

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



November 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 22.10

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

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New Members

This month we welcome car member Michael Somers. 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 to report this month

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

October Cover picture

This was the crossroads in Saintfield, taken from Todd's Hill and looking across the junction with the A7 towards Main Street.

Congratulations, in order of receipt of the answers, to Ralph Magee, Jim O'Brien, Norman Shearer, Ivan Greenfield, William McAteer, Angela Bell and David Hughes.

Do you know where this month's cover is? Just to make it more interesting it's looking "the wrong way" down a one way street! No prizes, just the satisfaction of good observation and, of course, a mention in the next Road Observer. Submit your answers to: leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.com

Dates for your diary

All dates relate to the Groomsport Boathouse unless otherwise stated

22 November - STAC session 6

29 November - STAC session 7

6 December - STAC session 8

14 December - Christmas Dinner: venue Carnalea Golf Club

Please note the Christmas Dinner will be on **Wednesday 14 December**

November Group Night

This was a return visit to The Pheasant which is located approximately halfway between Lisburn and Ballynahinch for a social evening of chat over tea/coffee and biscuits. We had a total of 10 car members and 5 from the bike side. The bikes started from the Boathouse as did one car. The rest of the car drivers made their own arrangements. As you will see from the pictures, the timing of arrivals and layout of where we were sitting wasn't conducive to the car and bike members mixing!



As a mere car driver knowing nothing about motorcycling I was intrigued by the flashing lights on the biker's jackets. I now know that these are airbags in the form of a jacket or vest that is inflated using a gas cartridge.

From a quick look on the internet I found out that there are two main types - tethered and non-tethered. With the tethered system a cord tethers the vest to the motorcycle and when the rider is thrown from or separates from the bike, the tether is activated causing the vest to inflate. Apparently they don't deploy if you just forget to undo the tether when getting off the bike. The non-tethered system uses a system of accelerometers, gyroscopes and GPS data to sense when a crash is happening and deploys the airbag. Both provide the rider with an air cushion around their neck, shoulders, and chest — areas of the body vulnerable in a motorcycle crash. Gas cartridges have to be replaced/refilled after each deployment - hopefully not too often, if at all!

You learn something new every day! I would be interested to hear if any members have experience of one of these airbags going off in a collision.

Night Driving - full beam ahead

By Richard Gladman head of Driving and Riding Standards

In the Advanced driving world, we talk about the limit point of vision. And this is, of course, usually dictated at night by your headlamps.



When your lights are dipped it is likely they project between 50 and 70 metres ahead of you. And on full beam, around 100 metres. The quality of your lights is particularly important if you're driving on an unlit road. If there's other traffic in front you, you can use their lights to extend your vision. Plus, if their brake lights come on, straightaway you'll be considering why they might be braking.

I was recently driving on an unlit section of the A1, overtaking an HGV in lane two, when I hit a tyre carcass flicked out by the HGV. I hit it before I saw it and there wasn't really anything I could have done. It is very likely that, in daylight I would have seen it. But in the dark, I didn't have any light on the nearside. So, that goes to show that you're very much reliant on yours, and other people's, beams.

Bearing all that in mind, it might sound obvious but prepare before you set off.

Check your front and rear lights, and your brake, fog and indicator lights are working and properly adjusted. You can dazzle people if your headlights are badly adjusted. Too often people adjust them down, so they don't then provide a proper beam. There are lots of tutorials on the internet that can help you to do this. But even using your garage door and some tape to mark where your headlights should hit when you park the correct distance away from it will help.

Also check your light lenses...

Plastic ones deteriorate and go foggy over time. Either your garage can polish them. Or you can buy a plastic polish to use at home that will allow more light through. And check the reflector lens inside the light. If that is starting to deteriorate, the light it reflects from the bulb won't be as bright.

Even before you set off at night, or if you know your journey will include night driving, make sure your windscreen is clean – inside and out. Get rid of that horrible mist you get on the inside, which is actually caused by the plastic of your dashboard releasing a vapour that condenses your windscreen.

It also goes without saying that you need to ensure your wipers are really good.

Because if they're not and it rains at night, you're going to get a horrible smear that will be really difficult to see through, particularly when the lights of oncoming traffic hit it.

Ask yourself whether your eyesight is as good as it should be.

Get it tested regularly. I know my eyes aren't as good as they were even three or four years ago. So I get mine checked regularly. And if you need to wear glasses, wear them – never set off without them. Perhaps keep a spare pair in the car. And don't try tinted glasses, even if they're advertised for night driving.

Finally, I'd advise that you discourage front seat passengers from looking at their phone or a tablet while you're driving.

There aren't any rules around having an interior light on, or a passenger looking at a mobile. But I personally find it really distracting and normally pull over if my passenger is looking up something about the journey, such as directions.

Editors notes:

If you can, reduce the brightness of your sat nav and the rest of your dashboard while driving at night.

When being a front seat passenger at night I have been surprised at how little some people (including Associates) use main beam. Use main beam as much as possible (obviously without impacting preceding or oncoming traffic or indeed cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders - rule 114 of the Highway Code) - remember the sooner you see things the more time you have to react.

Rule 115 says that you should slow down, and if necessary stop, if dazzled by oncoming headlights.

A few years ago I did an experiment to photograph the difference between dipped and main beam on a dark country road. Use main beam where possible. The results speak for themselves:



Merge in turn / Zip Merge

Member Ivan Greenfield posed a question about zip merging. Do you do it or not?

The concept is very simple. Two lanes of traffic have to merge into one either because of a lane closure, or the road narrows or sometimes as a result of traffic management. Vehicles in each lane take it in turn to move into a single lane.

In practice, as soon as a road sign shows a lane closure the majority of drivers tend to move into the unobstructed lane and patiently queue. Other drivers stay in the lane being closed and filter in when closer to the obstruction either because they know about merge in turn or are simply not prepared to join the long queue. This can cause frustration amongst the drivers in the long queue who see people “forcing” their way in ahead of them and causing them even further delays.

As an advanced driver/rider you know that making progress and taking the line of least resistance is an important aspect of advanced driving/riding and therefore we should be using merge in turn. Traffic approaching an obstruction such as a lane closure is often moving forward at a slow speed and therefore there is little danger involved provided you don't try to force your way in and cause conflict with another vehicle.



A local scenario is where there are multiple lanes at traffic lights and these lanes merge a short distance later eg at Tillysburn approaching Belfast or the entrance to the Westlink from the M3. In both these cases there are 3 lanes merging into two. In the case of Tillysburn the 3rd lane ends approximately 300 yards from the traffic lights and on the Westlink it is approximately 150 yards. In these cases we are dealing with accelerating traffic (50 mph speed limit) when the traffic lights change and adds another dynamic to the situation and poses greater potential for conflict. In the picture above there is more traffic in lane 3 and the last 2 or 3 cars should have no problem filtering into lane 2. It would be a different matter at 8.30 am on a weekday!

How do you approach lane mergers? Is your priority making progress and if so do you experience problems filtering left? Or do you queue and be considerate and let someone in from the right-hand lane?

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