

SWINDON & DISTRICT GROUP OF ADVANCED MOTORISTS
www.swindondrivers.com
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Newsletter
May 2003

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Disclaimer

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The Swindon & District Group of Advanced Motorists retains the names and addresses of all group members on computer for mailing and administrative purposes.

WHO'S WHO IN YOUR GROUP?

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CHAIRMAN'S RAMBLINGS

Welcome to the May edition of our Newsletter.

I clearly got it wrong in the last Newsletter, with winter failing to deliver, and March achieving record temperatures - the Simpson family having their first picnic of the year on 16th March!

In the true tradition of British melancholy, maybe we will look back and say that WAS our Summer.... I hope not for our increasingly active Events Team have a Treasure Hunt planned for June, and our Annual Barbecue at Savernake in July.

No doubt you will have read about A1, or Alpha 1, in our last Newsletter. This is an initiative to promote advanced motoring skills in the under 30's, currently 15 of our Associates are eligible in this category.

Derek Sheldrake, our intrepid Secretary, and never one to turn down a challenge, wrote to each of them individually inviting them to attend, at short notice, a regional meeting in Bristol, mid March.

Derek received an encouraging number of responses, but unfortunately was ultimately only able to take 3 to the meeting, combining the journey with an observed run for one of the attendees.

The meeting went well, with Swindon Group numerically well represented, and (as you might expect) appropriately vocal!

We hope to co-opt on to the Committee a number of these A1 candidates to assist in encouraging and promoting participation in the under 30's.

In previous Newsletters I have spoken of the Group's desire and intention to introduce a Theory Package for Associates. Aply lead by our Chief Observer, Chris Gleed, I am pleased to tell you that the sub committee is making good progress.

Currently, in the absence of a Theory Package, a new Associate is thrown in at the deep end with an Observer at the beginning of the practical stages of their Observed Runs. This is neither to the benefit of the Associate, or Observer, (see Rachel Pengelly's article " IAM Experience", paragraph 3, I was that man, and will never forget that "Marlbro' Moment"!)

It is the intention that from September we will introduce the Theory Package as a mandatory element of our Associate guidance, we will of course be flexible in accordance with individual circumstances.

What this means is that Associates will attend 6 * 2 hour theory session prior to being allocated an Observer and commencing their (practical) Observer runs.

This should deliver, to the Observer, an Associate better informed with a confirmed commitment, who should progress to test readiness in a shorter time. In business speak, a win-win outcome, and a practice adopted by many other Groups, Bristol being a good example (thank-you, Harold Wicks).

This may mean a change in the ad-hoc way that Associates are allocated to Observers, to one more oriented around completion of the Theory Package, we look forward to the understanding of Observers and Associates in achieving these objectives. Exact details will be available closer to the time of implementation.

Thanks to Chris and the sub committee for their work.

You should be pleased to know that Swindon Group has, after many years of relying on personal resources of Committee members, made a Capital purchase of a PC laptop. Small beer some of you may think, but this has been a long sought after acquisition.

The laptop will be allocated to the Secretary who is the most administratively active member of the Committee. As well as establishing the security of the data held, is the advantage that in the change of the Officer that the equipment transfers with all data complete and intact.

We now have a Treasurer (designate), Margaret Brewer, who has been with the Group since 1999. Margaret's financial experience, confirms your Committee's view that she is an ideal candidate. Initially Margaret will take responsibility for Membership activities, prior to formally adopting the full role at our AGM in September. Thank you Margaret.

A reminder that we are looking for an Associate Rep and Minutes Secretary, if you think you could contribute contact either Derek or myself.

Remember, we are YOUR Committee, if you like what we are doing, tell us; if you don't, tell us; if you think you could do better, join us!

Mark Simpson

MR KEN TURNER - OUR FOUNDER

We would like to offer our congratulations and good wishes to the founder of the Swindon Group of Advanced Motorists, Mr Ken Turner, who celebrated his 80th birthday in March.

For those newer members of our Group, Ken used to be a Police Officer with the Wiltshire Constabulary. One of his duties was that of Road Safety Officer for Swindon. During that time he was approached about starting a local Group of the IAM.

