

EAST KENT GROUP

Newsletter June 2008

IAM

DRIVING ROAD SAFETY



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OFFICERS

Nigel Cooke nigel@eastkentiam.org.uk	CHAIRMAN 55, Leyburne Road, Dover. CT16 1SL	01304 215891
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Vanessa Norley vanessa@eastkentiam.org.uk	SECRETARY 2 Barn Tye Close, Guston, Dover. CT15 5ND	01304 215168
---	--	--------------

Neil Oliver neil@eastkentiam.org.uk	TREASURER 22, Cornwall Road, Herne Bay. CT6 7SY	01227 369138
---	--	--------------

Carol Stone carol@eastkentiam.org.uk	MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY 5 Millfield Road, Ramsgate. CT12 6QW	01843 585356
--	--	--------------

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Richard Hazell richard@eastkentiam.org.uk	CHIEF OBSERVER 44, Canterbury Road, Hawkinge. CT18 7BP	01303 893339
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Alan Hollands	DEPUTY CHIEF OBSERVER 32 Hastings Avenue, Margate. CT9 2SG	01843 224123
----------------------	---	--------------

Jane Clarke jane@eastkentiam.org.uk	DRIVE-IN CO-ORDINATOR 20, Dumpton Park Drive, Ramsgate. CT11 8AE	01843 594910
---	---	--------------

Elizabeth Cooper elizabeth@eastkentiam.org.uk	ASSOCIATE CO-ORDINATOR 31 Charlton Avenue, Dover. CT16 2LZ	01304 204405
---	---	--------------

Michelle Stone michelle@eastkentiam.org.uk	EDITOR - NEWSLETTER/WEB Flat 5, 13 Paragon, Ramsgate. CT11 9JX	01843 588464
--	---	--------------

Ian Martin ian@eastkentiam.org.uk	COMMITTEE MEMBER 1 Freechurch Cottage, Deal Road, Worth, Deal. CT14 0BH	01304 613718
---	--	--------------

Richard Meadows richardm@eastkentiam.org.uk	PUBLICITY (ex-officio) 32, School Lane, Blean, Canterbury. CT2 9JA	01227 453728
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If you need to contact any of the above, please do so before 10 PM.

Should the person you require not be available, please contact any other member who will deal with your enquiry or pass on your message as soon as possible.

It has been an incredibly busy few months. Work is taking off, with new staff joining, and the workload promising to be enormous. I've also had some freelance work, which means that after spending all day on the computer I can then spend all night on the computer too! It was quite timely though as it turned out.

As you must all know by now, each year Mum and I take part in a trip from Land's End to John O'Groats in aid of Demelza House Children's Hospice. As I write this our next trip is only 2 weeks away. This being the case I put Mini Jock in for his yearly service, and this year proved quite expensive. A new radiator, steering rack & column, bushes I think were mentioned and possibly something on the front subframe. On the upside, we have had a really annoying rattle for a while, which has now been removed.

The run to Brighton highlighted some ...randomness... with the trailer wiring, so we set to and fixed that. We had a trailer board lying around, so we ripped that apart and completely rewired Jock Junior. While we were at it I replaced the speakers in the car too. It's true what they say - Ignorance is bliss. We didn't know what we were doing, so it never entered our heads that we wouldn't be able to do it.

Jock has been resting his tyres recently though as we have now entered the 'summer' season, which means it is the turn of my motorbike (currently nameless, although my work colleague favours Ricky or Kieran...). I had to make one of the most miserable trips I have ever endured recently, doing a run up to Surrey. M25, torrential rain, bit of wind, zero visibility due to rain, spray and steamed up visor. On the upside, the new bike gear I bought last year is the best I have ever owned. All that

weather misery - and I remained dry!! The gloves were wet through, the boots likewise a bit squelchy, but the jacket and trousers kept me bone dry, and warm!! Amazing - its only taken me 16 years to find bike gear that fits and works!! For those that may be interested I got them from GirlsBike2, a shop designed by women for women.

We will be having our annual Treasure Hunt this year on Sunday 17th August as a joint venture with EKAM (motorcyclists). There have been some developments though; we received the following from EKAM:

"Last year one of our Associates, a Police lady called Katie Mitchell, was sadly killed in a bike accident.

