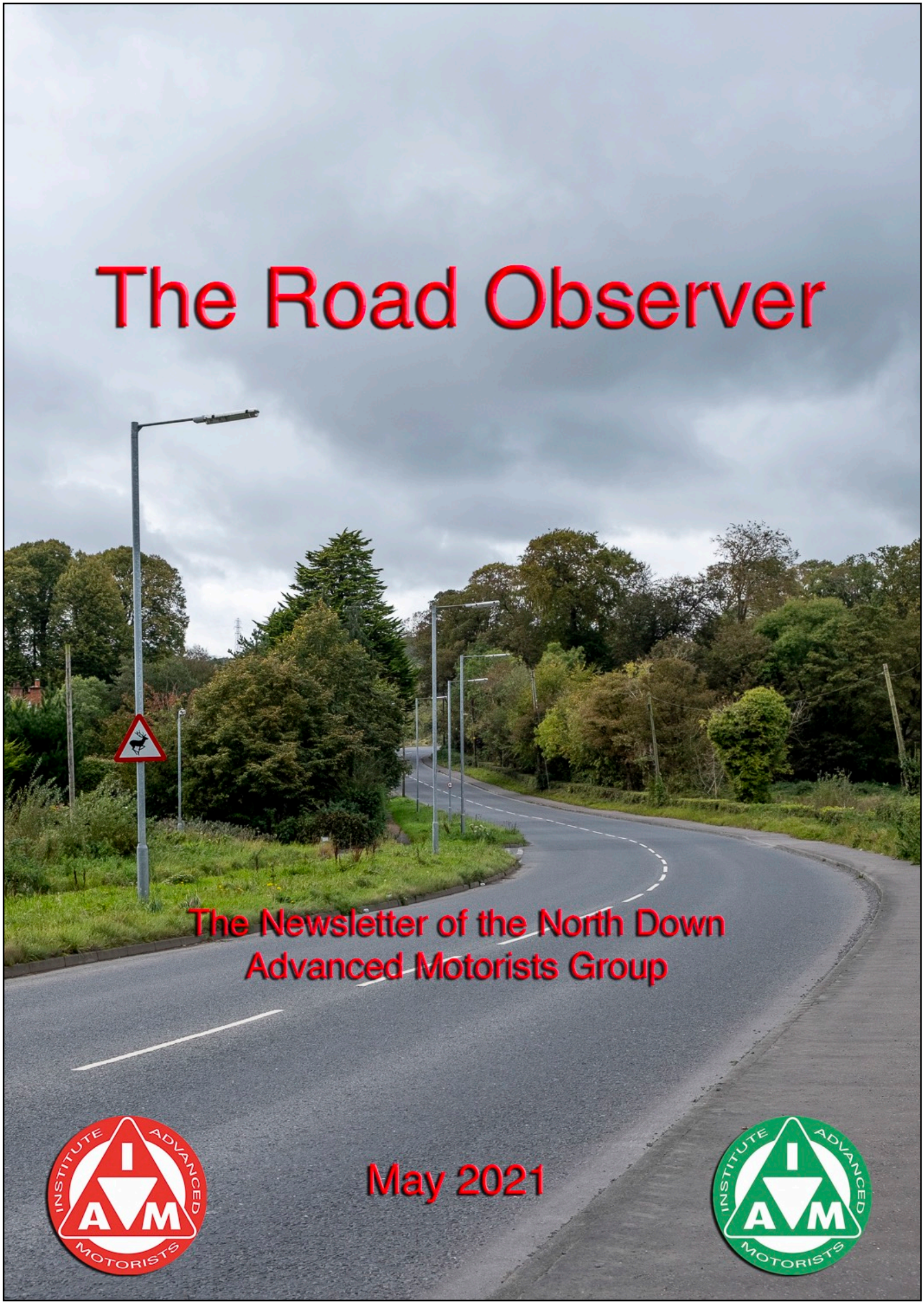
The Road Observer



The Newsletter of the North Down Advanced Motorists Group

May 2021

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down Advanced Motorists Group (Group 8199)

Helping to Improve the Standard of Driving and Riding on the Roads in Northern Ireland and the advancement of road safety

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https://www.facebook.com/NorthDownGroupIAM

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Test passes

With the ongoing restrictions due to Covid-19 we have no test passes to report.

