



40th Anniversary Newsletter - November 2025

St Helens Group of Advanced Motorists
Working to make our roads safer every day...



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Foreword

Hello everybody,

Welcome to the 40th Anniversary Special Edition Newsletter. The Group was founded on the 12th November 1985 and through generations of loyal committee members and Observers the Group is still very active.

I've put this newsletter together to give new members insights into the early years of the Group and its continued development since. I'm sure older members will also appreciate being reminded of what the Group has achieved and continues to

achieve. Thank you to all those who have provided contributions. I've also used some contributions that were provided for our 25th Anniversary newsletter in 2010 some of whom were the founder members of the Group. The Group is really about its people, those who voluntarily give their time to support it and help drivers to become more confident, skillful and safer. For the vast majority, they demonstrate this by passing the IAM RoadSmart Advanced Driving Test.

Mark Farnworth
Group Chairman

Maureen Walker (Leonard)

Group Secretary 1985 to 2001

(Written in 2010)
I first became interested in the Institute of Advanced Motorists many years ago through a friend who was a Founder Member of the Merseyside Group – sadly he passed away last year.

In 1980, I obtained a new secretarial position in Warrington and one day whilst reading the local newspaper I saw an advertisement for Warrington Group of Advanced Motorists, inviting members of the public to go along any Sunday morning to learn more about the Group. I went along, became a member and subsequently trained and passed my Advanced Driving Test, after which I became an Observer for the Group.

Whilst there I, along with many other IAM drivers living in and around the St Helens area, received a

letter from IAM HQ advising that consideration was being given to starting a new Group in St Helens and extending an invitation to go along to an Inaugural Meeting to be held in the Gerrard Arms Hotel at Denton's Green, St Helens. This was in June 1985.

I attended that meeting where it was announced that a Group was to be launched and two members from the Warrington Group (Alan Clark and Veronica Oates) were prepared to help with the start-up of the St Helens Group. The Group would be a full Group, although usually a new Group started up as a Sub-Group of an already established full Group.

First of all, a Committee was required. I was persuaded by a friend to go on to the Committee. Alan Clark appointed himself as Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary to help the newly formed Group. Two Police Officers from Merseyside Police volunteered to help the Group and were appointed on to the Committee. Joe Thomas, IAM Divisional Council Member and Bob Higginbotham, IAM Region 5 Organiser attended those early monthly meetings of the new Committee and helped on Sunday mornings at Birchley Street Car Park with Associate training (I had obtained

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Maureen Walker (Leonard) - contd.

permission from St Helens Council to use the small section of Birchley Street car park every Sunday morning for training, unless required by the Council for any reason). Of course, the Group had no money and I remember Bob Higginbotham started us off with a £5 donation!

It was agreed to have monthly Committee Meetings but for the first three meetings, Minutes were not produced. I was approached by Joe Thomas and asked if I would take the Minutes, as a record was required of the proceedings, and I agreed. The DCM and the RO were very supportive of the Group and helped in many ways. The Group were very fortunate in that the DCM lived in Newton-le-Willows and the RO lived in Stockport. It was agreed that the Group should hold its first AGM and that it would be better if the Group appointed its own Officers from within the Committee who were not members of any other Group. The first AGM was held on 12th November 1985 and I was appointed Secretary (a position I held for 17 years) and John Baxendale (Police Officer) was appointed Chairman.

We started to recruit and train Associates. Those Associates who were close to taking the IAM Test were asked to become Observers and train the new Associates. They all passed their IAM Test and went

on to train as Observers. It was a struggle but it worked and very soon we had our own qualified Observers.

As Secretary, I was issued with the Group's IAM Handbook and was asked to study it and act upon the contents. I realised that the next requirement was to appoint a President and the person appointed should preferably be a well-known local person with some standing in the community, but not a politician. After giving this matter some thought, I approached The Lady Mavis Pilkington, widow of the late Lord Harry Pilkington of the world famous Pilkington Glass Company. When I contacted her, she asked me what did she have to do? Did she have to drive on a Skid Pan and take a Test? I explained that the position was an honorary one and the only position within the Group where the person was not required to take a Test. She asked me what the Members of the Group had to do and when I told her that they had to take and pass the IAM Driving Test, The Lady Mavis told me that she would take on the role of President but only if she trained and passed the IAM Test too. I reported the matter to the Committee and it was agreed that she be trained to take the Test. John Baxendale, the Group Chairman, agreed to take her out on runs, fitting in with his work and The Lady Pilkington's commitments.

When I informed IAM HQ that The Lady Mavis Pilkington had joined the Group and was training for the Test, HQ wanted her to take her Test with them but she said that she would take the test locally like the rest of the members. The Lady Pilkington passed her IAM Test and we had our first President!



Photograph taken at the Group's first AGM held on 12th November 1985, Travellers Rest, Crab Street, St. Helens. Left to right: The Lady Mavis Pilkington, Denis Painter (Group Treasurer), John Baxendale (Group Chairman). Photo provided by Denis and Anne Painter



Maureen Walker (Leonard) - contd.

The Lady Mavis passed away and the Group required another President. The Lady Kirsty Pilkington (the Group's current President) also said the same as our late President and she too trained and passed the IAM Test with the St Helens Group.

It was quite a struggle for the Group in those early years, especially for finances. I remember the Group did not have a typewriter for the purpose of producing Minutes, letters, Newsletters, etc (computers were not in use like they are today) and I went and purchased a small portable electric typewriter on HP terms over nine months (interest free) from the St Helens Co-operative Society. A relative of mine worked for a Photocopying company and was of tremendous help because when photocopying machines came in for repair, before they were returned they had to be tested, and he did the Group's photocopying of the Newsletter and the notes for training on them.

