



# **NORTHUMBRIA ADVANCED MOTORCYCLISTS**

## **Alpine Adventure**



**2013 Issue 2**

**Newsletter**



**NAM is affiliated with the  
Institute of Advanced Motorists**



## In this issue



3

A word from the Editor



4

Chairman's remarks



5

Alpine adventure



14

Helmet bag review



16

Into the Czech Republic



17

Regional Observer Training



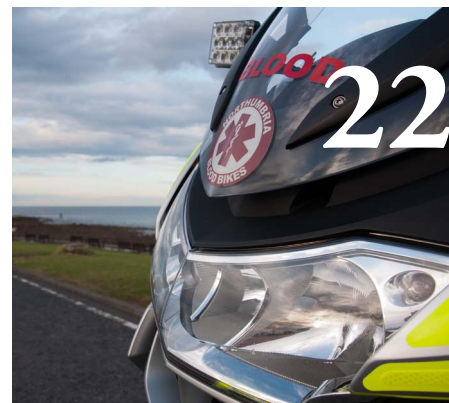
18

Oxford Strap Nav



19

10 Years with an FJR



22

Blood Bikes

The views expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those of Northumbria Advanced Motorcyclists or the Institute of Advanced Motorists and should not be interpreted as such.

## Did you know NAM has a Costco card?

Costco is a membership warehouse club, where members can buy quality goods and services at low prices.

They also sell and fit standard car tyres as and winter tyres. Contact David Henderson, Assistant Treasurer for more information.



## NAM is supported by Northumbria Fire & Rescue Service And Northumbria Police



## A word from the Editor



Welcome, to the latest newsletter. I am Barry Bullas the editor and as always I would like to particularly welcome anyone reading our newsletter for the first time. Hopefully you have all had a wonderful summer and got to spend some sunny days riding your motorcycles.

Inside this edition we have some great tales of motorcycling abroad including David Walton's Alpine adventure, and Mick Goodwin's thoughts on the Czech Republic. We also have some great product reviews from fellow NAM members Charles Wood and Martin Trainor. Geoff Toscano has also provided an insight into his 10 years with an FJR.

This newsletter is only as good as the contributions from our members. If you have a story, idea or feedback please get in touch. Email any contributions to [NamEditor@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:NamEditor@hotmail.co.uk) or speak to me at the monthly meeting. You can also send in any photos of you and your bike on your travels.

**Barry Bullas**



## Chairman's remarks

We are now well into the biking season and we have enjoyed an excellent spell of hot sunny weather since the beginning of July banishing the memory of our very late spring this year. Observed rides, training and club runs are now in full swing.

I am pleased to report that we have had 22 new Associates join the Skills for Life programme since the beginning of the year and to date we have had 5 passes of the IAM Advanced Motorcycle Test. Stewart Fawcett, our main link IAM Examiner has been joined by Paul Henry, a good friend of NAM, who many of us know from the Northumbria Police bike section and from running the Cornering Clinics over several years. Many of you will not know however that Paul is an experienced short circuit racer. Apparently he is almost unbeatable on his Ducati in the wet!

Thanks to members of the Training Group and Observers who gave up a Saturday in March to complete the

'Emergency First Aid at Work' course which was geared to riders who are first on the scene of an accident. The Group has now purchased dedicated first aid kits which are to be carried 'just in case' on observed rides and club runs.

On the subject of training, our Chief Observer Geoff Spencer has been busy assessing riders for the Blood Bike voluntary organisation which is ahead of schedule. Geoff was able to show off the first Blood Bike, an ex-Police RT1200 at the recent slow riding training up at Heighley Gates. We look forward to NAM's continuing close association with the Blood Bikes scheme.

