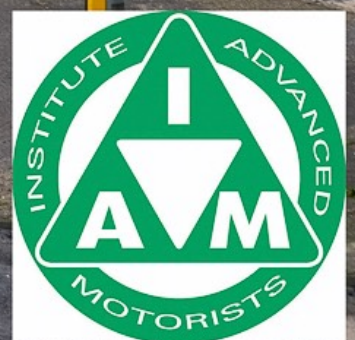


# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



March 2017





Official Provider

## 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 2017

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

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### Advanced Tests

Congratulations this month go to car member

**Stephen Bryars**

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

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### Cover picture

The February cover picture was the Groomsport to Donaghadee Road at Orlock looking towards Donaghadee. Congratulations to Angela Bell, Annie McFarland, Gareth Hughes, John Barry and Guy Thomson for correctly identifying it.

Can you identify the location of this month's cover? No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the Road Observer.

## Dates for your diary

28 March - STAC 4

4 April - STAC 5

**11 April - Group Night - Cinema evening - details in the covering email**

**18 April - Easter Tuesday - No meeting**

2 May - STAC 6

**9 May - Group Night - Table-top rally**

23 May - STAC 7

30 May - STAC 8

6 June - Additional driving practice

**13 June Group Night - TBA**

STAC - Short Term Associate Course. Associate Members should ensure that are familiar with either “How to be a better driver” or the new “Associate Handbook” before each STAC night so that you can get the most benefit from the theory session as well as your observed drive.

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### March Group Night - Inspector Rosie Leech

Our speaker on the March Group night was Inspector Rosie Leech of the PSNI (Road Policing) who is involved in road policing policy. She opened her talk by saying that she was doing a presentation the next day to the Freight Transport Association and would use her slides as the basis of her talk to us. Her subjects included mobile phone use, network congestion and drink driving.



*Angela Bell, Inspector Rosie Leech, Gareth Hughes*

She reminded us about the law relating to mobile phone use and that using a device hand-held in an interactive communication function was illegal. In Northern Ireland a fixed penalty notice for this is a £60 fine and 3 penalty points. However, the Police have discretion to have a case tried in court where the maximum penalties are disqualification and a fine of £1000. And if you are a vocational driver i.e. you are driving as part of your job be that as a delivery driver or a sales rep etc the maximum penalty is 3 penalty points and a maximum fine of £2500.

This applies to the use of all hand-held mobile phones and similar hand-held electronic devices that permit two-way communication, whether the medium is speech, text, email or other forms of data. It does not apply to cradle mounted hands-free kits, where the telephone remains in the cradle during use. However, bear in mind that you can still be prosecuted if the Police think you have been distracted by the use of a cradle mounted phone or sat-nav. And remember, all of this applies equally to a qualified driver who is supervising a learner.



An exception is to use a mobile phone to call 999 or 112 in the case of a genuine emergency and where it is impracticable to stop driving to make the call.

She also reminded members of the recent change to the law on the mainland following the highly publicised deaths of a family caused by a lorry driver using a mobile phone. The penalties are now 6 penalty points and a £200 fine. In Northern Ireland the Department for infrastructure is monitoring the changes made in Britain to see what can be learned!

Number of detections for mobile phone related offences (per Freedom of Information request to PSNI).

2011/12	9561
2012/13	8420
2013/14	7849
2014/15	7193
2015/16	6550

Despite these convictions the message still hasn't got through to many people. On a daily basis we all see mobile phones being used by drivers. The Police are doing what they can with reduced resources and manpower.

### **Road network congestion.**

At the best of times certain roads are congested, especially during the peak travel times, but when there is an incident such as a break-down or a collision then congestion becomes a major issue. Anyone who regularly travels on the A2 Bangor to Belfast Road, the Westlink or indeed who negotiates any of the main arterial routes into Belfast will know all about this.

Many road users complain about unnecessary delays in these circumstances. For those of us who have heard Damian McColl of the Forensic Service talk about the work they do in the case of serious accidents, especially those where there is a fatality, will appreciate the need to gather evidence to establish the cause of the incident and also the fact that there is only one chance to close the road to do this. Furthermore in less serious incidents like a breakdown or a lorry which has shed its load the road has to be cleared and with a large build-up of traffic it can be difficult for recovery vehicles to get through.



So what is being done to ease the situation. New protocols have been established between the Police and the Traffic Information and Control Centre to establish alternative routes which can be put into operation reasonably quickly when an incident causes severe disruption to the traffic. This includes nominating a senior police officer to take overall command. These arrangements are being extended to cover all the main routes in Northern Ireland but as many know to their cost the system has had its teething problems. A recent fatal accident on the A2 at Ballyrobert resulted in Belfast bound traffic being diverted up the Craigantlet Road resulting in a lorry getting stuck under the bridge (again!) creating even more congestion.



This is all work in progress and the Police are currently reviewing their road traffic collision policy including liaising with the Coroner about the collection of evidence in cases where there is a fatality. Around 30% of incidents involve vocational drivers and business owners and drivers are being encouraged to consider vehicle maintenance, insecure loads, speeding and for lorries the use of commercial sat navs to help avoid lorries getting stuck on narrow roads or under low bridges. For the rest of us - patience is required.

### **Drink driving**

New lower drink driving limits have been introduced. The current limit is 35 microgrammes of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath which is being reduced to 22 and in the case of vocational drivers whilst at work the limit will be 9 microgrammes. The date of operation of the new limits has been delayed due to the Home Office testing of the equipment but it is expected to apply later this year or early in 2018.

