

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



January 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

January 2022

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New Members

This month we welcome to the Group car members Ciara Bryans and Andrew Shaw together with bike member Glenn Hamilton. 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

Congratulations to motorcycle member

Tom Phillips

who achieved a F1RST pass

December 2021 cover picture

The December cover was of the Belfast bikes at Donegall Quay close to the Lagan Weir and "the big fish". Congratulations in order of receipt to Ralph Magee, Norman Sherare, Bill Moore, James O'Brien, David Harcourt, Ivan McStea (Belfast Group), Angela Bell 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.

- 1 February - STAC session 1
- 8 February - Group Night - Drive/ride to The Pheasant near Hillsborough for a social get-together and light refreshments (opportunity for an observed motorway drive/ride for associates)
- 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.

Peggy Moore

We are sorry to mark the passing of car Member Bill Moore's wife Peggy who was in her 101st year. Our sincere condolences to Bill and to his family and friends. The Group was represented at the funeral service.

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

A tale of my experiences as a pedestrian, cyclist, motorcyclist and car driver on our roads: nobody is perfect but we could make each other's lives easier with a bit of consideration...

Part 1: the Problem

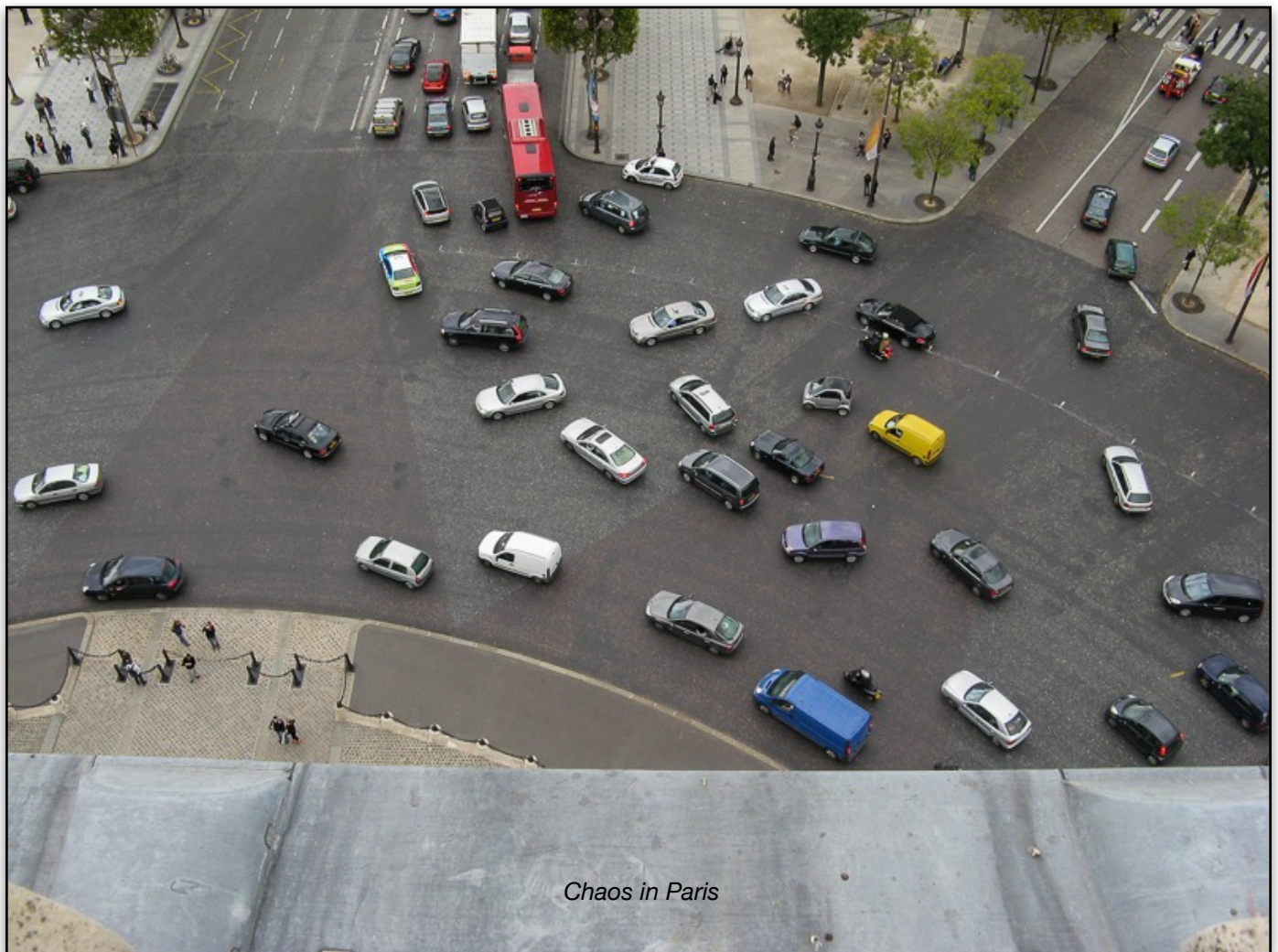
As a preface: I was born in Germany, moved to the United States when I was 15, spent a year in France as a university student, moved to London in 1986 and to Northern Ireland in 2018. That exposed me to a lot of different cultures and driving styles. German driver training is second to none. You can fail your test if you block traffic behind you because you did not properly pull into a turning lane, thereby blocking following traffic.