April Cover Picture

The April cover picture was Regent Street in Newtownards looking towards the town hall. It was a really easy one as I have not been out and about much to get anything to challenge you due to the Covid restrictions.

Congratulations (in order of receipt) to Norman Shearer, Ivan Greenfield, Alan McCartney, Annie McFarland, Ivan McStea (Belfast Group).

This month's cover is also local. The hazard warning sign might help (or maybe not!). Do you know where it 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

Covid-19 Update

At it's meeting last week the NI Executive relaxed a number of the restrictions we have been living and working under. We had hoped that this would allow us to get back to normal activities, or at least as close to normal as the restrictions allow.

However, the latest advice from IAM RoadSmart is

- The NI gov website has been changed today (25 May) to reflect the fact that the 'stay local' advice no longer applies.
- Motorcycle groups can run observer peer sessions but no associate training can take place. From 7 June Associate observed runs can take place.
- Car groups cannot yet start as advice is not to car share and where that does occur with two occupants, the passenger should sit in the rear left seat which is not ideal for observing.
- Next review is 10th June, hopefully we will get further with that one and can review our guidance to groups then.

Dates for your diary

As things stand, apart from 1 June we cannot give firm commitments for any of what would be our normal dates in June. While we have been given the go-ahead to use the Boathouse again, at present we are not permitted to car share which rules out car observing.

1 June - **For Car Observers and trainee car Observers only** - Boathouse 7.30pm
8 June - TBA
22 June - TBA
29 June - TBA

After 10 June we may get further relaxations by the NI Executive and IAM RoadSmart and we will keep members advised by email about anything else we can arrange for the month of June.

Myrtle Brown

It is with regret that we let you know that Myrtle Brown who was a former car member has passed away. Our sincere condolences to her family and friends.

May Group Night

We are aware that the car and bike sides of the Group rarely get the opportunity to get together and we had a suggestion that we might arrange an outing involving bikes and cars using the bike "drop-off" system. It was thought that this could be used on a drive/ride out with car Associates driving and having an observed run on the way back. The May Group Night was an introduction to how the system operates and featured videos by Ivan Greenfield and Kyle Thomson and several bikes demonstrating the system - screen shots below.

Basically the system operates by having a leader who determines the route and a sweeper at the back. These two do not change their positions in the group. At each junction the second bike in the group stops to provide an indication of the route and after all the bikes have successfully negotiated the junction that rider sets off ahead of the sweeper. All the riders (apart from the leader and sweeper) have now moved up one place in the group. At the next junction the rider who is now second performs the same function. As progress is made along the route each rider in turn will act as a junction marker at subsequent junctions.

After several junctions (and depending on the size of the group) the rider who first marked a junction will be back up to be second rider again, will mark the next junction and so the arrangement progresses. A cardinal rule is that the bikes have to hold back to the speed of the slowest rider and do not overtake each other.

For the joint bike and car arrangement it was envisaged that only the bikes would do the junction markings as there would be insufficient space at the side of the road for cars to do this. A potential

issue is that after each junction the bikes would all have to move up the group which would involve a number of overtakes of the cars involved. Depending on the nature of the roads and the volume of oncoming traffic this could put pressure on the bikes to do overtakes in order to continue the successful operation of the system.

It was agreed that the only way to see if it would work would be to have a trial run. This was arranged with 5 bikes and 2 cars staying local around a number of roads on the Ards Peninsula. David Harcourt and I were the car guinea pigs. It was a fine night with dry roads and we had a drive

which lasted about 45 minutes. We were both conscious that the bikes would have to overtake us regularly so that there would be a marker at each junction and as far as possible we both tried to facilitate this by keeping to the left when it was clear that a bike needed to do an overtake. From the point of view of us as drivers the system worked and nobody got lost or left behind. In a socially distanced discussion afterwards in the carpark the bikes did feel some pressure to do overtakes (and there were only 2 cars involved).

