

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



February 2022





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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

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<http://www.amni.org.uk/>

Vol 22.2

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

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New Members

This month we welcome to the Group car members Sandra Conn and Cathy McGimpsey together with bike members Ed Bolster, Linda Byrne and Adrian Simpson. 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

No test passes this month but good luck and safe driving and riding to any Associates approaching their test.

January cover picture

The January cover picture was High Street in Belfast looking towards Castle Junction with my back to the Albert Clock. Congratulations, in order of receipt to David Harcourt, Jim O'Brien, Norman Shearer and Ivan Greenfield. Do you know where this month's cover is? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to: secretaryndam@gmail.com

Dates for your diary

In addition to the regular STAC nights in the Boathouse for car Associates and the regular bike runs we have put together a varied programme for the Group Nights.

- 22 February - STAC session 2
- 1 March - STAC session 3
- 8 March - Group Night Talk - Air Traffic Control
- 22 March - STAC session 4
- 29 March - STAC session 5
- 5 April - STAC session 6
- 12 April - Group Night - Visit to James Black restorations
- 19 April - no meeting - Easter Tuesday
- 26 April - STAC session 7
- 3 May - STAC session 8
- 10 May - Group night talk by Mark Jarvis - Astrophotography
- 24 May - Test preparation and driving practice
- 7 June - Driving practice
- 14 June - Drive/ride for ice cream at the Rhinka, Islandmagee

STAC - Short Term Associate Course for drivers.

February Group Night

This was an opportunity for the car and bike sides to get together over tea/coffee and biscuits at The Pheasant between Lisburn and Ballynahinch. Four bikes set off from Groomsport led by Kyle who did his usual follow my leader tour of the country to get to the destination.

On the car side we had observed drives from Groomsport and also on the way back for two new Associate Members Cathy and Sandra. Talk about starting at the deep end! We had another observed drive from a different location and in addition a number of Members made their own way there giving us a total of 17 Members present for refreshments and a bit of a chat.



Many thanks to Ivan for the idea of a joint run out and to Kyle for organising the venue.

Whatever happened to tolerance on our roads? By bike Member Achim Gloger

Last month Achim highlighted the problem, this month he offers thoughts on the solution.

Part 2: The Solution

As a car driver I do ask myself, are cyclists not partially to blame for the war that has broken out on our roads? Even as a cyclist I would answer, definitely! I suspect this dichotomy is rooted in today's general lack of tolerance and consideration for others. Today is all about "me, me, me".

I am a qualified British Cycling coach and used to train young riders at my club, teaching bike handling skills on a closed circuit as well as group riding skills out on the roads of south-west London and Surrey. Riding in a group is not easy: you need to be able to ride your bike in a straight line (more difficult than you think!) and you need to be able to continue doing so when you get bumped by a neighbouring rider (that takes practice). You also need to look ahead, and further ahead than just the rider in front of you. In addition, you need to be aware of the riders behind you: you should not stop pedalling as that slows you down. Then the rider behind you might end up crossing wheels with you, leading to a crash of riders following you.

One of the London club rules is that we only go out in groups of six or less. That size group takes up about the same amount of road space as a large car and makes passing the cyclists fairly easy. The local clubs on the Ards peninsula often go out in much larger groups, sometimes with as many as 20 or more riders who, when two abreast, stretch out the length of an articulated lorry. On narrow lanes this makes it impossible for a faster vehicle to get past that slow-moving bottleneck, leading to frustration of the drivers that follow and risky overtakes. To make things worse, the ride leaders (if there ever is one?) rarely look back to observe the following traffic and if appropriate, tell the group to pull in somewhere to let a tailback pass. Tractors, caravans, and tourists are also guilty of that oversight. (Editor's note - The NI Highway Code - rule 169 - states "Do not hold up a long queue of traffic, especially if you are driving a large or slow moving vehicle. Check your mirrors frequently, and if necessary pull in where it is safe and let traffic pass. See also later article about the changes to the Highway Code in GB.)

The few times I went out with a local club I kept hearing horror stories about crashes riders had suffered while riding in a group. It turned out that new members receive no group riding skills training. After the 2012 Olympics cycling became the new golf. MAMILs (Middle-Aged Men In Lycra) are all over our roads now, on lovely shiny new bikes. Their level of expertise and understanding of the bike's capabilities is similar to that of a learner driver who has access to a Ferrari: they are mostly clueless.