He met with the IAM Chief Examiner from London, at the Goddard Arms Hotel in Swindon. That was in 1970.

The records show that the committee for the first year were :-

President - Capt. Barker
Chairman - Mr D. F. Morley
Vice Chairman - Mr B. Edgington
Treasurer - Mr S. Thomson
Secretary - Mr D. Wakley
Events - Mr D. Barrett
Newsletter - Mr B. Edgington

Ken went on to be Secretary from 1973 to 1975, Chairman from 1974 to 1977, and President from 1980 to 1981, and is still a Group Member today.

From all of the Swindon Group, we send Ken our Good Wishes, Good Health, and Good Luck, and may you remain one of us for many years to come.

A MESSAGE FROM YOUR CHIEF OBSERVER

We now have the 'New Year' well under way and hopefully we can look forward to positive progress within our group and I know that our Committee Members have that initiative in mind.

Within the Observer criteria we have had some members offering their services to train and become Observers. Bob McVay, (our Observer Trainer), took those members under his wing and completed the training programme with them. We have some Observers who have ceased Observing, (for lots of reasons, moving house, Work reasons, Illness, etc!) We have managed to maintain our numbers of Observers by the good people who have now become Observers and I offer my thanks to them for their dedication to the group.

We have an 'Observer Re-Test' Programme imminent which means that all those Observers that require the Annual Re-Test were allocated to either Bob McVay or myself. Unfortunately Bob had to reduce his Swindon Group workload because of family commitments and therefore the whole issue was placed upon my shoulders.

I was recently faced with a job loss so it is most important for me to prioritise my own personal concerns and get myself back to work, also in the meantime try to keep up the impetus of Observer requirements, so please bear with me!

I have mentioned many times before how much I have the Swindon Group to heart and we all try to do our bit.

At this moment in time though I feel that we as a Group and Committee are being rather 'Let Down' at times by the occasional 'Lack of Courtesy' and thank goodness it is only occasional!

We have mentioned before about those Associates who are allocated an Observer and then for some reason or another fail to give their dedication and commitment to the Voluntary actions of Observers and Committee Members. I myself and other Observers are still faced with complete lack of courtesy with Associates who join the Group, obtain their Observer, commence their Observed Runs and then for some reason give up without having the courtesy to contact the Observer or the Associate Rep. We contact the Associate Rep to try to re-establish contact with the Associate for us, this takes a couple of weeks at least. If no contact is established after that we ask the Associate Rep to allocate us another Associate because we are fed up waiting for a response back from our allocated Associate.

We are then given another Associate who then seems to take all the time in the world to make contact! This entails at least another couple of weeks, maybe a month before contact is made!

I say to all of you as Associates! Advanced Driving is a really worthwhile objective and it is just not possible to get the message across to all of those unsafe drivers out there. We do get through to some though and some of those people have paid for their 'Skill for Life' and are really eager to start and offer **their** dedication and commitment to their allocated Observer.

If you decide that 'Advanced Driving' isn't for you, don't lack the courtesy to let us know, just please step aside for a while until you have more time perhaps and allow someone else to step in.

We have Associates waiting quite a while for Observer allocation. We don't want them waiting needlessly. I want Associates that are '**Committed**' because my time and my fellow committee members time is valuable.

I could guarantee that over the past few months I alone could have reduced the waiting list of Associates by **Three** at least, couple that by the Observers who have been let down and you can easily see that we are being let down by those who are not really committed enough.

We welcome all of you with open arms to help establish safer drivers, save lives, to try and save the heartaches many families suffer by needless and reckless actions and to do this we don't need this 'Skill for Life' to be a 'Passing Fancy', we need it to be a '**Real Commitment**'. So '**Please, Get Real'!!!**' and give us the support we deserve!!!

PS. My apologies for being blunt but the comments made are mine, and my reasons for stating them as such are simply because I want Safer Driving to be a recognised attribute for those paying for the privilege and for them to reap the reward, so please do not hold them back.

To all those Associates waiting patiently, thank you for your consideration.

To Bob McVay: Hope all is well Bob and hopefully by the time this is printed you will be back with us.