As I said earlier, the Group really struggled in those early years but was helped by a great enthusiastic Committee and Members who worked together. We

Denis Painter

Group Treasurer 1985 to 1989, Co-Chairman 1986 to 1987

(Written in 2010)

Hi, I suspect most of you haven't even heard of me. I am one of the founder members of your St. Helens Group. Way back in 1985 several of us, with the backing of the I.A.M. decided to start a Group in St. Helens.

In the early days before we became a fully fledged Group ourselves we were only an offshoot of the Wigan Group. During those early years we could always rely on the Wigan Group for help and advice and we often did. We also had terrific support from, Joe Thomas (I.A.M. Divisional Council Member) and Bob Higginbotham (Group 5 Regional Organiser) without whom we would have seriously struggled. They were always available for sound advice, although at times we must have driven them mad, because we wanted to do it 'our way'.

We asked the late Lady Mavis Pilkington to be our President, which she readily agreed to be but being the way she was said if she was going to be President then she would have to pass the I.A.M. Test, which she duly did. We also had another connection with Pilkington; the St. Helens Group logo for many years incorporated part of Pilkington's own logo and we had to ask for permission from them before we could use it; this was very kindly forthcoming.

Another of our milestones (excuse the pun) was when we bought our first caravan. That little caravan was so instrumental in the success of the Group, we

also held monthly social meetings and one of the Committee Members ran raffles to raise funds; raffle prizes were donated by Members. In those early days, the Group was helped by the late John Harman who, at the time, was Secretary of the Wigan Group and later was appointed Divisional Council Member; not forgetting the Members of Warrington Group. I also received a lot of support from IAM HQ.

The Group then had to decide on a logo. It was agreed by the Committee to run a competition amongst the Members. Members were asked to submit their ideas for the logo which had to contain the words SKILL WITH RESPONSIBILITY. I remember this was won by one of our lady Members, Brenda Nicholls. The Committee organised social events, e.g. Hot Pot Supper and Dance (to records supplied by a Member), Treasure Hunts, trips to the Skid Pan at Blackburn. By this time the Group had moved from the Gerrard Arms (where they charged the Group £5 for each time we met there) to the Travellers Rest in Crab Street (now demolished). It was emphasised to the Group that any social events should make a profit or at least break even, but should not make a loss!

Over the years the Group went from strength to strength, during which time application was made for a Lottery Grant, and to the Rainford Trust, which were successful and helped the Group's funds enormously, as the Group was able to use the Grant to reduce the cost of Members taking the IAM Test.

made money selling teas and coffees on Sunday mornings and the Officers could work in comfort and have any discussions that needed to be had without having to stand out in the bad weather. For many years it also attended the St. Helens Show where it was fully staffed by members for the whole 3 days on a rota basis. Many Associates were recruited there I can tell you.

We also had a lot of support from Merseyside Police Traffic Department, who were always happy to give us advice and hints and tips. Several of their officers were actively involved with us. John Baxendale (Class 1 Driver) who actually held office within the Group and was himself a founder member, Martin Curran (Motorcycle Officer) he too held office within the Group, Bryan Moore (I.A.M. Examiner) and Paul Dereham (Class 1 Driver).

Altogether I was with the St. Helens Group for over five years throughout which I was the Treasurer and also stand-in Chairman for 6 months due to an unforeseen resignation. It is nice to see that you have now reached your 'Silver Jubilee' and seem to be as strong as ever, that's good.

In this small resume I have put together, I have avoided listing too many names because the list of people who so freely gave their time is endless. I will just mention three names, Maureen Leonard who was our Secretary - what would we have done without her? Phil Bayliss, Publicity Officer plus anything else we asked him to do. Last but not least Marmaduke Gardner (Duke) who used to get his face in a knot if he wasn't asked to be involved in everything from start to finish. Congratulations on reaching your 25 years, I hope you go from strength to strength. 1985 seems such a long time ago now!



Photograph taken at the Group's first AGM. The Lady Mavis Pilkington with Driver of the Year winner Denis Painter (third from right), Observer of the Year winner Duke Gardner (right) and Members with their Advanced Driving Test certificates. Photo provided by Denis and Anne Painter.



Photograph taken on Birchley Street car park on 12th August 1999. The Lady Kirsty Pilkington and St. Helens Road Safety Officer Conal Devitt receive their Advanced Driving Test certificates.

Left to Right. The Lady Kirsty Pilkington, Keith Scott (Group Chairman), Paul Dereham (IAM Examiner), Conal Devitt, Cllr. Neville Bullock (Group Observer), Maureen Walker (Leonard) - Group Secretary. Photo provided by Keith Scott

Mark Farnworth

Vice-President 1998 to present, Newsletter Editor 1995 to present, Observer 1986 to present, Training Officer 1995 to 1999, Publicity Officer 2000 to 2001, Chief Observer ~2004 to ~2010, 2025. Webmaster 2018 to present. Chairman 1994 to 1998, 2011 to 2018, 2022 to present.



My involvement with the Group dates back to March 1986 when, as a 24 year old, I saw an article in one of the local papers regarding an Advanced Driving Group that had recently been set up in the town. I contacted the Associate Co-ordinator Anne Painter and went down to Birchley Street car-park on the 9th March to find out what all this Advanced Driving business was about. I thought I was already a good driver but following my assessment drive with Ann Wright I realized that I had acquired some bad habits following my L-Test some five years earlier. The tone of the assessment was very good and I was motivated to go back and undertake 11 more Observed Runs. I was particularly impressed with the observing talents of Denis Painter, Brian Jackson and David Henshall. Brian remains a member to this

day.

I took my Test with Bryan Moore at 2pm on the 14th July. I was really nervous as I waited for Bryan on the car park of the Ship Inn on Prescott Road. It was a 'sticky' hot day so the temperature certainly didn't help! I was expecting to see a uniformed Police Officer arriving in a Police car! Bryan walked to the car park in everyday clothes. He looked like a 'normal' guy and he quickly put me at ease. Once I had started the Test, the nerves fell away and I got on with the task in hand for which I was awarded a Test Pass. I'd done it! [At this point I became a full Group member, little realising that as I type this now to celebrate the Group's 40th Anniversary, I'm in my 40th year with the Group!].