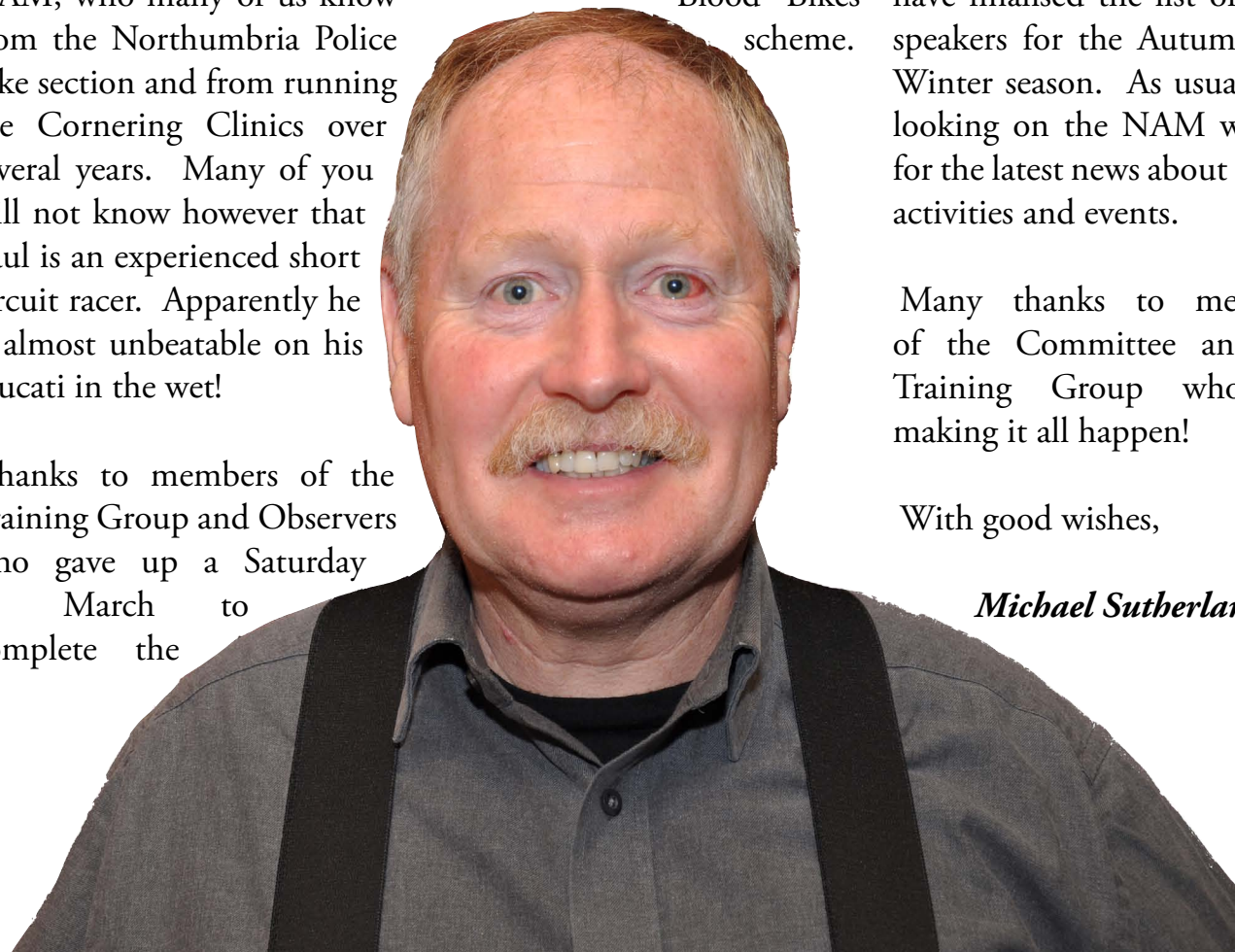
Looking ahead to the end of September the residential weekend at the Derwent Hill Centre in Portinscale is fully booked although there are still places available for the next residential weekend at Pitlochry in the Scottish Highlands for the May Bank Holiday in 2014. We have just about taken over the entire hotel but please get in touch with David Henderson as soon as possible to select your choice of room and to pay the £40 deposit. The basic cost has been held at £140 for three nights DB&B for the third year running which can't be bad.

Also at the time of writing we have finalised the list of guest speakers for the Autumn and Winter season. As usual keep looking on the NAM website for the latest news about all our activities and events.

Many thanks to members of the Committee and the Training Group who are making it all happen!

With good wishes,

*Michael Sutherland*



## Alpine Adventure by David Walton

Friday

"Remember – your bike's much wider with those panniers on!" "Yes, Yes!" And we were off! Mark, Gordon and me, off on our rendezvous with John and the Princess of Norway ferry at North Shields. (And it was well over 10 minutes before a certain someone ran his panniers along an unwitting Nissan).

Boarding started at 3.30pm, so we met at Mark's, said our farewells and set off at three o'clock, prompt. Plenty of time, as it turned out, since the ship showed no sign of moving by 5pm after we met John and hung around the dock with about 50 other bikers in the sun.

Shortly after 5.45, however, we were fastening down our bikes and looking for our cabin.

Back up on deck we watched the banks of the Tyne slip by, spotting the big sponge hand of John's daughter waving from Tynemouth Priory.

We spent the evening listening to Mike the guitar-man's Bob Dylan repertoire, drinking expensive larger, discussing growing facial hair and contemplating the week ahead. Gordon (or Heidi, as he insisted we call him on our Alpine adventure) took a sunset photo from the stern. Earlyish night. Cabin unbearably hot, but the North Sea was like a mill pond.



