

GWENT GROUP OF ADVANCED MOTORISTS

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Cut-off date for entries into
the next Newsletter (No. 151)
is Sunday 26th March 2006

YOUR COMMITTEE (Car Section)

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The above Committee will meet at 7:00pm on the second Tuesday of each month, at the Road Safety Centre, Hartridge Farm Road, Hartridge, off Ringland Way. For details of the next meeting please contact Carol Shergold or look at the schedule on page 10.

Any Group Member or Associate Member wishing to address the Committee may do so in writing or in person by attending one of the Committee Meetings. All are welcome.

If you wish to speak on a motorcycle issue and do not wish to approach the main committee, then you should contact Andrew Lamb.

The editorial committee of the Gwent Group of Advanced Motorists wish to make it clear that the views expressed in this newsletter and on the Group Website, are not necessarily those of the Institute of Advanced Motorists. They are purely the individual views and opinions of the contributors and some may be controversial. It is, however, felt that only by complete and uninhibited discussion can any impact be made of the road safety problems.

FREE EXPRESSION WILL PROMOTE DISCUSSION

Editor's Note:

Due to the lack of articles submitted, this edition of the newsletter is smaller than normal and seems to be primarily bike orientated - this is due to the lack of input received from the car section.

Remember this is your newsletter. If you would like to see more articles relating to cars, please forward them to me.

My details can be found on this page. Electronic input is preferable to paper.

YOUR COMMITTEE (Bike Section)

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Members wishing to be on our e-mail mailing list should send their request to steven.williams5@ntlworld.com or call Steve on 07725-328563. Members are contacted when last minute event or special occasions arise.

WHAT MAKES THE PERFECT RIDER ?
PRACTISE MAKES PERFECT, WELL ALMOST !

Motorcyclists - please note:
Wednesday runs (April to September)
Will meet at 7:15pm
Ride briefing will be at 7:20pm
Depart Edlogan Way at 7:30pm

From the Chairman

HAPPY NEW YEAR.

It was pointed out to me by a member of the Motorbike section that I had been very remiss in the December issue of this magazine. Apparently I had omitted to wish everyone a happy Christmas. This is of course correct. In my defence, if I have one, all I could think of was that since taking over the responsibilities of Chairman, all we seem to have achieved as a Committee is losing members. Not a good start to my Chairmanship!

I have received notification from Betty Williams that she has resigned from the Committee. Betty had previously been the events secretary for many years and organised some interesting events. It was not an easy job, so thanks for all your hard work, we are all sorry to see Betty go. Mervyn Thomas of course kindly agreed to take on this task last year when Betty finished as events secretary. Let's hope members will attend any future events organised.

I have also received notification that one of our Examiners, PC Geoff Brimble, has decided to stop working as an Examiner for the IAM. We thank him for all his support in the past and we wish him well in the future.

As you are aware, this year is the 50th anniversary of the IAM. Head Office have suggested local groups organise events in their local area to promote better driving and publicise the IAM, and offer assessment drives to members of the public during the month of May. This is something we, as a group have offered for many years – so that drivers can get a feel of what is required to take the Advanced Driving Test.

However, if, by Head Office publicising assessments during May, hopefully this will promote the work done by the IAM.

If any member has any suggestions as to how, we as a local group can celebrate 50 years of the IAM, please feel free to contact Mervyn.

Carol Shergold

Group AGM – Wednesday 17th May 2006

The Group's Presentation Evening and Annual General Meeting will be held at Green Meadows Golf Club, Treherbert Road, Cwmbran. Arrive at 7:15pm for a 7:30pm start. Recipients for the presentation of Certificates will be invited by letter four weeks before.

All members are invited to attend.

Please support your group.

Mervyn Thomas

A Warm Welcome to All New Members		
Name	Area	Observer
John Rich	Newport	Carol Shergold
Mervyn Reece	Cwmbran	Mervyn Thomas
Angela Roylance	Cwmbran	Mervyn Thomas
Caroline Cowley	Newport	Mervyn Thomas

Congratulations on Passing the I.A.M. Test		
Name	Area	Observer
Mark Ward-Jones	--	Mervyn Thomas
Judith Williams	Cardiff	Mark Jones

New members and members who have recently passed, their names may have been missed off being mentioned in the newsletter. If you are one of these people and would like a mention, and see your name in print, please forward your details to the Newsletter Editor. Contact details on page 2.