I'd already decided that I wanted to be an Observer and so the following Sunday morning I went down to Birchley Street car park and was given an Associate to take out. This was the way things were in those days: there was no formal Observer Training, you just got stuck in as an Observer! Over the following few years I learned my trade as an Observer and eventually won the Observer of the Year Competition and joined the Committee on 27th June 1991. In August 1992 I became Vice-Chair of the Training Committee (John Hudson was Chair) as I developed an appetite for organising training and taking my 'observer' skills to the next level. On 23rd June 1994 AGM I had the honour of becoming the Chairman of the Group and had at my side stalwart members Maureen Leonard (Group Secretary), Pauline Taylor (Treasurer) and other Committee members who helped me settle into this challenging position. Alan Prescott joined the Committee at the same time as Associate Co-ordinator following an invitation by me prior to the meeting. He replaced Barbara Swift who had done sterling work as Associate Co-ordinator for the previous five years. Alan remains our



Mark Farnworth - contd.

Associate Co-ordinator to this day - a fantastic commitment to the Group for over 31 years.

In 1995 I became Chair of the Training Committee and Newsletter Editor (taking over from Neil Ranson) in addition to my Group Chair role. In those days computers were not common place and producing a template Newsletter for commercial printing was a complicated business of typing, simple word processing, photocopying and cutting/gluing (rather than copy/pasting!). During my four years as Chairman I became one of two Nominated Examiners for the Group (Roger Eaves being the other). It became clear during this time we lacked a clear training structure to deal with the increasing number of members who were becoming Observers. We clarified the internal reporting structure by creating the position of Chief Observer who has the Observers interests as their main focus, an Associate Co-ordinator to look after the Associates: both reporting to a Training Officer who can resolve any conflicting interests and is Chair of the Training Committee. Roger Eaves became the Group's first Chief Observer and I continued as Training Officer and a Senior Observer.

Since the launch of the Group it had operated 'open ended mass guidance' Associate Training which most of the IAM Groups were doing. However, some Groups had moved to fixed term courses and had reported improved success at retaining Associates. Some of our Group members were a little sceptical of these new ideas but following Committee discussion we decided to trial a course programme (1998) to run in tandem with 'mass guidance'. We had about six Associates on the course starting at 10am on Sunday mornings for 8 weeks. Other Observers dealt with the 'mass guidance' Associates with the normal 10:30 start. The course was successful but not enough to convince the Group to move completely to fixed term courses.

When my tenure as the Group's Chairman came to an end I continued on the Committee as Training Officer and Newsletter Editor until Dec 1999. When I left the Committee I continued to support the Group as Newsletter Editor and Senior Observer and I was honoured to become the Group's Vice-President in 1998. During the following 12 months the Group went through an exceptionally bad spell with difficulties in both recruitment and retention of Associates. The end of the Group seemed close. To help the Group I went back on to the Committee as Publicity Officer and my wife, Nicky, became Publicity and Recruitment (P&R) Co-ordinator. Our involvement was conditional on the Group moving

away from open ended 'mass guidance' to fixed term courses only. The Committee agreed and with the support of Keith Scott (Group Chairman), Maureen Leonard (Group Secretary), Iain Grayson, Richard Dixon and Daniel Hooley the P&R team put together a course structure which, essentially, still operates today: an eight week course including an Introduction Evening, a mid-course Classroom session and a Meet an Examiner evening.

The new format worked and after two successful courses we were further blessed with a Lottery Grant secured by Group Secretary Maureen Leonard. The structures were in place to successfully deal with and retain the 40 or so Associates who came to the Group through the discounts that we were offering.

During the early 'noughties' the Group was bubbling and a number of our 'young' members: Iain Grayson, Daniel Hooley and Darren Tipton helped to set up a Region 5 Group 'Alpha 5' to recruit young members to the IAM. Iain and Daniel subsequently became Chairman of the St. Helens Group.

The 2010 to 2020 decade the Group had rapid and substantial change. Computers and their software became widespread leading to the newsletter being put together using Microsoft Publisher rather than simple word processing, we had our first website (thanks to my wife Nicky) mid-way through the decade. The Institute of Advanced Motorists was rebranded as IAM RoadSmart around 2016 and Observer training became more formalised with defined competencies developed by IAM RoadSmart. IAM RoadSmart started producing Associate and Observer books which removed the need for the Group to produce these documents which it had been doing for the previous 30 years. Mobile phone use with inbuilt cameras became more popular which provided an easy means to take pictures at Group events. Our Sunday morning venue moved to the ibis hotel, Haydock around 2012 and then in the early 2020s we had a couple of years at the Mercure Hotel and then a couple more years at the St. Helens Community Fire station. We now meet at the World of Glass. Change continues. Adapting to change is what we have to do. A big recent change for the Group was the formal launch in May this year of an advanced riding section - see page 9 for more details.

Dozens of people have contributed to the Group over the years. It is a testimony to all these people, having a shared desire to make our roads safer, that the Group is still here today. The Group's success continues but we can't rest on our laurels since experience has taught me that only through hard work and commitment can the Group get through both the good and bad times.

So why have I stayed with the Group all these years? My passion is to help people to become safer drivers. I've made many friends along the way and have shared in the joy and disappointments of those who passed and failed.

Interesting fact

Due to high observing and driving standards within the Group, four of our Observers went on to become IAM RoadSmart Examiners
Oliver Fullerton 2016
Jeff Mather ~ 2017
Lee Westhead ~ 2020
Val Cunningham 2025



By the end of 2017 all 15 of the Group's Observers had attained Institute of the Motor Industry accreditation.