One of her colleagues has recently contacted us to ask if we would be prepared to run a Club event to raise a little money, but to mainly celebrate her life."

There a few confirmed details yet, but it will start at Sandiacres. We will keep you posted.

We are also still looking to fill the Chief Observer and Membership Secretary posts. Check the Secretary's Corner for more information.

Michelle

Please send me any articles, letters, rants, suggestions or comments, either by e-mail to: michelle@eastkentiam.org.uk, or by snail mail to: Flat 5, 13 Paragon, Ramsgate, Kent, CT11 9JX

My apologies for lack of contribution to the last Newsletter. I made the contribution, but unfortunately not at the right time. The best-laid plans of mice and men....

As I write this, the sun is shining, the flowers in the garden look lovely, the birds are on the wing, the butterflies are fluttering by, and all is right with the world. I am relaxed, contented, have just had a nice cup of tea and put my feet up. So, if I went out in the car now, I should drive to the best of my ability. It seems fairly likely, because there seems no reason not to. Hold on a minute! I might be too relaxed, too contented, just lacking a little alertness, and therefore slower to react, and process information. If I think back to yesterday at work, there was a period of at least a couple of hours when I had to run to stand still, everything was happening at once, and steam was coming out of ears, at least one of them mine. What if I had to drive then? Would I have driven the same way as I might today? Or if I were in a traffic jam and late for an important appointment? Of course I would! Because I'm an Advanced Motorist. I am above allowing such outside influences to affect my driving.

That is what I like to think. It is sadly not entirely true all the time. But I do try to insulate my driving from matters not directly associated with it. When I am in the car I like to concentrate on driving and think about driving. I am usually alone in the car, so passengers are not normally a distraction. If I feel I need to get myself in the right frame of mind, I walk round the car initially, checking lights, tyres, and for anything obviously abnormal, and then go through a start-up drill which I say out loud to myself. I then do a commentary, and after the first few hundred yards the brain usually seems to be working as it should, and I am in 'driving mode'. It works for me, nearly always. Trouble is, it took me a while to realise it! And if it doesn't work, should I really be driving at that time?

Happy motoring,

Nigel



It is now about 15 months since I became Secretary for the Group and, I must say, those months have been interesting. I think I'm slowly getting to grips with the workings of the Group and I haven't yet forgotten to take along refreshments for the Committee meetings – there's always a first time though! Sheila was a hard act to follow and we miss her as she has now also given up the Chairmanship. Thinking of people standing down from various roles, we have also lost Nick Williams from the Committee and both Richard Hazell and Carol Stone are standing down from their Chief Observer and Membership Secretary roles respectively in October this year. Was it something I said folks?!!

Seriously though, we are starting our search for replacements for Richard and Carol without delay in order that we can achieve a 'seamless' transition and details can be found at the end of this article.

We have enjoyed some very different talks at our Social evenings over the last year and 2008 will again see a wide variation of Guest Speakers and events. As usual the details will be found at the back of the Newsletter (provided Michelle hasn't moved the slot!). One Speaker I must mention is Peter Rodger who will be with us on 11th September. Peter is the IAM Chief Examiner and he really does have a lot of interesting things to say, I was fortunate enough to join a meeting of Mid Kent Group last year when he spoke. He is very open to questions from Observers too.

I am always looking for suggestions for Speakers for our Social evenings and I would like to know the sort of talk or event YOU would like to see take place. Please let me know if you have any bright ideas.

I think I had better stop waffling on now and get down to the most important matters – finding a new Chief Observer and Membership Secretary.

Chief Observer – Applications are invited for this post. The Committee will be looking for an enthusiastic individual with a good degree of communication and organisational skills. A full job description, which outlines the responsibilities of the Chief Observer, is available from either Richard or myself. Applications in writing should be with the Group Secretary by 30th June 2008.

Membership Secretary – Applications are also invited for this post. The Committee will again be looking for an enthusiastic person to take care of new Group Members and be responsible for the day to day administration of the Membership list, renewals and coordination between the various other Group Officers concerned with Associates and Members. A full job description is available from the Group Secretary and I am sure Carol will be happy to expand on the role herself. Applications in writing should be with the Group Secretary by 30th June 2008.

