the near distance. Do the same looking left. Repeat the left and right looks and only then move if it’s clear.

4. Seatbelts

It’s hard to believe that some people still insist on not wearing a seatbelt. Of the number of people killed in collisions, quite a percentage were not wearing a seatbelt. Being caught without a seatbelt carries a £60 fine and three points.

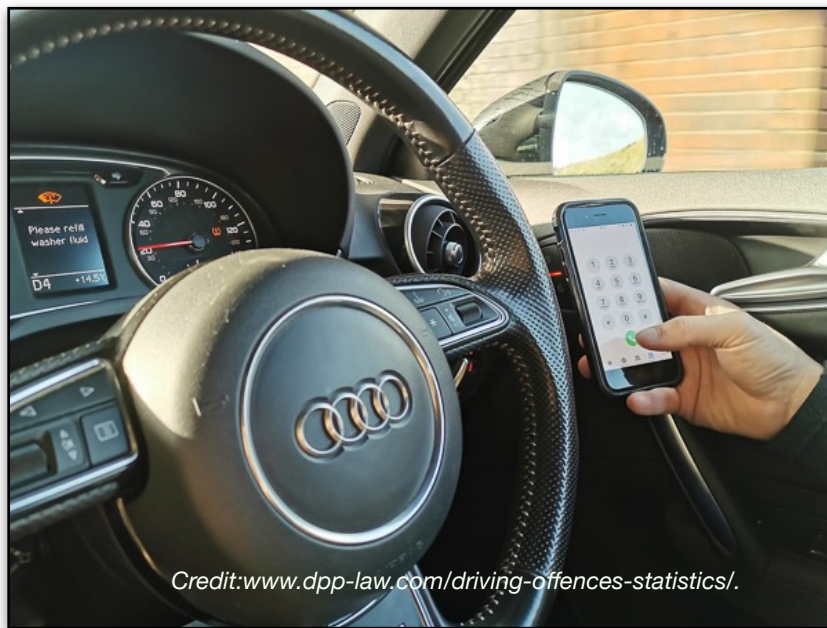
Mark showed a video where a driver not wearing a seatbelt in a collision was thrown about inside the car and ended up in the back seat.

5. Phones

You should not use your mobile phone:

- When stopped at traffic lights
- In queuing traffic
- To make or receive calls
- To send or receive pictures and text messages
- To access the internet

Hands-free phones can also be a distraction, with a risk of prosecution for not having proper control of your vehicle when using one. Also avoid touching a mobile phone in a cradle or your sat nav, as this is also a distraction.



Credit: www.dpp-law.com/driving-offences-statistics/.

Penalties are an automatic fixed penalty notice – a fine of £200 and six points on your licence. If a new driver gets six points within two years of passing their test, their licence will be revoked and they will have to resit their driving test.

Finally, Mark showed a video from a dashcam showing the lead-up to a collision. The driver, a man in his 30s, became frustrated by a car in front which was in the wrong lane and attempting to get into the correct lane. He was driving a Golf R and, shortly afterwards, he accelerated aggressively out of a junction, only to find a grandfather pushing a child’s buggy across the road and with a dog on a lead.

The video stops just immediately before the impact, resulting in a gasp around the room. The child and the dog survived, but the grandfather was killed. Subsequent interrogation of the car’s electronics indicated that it was doing 55 mph (in a 30 zone) at the point of impact.

The driver was convicted and spent 22 months in prison. The video continued with the driver describing how he has been affected since, saying that he thinks about the grandfather every night before he goes to sleep and on waking every morning. He said he felt that 22 months was not a sufficient penalty for what happened. He now works with the police, supporting them in getting the road safety message across.

We've all been in the wrong lane at some time, and we've all seen other drivers doing things that might cause annoyance. Mark's advice is: chill out, don't get frustrated and don't let the red mist come down.

Mark kept our attention throughout his presentation with the right balance between the hard facts and the videos, bringing home how it can all go very wrong, with a lighter touch and humour to provide some relief.

As advanced drivers and riders, we are all too aware of the dangers on the roads, but it is useful to be reminded of them in such stark terms. It was a brilliant night and the best-attended Group Night for some time. I am sure many of us we went home in a more sombre mood.

September bike run

On Sunday 6 September, the NDAM advanced bikers met in Ards for a 9.45am ride-off, with Ross leading the run and Neil taking on sweeper duties. Every good bike run needs someone at the front who knows where they're going and someone at the back making sure nobody has quietly defected to a coffee shop.