Jim Cunliffe

Vice-Chairman, 2010 to 2013, Observer 1990 to present, Chief Observer ~2010 to 2016

Why I am still an IAM Member - Jim Cunliffe



My dad taught me to drive when cars ran on coal, crossply tyres, and had no brakes, and I had never heard of Roadcraft. I had heard of the IAM, and, being a young lad at that time, I just knew I would breeze through an 'advanced' test. There being no Groups known to me at that time, I just turned up 'cold' for my test – not a good idea!

After a 20 minute dressing down from my Police Examiner explaining that I displayed good road sense (thanks, Dad) but lacked discipline and consistency (System), he passed me! But the whole experience, and his advice, was a shock to MY system, as I realised that I wasn't as good as I thought I was, and I began to take much more notice of what I was doing. Anyway, I suppose, like most people that pass the IAM test, over time I kept some good bits but fell back into mediocrity. And that was that!

Some 20 odd years later in 1989, I had cause to look again at driving standards. This was due to high collision rates on a fleet of vans I was operating at the time, and I decided that all the drivers would have to pass a test. But who was qualified to test them? I arranged a two-week full time training course on 'advanced' driving for myself and a few others, and so that's how I got to just love 'Roadcraft', and its then six features!

The course was one thing, a confirmation test was another. My preference was for ROSPA, due to its 3 year retest programme, so there could be no backsliding of standards. It was a pain travelling to Manchester every week, and my first shot gave me

Silver ('smoothness' was a bit off). My first 3year retest got me Gold, and I have hung onto it ever since.

By this time I realised that I could easily pass the first two exams leading to an ADI (Driving Instructor) qualification. I decided to go for it! And sure enough the first two exams were a breeze!

Now, foolishly full of confidence, I decided to go for the final exam that tested instructional ability. In at the deep end – feet first, another disaster!

This is where the IAM came in. I needed practice at talking to people whilst sat in the passenger seat. Where could I get the practice I needed? – with the St Helens Group of the IAM of course – and it would be FREE! I joined up, had a couple of runs, re-passed the test and I volunteered to be an Observer. The training wasn't as structured as it is now, a few runs in the back, and off you go! Fortunately there was already an ADI with the Group, so there was experience to draw on, and after a couple of one to one sessions with Norman Griffiths I felt I could have another go at the dreaded Part III exam. Came the day, it was like 'chalk and cheese', not perfect, but well good enough. Thank you Norman!

At this point I could have just walked away. But having 'used' the Group, I felt it only right and proper that I put a little bit back in. I decided to stay a bit longer as an Observer for the Group, and improved my skills not only as an Observer but also as a professional driving instructor. The regular practice with the Group did indeed improve my skills, and I have consistently achieved the top Grade (6) as a driving instructor. Not only was I able to give basic and advanced driving tuition to the public, but also to company vehicle drivers (via ROSPA), so doing my bit for 'hands on', practical road safety.

So, why am I still a member after 30 odd years? Not because of the IAM. Not just because I owe the St Helens Group a great deal, but because I got 'hooked'. The members of the St Helens group were, and still are, an enthusiastic and friendly lot, with a common cause. Not only that, but I still get a 'buzz' of satisfaction from passing on my skill and knowledge to help someone to improve their driving, especially if it results in a Test pass... and of course it means I have to stay up to scratch too!

Some would say I have nothing better to do on Sunday mornings – but there's much more to it than that. Don't knock it if you haven't tried it!



John Matthews

Group Secretary 2011 to 2022

Alison Matthews

Group Treasurer 2013 to 2022

Our 40th Anniversary cannot be marked properly without recognising the service of father and daughter team John and Alison Matthews who served respectively as Group Secretary and Treasurer together for over 10 years. Their talents were exceptional and I thank both for their contributions during a period of rapid change for the Group.

Mark Farnworth

Group Chairman



Alan Prescott

Associate Co-ordinator 1994 to present , Observer 1989 to 2021



Although I had been aware of the IAM for a long time, it was not until the Summer of 1988 that I discovered the St. Helens Group, doing a promotion at the St. Helens Show. I remember speaking to someone called Dave Henshall and collecting some leaflets. We were well into the Autumn of that year before I joined the Group. At that time, the open-ended system rather than fixed-term courses was the policy so for £10 I could have as many runs as was deemed necessary, and then apply for Test and send the fee direct to the IAM. As it was around Christmas when I was ready for Test, I was waiting until mid-January before applying and passed the Test mid-February 1989.

I became an Observer and remained one until the early 2020s. It was in 1994 when I took on the role



Lancashire Canal Cruise

Monday 29th August 2016

Members and family enjoy a great day out on the Lancashire Canal, starting at the Ring O'Bells, Lathom.

Brian Jackson (founder member, left front), Barbara Nevitt, Ken Nevitt (left back), Alison Matthews (Middle), Rita Rigby (right front), Frank Rigby, John Mathews and Kay Heppenstall (right back).

Photograph taken by Anne Jackson.

of Associate Co-ordinator, which I still hold and joined the committee at the same time. I have many memories that I could look back on but the one that really stands out was when Lee Westhead, a police driver, was with us.

As he had an Assessment with the police coming up I was amazed when he asked if he could take me for a drive to see if everything in his driving was in order. Of course his driving was excellent and really first class. He was using an unmarked police car for this exercise, and when we were on the motorway he was in lane three completing an overtake. The car behind, however, was no more than a car's length behind us. The driver was also flashing his lights and waving for Lee to get out of his way. As soon as Lee completed his overtake the driver did an illegal undertake, snarled at Lee and made an appalling gesture at him. No way was Lee going to put up with that. He switched on the blue lights and took him over to the hard shoulder. There Lee switched on the Follow Me sign and took him off the Motorway on to a quiet road when he put on the stop sign. There he gave him such a strong telling off that he must have thought he was going to be prosecuted. Never have I seen anyone so frightened. He must have been very relieved when Lee let him go with a warning. When Lee got back into his car to complete the drive he wondered what the driver's first thoughts must have been when after tailgating him, doing an illegal undertake and making a dreadful gesture at him, he saw the blue lights. I'm sure those thoughts and maybe words cannot be printed here.