All contact details can be found on the inside cover of this Newsletter.

Vanessa

Seeing Red at Yellow

Those yellow grids that are painted on some road junctions - can you tell me exactly what they are for and what the potential penalties are for motorists? I have been told that they are sometimes covered by CCTV cameras to trap drivers. Is this true? Any other general information on these yellow perils would be welcome. - Ken Varney, Addlestone, Surrey

These blighters are called Yellow Box Junctions. Their stated purpose is to "improve traffic flow", but that may be local council jargon for "squeeze motorists until their pips squeak", as research does not seem to back up the Government's claims about improving average vehicle speed.

The idea is that, unless you are turning right, you do not enter the box junction unless you can clear it without stopping. The penalty is normally £120, or £60 if you cough up quickly. And yes, you are right about CCTV devices - this is the sole enforcement technique at present. There have been cases of people successfully challenging tickets, and it is worth noting that many of these traps are not laid out in accordance with the regulations. If you are a stickler for correctness (and I would hope all my readers are!) here are some of the requirements that are often breached:

- There must be four straight sides.
- The width of the painted line should be 200mm.
- The angles between the sides must be 60-120 degrees.
- Corners must touch or overlap the kerb.
- The cross-hatching (lattice pattern) must be at 90 degrees, spaced at 2 or 2.5 metre intervals, with lines 150mm wide.

Always ask for the video evidence, which you can obtain under the Data Protection Act.

Is a cold a crime?

Q. I hear the police are cracking down on drivers on drugs, but I don't understand how. Could I be arrested for driving after taking too much Lemsip? And would driving after smoking cannabis be treated the same as if I'd had five pints? - Lucy Posner, Manchester

A. There is no reliable testing device for drugs. Police give simple co-ordination tests to drivers suspected of having taken drugs, which are inconclusive. Existing laws carry strong punishments. But the authorities should concentrate on educating people about the dangers. Prevention is surely better than cure.

Submitted by Ron Williams

Are you still safe to drive?

So many of us believe we are safe drivers, but I wonder how many would be willing to put it to the test. Particularly, when a story in the news this week told us how motoring and road safety groups are calling on the Government to introduce medical check ups for motorists aged over 70.

Over the past few years, there has been talk of millions of older drivers being forced to re-sit their driving tests in a bid to reduce accidents. The proposed plans are said to introduce medical check-ups and assessments of vision and dementia for the older motorists.

The proposals follow news that the number of drivers over the age of 70 has rocketed by 300,000 in the last two years and that older drivers are apparently three times more likely to have an accident.

Councils may also introduce voluntary driving tests, which would allow older drivers to brush up their skills or identify points of concern.

Out of interest, I spoke to my dad about this. He was a police driver in the county for many years and has seen many accidents and would be able to judge. He also faces his own 70th birthday this year, and is very much in favour of the plan.

But should these barrage of tests be restricted to older drivers I wonder?

According to recent surveys at least 80 per cent of us believe we are safe behind the wheel, but how safe is safe?

Come on now, let's be honest, how would you fair if you were put to the test?

I think I know how I would do. Having recently started to sit along my eager son in order to prepare him for impending driving lessons, I have begun to realise that perhaps I do lack the skills I once had in the driving seat.

I took my test in 1981, when the streets of Kent were much quieter, and to me, we all drove a lot slower. There was no written test then, and even parallel parking wasn't included in the practical.

The congestion and speed of life here now in the South East of England of course means we all need to keep up, but at what cost?

When driving, we all fall into bad habits along the way. Not following the procedure of 'mirror, indicate, manoeuvre', as my instructor taught me. Not holding our hands on the wheel in the 'ten to two' position, or concentrating on what we will do when we

get to our destination, rather than that vehicle in front.

So, shouldn't we all be retested?

With changes to the rules of the road, and the huge increase of congestion in our cities and towns, surely it would be a good idea for us all.