The plan was a little different from our usual Sunday runs, with the route finishing back close to home at Ards Airport. The route took the group up towards Ballynahinch, off at Spa, and along some of the beautiful roads around Slieve Croob before heading towards Hilltown and then up to



Spelga for a stop, a stretch of the legs, and the all-important photos. There was a slight route change along the way, but it turned out to be no bad thing, as the group finally got a clear run-up to Slieve Croob with absolutely stunning views, dry roads, and the kind of scenery that makes you forgive Northern Ireland for all the days it behaves like a damp flannel.

Spelga was class in the low cloud, giving the stop a proper atmospheric feel, before the group enjoyed a mighty run back through Castlewellan, Spa, Ballynahinch, and Ballygowan. After the tighter and twistier sections earlier in the day, the roads back towards Comber finally gave everyone the chance to get a bit of breeze through the hair and maybe, just maybe, get the bikes out of third gear, which was a touching moment for the gearboxes involved.

There was also some very useful advanced riding advice shared on the day, with Ivan encouraging riders to try riding without relying heavily on their brakes and to watch experienced riders like Don and Guy, where brake lights are rarely seen. It's a simple point, but a valuable one: good observation, planning, and throttle sense make for smoother, safer riding, while grabbing at the brakes every five seconds tends to suggest either panic or poor planning.

The run finished at Ards Airport with coffee, chat, and a small but noticeable outbreak of jealousy over Neil's food. A man can sweep a run beautifully, but ordering the best-looking food at the table is just showing off.

A few teachable moments were spotted on the roads too, with one KTM and one GSXR demonstrating the difference between riders who get home through good riding and riders who get home through good luck, and while luck is lovely, it's not generally the recommended advanced riding strategy.

A big thank you to Ross for leading a cracking run, to Neil for sweeping, and to everyone who joined in and made it such an enjoyable morning. The dry roads, clear views around Slieve Croob, atmospheric stop at Spelga, brilliant company, and handy finish close to home all came together beautifully.

As Ralph said, today was one made for the motorbike—and he wasn't wrong.

Safe riding, everyone, and may your roads be dry, your lines be smooth, your brake lights be occasional, and your lunch choices as smug as Neil's.



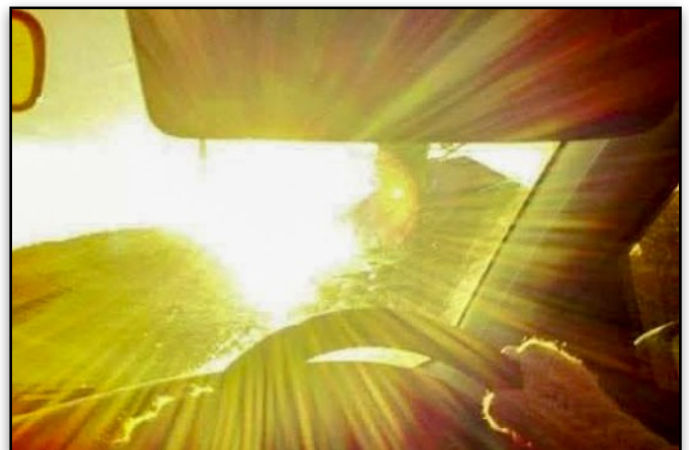
Autumn preparation

Here is some advice with autumn firmly on the way:

Low sun

Always keep a good pair of sunglasses in the car – they really will make a big difference.

- If you can't see, do the obvious thing and slow down, keeping an eye on the vehicle behind in case the following traffic can't see you against the sun.
- If the sun is behind you, it's in the eyes of drivers coming towards you – be aware that they might not see you or the road markings between you and them.
- Low sun behind can dazzle you via your mirrors, so be ready to dip the mirror and remember to check over your shoulder for vehicles in your blind spot.



- Low sun highlights scratches and grime which can hinder your view, so keep your washer bottles topped up with a good quality screen wash and change your windscreen wiper blades every year.
- Turn on your headlights before sunset and keep them on for an hour after sunrise so that it's easier for other drivers to see you in twilight.

Dirty windscreens make it even more difficult for drivers to see in the low sun we get every morning and late afternoon as winter draws closer. Your heater is often on the de-mist setting, blowing traffic fumes, suspended oil and smoke onto the inside of the screen which quickly builds up a film of grime which is a major source of glare. Regularly clean your screen inside and out with glass cleaner.

Leaves

Watch out for fallen leaves which can render the road surface like an ice rink, particularly for bikes, especially on corners and on braking areas.

Also check under your bonnet and remove leaves that might block drain holes in the area in front of the windscreen.



And finally..... some inconsiderate local parking. Could you negotiate these with a buggy or a mobility scooter? See rule 244 of the Highway Code (you do have a copy don't you?).



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