David and I both enjoyed the experience. It was a challenging route and a number of lessons were learned which will be taken into account if we explore this again at a later date.

Bike portraits by Ian Crawford

In response to my request for bike portraits Ian Crawford contributed a couple of pictures which illustrate an interesting condition rather than an interesting place (although I would say that a bike tour of Mexico would be to an interesting trip and place.)

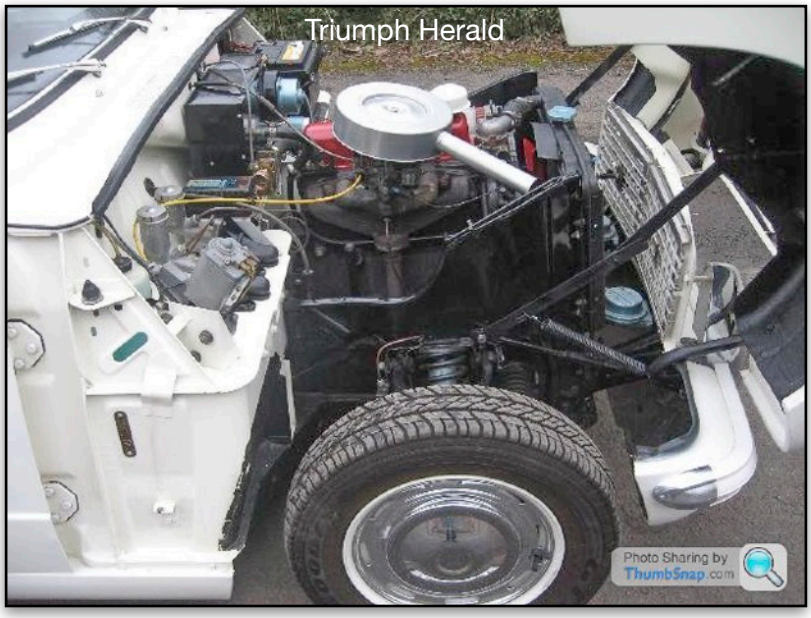
I was touring Mexico 10 years ago on a Kawasaki KLR650 when I had a rear blowout near Tampico. It was inner tubes with the type of tyres I was using so I had to get the rear wheel off and the rear tyre too in order to replace the inner. Fortunately I was only a short distance from a roadside cantina that was still in the process of construction (and looked like it had been that way for quite a while). I used construction blocks to make up the equivalent of a rear axle stand. I was carrying tyre irons and a complete socket set with torque bar so I was able to do all that was necessary to remove the wheel and tyre, replace the inner tube (I was carrying a spare and as you can see the one that blew out was in no state to be repaired), replace the tyre and then the wheel and get back on the road. All told about 2.5 hours, though that did include some welcome refreshments from the cantina and a bit of chat with the locals.

How cars and car ownership has changed by Ivan Greenfield

I have been working at cars from an early age, not long out of primary school in fact. (Flying control line model aircraft was a Saturday afternoon pastime using 2 stroke diesel or petrol engines.

Anything to do with engines was a must). The model 2 strokes were a doddle to strip down. At most, 4 screws held the back cover (the equivalent to a crankcase side), 4 screws held the cylinder head and a flange to drive the propeller also kept the crankshaft in place. Many a conrod was replaced on my 1.5cc diesel, the peek RPM of 19,000 was state of the art I guess. Adjusting the compression was equivalent to changing the ignition timing, increase the compression and you were advancing the ignition. Combine that with adjusting the fuel and it was just a case of a little over compression and a touch rich mixture and the motor ran a treat when the model was flying through the air at 80 or 90 miles per hour and the prop was no longer stalled. In the model car world, 3.5cc model "glow plug" engines were being tested to 45,000 RPM on the bench in the 80s because that was the best that could be expected of crankshaft ball races. I digress, back to cars.

