

The Road Observer

The Newsletter of the North Down
Advanced Motorists Group



Summer 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

Summer 2024

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Test Passes

Congratulations this month to car Members

Davie Hall and Giorgia Thornycroft

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

New Members

This month we welcome motorcycle members, Adriana Lordache and Paul Greggan. We hope you not only gain from being members of our Group but will also enjoy the friendship and camaraderie of our get-togethers.

May Cover Picture

Last month's cover would be familiar to anyone who has taken the ferry to Scotland and gone north. It was the A77 at the beginning of the long hill down to Lendalfoot. Congratulations this month (in order of receipt) to David Harcourt, Norman Shearer and James O'Brien. Also apologies to David Hall who was omitted from the roll of honour for the April cover.

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

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

13 August	Enrolment for new car members, demonstration drives
3 September	STAC 1 - Human factor and IPSSGA
10 September	Group Night - TBA
24 September	STAC 2 - Core driving skills
1 October	STAC 3 - Bends
8 October	Group Night - Annual General Meeting
29 October	STAC 4 - Junctions and roundabouts
5 November	STAC 5 - Overtaking
12 November	Group Night - TBA
26 November	STAC 6 - Motorways and dual carriageways
3 December	STAC 7 - Manoeuvring
10 December	Group Night - Christmas dinner

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.

June Group Night

In May 2013 the Group visited the Ulster Aviation Society at the Maze just outside Lisburn. After an 11 year gap it was time to organise a repeat visit on our June Group Night. The premises have been greatly expanded since our visit in 2013.

We had a fantastic 3 hour guided visit and as well as looking at, and getting into, some of the aircraft on display we had a tour of additional exhibitions on air crew life support, a room entirely devoted to aircraft engines, and a room of displays about the military role of Aldergrove during the second world war.

A main feature of the collection is that the aircraft and memorabilia on display all have a connection with Northern Ireland.

During the 3 hour tour we were informed and entertained by Society Chairman Ray Burrows with the stories of the aircraft and various exhibits. Ray's knowledge of the exhibits was amazing. Rather than try to summarise all this you can visit the UAS website and get detailed information about each of their aircraft and the other displays. Click on the following link then click on the relevant section for further links to, for example, the story behind individual aircraft.

<https://www.ulsteraviationsociety.org/collection>

If you were unable to join us on our visit, as part of European Heritage Days, the UAS will be providing free access. This will take place on 14 and 15 September. Details are available in this link:

<https://www.ulsteraviationsociety.org/events>

Below is a selection of pictures from our visit.



Buccaneer



John trying out a Red Arrows Hawk



Martin Baker ejector seat



Mark and his daughter in a Shorts SD330. Mark has flown these aircraft.



Shorts SD330 cockpit



Hawk cockpit



Stephen in the Tornado GR4



Navigator's position in the Canberra PR9



Mark trying a fast Jet - the Canberra



The engine room



Shorts SD330 interior



Phantom FG1

Driving in France (Provence)

This was my first time back in France since 2019 and I was curious as to how I would adapt after such a long time away. After a gingerly start I felt I was back in the groove after about 20km. I drove a total of 920km (c.570 miles) of which about 400km (c.250 miles) was on Autoroutes. The remainder was mainly rural roads (some of which were winding through mountainous terrain). And with a bit of urban driving thrown in. All roads were very smooth and noticeable for an absence of potholes.



Winding remote country roads were a joy to drive and would be even better in a car where finding the right gear was easier (see review of car).

Around large towns/cities traffic volumes were high (Nice, Avignon, Aix-en-Provence). Tailgating at 130kph was a regular sight on autoroutes especially where the road was busy - often several cars in a row very close together. Nipping into spaces which would be questionable at 50kph was regularly witnessed at speeds of 100-130kph.

Road humps are everywhere in urban areas and most have a 30kph limit. Many other 30kph zones were encountered. Roundabouts are everywhere. Research has revealed that there are almost 43,000 roundabouts in France compared to almost 26,000 in the UK. Proper signalling was very much the exception rather than the rule.

Autoroute driving has to be endured if you want to cover distance but the most enjoyable roads were the winding country roads especially in the mountainous areas.

The car

We don't stay longer than 7-10 days and so we use a rental car rather than the long drive in my own car to the south of France.

A small SUV was the chosen category and our chariot turned out to be a manual Renault Captur. This had a 1.0 litre 3 cylinder turbocharged engine mated to a 6 speed manual gearbox. Interestingly it was equipped with all season tyres and, on a quick inspection, the majority of the cars in the pick-up area were the same.

Unless pushed the car was quiet. With the right choice of gear it would move on rightly although, as you would expect, 6th is essentially a cruising gear for motorways. Provided you managed to choose the correct gear it cornered well.



I would describe the gear-change as unpleasant. I am used to driving my other half's VW Polo which has a very slick gear-change and by comparison the Renault's was like stirring porridge. Down-shifting in particular was a bit hit and miss which isn't the best on the approach to corners or on the final approach to a roundabout (using IPSGA). I accept that I was changing gear with my right hand which I am not used to but nevertheless the general woolly feel made changes less than precise. Perhaps with longer in the car I would have developed the muscle memory but I thought that a hundred miles or so was sufficient to allow me to adapt to the gear-change. In its defence, the car was new (740km on the clock when I picked it up) and with a few thousand miles on it the gear-change might loosen up. However, I am not entirely convinced.

Although I had my old Garmin sat-nav with me I decided to use the built in sat-nav. In the main it wasn't bad. They all have their own systems and it can take time to get used to them. However, some of the directions were strange. Leaving Avignon it took us round in a circle 3 times before I stopped, pulled out a tourist map of the town and saw where we had to turn left instead of following the sat-nav instruction to turn right!

A minor criticism is that when the boot is opened the parcel shelf lifts up to a height which guarantees your head hitting the edge when reaching in. The parcel shelf edge is unforgiving and drew blood and a few anglo-saxon words on one occasion.

It was a comfortable car, there was plenty of adjustment for the seat and the steering wheel, it ran perfectly, the ride was good (smooth roads helped) and it did the job for the time we were there. A more precise gear-change mechanism would have transformed it.



In the Verdon Gorge

It was the Whitsun holiday weekend while we were there and I have never before seen so many groups of motorcyclists touring the roads, especially around the Verdon Gorge. If you haven't been, it's a drivers/motorcyclists playground as long as you stay away from holiday weekends.

I once had the good fortune to have a 3 series BMW for 10 days in this area, including a drive over the Col de Turini, the classic Monte Carlo Rally special stage - deep joy!



The Rhinka

And finally..... Our run to The Rhinka at Islandmagee had become our usual June Group Night. This year it was replaced by our visit to the Ulster Aviation Society and so we arranged an extra Tuesday night to make sure we we had the opportunity of sampling their ice-cream. We were joined by a number of members of the City of Belfast Motorcycle Group. The ice-cream is as good as ever!



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