

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



February 2025





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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

February 2025

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

Vol 25.2

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

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Test passes

No test passes to report this month.

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

New Members

This month we welcome new car members Ryan Quinn and Charlie Niblock-Hamill. 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.

January Cover Picture

This was taken in Strangford - the street leading down to the ferry which is just out of sight round the corner. Congratulations to David Harcourt, Norman Shearer, James O'Brien, Ralph Magee, Don McQuillan, Michael Gould and Richard Walker.

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

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. All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated.

25 February	STAC 2 - IPSGA
4 March	STAC 3 - Core driving skills
11 March	Group night - CRASH accident management services
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.

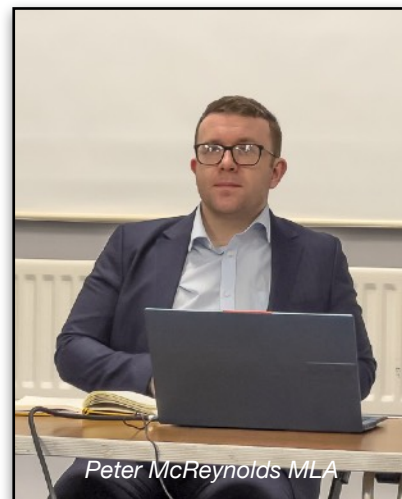
STAC - Short Term Associate Course. Associate Members should ensure that you are familiar with the relevant section of the "Associate Handbook" before each STAC night so that you can get the most benefit from the theory session as well as your observed drive.

February Group Night

Our speaker was Peter McReynolds MLA who is chair of the NI Assembly All-Party Group on Road Safety. The Group was established in October 2024 with the aims of facilitating discussion on road safety issues, to work with stakeholders to improve safety of all road users, especially those deemed as vulnerable, and to act as a forum to educate Assembly Members on road safety issues.

Its work is intended to complement the work of the Minister for Infrastructure, the Infrastructure Committee and the Executive on road safety matters. Peter is a member of the Infrastructure Committee and is therefore well placed to bring matters to the attention of that Committee. In addition he is infrastructure spokesperson for the Alliance Party and is a member of the Policing Board. In this latter role he is well positioned to establish good relations with the police on road safety issues.

On arrival David and Stephen had a chat with Peter and outlined North Down Advanced Motorists role as one of IAM RoadSmart Groups. We serve North Down and its wider environs. Given that the All Party Group was not long established Peter explained that he was in listening mode rather than giving a presentation and asked Members to raise any road safety issues they thought needed change or consideration by the All-Part Group and ultimately with the Infrastructure Committee and Minister.



Peter McReynolds MLA

There followed a very wide-ranging discussion covering issues including whether penalties should be increased, any plans to revise speed limits, education of children and the wider public. With regard to penalties Peter explained that the Justice Minister (Naomi Long MLA) was in favour of increasing penalties for driving offences as a deterrent.

In relation to R drivers, including the dangers of these drivers being restricted to 45mph on motorways, Peter explained that proposals for a graduated licensing system for new drivers was under consideration by the Department for Infrastructure and that it was likely that there would be a wide-ranging consultation on this in due course.

On the subject of education Peter referred to a hard-hitting road safety road show aimed at teenagers which is going round groups of schools. Members raised issues such as including road safety as part of the curriculum in schools, cycling proficiency and from the past the Tufty Club, all aimed at creating awareness of the dangers on the roads. With regard to educating the wider public Peter explained that the hard-hitting advertisements on TV were coming back and that with the increase of social media consideration was being given to how this medium can be used to get the message across.

Members asked if any consideration was being given to reducing speed limits in urban areas or on rural roads such as is happening in Wales and the Republic of Ireland. Peter said that he wasn't aware of anything.

Other issues raised included the danger of electric scooters on roads and pavements (the Police have difficulty catching them as they have the ability to go into places at speed where a police car can't follow), the need for doctors to inform DVA if a patient's medical condition, including medication they are on, would render them unfit to drive, and problems with road marking, road signs etc. Peter explained that the public needs to report these to DFI Roads so that remedial action can be taken (<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/travel-transport-and-roads/problems-roads-and-streets>). One member did use this facility but said that apart from being given a reference number there was no follow up action with the person reporting the problem.

Finally, Members made the point that IAM RoadSmart plays an important role in driver education and that it should be included when consultation on road safety matters is being carried out.

Throughout the discussion Peter was making notes and said that he would follow up the points made with the relevant Departments and/or Assembly Committees. The evening was a useful opening discussion between the Assembly and IAM RoadSmart and hopefully will lead to ongoing dialogue on matters of mutual interest.

Speed limits in the Republic of Ireland

If you travel to the Republic you need to be aware of the changes to speed limits already in place and of more to come later this year.

From 7 February this year the speed limit on rural local roads was reduced from 80 kph to 60 kph.

How do you know what is a rural local road? They are roads where the road number is prefixed by an "L" eg L1146. They will also show a sign which is a white circle with 5 black diagonal lines and a plate saying "Go Mall/Slow".