The US is the opposite. I got my driving license on my 16th birthday. One of the multiple-choice questions on the theory test was, "why is it so dangerous to drive at night? The answers provided were

- A) In the dark visibility is reduced.
- B) Wild animals might present a hazard as they cross the road.
- C) Because there are lots of drunk drivers on the road.

The correct answer is C!

In France - and in Italy - traffic is a bit of a free-for-all, bordering on organised chaos. Yet somehow it works because people expect the unexpected.



When I moved to the UK I discovered that driving instructors appeared more concerned with teaching how to hold a steering wheel correctly (shuffle the wheel through your hands as you turn it) (*Editor's note: push/pull steering is no longer a mandatory part of the advanced driving test*) and how to reverse around corners (technically turning into a road on the wrong side – fortunately eliminated from the driving test in 2017) than teaching how to drive smoothly with consideration for others.

Coming to Northern Ireland and encountering the traffic here for the first time was a shock to my system: as a London blow-in I thought I was moving to a kinder, gentler environment. Was I wrong! Let me elaborate.

As an active cyclist (4,000 miles/year) I appreciated the reminder in the February edition of our magazine to give cyclists plenty of space. Based on my personal experience, I would argue that riding a bicycle around County Down is more dangerous than commuting into Central London by bike during rush hour. Yes, you read that correctly: over the past fifteen months I have reported three drivers to the police for close passes. I never reported someone for endangering my life in 15 years of commuting by bike and motorcycle in London.

Because driving standards here are so bad compared to the mainland I started to ride with front and rear cameras on the bike. I am uncertain whether it is the driver training here - or the lack thereof - that makes drivers think it is ok to do a fly-by when passing a cyclist on the road.

The poor state of the local roads means that on occasion I will have to use all of my lane to avoid pot holes, damaged bits of tarmac, glass or other debris (bricks, discarded McDonald's bags). If someone passes closer than the 1.5m stipulated in the highway code that could result in a direct hit. Note that I wrote "direct hit", not "accident". Passing a cyclist so closely that if he/she needs to

circumnavigate around a pothole, you end up propelling that cyclist into a ditch is not an accident. Sometimes I wonder whether this type of behaviour is not deliberate: “that cyclist is holding me up, he



should be paying road tax, so I'll teach him...!" I have encountered this attitude with cars, vans, lorries, and even motorcycles. As an advanced motorcyclist, I really wish I could give those two-wheeled idiots a piece of my mind! There is NO excuse for a close pass on a motorcycle.

As an aside, it is not “road tax”, it is Vehicle Excise Duty that drivers are paying: it is our chosen mode of transport that the Government taxes. Bicycles, being a green mode of transport, are tax-free.

The first time I filed a complaint and uploaded video evidence on to the [PSNI website](#) was after a driver passed me as I was coming out of Donaghadee and about 15 meters away from executing a right turn into Ballyvester Road. To my amazement an officer contacted me within 10 minutes to follow up. An hour later an officer from the Newtownards Station arrived at my house to take a statement. The officer spoke to the driver, took his statement and asked me whether I wanted to press charges. In the end I decided not to as the elderly gentleman seemed genuinely sorry. In hindsight, however, I would press charges: now I am just fed up with the constant harassment from drivers.