General Information

Newsletter in Electronic Form (PDF)

If people would like to receive or access a PDF copy of the Newsletter then this is available via the new website. Access is restricted to members only, contact Steve Williams on steven.williams5@ntlworld.com for more details.

Advantages of having an electronic copy of the newsletter - you will be see the pictures in better detail and in colour too!

In Addition . . .

Why not subscribe to our e-mail list, you will be updated of any last minute events or relevant News Releases as they occur.

Your e-mail address is secure and not viewable by other parties.

You can un-subscribe at any time.

Visit www.gwent-advanced-motorists.org/mail_list1.htm

Whilst you're on the site why not sign our guestbook - it can be found at the top of every page.

Events

Month	Day	Destination / Activity
February	Sunday 12th	Weston-Super-Mare - (120 miles) Departure time 10:00am at Edlogan Way Across the estuary to visit this coastal town.
	Wednesday 22nd	Presentation First Aid by David James
March	Sunday 12th	Bath - (120 miles) Departure time 10:00am at Edlogan Way Pillions most welcome to enjoy this world heritage site.
	Wednesday 29th	Presentation A presentation by Alan Dunn on Advanced Riding.
April	Sunday 9th	Llanddewi Brefi - (160 miles) Departure time 10:00am at Edlogan Way Home of the T.V. Series – ‘Little Britain’.
	Wednesday 26th	Skenfrith - Training Run Liquid refreshments at the Bell Inn.
May	Sunday 14th	Gaydon - (200 miles) Departure time 9:00am at Edlogan Way Head for the motor museum via some of the most picturesque villages in the Cotswolds / Wiltshire.
	Wednesday 10th	Slow Riding Sort out the slow speed wobbles with some practice.
	Wednesday 17th	Group AGM Green Meadows Golf Club, Treherbert Road, Cwmbran. Arrive at 7:15pm for a 7:30pm start.
	Wednesday 31st	Porthcawl - Training Run Fish and Chips, the traditional cuisine at Butty Bay.

June	Wednesday 14th	5 Bridges (IV) - Training Run A bit of everything and always a favourite.
	Sunday 11th	Cardigan Coast - (200 miles) Departure time 9:00am at Edlogan Way Aberaeron up to Aberystwyth, returning via Devils Bridge and the Elan Valley.
	Wednesday 28th	Brecon and the reservoirs - Training Run Off to Brecon again but then heading back another way?
July	Sunday 9th	Powys Castle, Welshpool - (230 miles) Departure time 9:00am at Edlogan Way Up via Craven Arms and back via Cross Gates and the Golden Valley.
	Wednesday 14th	BBQ - To be Confirmed Tony Parsons hosts the group at the Anchor Inn in the shadows of Tintern Abbey.
	Wednesday 26th	Destination TBD - Training Run Details to be added.
August	Wednesday 9th	Local Peaks - Training Run Superb views all within easy reach.
	Sunday 13th	Stratford Upon Avon - (200 miles) Departure time 9:00am at Edlogan Way Shakespeare's birthplace in rural Warwickshire.
	Wednesday 30th	Forest of Dean - Training Run Getting there will be good with Stow Hill to look forward to.
September	Sunday 10th	Worcester Triangle - (160 miles) Departure time 9:00am at Edlogan Way An excellent route taking in some great roads.
	Wednesday 27th	Wye Valley - Training Run Why? Roads, scenery, pub, what more could you wish for!

October	Sunday 8th	Cheddar & Brean Sands - (140 miles) Departure time 10:00am at Edlogan Way Britain's largest gorge and on to Bridgewater bay.
	Wednesday 25th	? Open Forum / Presentation ? -
November	Sunday 12th	Castle Coombe - (120 miles) Departure time 10:00am at Edlogan Way Arguably the prettiest village in England.
	Wednesday 29th	Quiz Andy Lamb steps in to run this annual event.
December	Sunday 10th	Llandovery - (100 miles) Departure time 10:00am at Edlogan Way Battery run. Another chance to charge those batteries!
	TBD	Christmas Function

PLEASE NOTE:

THE WEBSITE IS UPDATED FREQUENTLY AND HAS DETAILS OF ALL UPCOMING RIDES AND ADDITIONAL RIDES.