Please take care when passing large groups of cyclists – they may suddenly end up in a pile on the road in front of you.

I use the coastal path to cycle from Bangor into Belfast. In its current state it is a lovely mixture of terrain: there are some smooth bits as well as many very technical and difficult-to-ride sections.





Coastal path

There are wide, paved sections and wild, rocky and narrow sections. I use my bell early and thank every pedestrian as I pass. If they don't hear me, I politely shout, "bike!" or "Sorry, can I just squeeze by?", sometimes three times or more, depending on the wind and the weather. Some pedestrians move to the side. Of those that do not, very few acknowledge that they have heard me. 99% do not, making it very difficult to determine whether someone has heard me and it is safe to pass.

Pedestrians complain that mountain bikers do fly-bys and scare them. As a regular walker on the coastal path I understand how upsetting such behaviour can be, while as a cyclist I hate being tarred with that brush. In every cohort there always will be some ignorant or egotistical people around who give the rest a bad name.

The common theme of my anecdotes is the lack of understanding of other road users' behaviour and needs. Addressing this issue is not difficult. First, improve driver and (motor)cyclist training. It doesn't matter whether it is a new or an experienced driver or rider: we all develop bad habits that occasionally need fixing. Second, look at yourself, take a deep breath and be a bit more patient.

Put yourself into the other driver/rider/walker's shoes. The roads here would be a lot more pleasant if their users were more tolerant and considerate of others, be they slower, faster, smaller, larger, more, or less agile than us.

Ask yourself, is getting to church on time on Sunday really so life-critical that you risk taking out a cyclist as you pass too closely? As a cyclist, would it really upset your training regime if you pulled in behind your mate to let a car pass you on a narrow road, if you slowed down as you pass a pedestrian with a child or a dog in tow? As a walker on the coastal path headed in the same direction as me, why not lift your hand to acknowledge that you heard my bell as I come up behind you and move a little to the side to give me more space to observe social distancing?

More tolerance and consideration would make everyone's journey more pleasant and less stressful.

Many thanks to Achim for these thought provoking articles.

How are your observation skills?

You never know what is around the next bend or over the next crest. If you are reading the road well ahead and looking over hedges and walls there are often clues as to what is happening up ahead. for example it could be a tractor emerging or in this case a cyclist.

In the first of the following pictures you can see that the road goes to the left but by looking over the hedges you can see that it also swings to the right after a short distance and you will see the yellow



jacket of a cyclist just entering the second bend. It is not the most obvious in a still picture but in a real life situation the cyclist will be moving and therefore be easier to spot. In this case there was a long straight after the second bend giving good vision of the cyclist ahead but it could equally have been a continuing series of bends.



Remember to constantly scan ahead, look for other clues, and when entering bends or approaching crests adjust your speed so that you are able to stop in the distance you can see to be clear on your own side of the road, ie the limit point.

The Highway Code

There has been much in the print media in recent weeks about the changes to the Highway Code in Great Britain to improve safety for people walking, cycling and riding horses. The changes include a hierarchy of road users, specific advice about priority for pedestrians crossing at road junctions, walking, riding or cycling in shared spaces, positioning on the road when cycling, together with a number of other changes to the rules for cyclists.

As reported last month, in Northern Ireland the Department for Infrastructure will consider the policy and legislative changes implemented for Great Britain and the implications for road safety here as part of the development of its new Road Safety Strategy.

If you are intending to travel to GB you need to be aware of the changes - these are summarised in the following link: [GB Highway Code changes](#).

And finally, a few more motoring memories that our kids laugh at.....

- Using a self service fuel station for the first time
- Setting the tappets (valve clearances)
- Adjusting the mixture setting of the carburettor
- Adjusting the brakes every 5000 miles (drum brakes before self-adjusting drums)
- Bench front seats
- No seatbelts
- Carrying a comprehensive tool kit “just in case”
- Carrying a tin of WD40 to sort out damp/ condensation in the ignition system (especially in a mini but other makes were susceptible to this as well).

And finally, finally while we have been on the subject of cyclists, here is a picture from a more carefree bygone age:



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