Chris Gleed (Chief Observer)

WEB LINKS

In the last edition of the Newsletter we mentioned Paul Berry's excellent "UK Roads" website. Judging from feedback received, members of our group enjoyed the "Duplicated Road Numbers" section most with the "Ring Roads" section a close second.

This time we feature another site in the same vein - **Chris's British Roads Directory** which can be found at :-
<http://www.cbrd.co.uk/>

An interesting and different feature of this site is the "Great C Road Hunt". There is also a downloadable "Motorway Simulator" program that is well worth a look.

The site is very well laid out and is regularly updated. There is even a weekly opinion poll.

If you are not on the web yet you can often access the internet from your local library, or from the new terminals in Central and West Swindon libraries.

We enjoy motoring sites with local references, and a good one is "**From Watford Gap to Camelot**" by **David Craig**. This site (URL : **<http://www.strum.co.uk/watcam.htm>**) is dedicated to a journey along the A(4)361. Not only does the "Swindon" section of the journey have photographs of the Magic Roundabout and other local features but also includes a downloadable mp3 audio file of a song about our best known landmark.

David is looking for a local band to record this song and invites you to contact him if you or anyone you know might be interested in doing this.

Let us know of any other sites you have found interesting and we will include details in this section next time.

ASSOCIATES NEWS

New Starters

The Swindon Group welcomes the following new Associates to the Group, and wishes them well during their observed runs :-

Diana Turnbull, Louise Cooper, Derrick Pike, Paul Sewell, Alan Percival, Mark Percival, Jonathan Tuck, Barry Pearce, Anthony Hand, Soibhan Vinall, Tracey Brooks, Janette Hayter, Michael Hayter, Priscilla Kirby

Background Reading

When an Associate joins the Group, they receive a book called "*Pass Your Advanced Driving Test*". As a new associate we would like you to spend some time browsing through this book, paying particular attention to the sections listed below, to get some idea of what is required in total to become an Advanced Driver - but not to try and remember it all before their first run with their Observer.

The important pages to really get too know before their first run start on page 16, The Planned System of Driving.

Here you will find details of the Five-Point System (also known as "the system of car control" that the examiner will ask you about, and expect you to follow during your test.

These are :-

1. Information.
2. Position.
3. Speed.
4. Gear.
5. Acceleration.

Your Observer will answer any questions that you may have on this item, and any other items, when you meet for your Observed runs.

For legal reasons, the Institute, and our Insurers, do not permit us to "Instruct" or "Teach" you. We are only permitted to "Guide" and "Observe".

When you are "Test-Ready"

When your Observer considers that you are "Test-Ready", you will be asked to go out for a run with our Chief Observer. When he considers that you are ready, apply for the Test on the form that was sent to you at the time that you joined. If you have lost it, ask our Chief Observer, or Group Secretary, for a copy.

Having sent the form to IAM House, in London, they will send you back a letter telling you that your Examiner will contact you within three weeks. **PLEASE** do not let it go longer than three weeks before you phone the number given on the letter. If, for any reason, you are unable to contact them during the day, then let our Secretary know (phone numbers at the beginning of this Newsletter). The longer you wait, the longer it is before the next Associate has an Observer, and the longer our waiting list gets. We can only help you if you inform us.

Chris Gleed (Chief Observer)

TEST PASSES

We congratulate the following who have recently passed their Advanced Driving Test.

Anthony Gilbert	Observed by	Jim Wilde
Kevin Henderson	Observed by	Chris Gleed
Philip Brown	Observed by	Cynthia Howard
Sean McCarthy	Observed by	Chris Gleed
Vikki Levick	Observed by	Bob McVay
Karina Mann	Observed by	Kirsty Newland
Jane Clothier	Observed by	Chris Gleed / Dave Abbott
Alistair Johnson	Observed by	Linda Simpson

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THE PROGRESS DRIVE (AKA the “Pre-Test Drive”)

To all those Associates awaiting and preparing for the time when you have to approach me to carry out the ‘Progress Drive’.

