

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



May 2024





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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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Test Passes

Congratulations this month to motorcycle Member

Garvin Rice

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

April Cover Picture

This was Main Street in Royal Hillsborough looking down the hill from the entrance to Hillsborough Castle. Congratulations this month (in order of receipt) to James O'Brien, David McFall, Ernie Foster and Norman Shearer.

Do you know where this month's picture was taken? It's a road many of you will have travelled. No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and of course, you will get a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to:

leslie.ashe.LA@gmail.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 plan a varied programme for the Group Nights. All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated

- 4 June Additional driving practice
11 June Visit to the Ulster Aviation Society

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.

May Group Night

Our guest speaker at the Boathouse on 14th May was William McAleese, owner of Rider Airbags Ltd, service agent for Helite in Ireland. His talk was primarily for the motorcyclists, but he has products for equestrian, pedal cyclists, and the elderly, of which more later. William is a keen motorcyclist, and passed his advanced bike test in 2003, followed by car in 2009. He ran his own track day company, offering rental of air bags and safety equipment in addition to sales. The track day business was forced to close by noise complaints, but the sales side was well established, with Helite his brand of choice.

Unlike car airbags which are now standard by legislation, airbag technology for motorcyclists is optional and at the choice of the rider.

Helite was founded in 2002 by Gérard Thevenot, an inventor and microlight aircraft enthusiast. Having seen friends and colleagues suffer injury on hard landings, he made an inflatable vest and rapidly put it into production to meet demand. The



vest consists of a polyurethane bladder, a CO₂ canister, and a trigger mechanism, which can be mechanical or electronic. The mechanical system has been on the market for 20 years, and is operated by a lanyard. It is important to fix the lanyard to the bike frame below the rider, so it is triggered as the rider and bike part company. Attachment to the handlebars, for example, would not trigger in a collision until the rider is well past the handlebars. It's a simple, reliable mechanism, and lest you worry about triggering it accidentally by failing to detach when refuelling, it requires a 30kg tug to activate. The electronic version doesn't require tethering to the bike. The electronic control unit measures acceleration and shock, and it is programmed to recognise normal operating parameters, and respond accordingly. The unit has road and track profiles, the latter requiring more extreme parameter changes to trigger the vest. Whether mechanical or electronic, the vest inflates within 0.09s to cushion the rider's impact.

Don't compromise on safety when it comes to riding

www.riderairbags.com

HELITE
airbag technology expert

However, the electronic version should be turned off when not in use. It is designed to be inactive below 8mph so it won't trigger if you drop it while getting your bike gear on. However, as one of our members discovered, if you've hung it on the back of a chair in the Stena Lounge, the whole boat is moving faster than 8mph, so it will do exactly what it's designed to do if it falls.

The vest has tubes either side of the spine, and heels at the hips to protect the coccyx, and pockets at the front to protect the ribs. The collar round the neck and shoulders inflates to brace the helmet and limit neck injury. William gave us a demonstration, and although he pre-warned our guinea-pig / volunteer that he was about to receive the bear hug of his life, the look of surprise when it triggered suggested that was an understatement. The vest inflates, violently, as the rider leaves the bike, and if he is folded up and tumbling, the ribs and tubes straighten the spine while the collar lifts the helmet and straightens the neck. It begins to bleed pressure after 10s, and deflates fully over 10 minutes, though can be released by removing the canister. Reset of either version takes about 5 minutes, though does require carrying a spare canister.



The Helite vest comes with a 2 year warranty, which can be extended by having it serviced. William's company is the official service agent for Ireland, which benefits ROI customers who would otherwise have to send their vests to GB and pay duty both directions. The most popular vest, as demonstrated, is called the Turtle – it's a protective shell on your back. There is also a Super Turtle, incorporating a chest plate, and the same protection is also built into a range of jackets, including a very stylish leather version. It can be built into custom race leathers, and there is a rucksack version, very popular with city commuters. There is a belt available to protect the elderly and infirm from hip fractures, and when he was at the Helite factory they were working on a pedestrian airbag for the front of trams. William urged that this product offers best protection only if properly fitted. It's not a product to buy sight unseen, and he can offer you a fitting service so it sits properly over your regular bike wear.

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William was off to Balmoral Show the following day to man the stand and promote the equestrian products. He offered a case study, where a man at the Dublin Equestrian Show came to the stand a couple of years after buying a vest for his teenage daughter to relate his experience. The daughter had a full rotational fall, where the horse fell and rolled over her. Paramedics strapped her to a back board and dashed to hospital, where she had multiple scans to determine the extent of breakages and crush injuries, but found absolutely nothing. What would have been a severely debilitating, possibly fatal accident was mitigated to mild bruising. Likewise, he had a motorcyclist at a track event return a

“well-worn” vest for service. The vest was punctured and abraded beyond repair, so the biker gladly purchased a replacement and donated the old one as a sales sample – he had parted company with his bike at 130mph+ at Donnington, and walked away with only a broken thumb.

Many thanks to David Harcourt for the report.