IF ANY GROUP MEMBER HAS ANY IDEAS OF A PLACE TO VISIT, PLEASE CONTACT STEVE VIA THE WEBSITE OR BY PHONE.

Unless otherwise stated :

- Sunday rides (May to September) leave RSC, Edlogan Way at 9:00am
All other Sunday rides leave at 10:00am
- Wednesday evening events at 7:30pm
 - Wednesday rides (April to September) will meet at 7:15pm
 - Ride briefing will be at 7:20pm
 - Depart Edlogan Way at 7:30pm

Additional Information

Approximate mileages have been added against each Sunday rideout, in order to provide some idea of the duration.

Meeting Schedule for 2006

Month	Day	Meeting
February	Tuesday 14 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 21 st	Car Observer
	Tuesday 21 st	Bike Observer
March	Tuesday 14 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 21 st	Car Observer
	Tuesday 21 st	Bike Committee
April	Tuesday 11 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 18 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 18 th	Bike Observer
May	Tuesday 9 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 16 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 16 th	Bike Committee
	Wednesday 17 th	Group Annual General Meeting
June	Tuesday 13 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 20 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 20 th	Bike Observer
July	Tuesday 11 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 18 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 18 th	Bike Committee
August	Tuesday 8 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 15 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 15 th	Bike Observer
September	Tuesday 12 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 19 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 19 th	Bike Committee
October	Tuesday 10 th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 17 th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 17 th	Bike Observer

November	Tuesday 14th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 21st	Car Observer
	Tuesday 21st	Bike Committee
December	Tuesday 12th	Group Committee
	Tuesday 19th	Car Observer
	Tuesday 19th	Bike Observer

All meetings commence at 7:00pm

Group Committee meetings and Car Observer meetings are held at the Road Safety Centre, Hartridge Farm Road, Hartridge, off Ringland Way

Bike Committee meetings and Bike Observer meetings are held at the Road Safety Centre, Edlogan Way, Cwmbran

Bikesafe National Launch

As with 2005 it is again being held at Cheltenham Racecourse on Saturday and Sunday 1st and 2nd April 2006.

The new Motorcycle Committee is:

Chairman : Andy Lamb

Secretary : Dave Williams

Chief Observer : Mike Odelet

PRO : Greg Sullivan

Events Co-ordinator : The Committee – although Greg has offered to co-ordinate the Sunday Rides

Non Specific Role

Committee Members : Lee Clarke, Mark Jones and Judith Williams

IAM News Articles

Speed Camera "Plague" Still Eroding Driver Confidence, says IAM Chief

Issued: 7 December 2005

The damaging effect on relations between the driver and the police caused by a "plague" of speed cameras, coupled with the "robotic issue of tough penalties" has continued to damage road safety, the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) said today (Wednesday 7 December 2005).

Speaking at the IAM Annual Lunch in London, IAM Chairman John Maxwell told guests, including guest speaker, Road Safety Minister Dr Stephen Ladyman, that too many drivers and rider are still convinced that the safety camera regime is about income-generation, not road safety.

Mr Maxwell, said: "Speed limits must be worthy of respect, if they are not to be ignored, and that it is both essential and urgent that we settle on a sensible regime of limits and their enforcement."

The IAM welcomes the Road Safety Bill because it will enable the Minister to display in legislative terms what has been described as a "new deal" with drivers and riders, who should be seen as part of the solution, not just the problem.

"We are pleased that the Bill proposes graduated fixed penalties for speeding offences, which will, we're sure, go a long way to reassuring law-abiding drivers, who presently feel victimised when prosecuted for relatively minor infringements," said Mr Maxwell.

He went on to describe as entirely sensible the proposals relating to drinking and driving, driver fatigue, the re-training of seriously bad drivers and the better regulation of driving instructors.

Mr Maxwell thanked the Minister for halting the installation of more speed cameras until a thoroughgoing review of their road-safety value can be completed.

"But do please accept that in addition to the review of camera-use there needs to be a proper review of speed limits themselves – allowing for the possibility of raising limits under some circumstances, and looking to replace automatic, inflexible, indiscriminate detection and enforcement with discretion."

Mr Maxwell said that the IAM is marking its 50th year in 2006 and that following its own strategic review it is determined to be bigger, better and more influential in the cause of road safety.

