

# The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down  
Advanced Motorists Group



October 2023





## 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

October 2023

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

Vol 23.9

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

Group Contact - David Harcourt

Tel No 07760 578444

[e-mail: david.harcourt@gmail.com](mailto:david.harcourt@gmail.com)

---

### New Members

This month we welcome new car member Stephanie Jameson. We hope you not only gain from being a member of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

---

### Test Passes

Congratulations this month to motorcycle Member

**Gary McKie**

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

---

### September cover picture

The September picture was Bridge Street in Portadown. Congratulations, in order of receipt, to David Harcourt, Gareth Hughes, Ernie Foster and James O'Brien.

Do you know where this months picture was taken? 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@googlemail.com](mailto:leslie.ashe.LA@googlemail.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 have a varied programme for the Group Nights. All meetings will take place in the Boathouse at Groomsport Harbour car park unless otherwise stated.

24 October - STAC session 4  
31 October - STAC session 5  
7 November - STAC Session 6  
14 November - Group Night - Ten Pin Bowling, Dundonald Ice-Bowl  
28 November - STAC Session 7  
5 December - STAC Session 8  
12 December - Christmas Dinner - Carnalea Golf Club

STAC - Short Term Associate Course for drivers. Car 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.

---

## October Group Night

The October Group night is traditionally our Annual General Meeting. The 33rd AGM was held on Tuesday 10 October in the Boathouse. Chairman David Harcourt's report highlighted the activities since the last AGM and the impact of the Covid pandemic in terms of reduced numbers and the need to re-skill Observers.

Campbell English who took over as Treasurer during the financial year presented the Treasurer's report which focused on efforts to establish a new bank account. Our financial position remains strong, the Group is solvent and has more than enough funds to cover any foreseeable debt.

Lisa Thompson presented the membership report which is work in progress as we are still collecting subscriptions for the period 2023/24 year.



Angela Bell, now an IAM RoadSmart Trustee (see below) conducted the election to the Committee for the 2023/24 year:

<b>Chairman:</b> David Harcourt	<b>Secretary:</b> Stephen Patterson
<b>Treasurer:</b> Campbell English	
<b>Committee Members:</b> Leslie Ashe, Simon Beckett, Neil Geoghegan, Ivan Greenfield, Colin Hay, Ralph Magee, John Seawright, Lisa Thompson, Kyle Thomson	

## Awards

The awards this year were presented by Brian McFarland husband of the late Annie McFarland. The Mervyn Bates 3 Jags award was presented to Campbell English and the Motorcycle award to Neil Geoghegan.



*Neil got the motorcycle award*

The Annie McFarland Memorial award which was gifted to the Group by Brian to mark Annie's involvement, enthusiasm and affection for the Group went to William McAteer. As William wasn't at the AGM Colin Hay accepted it William's behalf.



*Brian McFarland presenting the Annie McFarland award*

---

## Northern Ireland Air Ambulance

At the AGM our guest speaker was Martin Boyd a volunteer with the Air Ambulance Northern Ireland. He gave us an insight into the history and working of this registered charity which works alongside the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service to provide the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service for the region. On average it provides emergency care to two people per day.

Since the service was formed in July 2017, the medical team have been tasked on over 3,718 times, to incidents of serious trauma or medical events, throughout Northern Ireland.



AANI has two AW109 helicopters, one of which is flight ready whilst the other undergoes routine maintenance, providing cover 365 days a year. These can be airborne within five minutes and reach any part of Northern Ireland within twenty-five minutes. Each carry a pilot, a doctor and a paramedic who aim to provide the best pre-hospital critical care at the scene and during transport to hospital. There is also a paramedic at the NIAS 999 call centre, who is responsible for tasking the team.



This service has operational costs of just under £7000 per day which equates to £2.5 million per year and is entirely funded by public and commercial donation, not receiving any government money. Whilst the pilots and mechanics are paid members of staff the medical and paramedical team volunteer for this as an extra duty from their employing health trust.