Finally, I will close by saying that our present team is at least as strong, and probably stronger, than we have ever had. The future of the Group is assured.



Ken Nevitt

Training Officer ~ 2004 to present, Observer 2000 to present.



In 1990 I visited a caravan manned by members of the Wigan Group of the IAM at a motor show at Haigh Hall and gathered some information about the advanced driving test. Subsequently, I booked an assessment drive which I took some weeks later and received a mixed report on my competencies. At this time, I was completely ignorant of terms such as "observer", "associate", "static brake test", moving brake test", "brake/gear overlap", "cockpit drill", "POWDERY", "limit point", "system of car control" and so on.

Like many people, my next contact with the IAM came some nine years later in 1999 when, after a house move, I finally got around to contacting the St. Helens Group to sign on for a course in preparation for taking the advanced driving test. At this time the Group met on Birchley Street car park where there were no facilities and all new "associates" began their training independently as there were no set course dates. I was introduced to a range of "observers", all of whom enjoyed varying degrees of success in getting me to master the new concepts and practices. Some encouraged observation links across fields and low walls, others wanted more progress which at that time seemed pure speed to me, a few demanded more deliberate gear changes or more progressive braking. All this unpicking of my existing skills and fine tuning of my adoption of new

skills left me in the shambolic situation of retaining the vestiges of my old ways and an incomplete mastery of the new ways.

The "cockpit drill" made me think of the comics and films of my schooldays, where RAF pilots flew Spitfires and Hurricanes. "POWDERY" seemed a term completely unrelated to driving a chunk of metal around. I had never even thought of utilising one brake test, never mind two! The "system of car control" was whirring around in my head as I tried to implant the sequence of the phases in my brain. On rural roads, the "limit point" was confusing me more than helping me as I struggled to get the feel for it. As for "brake/gear overlap", why was I putting myself through this hell? I had changed gear countless times in the previous 22 years since passing my "L" test, and none had caused me a moment's anxiety. Yet, here I was stressing out because for a moment I had both feet on a pedal simultaneously! That is until I determined to crack this one and I spent 90 minutes going up and down the Linkway to Rainhill Stoops, talking myself through every approach and gear change until it sank in. From that moment on, my improvement was consistent as things fell into place and the new training became completely second nature after I passed the advanced driving test in February 2000.

When I embarked on this journey, I had no intention of becoming an observer. Yet, here I am nearly a quarter of a century later. I still get a kick out of seeing today's "Associates" improve their mastery of some new skill. I empathise with their struggles as some concept defies all their efforts. I enjoy it when they say, "It's not rocket science, is it? It's just common sense."

Over my journey, the Group's meeting venue has changed; the course reading materials are now glossier and more varied; corporate clothing identifies the Observers; observer training is now more professional; the course programme is tweaked more frequently. However, in essence nothing has changed. An "Associate" needs an "Observer" in the car with them. That "observer" needs to be a good listener who is able to spot an area for improvement and to explain what is causing the issue and, most importantly, how the issue can be successfully addressed.

Pics from our events

Jodrell Bank - 27th May 2017

Members and family gather in front of the Lovell Telescope during a visit to the Jodrell Bank Discovery Centre.



Mersey Tunnel Walk - 25th March 2017

Group members and family members relax after negotiating 600 steps as part of a tour of the Queens (Birkenhead) Tunnel, Liverpool. We viewed the ventilation stations with their giant fans, learned how they work and how the tunnel was constructed.





**Alan Douglas
Rider Associate Co-ordinator**



It was April 2024 when I first met with our Chairman, Mark Farnworth and the committee, with an offer to add Advanced Rider Training alongside the enormously successful Advanced Driver Training; which St Helens Group has provided for many years. The difficulty at the start, was me being the only National Observer, therefore we needed to be careful not to overdo how many Associates we can train at once. Leading up to the recent Winter period, I asked a good friend Graham Roberts (a dual RoSPA Gold Advanced Rider) to join us and train to become National Observer, which he achieved earlier this year to everyone's delight.

In the meantime, I got to know Olliver Fullerton, in his capacity as IAM RoadSmart Driver Examiner & St Helens Group Member, who asked to join-in our training alongside Graham, only to discover the moment Olly achieved National Observer (Rider), IAM RoadSmart then informed us that their rules prohibit an Examiner being an Observer as well (in any

capacity). To Olly's credit, he now has a dual IAM RoadSmart Examiner role; locally testing both Advanced Drivers & Advanced Riders (well done, Olly).

So presently we have just two National Observers who provide our Associates with Advanced Rider Training. Nevertheless, our results have been exceedingly rewarding. This year alone, thus far we have trained TEN Rider Associates who have successfully completed their course and passed their Advanced Rider Test with five achieving the IAM F1rst. We hope to see some of these Riders continue their initial 12 months membership with the IAM and our St Helens Group. Olly, to his credit, has been arranging Group Rides, on a monthly basis, for all our Rider Members and these Group Rides are creating regular additional interest.

Graham & I remain equally enthusiastic and we take great pleasure helping our members become Advanced Riders. We're a little different to others who can offer like-for-like training, whereby at St Helens Group we uniquely:

- Operate all year round.
- Our training is carried out 'one-to-one'.
- Days and times are arranged by mutual agreement & convenience and avoiding adverse road conditions.
- Information delivery adjusted for Associates needs.
- Progress can be individualised for Associate needs and availability.
- Use directional instructions using turn-signals as well Bluetooth.
- After every observed run, our Associate receives a comprehensive report.
- Further training offered leading to First or Masters.