MBE for IAM's Chief Examiner

Issued: 31 December 2005

Bryan Lunn, Chief Examiner at the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists) has been awarded an MBE in Her Majesty's New Year's Honours for services to road safety and the IAM.

Bryan, 61, has been Chief Examiner at the IAM for 10 years.

For many years, Bryan lived in Barkingside, East London and recently moved to Suffolk. He said: "The honour is a delight, and totally unexpected. My family asked me to accept it and I am happy to do so. I am sure that the honour reflects well on the work of the IAM, where it has been a pleasure to work for the last ten years."

Born in Redhill, Surrey, Bryan was educated in East Africa and joined the Metropolitan Police as a cadet in 1962. He spent much of his 40-year career in the Met's Traffic Division. His final post before joining the IAM was as the Commandant of the Metropolitan Police Driving School in Hendon.

During his time with the IAM, Bryan assessed the driving of a wide variety of candidates including celebrity Julian Clarey and former Daily Telegraph editor Lord Deedes.

Bryan is married with two grown up children. His hobbies include astronomy and cinema going.

Bryan retired from the IAM on 31 December 2005 and is succeeded as IAM Chief Examiner by Peter Rodger.

Mansell Takes the Wheel at the IAM

Issued: 9 January 2006

F1 Racing legend Nigel Mansell is to be the new President of the IAM (Institute of Advanced Motorists).

Mansell passed his Advanced Driving Test last August, 19 years after scoring his first Formula One victory at Brands Hatch. As IAM President, Mansell brings a lifetime of driving experience to the IAM.

"I believe driving expertise isn't just for the race track," said Mr Mansell.

"My grandfather always told me that it is no good lying on a hospital bed saying 'But I had the right of way'. That is why drivers can gain so much from preparing for their IAM test.

"I am honoured to take the Presidency of such a well regarded organisation and I hope that in this, its 50th Anniversary Year, we can inform and educate more drivers and riders than ever before," he said.

Welcoming the appointment, IAM Chairman John Maxwell said:

"I am delighted that Nigel has accepted the invitation to be our new President. He is a well respected public figure, with immense driving experience. As well as his legendary track record, Nigel has consistently campaigned for safety on the road and I know that drivers of all ages will regard him as a leading proponent of safety, both on and off the track."

With 31 Grand Prix wins, Nigel Mansell already has his place in the Formula One Hall of Fame. He has joined racing drivers John Surtees, the late Graham Hill, Sir Stirling Moss and motorcyclist Geoff Duke who have all passed their IAM test.

The first IAM President was Lord Sempill and the most recent was HRH The Duke of Gloucester, who held the position for 32 years.

Mobile Display Unit (M.D.U.)

A plaque has been placed in the Mobile Display Unit in memory of our late Chairman Mike Lahert.

I am now in correspondence with Monmouthshire Council regarding the M.D.U. visiting towns in Monmouthshire during this year. Dates for the various locations will be published in the next newsletter.

If any member of the group have any events or venues in mind that they would like the M.D.U. to visit please let me know.

Mervyn Thomas
M.D.U. Coordinator

Polo Shirts and Sweatshirts

Group Polo Shirts and Sweatshirts which can be personalised can now be obtained through Tony Blane and the shop (contact details on the front inside cover).

The price for the Polo Shirt is £10 and for the Sweatshirt £14 (plus any postage and packing if necessary) in sizes S, M, L and XL and in colours Black, Red, Navy, Royal Blue, Bottle Green (dark), Grey and Maroon – the writing in each case is in white.

Please remember to provide proof of IAM Membership when placing your order.

Members' comments

END OF YEAR MOTORCYCLE REGISTRATIONS REVEAL OPTIMISTIC FUTURE

Issue Date: 10th January 2006

The motorcycle market has had an interesting year in 2005 starting with Roads Minister David Jamieson launching the Government's Motorcycle Strategy, announcing the mainstreaming of motorcycling as a form of transport and ending with new motorcycle registrations showing little movement on 2004.

After four consecutive years of decline, 2005 saw the market levelling-off. Registrations totalled 132,803 new mopeds, scooters and motorcycles - less than one percent down on the 2004 total and somewhat better than the five percent fall in new car registrations.