It would help us to iron out those silly mistakes we make, and help us to become more aware of our driving habits and importantly keep up to date with changing rules on the road.

I'm not for a moment suggesting a test every year, but there have to be certain milestones and intervals in our lives when retesting for all would seem appropriate.

I'm guessing the matter of cost would be a deciding factor, but you have to ask - what price do you see appropriate to see safer drivers on the roads?

Julie Maddocks, Local Paper

A Physicist writes...

(May 2008)

Here is a question to which I'm hoping the answer is No: am I the only interfering busy-body on the roads? Let me explain. As I've suggested before, maybe it's because I'm a physicist, but when I see something 'out of order' and particularly if it is causing a traffic hazard I have a powerful urge to get it put right or made safe, or at least to give some sort of warning.

The problem might be static (potholes, traffic lights, street-lamps), or something loose on the road (animals, people, objects), or a fault on another vehicle (lights, tyres, bits falling off). If I don't do something about it, I say to myself, will anyone else?

I guess people do notify their local authority of such things as potholes, blocked gullies, broken glass on the road, and failed traffic lights and street-lamps — otherwise councils wouldn't all have gone to the trouble that they have, in setting up report forms for these problems (and others) on their websites. But I've lost count of the number of such things, across several counties, that have been fixed only after I reported them. The councils themselves are supposed to do regular surveys of their roads, of course, but I don't get the impression it's their top priority...

Sometimes a traffic hazard is sudden and serious. Last month I arrived at the level crossing at Ford in West Sussex to discover that although the lights were flashing red, the gates were still up! Vehicles were edging across, and I did the same. This was almost sheep mentality and very unwise, I realized afterwards (though I first looked L, R, L, R and L again), because there would have been no

real warning of a fast approaching train, nor of the gates suddenly coming down. What I should have done is stop short and use the yellow phone. Instead, I drove on to Littlehampton and left a message at the station. To my great relief, there was no news afterwards of any accident.

As for actual animals on the road, these are rarely sheep, sometimes cats and dogs, but more usually horses, which have every right to be there (if with riders). But they are still a hazard. The puzzle, as I've said before, is that the place where you're least likely to encounter them seems to be just after a horse-and-rider warning sign. Lately, though, I've realized that these signs mainly indicate exits from stables and bridle-paths (just as a bicycle in a triangle sign marks the end of a cycle lane). But the fact is that you are much more likely to meet a horse or, worse, a group of them on the open road, than near a sign.

When horses come into view, what should you do? Slow right down in order to pass them, obviously. But then as you accelerate again, oughtn't you consider warning oncoming traffic about them? The same question applies to any sort of obstruction that you have just passed. If it's plain that approaching drivers can see the problem then don't give any signal, I suggest — it will only be a distraction. But after you have gone round the next bend, surely it's your duty to indicate to drivers that there's trouble just out of sight.

I'd say this requires at least three quick flashes. Giving just one or two looks more like signalling hello (or else: "I reached for something and my sleeve caught the lighting stalk"). I remember giving about five flashes once, after I passed horses on the other side of the road and then immediately rounded an uphill bend to face

a rapidly approaching coach and a tail-back of cars!

Another time it was a lesser hazard (and fewer legs): I had passed an old lady striding along in the opposite gutter, just short of a narrow, blind right-hand bend. But you need to weigh up the situation. Best not to flash if you are trailing another vehicle, because it will look as if that's what you are signalling to. And if you've travelled more than about a quarter of a mile beyond the obstruction there's no point, because the oncoming driver will give up looking out for trouble before reaching it.

The third sort of problem that I mentioned is things out of order on other vehicles. If someone has forgotten to light up at twilight, I blip my headlights off rather than dazzle the driver with a full-beam flash warning. I ignore the stern advice given in the *Advanced Driving* magazine once, that unless you are on a street-lit road this act will put you (however briefly) in breach of the Lighting Regulations yourself!

Then another source of mild horror in me is a burnt-out bulb on a vehicle. After all, the other one of the pair could go soon (and I've noticed cars in this state too). Any driver who has a dark headlight must be aware of it, but clearly many do not often check their rear lights and brake lights for failures. Whenever possible I tell them of the problem, and invariably they are grateful (as I would be, in reverse).