The PSNI were grateful for my video evidence and were very happy to investigate. In fact, they told me they wished more cyclists did the same and asked me to contact a local club about this.

The second close pass - by a van at 60mph (he gave me about 50cm of space on a windy day) on the A2 outside of Groomsport - resulted in a careless driving charge and three points for the driver. I still maintain it should have been a dangerous driving charge, but apparently the CPS uses that only if someone gets injured or killed. When I get hit from behind by a Transit at 60mph I won't just be injured...



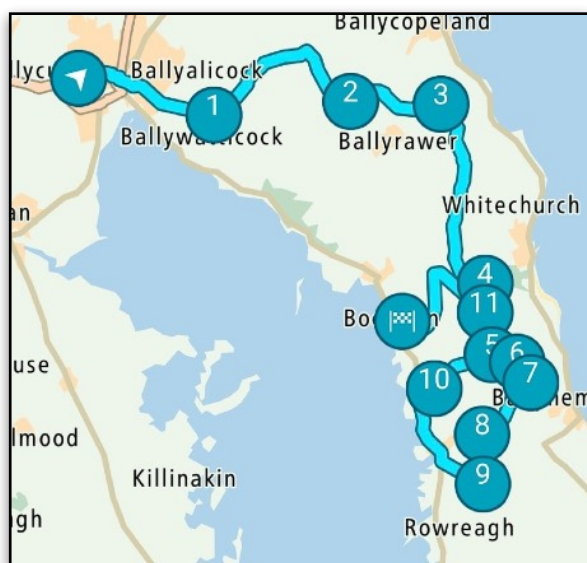
The third incident was potentially the most serious one: an 88 year old driver passed us on our tandem 20 meters before a turn-off at the Ballyferris Holiday Park outside Ballywalter. We (both!) had signalled to turn right into Ganaway Road and I had taken the primary position, virtually straddling the lane divider, as I could hear traffic behind me. Fortunately I did a lifesaver before turning right and saw that the driver of a red Yaris was about to overtake us as we prepared to lean into the turn.

Again I filed an incident report and uploaded the video evidence from both cameras. During the ensuing police interview the driver stated, "yes, I had seen both riders signalling but I didn't know what they were going to do so I passed them." Words failed me when I heard that from the investigating police officer. Thank God my advanced training had drilled the lifesaver into my subconscious. It took a near miss and two potential fatalities to make that driver realise that he no longer is fit to drive. The incident resulted in the driver's license being taken away. I fully understand the impact the lack of a driving license has on one's personal mobility, but what price is two people's life?

Part 2: Achim's view of the solution is next month.

Bike run Saturday 15 January Simon Beckett

Great turn out on a wet and miserable day. We had the mystery tour from McDonald's in Ards to Harrisons in Greyabbey.



11 bikes and 1 pillion braved the roads, still don't know how to have gotten so lost that what should have been a 20 minute run down the peninsula ended up being 90 minutes. We had a mixture of roads, single track with gravel, grass, mud and one of them I'm not sure was actually a road (although it did have a road sign at the end).



Thankfully everyone remained the right way up, even Philip on the Harley survived the off road stint. No doubt there will be an afternoon of cleaning now (or just put it in the garage and forget about the mud for a few days). Always great to get to the destination and have everyone laughing about what they've just done on their bikes.

Harrison's did not disappoint as usual, a big thanks to Clark for sorting us some seating at short notice (the third Saturday of the month came up quicker than we expected).



Until the next one, keep safe on the roads. Thanks to Simon and Jo-Anne Crooks for the pictures.

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

- Using the choke when starting from cold
- Greasing steering and suspension joints every 5000 miles
- Using the air pressure of the spare wheel to pressurise the windscreen washer bottle (VW Beetle)
- Depending on the car the dip-switch on the floor beside the clutch pedal, or the windscreen washer pump on the floor beside the clutch pedal
- Sticking on a heated rear screen
- Fitting a door mirror to the front quarter-light frame
- 3 gallons of petrol for £1 (6 shillings and 8 pence a gallon)

And there are some more to come!

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