The further changes later this year are:

Local roads in urban areas: the limit will be reduced from 50kph to 30kph

National secondary roads: the limit will be reduced from 100kph to 80kph.

No date has been announced as to when these changes will happen.

Summary of Road categories in Ireland and their speed limits:

National Primary Roads are major routes between major urban centres and include motorways. They are numbered N1 to N50 whereas motorways have the “M” prefix. The speed limit on motorways is 120kph and on National Roads is 100kph.

National Secondary Roads are numbered N51 to N99. These roads connect larger towns which aren't served by National Primary Roads. Currently 100kph and will be reduced to 80kph.

Regional Roads connect regional towns and are prefixed with the letter “R” and have a 3 digit number and generally have a speed limit of 80kph although this may be reduced passing through towns and villages.

Local Roads in urban areas - currently 50kph and will be reduced to 30kph

Rural local roads These are often narrow roads and poor quality roads connecting farms and small rural communities. Now reduced to 60kph.

February bike run

On Saturday, 15th February, eleven members of the NDAM Bike Section took to the roads of south County Down for our monthly motorbike run. It was a day full of adventure, camaraderie, and, of course, a few challenges thrown in by the unpredictable weather and road conditions.



A Ride Through the Countryside

The weather started off a bit tricky, with greasy surfaces and some muddy hazards keeping us on our toes. However, the conditions gradually improved towards lunchtime, and the roads began to dry up. Despite the variable conditions, everyone stayed focused and enjoyed the ride.

We set off heading south towards Portaferry, and to make the journey a bit more exciting, we took the ferry across to Strangford. Big thanks to Don for having a wallet full of tickets – apparently, he's still got plenty left, even after Saturday!

The Route

After the ferry, we cruised through the scenic bends to Downpatrick, where we experienced the usual traffic hold-ups in the town. After regrouping, we stopped for brunch at our 'old favourite,' French's in Clough. A much-needed break to refuel and chat before continuing on our way.

The ride continued through Castlewellan and up the misty mountain road past Fofanny and Spelga, which led us down into Kilkeel. From there, we enjoyed a beautiful coastal ride into Newcastle, before heading back to Downpatrick. We then took the ferry back across to Strangford and rode up the peninsula, completing a fantastic loop.



Teamwork and Focus

It was a great turnout, and we were thrilled to welcome some old friends back into the fold. We are extremely grateful to Don for organising and leading the run, and a big shoutout to Ivan, our 'tail-end Charlie,' for performing his duties with style – complete with his new blue vest!

We also made a strong collective effort to implement the 'drop-off' system more effectively. Don's briefing and marking of drop-off points was a real game-changer. It helped everyone stay focused and ensured we stayed together throughout the run.

Looking Ahead to March

As we wrap up another successful bike run, we're already looking forward to March. We have several route options circulating, and we'll be confirming the final details soon. Be sure to keep an eye on the usual platforms for updates. Our next run will take place on Saturday, 15th March.

Thank you to everyone who joined the ride, and we hope to see even more of you in March for another fantastic outing.

MG Owners Club

On 27 January Group Secretary Stephen Patterson and Leslie Ashe gave a presentation for the MG Owners Club at their monthly meeting held in the Ivanhoe on the Saintfield Road in Belfast.

We opened with a quiz including a couple of light-hearted rounds alongside a round of road signs and one of Highway Code questions. It was interesting to hear the discussions about the possible answers between members illustrating how there can be a lack of knowledge even amongst experienced and enthusiastic drivers. However they were able to correct us on one answer. The exemption from MOT applies to cars at least 40 years old from when they were first registered or constructed and are no longer in production rather than our understanding of a fixed date of 1960. Goes to show that we all need to keep up to date!



The presentation outlined the work of IAM RoadSmart and the role that local Groups play in delivering advanced driver and motorcycle training. We finished with a lively question and answer session about how we operate and about different aspects of advanced driving. One of their questions was whether we could give any advice about cars travelling in convoy. Invariably they tend to get split up at road junctions or if overtaken. This isn't an issue where there are 2 people in the car and the passenger can read the route instructions but it is a problem when there is only the driver and reading route instructions while driving is a distraction with potentially serious results.

One solution is to devise a route with a number of easily identifiable way points to which drivers could devise their own route. We emphasised that travelling in convoy they need to allow sufficient space between vehicles to allow other road users to overtake, particularly if they are travelling at a speed which could cause a build-up of traffic behind.



We mentioned the availability of free taster sessions but to date we haven't had any follow-up enquiries. However, if nothing else we all learned something new about road signs or the Highway Code.

Regional Road Safety Manager



Bruce Steele has been appointed as IAM RoadSmart Road Safety Manager for Northern Ireland. Bruce is well known to us as a former Committee Member of NDAM and he joined us at our February Committee meeting for a chat about his role supporting NI Groups and developing partnerships with other stakeholders in NI with the aim of promoting safer driving and riding in NI. We wish him well as he takes up his new role and look forward to working with him.

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