I remember doing my test in a Triumph Herald. Brakes were drums all round, unless you had some fancy motor and since about one household in ten had a car in the early 60s very few were in the fancy bracket. Some were only taxed and insured for the summer period, April to September.



DIY was common place, with the owners handbook giving the owner valve clearances and ignition timing. Today the owners handbook tells you not to drink the battery acid! A service consisted of an oil and filter change, a set of spark plugs, contact set, check and set the valve clearances, new air filter and a check if necessary to reset the timing and carburation. Check the brake shoes and their adjustment, a general visual check underneath to see that all was well and free of the dreaded metal worm. Check the lights and hey presto the job was finished. Washing the car was down to the owner, I was only concerned with the mechanics.

Editor's note: Remember when disc brakes were introduced? The must have accessory was a sticker on the back warning following vehicles that disc brakes were fitted!

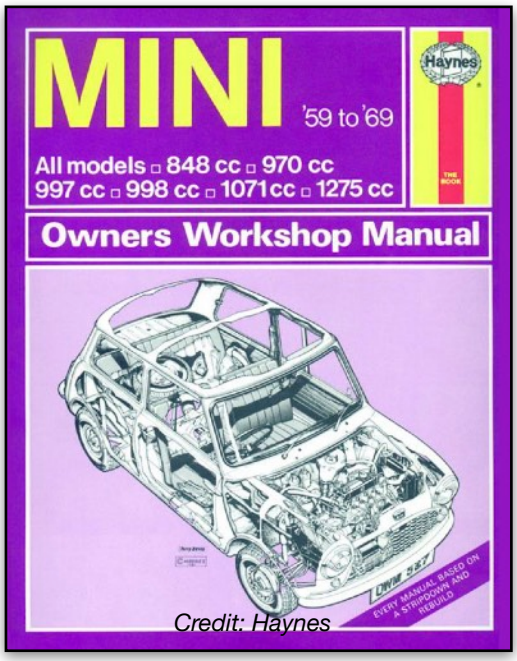
The best modification was to fit sealed beam headlight units in place of the standard bulbs. This let you see maybe 50 yards, about 20 yards more than before.

Editor's note: In the 70s I fitted Cibié headlight units (as a replacement to sealed beams) to a Ford Escort which absolutely transformed the lights. In later cars fitting 100w (not road legal!) halogen bulbs were good but didn't come close to the light from the Cibiés.

Brakes and lights have come a long way since the very early sixties. I was able to purchase the parts at trade prices and family and friends were delighted, and as I gave them the old replaced parts they knew that everything had been done.

I could change a clutch in a couple of hours for less than £30. Clutch plate, clutch cover and thrust bearing, all brand new and supplied by the recognised and considered reputable manufactures. Rear crankshaft oil seals were often leaking and were a gift to replace.

Editor's note: A Haynes manual was a must for many car DIY enthusiasts:



Credit: Haynes

A far cry from today's cars where a clutch could cost upwards of £250 to replace plus a labour charge, though they do last considerably longer. Spark plugs can go for over 40,000 miles before a problem might be encountered while 10,000 or 12,000 miles might have been the life span before, though it would generally be recommended that you change them well before these mileages. Contact sets do not exist on the modern car and few cars have drum brakes unless for the parking brake and even then they are generally problematic. The modern car is put together with a view to being easier to assemble but with little or no thoughts about future maintenance.

In the very early seventies a screen heater was all the rage and a kit from Smiths that stuck something akin to a farm gate on to the rear screen was a must have. A cable was run under the carpet to a switch fitted on the dash panel with an adjoining warning light; all part of the kit; and you were sporting the latest must have for the discerning motorist.

Cars and car service parts have changed dramatically. None more so than modern lubricants. A vehicle with 100,000 miles on the clock would have been considered to be at the end of its days though to be fair the dreaded rust bug would probably done enough to end a cars usable life by then anyway. Modern synthetic and semi synthetic engine and transmission oils have transformed the life span of engines and transmissions.

And finally… spotted by William McAteer outside a chippy:

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