More events pics

**Senior Road Users Event
Halewood 19th Sept 2017**

The presenter was Jim Cunliffe



**Visit to the Commercial Vehicle
Museum Leyland, 23rd Feb 2019**

Left to right: Frank Rigby, Kay Heppenstall, Gerry Stubbs.



**Morcambe Bay Walk - 18th August
2018**

**Highways Agency visit
Sat 28th April 2018**



Gerry Stubbs, Kay Heppenstall, Anita Clift and Mark Farnworth took on the challenge of walking





Recent Testimonials

Liza Berry



I passed my driving test 40 years ago and having lived and driven in different cities and countries over the years, clocking up a lot of long-distance mileage too, I considered myself to be a reasonably competent driver. However, having a teenage son about to learn to drive and a sudden 'reality check' from one of the new AI traffic cameras, I realised the opportunity to review my driving skills was a very good idea!

I hoped the advanced driving course would highlight my bad habits and improve my skills. Yet the overall experience has offered much more. This systematic and comprehensive course completely deconstructs your driving and presents you with a unique opportunity to analyse and reflect upon what you do when driving in different road environments. It introduces you to driving whilst constantly observing, thinking, prioritising, planning and reviewing. You may think that you already do this, but the 'spoken thought' practice reveals to what degree you are doing it. At

Kathy Higgins



I passed my driving test in 1986, but I never felt quite safe driving on my own as I was not sure what to do if something went wrong with the car. So, after I heard that a friend of mine had been stranded with his car, I decided to go to night school and do a short course on car maintenance. Believe this or not, it gave me a

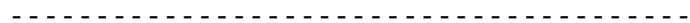
times, you may feel like you have never concentrated so hard behind the wheel! In fact, the course immediately stops any 'auto-pilot driving'; the intention is definitely to create a thinking driver.

The rationale and theory behind everything you are taught make perfect sense when they are explained through the materials, the classroom sessions and the demonstrations you receive. Nevertheless, when you attempt to use what you have been taught you very quickly realise why the weekly observed practices are so invaluable alongside your own daily practice, as one of the greatest challenges is to undo the muscle memory formed over decades and replace it with something that feels quite alien. Your brain might be telling you not to overlap the brake and clutch anymore but your feet have their own ideas! Indeed, it is one thing to know what you are supposed to be doing as an advanced driver and another to do it and do it consistently. It is why the course needs to be the length it is. With the help of all the observers, you really are becoming a different driver.

Each week, one of the brilliant St Helens' volunteers takes you through the elements of the course and the IPSCA system of car control with patience, encouragement, good humour and a knack for finding the right advice and tips to help you crack whatever it is that is causing you the most problems. I would never have passed the advanced test without all their support, and I really appreciate the time they give, encouraging and guiding drivers like me. To have a chance at passing the test you need to practise weaving all the elements together, over and over again. The first time you do manage this, 'the penny drops' and you really experience why this is a better and more enjoyable way to drive. To have an observer at your side when this happens makes it especially rewarding.

Post test, you may no longer have them sitting next to you, but after all the shared efforts you feel motivated to maintain these skills and keep improving.

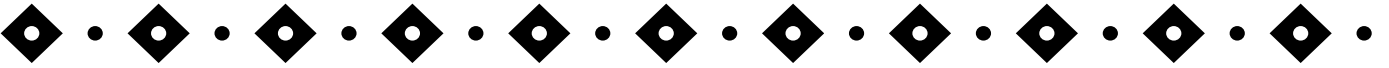
Do the course – you will not regret it!



massive confidence boost to know what to look for and what to do in the event of a breakdown, of the car, not me, but that's another story!

I didn't start my career as a driving instructor. I arrived at the profession when I realised what I loved most about my job as a sales representative, selling veterinary medicines, was the driving. Being a sales rep took me all over the country, driving on roads and routes I did not know, navigating them all without the handy Sat Nav system, or even Google Maps. More often than not I would come home complaining to my dad, Brian, telling him about yet another near-miss I'd had.

He advised me to take some advanced driving lessons; he claimed that I could easily pass the test. In this, Brian had thrown down the gauntlet, there was nothing else I could do, but contact my local advanced driving group, which was the IAM, (Institute of Advanced Motorists, now called IAM Roadsmart.). I passed the IAM test, first time in 1995, driving a Transit van.



Simon Brook



Like many, my annual car mileage plummeted following the pandemic, yet I was keen to remain a confident and engaged driver. I found I was arriving

at destinations but couldn't recall anything specific about the journey. This growing disconnect from my driving was a concern. Remembering the prominent IAM badge on my Dad's car from years ago, I decided to sign up for the IAM RoadSmart course in May 2024.

The RoadSmart course is expertly structured beginning with insightful classroom discussions, followed by practical, real-world driving sessions. The group provides several highly qualified national observers, who ensure a progression that steadily refines your driving skills and awareness.

At the end of the course I was delighted to pass the practical exam, achieving a F1RST grade, a testament to the comprehensive training offered by the St Helens group. I have since remained an active member of the group as an observer.

Reflecting on my experience, the transformation in my driving enjoyment has been profound. Like upgrading from a black-and-white instruction leaflet to watching a full-HD movie.

Peter Bellis



In August 2024, I was caught for speeding in Scotland Road, Liverpool, doing 36 mph in a 30 mph zone. Following this error, I attended a 'Speed Awareness Course and quickly realised that I wanted to improve my driving skills... things had changed since I passed my driving test some 73 years earlier.

Going online, I joined the IAM RoadSmart Advanced Driver Course provided by the St. Helens Group, where I hoped to meet highly qualified drivers, willing to pass on their skills and experiences.

Attending the 1st meeting on the 9th January 2025, the Chairman, Mr Mark Farnworth, explained the different aspects we would be taught during the next 12 weeks of the course, and that the procedures were based on Police standards.