Overcoming Challenges: A Deaf Learner's Journey through the IAM Advanced Driver Course. By Tina Lannin

In a world where communication is often taken for granted, my journey stands as a testament to determination, resilience, and the power of adapting to overcome obstacles. I am a profoundly deaf individual and enrolled on the Advanced Driver course recently. My experience not only highlights my personal triumphs but also sheds light on the importance of inclusivity in training programmes.

My story is one of overcoming barriers, both literal and metaphorical. As a deaf learner, traditional methods of instruction posed significant challenges. Communicating while driving, a task that involves split-second decisions and constant focus, presented a unique dilemma for me. My reliance on lipreading made it difficult to maintain conversation with my Observer, David Harcourt, while keeping my eyes on the road. Recognising this challenge, the IAM granted permission to adjust the learning format, allowing for periodic stops during lessons, akin to how motorbike riders are instructed.

The journey began with trepidation. Like many learners, I grappled with nervousness and self-doubt. The prospect of being scrutinised and evaluated while behind the wheel stirred anxiety, especially considering the years that had elapsed since my last driving test. My background added layers to my story; from learning to drive in Gibraltar and Spain to navigating the bustling streets of London then the countryside of NI, each chapter contributed to my diverse experience behind the wheel.

However, my passion for driving remained unwavering. The motivation to enhance my skills and fill in the gaps led to the IAM course. Under the guidance of David, a patient and understanding instructor, I embarked on a transformative journey. Despite initial apprehensions, David's calm demeanour and supportive approach played a pivotal role in managing my nervousness and accommodating my hearing loss.

One particular moment stands out in my journey – a simple suggestion from David to drive to the Rinkha for an ice cream. This seemingly ordinary outing became a turning point, symbolising a shift in my perspective. As we chatted over ice cream, I realised that my Observer wasn't there to judge, but rather to support and empower me. This realisation marked a profound shift in my mindset, fostering a sense of camaraderie and trust between Associate and Observer.

The IAM course proved to be instrumental in my development as a driver. Beyond acquiring technical knowledge and skills, I experienced personal growth, emerging as a safer, calmer and more confident driver. The course provided a platform for me to confront my fears, challenge my limits, and ultimately, thrive in an environment tailored to my needs.

I hope my journey serves as an inspiration, not only to individuals facing similar challenges but to the broader community as well. My story underscores the importance of inclusivity in training programmes, highlighting the transformative impact of adapting to accommodate diverse learners.



As I continue to navigate the roads with newfound confidence and proficiency, my journey shows resilience, reminding us that with determination and support, any obstacle can be overcome, and every dream can be within reach.



David's perspective as Tina's Observer

Tina's enrolment to North Down came to us via an enquiry she made at a car club event, where she spoke to a group contact for several minutes without disclosing her profound hearing impairment, such is her lipreading ability. She does have cochlear implants, but relies heavily on visual cues as it requires intense concentration to isolate voice from ambient noise. I have some empathy as I have difficulty isolating a conversation from background noise since suffering a brain haemorrhage several years ago, though obviously Tina's experience is much more extreme and life-long. We decided from the start that our standard car training, where we pair associates and observers ad-hoc on a Tuesday evening, wouldn't work, and would be unnecessarily difficult for all parties. I offered to be Tina's observer for the duration, with an escape clause if we couldn't get along, which so far we have not invoked.

Tina's a bit of a petrol head with track experience at Kirkistown, and her Porsche Boxster generates a lot of ambient noise, so we can have almost no verbal communication on the move. I can give the occasional one-word instruction, accompanied by an air-steward style hand gesture to indicate left, right or straight ahead, and roundabout directions are mostly by an appropriate number of raised fingers to countdown to the desired exit. I consulted HQ for guidance but there was nothing specific, so we staged the drive in approximate 15 minute blocks, where we park up and discuss. This revealed another difficulty, not specific to Tina. As a relative newcomer to the area, Tina's knowledge of local geography is a work in progress, so I couldn't stage the drive with directions such as "drive to the Killinchy Road car park in Comber". This applied to the run sheets too, so I had to include a lot of detail, and sometimes a Google Street View snap.

Tina was nervous on our first drive, though probably no more so than most associates, but she was equally nervous on the second drive. When the associate is not relaxed, they tend to overthink everything, hesitate and make trivial errors, simply because there's an observer present. I had noticed that she relaxed and improved as the drive progressed, so I suggested a long drive to Islandmagee, with an ice-cream break at the Rinkha before the return run. That drive marked a change, and subsequent drives were more relaxed, more natural, and overall better. Tina's car is a DSG automatic with TipTronic change, which she had seldom used, if ever. Over the course of a few more drives, I showed her how, why and when to use TipTronic, and after one particularly satisfying overtake near Templepatrick, she played with the manual option most of the way home and became quite proficient. Her overall car control and smoothness improved, and she delivered drives with the "Sparkle" we strive for – I can't define it, but I know it when I see it.

Tina's run sheets were very demanding, though not for the reasons you might expect. Such is her determination that she would read my run sheet in minute detail and come back with questions, and my response would generate supplementary questions over several iterations. Nonetheless, I have really enjoyed coaching her to IAM Advanced test standard. It was challenging for me, a very different experience from our normal observer/associate relationship, and I didn't always get it right, but we managed to get a system which worked pretty well.

And finally..... great parking



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