Overall, the motorcycle market gained in two key areas throughout 2005; Learner legal bikes (up to 125cc) were up 4.2% on 2004 at 33,825, reflecting the continued growth in new riders and commuter riders, whilst large capacity bikes (over 1,000cc) popular among long-distance riders were up 17.2% to reach 18,960 new registrations in 2005.

At 40,092 new registrations, Scooters remain the single largest segment (30.2% of all new registrations) with Piaggio's NRG and Peugeot's Ludix and Speedfight models topping the Moped Scooter popularity stakes.

Sports motorcycles (Supersport and Sport/Tourers) accounted for 35,498 registrations (26.7% of all new registrations). Kawasaki's ZX6R and Suzuki's GSXR1000 are at the top of the Supersport 600cc and 1000cc classes. Suzuki's SV650S and Triumph's Sprint ST1050 are the most popular Sports-Tourers.

Honda's CBR125R, CG125, SCV100 Lead and XR125L models topped the Naked, Sports, Scooter and Trail/Enduro sectors respectively and dominated the list of best-selling Learner-legal motorcycles.

BMW's R1200GS and R1200RT showed the popularity of Adventure Sport and Touring styles among the large capacity machines. Harley-Davidson models were again the most popular in the Custom sector top-ten listing.

Craig Carey-Clinch, MCI's Director of Public Affairs said, "The MCI is optimistic about the future of motorcycling in Britain. Motorcycle technology is constantly evolving and the 2006 models are cleaner and more user-friendly than ever. There is more choice for the consumer and more opportunities for people to do more with their bike and reap the many benefits from reduced-stress commuting, over-land travel adventures or attending motorcycle sports events -- plus other activities, rallies and meets.

"It cannot be ignored that some aspects of the motorcycle market are under-pressure. The challenge of meeting new competition from China and other developing producers will become stronger in the next few years. However, the increased diversity in motorcycling may well bring interesting new opportunities, and could even attract people to motorcycling that might not have previously thought it was right for them.

Scottish Highlands

I have been on a number of foreign tours riding solo as part of a group but the opportunity came for my wife and I to finally try a bike touring holiday during my daughter's school trip.

Sunday 24th July We waved the school bus away at 7:30am, my wife Wendy looking as if she would start crying at any time as I tried hard not to show my delight. I did think about us already wearing our bike clothes to the school but decided it might look like we were rushing her away on the school trip, so instead they were all laid out at home.

Getting to Fort William

With heavy rain to start and heading north the omens did not look too good at this stage. Wanting to get there reasonably quickly but also hoping to see some sights we used mainly the A roads but by-passed the heavily congested areas by using the Motorways.

The A49 took us to Shrewsbury for our first cuppa where we provided onlookers with much entertainment whilst removing our waterproofs; I suppose we did look like aliens in this garden centre café. Moving on to Whitchurch and heading for Warrington I finally had to relent and used the M6 getting off for the Lake District and Newby Bridge.

Riding along Lake Windermere proved slow going with the heaviest traffic we endured all trip then over a rather disappointing Kirkstone pass and along Ullswater to Pooley Bridge for our first nights B&B accommodation.

Distance - 273 miles

Monday 25th Dry weather and we were away at 9am using the M6 from Penrith to Carlisle, things getting better on the A roads to Dumfries and Kilmarnock with slow moving vehicles spaced out for easy overtakes.

Following signs for Glasgow we skirted around the west of the city through Paisley and over the Erskine Bridge noticing the contrast of high rise housing in Glasgow towards the east and the Highlands in the distance. Feeling as if we were at the real start point it was onto the A82 alongside Lock Lomond taking a well earned rest at Inverarnan in the Drovers Inn.

Drovers Inn - Built in 1705 the Inn was used by the Highland drovers on their way to the markets in Glasgow. On entry to the reception area you are faced by a full grown, stuffed Grizzly Bear and assortment of other animals and an impression that little has changed over the last 300 years.

During the final push of the day neon road signs warned drivers to expect delays ahead due to roadwork's and holiday traffic, but I can't say they held us up too much as we filtered to the front and made steady progress through the dramatic location of Glen Coe. Finally we reached Fort William the largest town in the Highlands, finding our accommodation with ease where we based ourselves for the next three nights.

Distance – 236 miles

The Highlands

Tuesday 26th A day off the bike, so with the intention of walking Ben Nevis i had posted my walking gear ahead of us to the B&B rather than use up essential luggage capacity.