I was given so much information at this time, that my

first thought was..."I'm DOOMED !!"

Fortunately, the session ended with an 'Observer' taking me for an assessment drive in my car, and Jeff Fishwick judged me to be a 'good driver', but in need of help and advice.

I have attended 10 of the 12 week course, and have got to say that "My decision to partake in this Advanced Driving Course has been one of the most Important ones in my life". My knowledge and awareness, timing, positioning etc have improved dramatically. All types of roads, limit points, overtaking, mirror checks etc, etc. The improvement in my driving skills has changed beyond recognition and it has become a reality because of the dedication and kindness given to me by the Observers. .

There are no words that can be uttered to express my appreciation of what they have achieved for me.

Yours forever grateful.

	George Gaskell
	21st March 1930 to 3rd September 2015
	Passionate Advanced Driver and dedicated Observer.
	Forever remembered.

Presidents

The Lady Kirsty Pilkington - 1999

The Lady Mavis Pilkington - 1985-1998

Vice-Presidents

Mark Farnworth - 1998

John Baxendale - 1987-1998

Year	Chair	Vice-Chair	Secretary	Treasurer	Associate Coordinator
2025-2026	Mark Farnworth	Philip Sharples	Chris Bradley	Stephen Dumont	Alan Prescott
2024-2025	Mark Farnworth	Phil Sharples	Chris Bradley	Stephen Dumont	Alan Prescott
2023-2024	Mark Farnworth	Phil Sharples	Chris Bradley	Stephen Dumont	Alan Prescott
2022-2023	Mark Farnworth	Phil Sharples	Chris Bradley	Stephen Dumont	Alan Prescott
2021-2022	Tom Field	Mark Farnworth	John Matthews / Chris Bradley	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2020-2021	Tom Field	Mark Farnworth	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2019-2020	Tom Field	Mark Farnworth	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2018-2019	Tom Field	Mark Farnworth	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2017-2018	Mark Farnworth	Tom Field	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2016-2017	Mark Farnworth	Ken Nevitt/Tom Field	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2015-2016	Mark Farnworth	Ken Nevitt	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2014-2015	Mark Farnworth	Ken Nevitt	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2013-2014	Mark Farnworth	Ken Nevitt	John Matthews	Alison Matthews	Alan Prescott
2012-2013	Mark Farnworth	Jim Cunliffe	John Matthews	Val Blackburn	Alan Prescott
2011-2012	Mark Farnworth	Jim Cunliffe	Rona Houlton/John Matthews	Rona Houlton/Val Blackburn	Alan Prescott
2010-2011	Val O'Hanlon	Jim Cunliffe	Sue Hunt	Rona Houlton	Alan Prescott



Year	Chair	Vice-Chair	Secretary	Treasurer	Associate Coordinator
2009-2010	Rob Evans	Jim Cunliffe	Sue Hunt	Rona Houlton	Alan Prescott
2008-2009	Rob Evans	###	Sue Hunt	Chris Brown	Alan Prescott
2007-2008	Rob Evans	###	Sue Hunt	Chris Brown	Alan Prescott
2006-2007	Daniel Hooley	###	Sue Hunt	Daniel Hooley	Alan Prescott
2005-2006	Daniel Hooley	###	Sue Hunt	Daniel Hooley	Alan Prescott
2004-2005	Daniel Hooley	Andrew Boyle	Lorraine Rigby	Daniel Hooley	Alan Prescott
2003-2004	Iain Grayson	###	Debbie Grayson	Daniel Hooley	Alan Prescott
2002-2003	Iain Grayson	###	Debbie Grayson	Daniel Hooley	Alan Prescott
2001-2002	Iain Grayson	###	Maureen Walker (Leonard)	Daniel Hooley	Alan Prescott
2000-2001	Keith Scott	Fran Lewis	Maureen Leonard	Keith Scott	Alan Prescott
1999-2000	Keith Scott	Fran Lewis	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Alan Prescott
1998-1999	Keith Scott	Fran Lewis	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Alan Prescott
1997-1998	Mark Farnworth	Fran Lewis	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Alan Prescott
1996-1997	Mark Farnworth	Iain Grayson	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Alan Prescott
1995-1996	Mark Farnworth	Iain Grayson	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Alan Prescott
1994-1995	Mark Farnworth	Neil Ranson	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Alan Prescott
1993-1994	Neil Ranson	Keith Scott	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Barbara Swift
1992-1993	Neil Ranson	Keith Scott	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Barbara Swift
1991-1992	Neil Ranson	Keith Scott	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Barbara Swift
1990-1991	Ian Smith	Keith Scott	Maureen Leonard	Pauline Taylor	Barbara Swift
1989-1990	Ian Smith	Keith Scott	Maureen Leonard	John Kirby	Barbara Swift
1988-1989	Mike Blanche	Anne Painter	Maureen Leonard	Denis Painter	Carole Stevens / Anne Painter
1987-1988	John Henshall	David Henshall	Maureen Leonard	Denis Painter	Anne Painter
1986-1987	John Baxendale / Martin Curran / Denis Painter	David Henshall	Maureen Leonard	Denis Painter	Anne Painter
1985-1986	John Baxendale	Valerie Saunders	Maureen Leonard	Denis Painter	Anne Painter