Please show your commitment and dedication to your Observer by preparing well for this occasion. Your Observer is giving you the guidance required over the series of observed drives to enable you to reach the ability to drive at the required standard for the IAM. Test but this means that the foundation has been laid and there is still some work to be done!

Start your preparation by reading through the ‘Pass your Advanced Driving Test’ book, it is a valuable guide to be used in conjunction with the advice from your Observer. Your Observer will detail the areas that require some practice so combine this with reading the appropriate chapter within the book.

When I meet some Associates for the Progress Drive I do sense that there is a sign of ‘Nervousness’, please try to relax and do not try to do anything different to the way you have been guided. Look on the Progress Drive as the next step because if there is anything amiss I will do my best to rectify that. I will possibly ask you to apply for your test but in the meantime go back to your Observer and just refine the drive a little more.

I do notice sometimes that the ‘Head Restraint’ is not suitably adjusted for the driver, (or for me!), so make sure that this is correct, (Your Observer will guide you on this).

Make sure that you are aware of the ‘Tyre Pressures’ required for the vehicle and the ‘Legal Limit’ of Tread Depth. Some ladies have said to me, “My Husband looks after that for me”! It is up to you to have that knowledge and I cannot stress the importance of that. It is a crucial aspect of safe driving!

When you come back to the car after shopping or that visit to the hairdressers or just leaving the car for a while just have a look at the tyres to check if there has been any noticeable deflation, also check around for any visible signs of damage to the vehicle before driving away.

‘Clutter’! Make sure that your vehicle is clear of clutter and put only the items required for your journey safely within the vehicle. I am surprised by the state of some vehicles and I suggest to you that a tidy vehicle should be part of the pre-drive preparation, consequently if you arrive for the Progress Drive with an untidy vehicle I **WILL** question your attitude to Advanced Driving.

Be prepared for a drive of about one and a half hours duration with some Reversing manoeuvres included. A Safe, Systematic and Progressive Drive is required but rest assured I will spend time with you to ensure that you can approach the Test with confidence.

I am very pleased to see some younger people coming along, Male and Female, all sorts of vehicles etc. I do find the Sports Cars require some extra agility from me to get in and out of though!

Don't forget though if you do drive a low sporty vehicle you are more difficult to see, especially when we are using our 'Vision Scans' to look over the tops of hedges etc, for any signs of oncoming vehicles, Tractors with wide trailers, Horses and Riders, large vans etc. I have never seen a Sports Car over the top of a hedge, but if I ever do I think I can guarantee that they do not belong to any Advanced Drivers Group!

In conclusion! Do not feel daunted by the onset of the 'Progress Drive' or what people say about me! (I'm not really that bad!) I am there to help and I am 'Committed' to being Safe on the road and I want you to be !!! Take care! - **Chris Gleed**

IAM EXPERIENCE

It has now been just over 12 months since joining the Swindon Group as an associate. For some time I wished to improve my general driving skills as my work means that a large part of my week is spent on the road. I also felt sure that having passed my driving test 20 years earlier, a refresher wouldn't go amiss. So encouraged by one of my colleagues, himself an IAM Member, I plucked up the courage to contact the group and was allocated an observer a few weeks later.

I met Mark behind the re-cycling bins in Sainsbury's car park, going against all the advice my mother had ever given me! I rather felt that I should have had a copy of the times on the dashboard or a yellow flower under my wiper blade! However, I quickly identified my observer from his car & number plate, Mark explaining his role and confirming the plan for observed drives.

Mark advised me that our first run out was to assess my general driving ability, the drive being described as 'interesting'! It quickly became apparent that anticipation and planning ahead were skills that needed a little work - I feel that the Turnpike roundabout will always have fond memories for Mark!

After 6 observed drives, I was referred to Chris to be put through my final paces by the Groups Chief Observer and to ensure I was test ready. I was grateful to Chris, giving me a few extra hint & tips to engender confidence in the examiner throughout the actual test.

There was unfortunately a delay of several weeks prior to receiving my test date as the area had a change in examiners. However, I finally received a call from the Examiner, introducing himself and arranging the test date. A final run out just before my test made sure that I had kept up to the required standard.