Ben Nevis - Britain's highest mountain has a summit of 4,406ft (1,344m). The mountain begins its rise from the shores of Loch Linnhe so the ascent is virtually the full height from sea level to the summit over a distance of 10 miles.

The views up to 3500ft were wonderful being able to look across the dozens of other peaks within sight and taking every opportunity for pictures. The mist then reduced visibility and made things much colder. Total walk took almost 5 hours, but later in the visitor centre i was humbled to read the record is less than 2 hours.

During the evening we opted for the entertainment of McTavish's Kitchens. Initially we thought the sole piper to be worth the entrance fee, until we heard the tremendous sound of the highlands band making their way along the main street. If only we had gone window shopping instead that evening!

Wednesday 27th We spent this day exploring the surrounding area without having to carry the luggage. Firstly we rode along Glen Nevis which is a single track leading to a parking area for all those that want access to walking routes and climbing.

Next we visited the Ben Nevis Distillery which was easy to find as we could smell the whisky from some distance. Established in 1825 this was an interesting visit around one of the oldest distilleries in Scotland. From here we travelled just a few miles to view Neptune's Staircase.

Neptune's Staircase - In 1803 Thomas Telford was appointed Chief Engineer when Parliament commissioned the building of the Caledonian Canal. Taking nearly 20 years to complete the canal runs from Loch Linnhe on the west coast to the Moray Firth on the east via Glen More, so that sailing around the dangerous north coast could be avoided. A system of four canals linking three lochs over a length of 96 km, it is controlled by a series of 9 gates and 8 locks hence the name Neptune's Staircase.

After approx 3 hrs we were still within the area of Fort William but soon covered some distance on the wonderful "Road to the Isles." A 40 mile ride on the A830 through Glenfinnan alongside the famous 21-arched Viaduct (as shown in the Harry Potter films), enjoying wide sweeping bends to the quaint fishing port of Mallaig with a view of the Inner Hebridean islands.

After relaxing for a while we retraced a few miles before turning off on the A861 for the scenic route around Glenuig and Kinlockmoidart. This is single track but nevertheless good road surface as we made our way back the long way round along Loch Sunart, Loch Linnhe and Loch Eil. Although within sight of Fort William this area is very remote as it takes approx 2 hours to reach when driving around the Lochs, the only other option being the ferry across from Ardgour to Corran.

Wanting to pack for an early departure the following morning it was back to the B&B to get ready for the next destination.

Distance – 170 miles

Thursday 28th With a long day ahead and hoping to arrive at a reasonable time we were away by 8am travelling northwards on the A82.

Within 15 minutes whilst passing through Spean Bridge on a tight left hander we came to a car on its roof with the music blaring, wheels still turning, driver hanging out of the door and the passenger dazed but walking around. First on the scene was a car driver travelling in the same direction as the accident victim, and we arrived next in the opposite direction. Thankfully the victim had already been placed in the recovery position so it was a case of stop the traffic, get an ambulance on its way, try to get a response from the victim and reassure the passenger.

Slowly the Paramedics recovered the victim to the extent where he regained consciousness. All traffic respectfully waited for the scene to be cleared and the Police to start directing them through. Unfortunately one bike could not wait and came filtering from the other direction, managing to avoid the debris as he passed a scene that looked as though there must have been a fatality involved. Personally I felt utter contempt at the actions of that rider, but had some reassurance of British principles when I recognised the number plate – lets just say it was foreign.

On our way again at 10ish it was a struggle to put the scene out of my mind and concentrate on my riding, but i then started to relax as we neared Invergarry taking the A87 to the Kyle of Lochalsh.

At Shiel Bridge we took the scenic detour along single track over some steep inclines leading down to the shore of Gleneig Bay. The two main routes onto the Isle of Skye are the ferry from Mallaig to the southern end and the Skye Bridge to the northern end, but there is a little known ferry crossing, reputedly the last of its type in the world where the upper deck swivels around to accommodate rolling on and off. This operates during the summer months only and crosses when there are enough passengers waiting.

After waiting for 30 minutes and paying our £4 we boarded with three cars and four cyclists and were soon over onto the Isle of Skye. Continuing on un-named roads to the A87 we departed Skye on the un-tolled bridge over the Kyle of Lochalsh and into the area of Wester Ross where we continued north on our second little detour.