In addition the Police have new powers to establish random breath tests. These were introduced in time for the Christmas 2016 drink driving campaign. These new powers do not require the Police to have a suspicion that a driver may be over the limit. Simply, a Police Inspector can give authority for a random test to be set up and this establishes a new expectation amongst the public that they can be tested at any time.

Gareth thanked Rosie for her informative presentation and hoped that the question and answer session at the end was less of an ordeal than being questioned by Stephen Nolan.



## Vulnerable Road Users

We are all made up of different shapes and sizes, from old to young and within our unique make-up we each have a different set of problems and vulnerabilities. Below is advice on sharing the road with vulnerable road users, from IAM RoadSmart's head of driving and riding standards Richard Gladman.

- Treat pedestrians in the way you would want to be treated. We all have to walk to get to various destinations. It is important give people time and space they need to use the road, especially those with who have restricted mobility. Pay special attention in the rain – you may just spot someone so keen to get out of the rain they may not see you before crossing the road in front of you



•Cyclists need space too. They share our roads and are vulnerable to other traffic. When driving ensure you have checked to see it's safe before changing speed or direction. You may be in a hurry but be patient; cyclists are easily affected by the elements and could wobble in instances of windy weather. Before you overtake them, make sure you have given them enough room as they could adjust their road positioning unexpectedly for a pothole or drain. A few seconds delay is better than a lifetime of regret.

- Don't scare animals. Animals such as cows and sheep need to be driven past carefully. Horses are normally in rural areas and are accompanied by a rider. They could be nervous of traffic; however police horses can be spotted working in any area. Turn the radio down and keep the engine revs low, be patient and take your time when passing a horse. Keep your car well away from them and proceed slowly
- Mobility scooters are becoming more common. This road user may have restricted movement, vision or hearing. Give this road user plenty of space and time, look for any clues which might help you work out where they are heading
- Look out for motorcyclists. They can be hard to see especially in blind spots created by pillars or when looking into the sun. You may find them filtering in traffic so before you change position - Think Bike!



Richard said: "Drivers need to remember they are inside at least one tonne of highly engineered metal box fitted with all the latest safety features. Cyclists and pedestrians have no airbags, crumple zones or seatbelts to protect them. Always give more vulnerable road users that extra little bit of space and time so you can react. The roads will be a much nicer place if we share nicely."

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## Geneva Motor Show

Our roving reporters Colin Hay and William McAteer made their annual pilgrimage to the Geneva Motor Show earlier this month. While remaining tight-lipped about what they ordered (!), Colin supplied some pictures of the exotic machinery which caught their attention. See pictures on the next page. Anyone interested in a Group visit in 2018?

What takes your fancy?



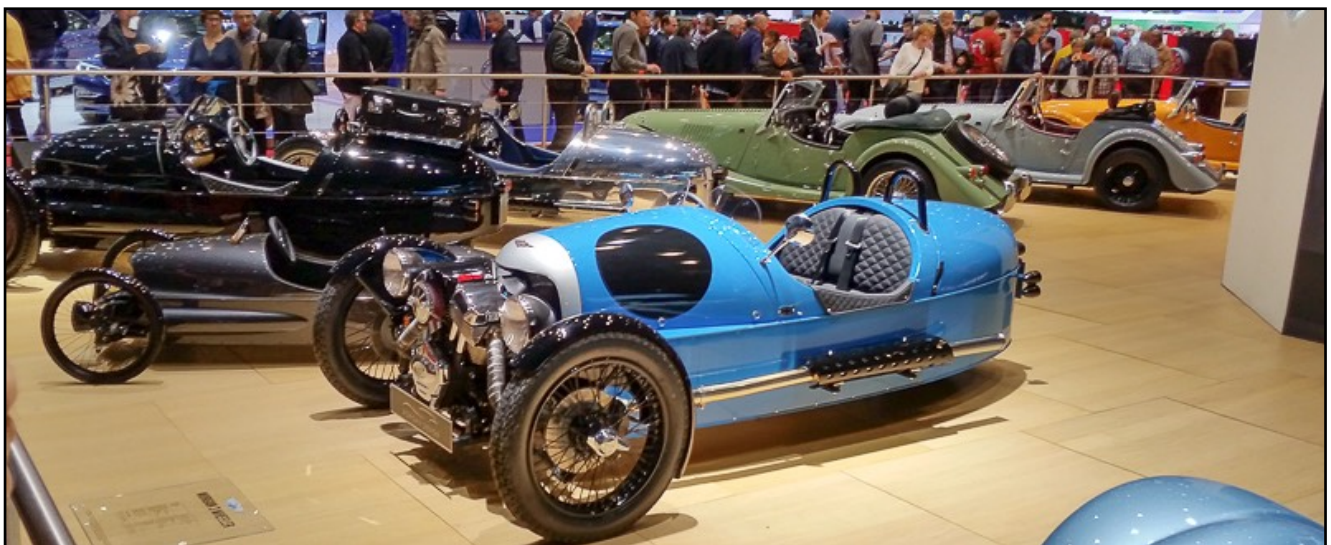
*Bentley convertible*



*Renault Trezor*



*Bugatti*



*Morgan eccentricity*



*You could always build your own!*

### **March Bike run**

This was organised and led by Simon Beckett. From the meeting point at McDonalds in Newtownards 10 bikers travelled to Strangford, across in the ferry and round the lower part of the Ards Peninsula finishing up in Harrison's near Greyabbey for brunch. Inclement weather and mud on some roads meant a bit of bike cleaning afterwards.

**And finally.....**



If you have any pictures of poor parking, interesting vehicles etc please send me a copy for the Road Observer.

**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**