From mild horror to the stuff of nightmares. On dozens of occasions over the years, I have seen a soft or a distorted tyre on the vehicle ahead. Would someone else take action to warn the driver if I didn't, and if not, what might be the consequences? So I've chased vehicles (at a safe distance) through town and through country flashing

my lights and (when closer) sounding my horn and gesticulating, but trying to indicate danger rather than that I am dangerous, and eventually inducing the driver to halt.

Once I managed to get alongside a car and warn the occupant about an almost flat rear tyre, just in time to stop her taking the slip road on to the M4. But sometimes there has been simply no opportunity to get the message across to drivers that they are at great risk of tyre failure, before they've disappeared into the distance. Hence my nightmares — and hence my question at the start...

*Peter Soul
Thames Valley Group*

Driving Tip Sorry Mate - I Didn't See You

The joys of motorcycling - including more predictable journey times and better fuel consumption - have encouraged a recent revival in biking, especially in urban areas.

But commuters on two wheels have to cope with a host of hazards - not least, car drivers who for various reasons fail to see the motorcycle coming towards them.

In the jargon, too often car drivers look, but fail to see, motorcycles.

This problem is particularly acute at junctions and that is why it is the subject of an advertising campaign. "Sorry mate I didn't see you" is for too many bikers the last words they hear before they are put in the ambulance. Don't forget to check carefully at junctions when you are emerging. An older slogan had the same affect: "Think once, think twice ... think bike".

Apart from giving bikers a "second glance", there are other things that drivers can do to ease the passage of motorcycles, particularly in heavy congestion, that in turn will mean a safer journey for everybody.

If you are stuck in dense traffic, keep checking your mirrors for bikes. These days they nearly all have their headlight on to make them easier to see. If the biker is trying to "filter" - make his way through the traffic by riding slowly between stationary vehicles, or riding on the white line in the middle of the road - make a point of creating space for them if you can do so in safety.

By pulling over slightly, to one side or the other, you can make the difference between letting the biker past, or adding to the congestion. Remember to check all your mirrors first: you don't want to compromise the bicycle making its way along the nearside in order to allow passage to a biker.

Never be tempted to vent your frustration with the traffic by getting in the way of a motorcycle on purpose. You won't go any faster and you may just contribute to a collision which of course will add to congestion rather than alleviate it.

If you are the biker – don't be aggressive, the car driver you upset today won't be inclined to help tomorrow.

And all this applies for pedal cyclists as well – both from car and cyclists point of view.

IAM website

About Us

How can the Group help me?

The Group offers observed runs to Associates on a one-to-one basis in their own cars. Your driving skills and attitude to all aspects of motoring and road use will be closely monitored by an Observer (a full Group member who has already passed the advanced driving test). Your Observer (who is a volunteer) will give you practical guidance, constructive advice, and support to help you to pass the advanced test.

How much does it cost?

The Skill for Life package which includes Associate Group Membership, the IAM Book "Pass Your Advanced Driving Test", the Advanced Test and the first year's membership of the IAM when you pass, costs just £85. As an Associate member, you will benefit from the Group's activities and have as many observed runs as you need to attain the IAM Test standard, (there is no additional charge for the observed runs). Associate membership is given on the understanding that you will apply for the advanced test within the first 12 months after joining the Group.

How does the Group Operate?

The dates, times, and meeting places for your observed runs are arranged directly with your Observer. The Group itself meets socially at 7:30 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month at the Littlebourne War Memorial Hall, (4 miles east of Canterbury on the A257), OS Grid Reference TR208575.

How do I join the Group?