The sign said "Often closed in winter," which fuelled my interest as we aimed for Applecross over the UK's highest road pass "Bealach Na Ba," (Pass of the Cattle). This is a steep climb with hairpin bends up to a peak of 710m (2329 ft) on Meall Gorm. The views were stunning enhanced by the colours of the angry sky where storms rained down in the distance.

Snow poles to indicate the depth of the snow and direction of the road lined much of this route which is very useful when reading the road ahead. "Passing places" are available every 100metres or so with signs encouraging slower moving vehicles to pull in for others to pass by. In fact although it is a very remote location every effort has been made to cater for the motorist without spoiling the landscape.

After the photo stop it was a gradual downhill to Applecross just managing to beat the cyclists to the local café.

Continuing north around the coastal route it was onto the A896 at Shieldaig then the A832 at Kinlochewe. Single track with a wet surface meant slow going along Loch Maree and Little Loch Broom but thankfully we continued to miss all the surrounding storms that looked so close. Finally we reached the A835 for the last few miles to Ullapool.

When arriving at a new destination i always get fuel ready for the next journey and then take the opportunity to check the street map for our accommodation. After a long day i find this gives me a little rest before struggling through built up areas trying to find a particular address, this worked well and we arrived at our accommodation "The Old Surgery" at 6pm.

We spent the evening in a pub struggling with the local language – Russian, as half the customers and staff seemed to be Russian, even the rather stern looking door man. Still we had a most enjoyable evening with some tourists from North Germany who visit Scotland every year.

Distance – 241 miles

Friday 29th Leaving on the A835 we continued northwards on the A894 over open Mooreland with sweeping bends spoiled only by the strong easterly crosswinds.

We stopped briefly at Kylesku to view the highest waterfall in the UK. Now I wasn't expecting anything like the Angel Falls of Venezuela of course, but nevertheless this was a little disappointing when viewed from a few miles as the only way to get close is by boat. After marvelling at the local Post Office – a garden shed, we continued north to the area of North-West Sutherland.

Continuing on single track again we arrived in Durness on the North Coast to watch their Highland Games being opened by the highlands band. Cape Wrath, the furthest point North West is only a few miles from here but involves a short boat trip across the Kyle of Durness and then a mini bus ride to the lighthouse. That was sure to be one detour too many so we continued east along the north coast, marvelling at the unspoilt beaches and battered coastline following the A836 to Thurso for our next two nights accommodation.

It was still only mid-afternoon so we pushed on to Dunnet Head the UK's most northerly point, took the obligatory photographs and then went to John O'Groats. Here we booked ourselves for a trip to the Orkney Islands and then returned to Thurso via Wick and settled into our accommodation.

Distance – 217 miles.

Saturday 30th Firstly a brisk ride to John O Groat's followed by the 8:30am crossing over the Pentland Firth, arriving in the Orkney Islands some 40 minutes later where a coach awaited us.

The day tour included visiting many local attractions including the Churchill Barriers, the Neolithic village of Scara Brae (2,500BC), the Italian Chapel and the capital Kirkwall.

After the windswept return crossing we rode back late evening to complete an enjoyable and interesting day.

Distance - 40 Miles

Sunday 31st Departing Thurso and heading south we followed the A9 along the coastal route to Inverness, and the A82 along Loch Ness to rest at Drumadrochit.

Loch Ness is well known of course but still surprised me in that it holds more water than all the lakes and reservoirs in England combined, it is up to 230 metres deep and 38 km long. A visit to the Loch Ness visitor centre followed, where a surprisingly balanced view of the myth was presented that showed hoax claims and unexplained sightings.

We pushed on further through the now familiar Fort William and on to Ballachulish, arriving early after making much better progress by avoiding the single track roads. This was to be our base for the next two evenings.

Distance – 195 miles

Monday 1st August We spent the morning walking some delightful little known routes along Glen Creran courtesy of local information from our hosts, nothing too strenuous i'm glad to say but very relaxing as we were away from sight or sound of any other persons.

Throughout the afternoon we explored further on the Bike. First we rode along Loch Leven to take a look at the area of Glen Coe with Majestic views of mountain scenery, and then we visited the monument to the MacDonald Clan massacred in 1692. Next we followed the wonderful B863 to Kinlochleven where we spent a few hours around the local waterfalls and the indoor ice climbing centre.