Whilst this is a service none of us hope to need, it is reassuring to know it is there! Further information on the charity can be found by visiting [www.airambulanceni.org](http://www.airambulanceni.org)

## Angela Bell

Congratulations to Group Member Angela on being appointed a trustee of IAM RoadSmart. Angela has a long-standing relationship with IAM RoadSmart. She took her advanced driving test in 1996 and quickly became an Observer and committee member with North Down Advanced Motorists. She went on to become Group Chair before taking on the role of Regional Groups Co-ordinator, a voluntary role and continued to exist in Northern Ireland until more recently. She is a National Observer, a member of the Regional Training Team, and a Masters mentor, having passed the Masters test with distinction.

Best wishes to Angela in her new role and I'm sure she will represent the best interests of the Northern Ireland Groups on the National body.



---

## October bike run



After recent cancellations because of bad weather the bikers got lucky with the weather, only a couple of small showers but the rest of the run was nice and sunny.

Starting at McDonald's in Sprucefield we went on a little trip to Slieve Gullion where we enjoyed some of the back roads round Blackskull and Poyntzpass. A little coffee stop before enjoying the forest drive round the Slieve Gullion Forest Park and then on towards the Mourne via Newry, Warrenpoint and Rostrevor.



An obligatory stop at Spelga Dam for a photo and then a route past Silent Valley where we met a tractor rally coming in the opposite direction.



Final stop of the afternoon was Nikki's cafe in Newcastle for a bit of lunch before we all headed back towards Newtownards. Around 160 miles door to door, great weather and some craic along the way.



And it doesn't always work out perfectly, Ralph was unlucky and ended up on a recovery vehicle before he got to the start point. Hopefully it's an easy fix and he makes the next run...

Thanks to Gary for photographs and to Simon for the report.

---

### **IAM RoadSmart has some tips to keep you safe in the bad weather.**

If the weather conditions in your area are severe, you should take notice of police advice and simply do not travel. If you can, stick to main roads, where you are less likely to come across debris, fallen trees and flooding.

Be aware of standing water and the risk of aquaplaning. Also, if a flooded route looks too deep to drive through, find an alternative.





Wet weather can cause roads to become very slippery, so you should slow down and give yourself more time to react to potential hazards. You should increase the distance between yourself and the car in front. Headlights on increases visibility.

High winds can get under a car and affect its handling and braking significantly. Grip the steering wheel firmly and be mindful of vulnerable road users, like motorcyclists and cyclists who may need more room than usual.

Crosswinds on exposed bridges and coasts can quickly impact a vehicle. Be cautious if you are overtaking a lorry as you might find you'll be hit by a strong gust after you pass.

Park safely. Try not to park your vehicle close to or underneath trees, telephone wires or poles that could fall in high winds.

Keep an eye on the vehicles ahead of you; looking for clues as to how the wind may be affecting them.

Check your tyre tread and pressures. Keep the tread on your tyres above 2mm (ideally 3mm), the more tread you have the more water they can cope with. Letting your tyres get down to the legal limit of 1.6mm is not recommended, and don't forget you can always consider winter tyres. Properly inflated tyres can improve steering, handling and grip.



IAM RoadSmart's Director of Policy and Standards, Nicholas Lyes, said: Named storms will bring heavy rain and very strong winds. This creates particularly hazardous driving conditions and road safety problems. Firstly, there is a greater chance of falling branches because many trees are still in full leaf. Drivers should keep a firm grip on the steering wheel in case of crosswinds in exposed areas which may push them off-course and alongside this should reduce their speed because of the impact strong winds have on a vehicle's handling. It's also vital drivers give other road users – particularly cyclists and motorcyclists – a wide berth when overtaking.

“For riders, conditions can be even more challenging. We encourage them to slow down and maintain control by using the throttle and counter steering to balance out the effects of the wind. Loose clothing will also flap around far more in strong winds so it's vital to ensure everything is properly done up.”

---

## And finally....

From an insurance claim: The accident was caused by me waving to the man I hit last week.

---

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