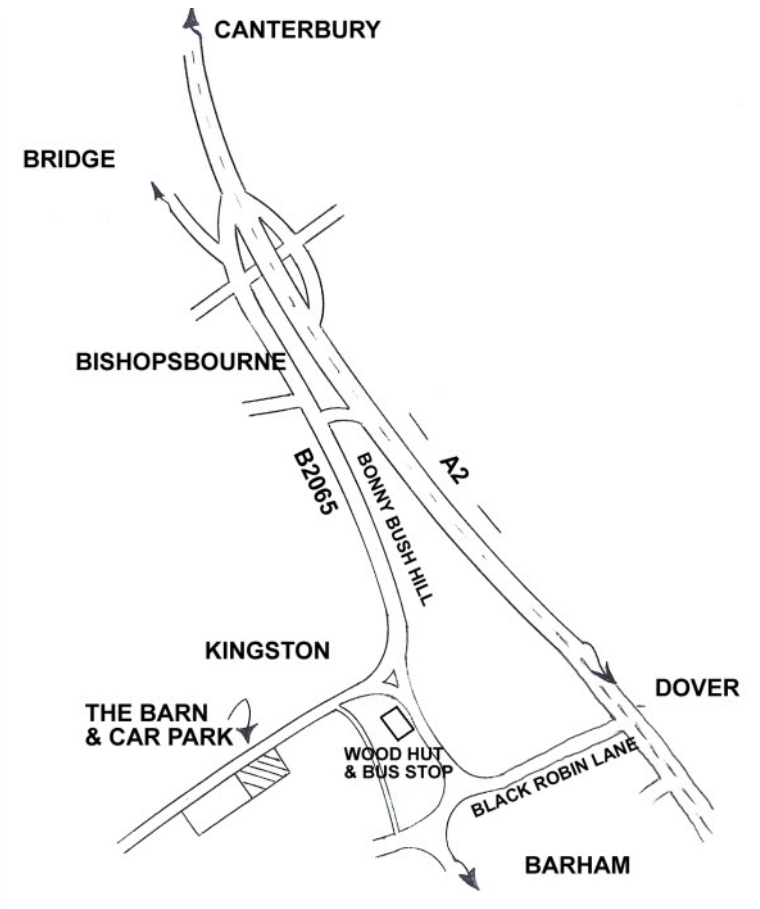
If you contact Mrs Vanessa Norley, 01304 215168, she will be able to give you full details, or visit our website at: <http://www.eastkentiam.org.uk>

The sessions are run the first Sunday of every month, from 10 am – 12 noon.

PLEASE NOTE: There is no session in January.

To find 'The Barn', Kingston:

- Leave the A2 – Canterbury to Dover Road – at the junction signposted "Bishopsbourne Kingston and Barham".
- Take the B2065 signposted "Kingston, Barham and Elham".
- At the bottom of "Bonny Bush Hill" turn right by the bus shelter into "The Street".
- Pass "Church Lane" on the left and The Barn and adjoining car park are within 200m on the left.



New Associates since the last update

Nigel Holden
 Alan Atherton Jackman
 Ryan McConnell
 Christopher Gunton
 Victor Johnson
 Anthony Pierce
 Donald Parish
 Hannah Al-Hasani
 Alexander O'Connor
 Alma Miller
 Simon Northey
 Keith Watson
 Sally Amos
 Watson McMunn
 Gillian Moore
 John Moore
 Tania Dunning

Members

Mike Tatlow

Events Data

Littlebourne War Memorial Hall
 - Second Thursday - 19.30pm

12th June - Manoeuvring Evening Hersden

10th July - Ley Liberson – A life on the Ocean waves

14th August - Group 'chat' evening with refreshments (to be provided by the Group)

17th August - Treasure Hunt . Starts at Sandy Acres, Maidstone

11th September - Peter Rodger IAM Chief Examiner

9th October - AGM Followed by talk from Geoff Pretty our present Regional Coordinator

13th November - TBA

11th December - John Pearce – Retired Senior Detective with Kent Police – 'Murder comes Gift Wrapped'

Test Passes

Period:

11.03.08 - 28.04.08

Associate	Date	Observer
Kathryn Hull	11.03.2008	David Beswick
Angela Payne	24.04.2008	Richard Hazell
Christian Brewer	26.04.2008	Eric Gowler
Joseph (Joe) Rumble	28.04.2008	Ted Willey

If you haven't been mentioned in the Test Passes and you think you should be, please contact Elizabeth. Thank you.

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Any views contained within this publication are not necessarily the views of the Editor, EKG or the IAM. The Editor claims no liability for correctness of information, printing or typesetting errors.