The evening brought our first introduction to some well known locals – Midges. Leaving a pub and riding away with a crash helmet full of them made us realise what we had been warned about, thankfully that was our only encounter with the Midges.

Distance – 60 miles

Heading Home

Tuesday 2nd Leaving on the A828 along Loch Linnhe and Loch Creran our first stop was in the bustling seaside resort of Oban. Next the A85 took us to Loch Awe turning right onto the A419 and then the A83 along Loch Fyne. The A83 goes over the aptly named "Rest and be Thankful" a road first built in 1746 that rises to 262m, taking the name from the inscription on a rough stone bench at the summit. This road is ideal for motorcycling with fast open bends and great views and plenty of room to overtake any slow movers.

Arriving at the A82 just south of the Drovers Inn at Inveranan we retraced our steps around Glasgow and Kilmarnock. Stopping at a café in New Cumnock the old photographs on the wall showed that the area used to rely heavily on coal mining. Carrying on through Dumfries we encountered the strongest winds so far along the exposed M6 leaving at J40 on the A66 for the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Having already studied the map for any steep inclines the call to explore was too great to ignore so it was off the beaten track again onto the B6270 for Thwaite and then unnamed roads over Buttertubs Pass to Hawes. This section was tough after a long day being buffeted by strong winds, but certainly not to be missed. However the roads were very difficult to read with blind crests and hidden dips over open moors giving little clue of which way the road would turn.

Arriving in Hawes late afternoon this being the one evening we had not booked accommodation in advance we found what must have been the only available

room in the village. The reason it was available soon became apparent but it was too late to go looking elsewhere so we made the most of what was on offer and were soon out for an evening meal.

Distance – 305 miles.

Wednesday 3rd Our last day, we carried on through The Dales on yet more twisties noticing that there were many more motorcyclists in this area. Through Settle and Clitheroe it was onto the M6 at Preston and back off again at J15 to continue on the A roads.

Final route took us through Market Drayton, Telford, Bridgenorth, Kidderminster, and Worcester and onto Malvern Hills for a cuppa. Here we had the telephone call to say that the school coach had managed to get the earlier crossing over the channel hence would arrive at 7pm instead of 10pm.

So it was home via Ledbury arriving with time to spare at 5pm, in fact I'm sure we could have squeezed in a few more unnamed roads on the route home.

Distance – 270 miles

Highlights

A 2000 mile trip over a period of 11 days was comfortable, and a mix of moving on regularly yet also basing ourselves at a number of locations was about right. Having travelled so far north it would be a shame not to visit Dunnet Head and John O'Groats, yet these were certainly not the best part of the ride and paled into insignificance compared to the wonderful west highlands. The lush beauty of Glen Coe and the Road to the Isles gradually changes to a more rugged and unforgiving landscape as you head north, all leaving wonderful memories that compare favourably to other European destinations visited previously.

Greg Sullivan

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Cheques for payment at the appropriate rate should be made payable to Gwent Group of Advanced Motorists and be sent to the Group Treasurer, Ron Palmer, 8 Maple Close, Llanmartin, Newport NP18 2ET at least 7 days before the first day of the month of issue.

Small 'For Sale' type ads, from members only, will be accepted free of charge up to a maximum of 30 words. Please send a copy of the wording to the Editor.

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IF AN OBSERVER HAS NOT CONTACTED YOU WITHIN THREE WEEKS OF JOINING THE GROUP, PLEASE CONTACT THE CHIEF OBSERVER (DETAILS ON PAGES 2 & 4 OF THIS NEWSLETTER).

IN ORDER THAT THE GROUP MEMBERSHIP RECORDS ARE CORRECT AND UP TO DATE, PLEASE

INFORM YOUR OBSERVER OF THE DATE OF YOUR ADVANCED DRIVING TEST AS SOON AS YOU ARE NOTIFIED OF THIS.

WHEN YOU HAVE THE RESULT OF THE TEST, PLEASE INFORM YOUR OBSERVER.

IF YOU HAVE BEEN SUCCESSFUL, PLEASE INFORM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY OF THE MEMBERSHIP NUMBER OF THE IAM WHICH YOU WILL HAVE RECEIVED FROM THE INSTITUTE.