Annual Competition Winners

Year	Driver of the Year	Observer of the Year	Associate of the Year
2025	Ken Nevitt	Alan Douglas	Simon Brook
2024	Valerie Cunningham	Andrew Farrimond	Sarah McNally
2023	Garry Maddocks	Chris Bradley	Paul Fryer
2019	Mark Farnworth	Ken Nevitt	Andrew Farrimond
2018	Jeff Fishwick	Mark Farnworth	Kate Riley
2017	Jim Cunliffe	Oliver Fullerton	Anita Cliff
2016	Oliver Fullerton	Philip Sharples	Fred Fitter
2015	Mark Farnworth	Alan Phillips	Carrie Nevitt
2014	Frank Rigby	George Gaskell	Dylan Sinclair
2013	Ken Nevitt	Philip Sharples	Catherine Harris
2012	Mark Wareing	Ken Nevitt	John Matthews
2011	George Gaskell	Alan Prescott	Tom Field
2010	Jim Cunliffe	John Plumb	David Roberts
2009	John Plumb	George Gaskell	John Plumb
2008	George Gaskell & Jeff Mather	Jim Cunliffe	Rob Evans
2007	Not judged	Les Roughley	Chris Brown
2006	Not judged	Mark Farnworth	Liz Templeman
2005	Daniel Hooley	Ken Nevitt	Roy Matthews
2004	No	Competitions Held	
2003	Gordon Bettely	Norman Griffith	John Fairhurst
2002	Jim Cunliffe	Mark Syder	Mary James
2001	Dennis Boyle	Richard Dixon	Sue Hunt
2000	—	Gordon Bettely	Ken Nevitt
1999	Jim Cunliffe	Jim Cunliffe	Darren Tipton

Annual Competition Winners

1998	David Smith	Mark Farnworth	Martina Navin
1997	Alan Prescott	Alan Prescott	Adam Gallimore
1996	Jeff Topping	Neville Bullock	Daniel Hooley
1995	Gordon Bettely	Jim Cunliffe	Christopher Albrathat
1994	Mark Farnworth	Jeff Topping	Richard Dixon
1993	Iain Grayson	Mark Farnworth	
1992	Jim Cunliffe	Roger Eaves	
1991	Brian Jackson	Mark Farnworth	
1990	David Henshall	Roger Eaves	
1989	David Henshall	Mike Blanche	
1988	David Henshall	Carol Stevens	
1987	Mike Blanche	Mike Blanche	
1986	Dennis Painter	Duke Gardner	

ST. HELENS GROUP OF ADVANCED MOTORISTS

THE FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE GROUP WAS HELD AT THE TRAVELLERS REST, CRAB STREET, ST. HELENS, ON TUESDAY THE 12TH NOVEMBER 1985, AT 8 P.M. AT WHICH 16 MEMBERS OF THE INSTITUTE WERE PRESENT, ALONG WITH TWO ASSOCIATES, AS SHOWN IN THE OFFICIAL ATTENDANCE BOOK.

The meeting had been called by the Regional Organiser, Mr. R. J. Higginbotham, and the Divisional Council Member, Mr. J. Thomas, and with the approval of the meeting the Notice convening the meeting was taken as read.

Mr. R. J. Higginbotham thereupon took the Chair.

53. Apologies for Absence: Apologies for absence were received from Messrs. Brian Moore, Brian Jackson, Duke Gardner, Steve Livesey, Malcolm Darbyshire, Ron Clare, Mrs. Jean Neve and Mrs. Ann Wright.
54. Correspondence: A letter was opened and read to the meeting from Mr. Alan Clark intimating that he would not be seeking re-election as Secretary and containing his resignation from the Group with immediate effect, which was accepted.
55. Group Rules: It was moved, seconded and unanimously agreed that the Model Rules of the Institute of Advanced Motorists be accepted, but that Headquarters be asked to approve the following two amendments:-
- "1 (c) - the first line to read 'The Group Committee may at their discretion accept as a Member of a Group a current Member of the Institute on completion of the Group's application form and on payment of his Group subscription.'
- 1 (e) - 'Membership between Groups is reciprocal, but a member of the St. Helens Committee may not be a Committee member of any other full Group.' "
56. Accounts and Honorary Treasurer's Report: It was moved, seconded and unanimously agreed that the Treasurer's report covering the period from the Group being formed to the 31st October 1985, be approved.
- Mr. J. Thomas thereupon took the Chair.
57. Election of Officers: It was duly moved, seconded and unanimously agreed that the following officers of the Group be elected:-
- | | | |
|---------------|---|------------------|
| CHAIRMAN | - | JOHN BAXENDALE |
| VICE-CHAIRMAN | - | VALERIE SAUNDERS |
| SECRETARY | - | MAUREEN LEONARD |
| TREASURER | - | DENIS PAINTER. |

There were no other nominations for the above appointments.

contd....

- 2 -

58. Election of Committee: It was duly moved, seconded and unanimously agreed that the following members be elected to the Committee:-

ANNE PAINTER
 GEOFFREY HAIGH
 PHILLIP BAYLISS
 MARTIN CURRAN
 BRIAN McCORMAC
 DAVID ATKINSON
 ROLAND BURKE
 VICTOR HUMPHREYS
 DUKE GARDNER
 ANN WRIGHT
 ROY WRIGHT.

There were no other nominations for the above appointments.

59. Appointment of Auditor: It was duly moved, seconded and unanimously agreed that Mr. G. Flynn be appointed Honorary Auditor of the Group.

Mr. J. Baxendale thereupon took the Chair.

At this point, both the Regional Organiser and the Divisional Council Member wished the Group every success for the future.

60. Subscriptions: It was duly moved, seconded and unanimously agreed that the subscriptions of the Group remain unchanged as follows:-

Associates	-	£10-00
Group Friends	-	£5-00
Full Members	-	£5-00

It was further unanimously agreed that the above subscriptions be for 12 months and fall due for renewal 12 months after date of first joining the Group which meant that the first renewals would become due on 1st June 1986.

61. Any other Business: In reply to the Regional Organiser's question, it was agreed that the Group's year-end date would be fixed by the Committee meeting which would be held at the conclusion of the A.G.M.

The Regional Organiser complimented the officers on the way they had carried out their duties and also the secretarial assistance provided by Maureen Leonard during the last few difficult months.

There being no further business, the meeting then closed.

Approved _____
 Chairman.