The Test Day had arrived - I hadn't felt that nervous for a long time, falling asleep the night before with a copy of the Highway Code in my hand, dreaming of road signs and stopping distances. Thankfully, the weather had been kind to me - cloudy but remaining dry.

The Examiner quickly tried to put me at my ease by explaining the test format - a route of approximately 40 miles covering a range of road conditions, expected to last approximately 1½ hours. The first surprise was that he said that he was looking for 'finesse', stressing that this was not a ministry test but an opportunity to demonstrate driving skills. Encouragingly, the Police Advanced Driving Examiner pointed out that we already had a shared aim - to increase road safety.

After going through the necessary paperwork and Cockpit Drill, we were off - no time at all to let the nerves take over. We drove out through Swindon onto the back roads towards Newbury, returning on the Motorway to the Police Station via Wroughton and Salthrop. The examiner picked up on a number of give-aways - after mentioning that I can spend lengthy periods of time on motorways he encouraged me to show him a confident motorway drive, paying attention throughout the drive on car control, planning and anticipation. I continued commentary throughout the test as I had found that this helped in retaining concentration, demonstrates the Advanced Driving skills of Safety, System, Smoothness & Speed and kept the nerves at bay.

Just under 90 minutes later, we returned arrived back at the Police Station, I couldn't believe it really was all over & how quickly the time had gone. He advised that he was pleased to congratulate me on passing the Advanced Driving Test, briefing me on the drive and letting me know that the Certificate would be in the post!

12 months later, am I still driving with the same standard as that nerve-wracking day in May? I do find myself regularly checking my speed, applying the 2-second rule and thinking 13 car lengths at 50 mph. A regular cockpit drill gives me confidence in the car before going anywhere and prevents any unpleasant surprises, (partners unexpectedly changing the seating position)! I feel more in control and take pleasure from being able to anticipate the actions of others in advance. The only downside I can see is that I have become a more critical backseat driver!

I would encourage anyone with an interest in driving to go through the IAM experience. It was occasionally frustrating at the start whilst unraveling years of built in bad habits, at one point I felt that I had become a worse driver, but Mark encouraged me -everything seeming to come together at once. (Mark - please excuse the 'Marlborough' moment)!

I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to Mark for all his support and patience during our Sunday morning meetings at the back of Sainsbury's recycling bins! I would also like to thank Linda for undoubtedly putting up with a shaken husband after our Sunday morning drives!

Rachel Pengelly

MEMBERS DISCOUNTS

A range of discounts exclusive to all members of the group are available. Discounts currently available are as follows :-

Central Tyre Ltd, Newport Street, Old Town - 10% discount on tyres, batteries, brakes, oil and filter changes and shock absorbers, 15% discount on exhausts.

Tel: 01793 528493

MotorWay Tyre and Autocentres Ltd, Hawkesworth Trading Estate, North Star - 10% discount on tyres, batteries and related services.

Tel: 01793 525525

Quick-Lee Cleaners Ltd, 15 Borough Fields Shopping Centre, Wootton Bassett - 10% discount on dry cleaning services.

Tel: 01793 848859

Car & Truck Services (Swindon) Ltd, Transfer Bridge Ind Estate - 10-40% Discount dependent on the product purchased.

Tel : 01793 616151

To obtain your discount you will need to produce your current, valid group membership card when obtaining a quote or before any work is started.

In addition to the above FULL members of the IAM are eligible for a range of additional benefits, details of which can usually be found in the current edition of "Advanced Driving" magazine.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS & EVENTS

Our next Group Night to be held on Wednesday 4th June will include a demonstration of car valeting products by Autoglym.

This demonstration was very popular last time - because as we know a well maintained and clean vehicle is often the hallmark of an advanced motorist.

Don't forget our annual summer barbecue to be held in July in Savernake Forest. Details from the Events team - contact details on Page 2 of the newsletter.

EDITOR'S FINALE

Thanks again to everyone who has contributed to this edition of the Newsletter. Articles are always welcome - the next edition will be published in August and the copy date by which contributions should be received is 18th July 2003.

This edition will also include committee member nomination forms for our AGM to be held at the September group night.

We look forward to seeing you at our next group night.