Saturday

John was up at 4am. Probably the heat. Hearty breakfast. Cold Buffet – 16 Euros. Heidi had a laugh with the Chinese waiter who appeared at every counter we approached. Our cabin gave us a captain's view of our approach to IJmuiden, Amsterdam. Bikes still standing where we left them. Soon we were rolling out of the port in sunshine and onto the motorway. Big mileage to cover today. (350+ miles) Through Arnhem (over the bridge (we think!)– twice) and out of Holland into Germany, down the Rhine valley. Over-taken by BMWs doing 200mph – and vans doing not much less!

Didn't quite get as far as we had hoped on our first day, on account of being shagged out by tea time. Toured the industrial and social housing estates of

the southern Rhineland for two or three hours looking for accommodation. There must be some here somewhere!

Eventually found Bate's Motel in a ghost town. A smartish-looking hotel with a room-occupancy rate of zero. The lone receptionist spoke fluent German, and we spoke fluent English, but soon had two twin rooms booked for the night. An English-speaker turned up a while later and asked us to turn the lights off and lock up when we left in the morning! Anyway, we had the most welcome showers we have ever had then hit town!

The second enjoyable Chinese experience of the day! Restaurant to ourselves – great personal service.

Sunday

Even McDonalds was shut at



breakfast time in this place. Set off in the sun, southbound. Quick stop in Baden Baden at the start of the Black Forest.

Then Freudenstadt for a relaxing coffee in the square. Continued via Rottweil, and sat in Bad Derem to read my texts from home that the Toon were down. (Newcastle United relegated to the Championship) Bugger!

After about 600 miles, my bike chain was starting to look as jaded as we felt at that moment so I introduced my fellow riders to the "Wal-oiler" (patent pending). Then off again towards Singen at the very southern end of Germany.

The Black Forest was very nice but started to get a bit boring after a day of it. Started to lose our way a bit, but John took the lead. He threw the map aside and took us, seemingly by instinct, on some magnificent twisty roads that lead eventually



to the Konstanz area, and the lake came into view just beyond a camp site. Bingo! Just the ticket. (Kruzzlingen?).

Kit off. In the lake. The holiday had started. Put the tents up and strolled down for some pleasantly cheap bottles of beer and a round of German sausages and soup. The friendly German stall-owner sat down to chat with us, but we buggered off. We're on holiday mate!

Places to go – people to see!

The next thing I knew Heidi was wrapped up – swaddled head to foot with only his eyes showing – like a cross between a Muslim woman in her burka and a ninja warrior – because he was frightened of the mosquitoes! As I took the piss, I noticed my naked arms and legs were covered in bites and swelling up. (No one likes a smart arse!)

Ninja warrior and Mark headed off to their tents for another early night while John and me finished off the beers. 9.30pm! Rock'n'roll! Even texted the missus!

### Monday

Woken at sunrise (4.30am) by an effin cuckoo that sounded like it was on the roof of our tent, but was shouting to its mates in clocks in Switzerland!

Eventually rose at about 7.30

to find Heidi was up and washing his bike with a Wet-wipe. I think he was also singing a little love song to it.

Chatted to an English couple about the weather – what else – and headed off after a wash and polish. Nice camping facilities the German's have.

Headed round Lake Konstanz. Traffic quite heavy at first. Quite a few groups of motorbikes. Weather getting warmer.

We were in Austria by lunchtime, (though saw no sign of a border) and stopped in a little spa town ... well, a little town with a SPAR. Got the Gaz stove out, got a brew going and lay in the sun, dining on bread, cheese and watermelon from the SPAR. Felt like a king's banquet!

Had a laugh at a dumb blonde who was locked out of a car she thought was hers. Wrong car! Good job we didn't smash the window for her – as someone (Mark) was itching to do – before she realised.

From there we eventually found our way onto the twisty mountain roads we had been looking forward to. They were so good, John and me found ourselves yodelling to each other as we flew through the open-sided tunnels that James Bond had raced through in his last film (Probably)

Up into the Austrian mountains and down into

some glorious green valleys (Bludenz?), eventually finding another camp site at Prutz. As we rolled around the site looking for a pitch I swear I saw mothers hiding their children and fathers reaching for their shotguns. But we got our tents up and we were no bother. Hell, we'd probably be tucked up asleep by nine!

Sat outside a bar under a parasol in a little square. Had a few beers and some Austrian cuisine. Another German-only speaking establishment. (Does no-one speak the Queen's tongue around here!?) Heidi interrogated the waitress about the menu, but she was having none of it. I think she was saying – look mate, you're in Austria now. You'll have to speak Austrian – or, well, you know, German. Anyway, the beer flowed and we all learned a little about each other's misspent teenage years. Enough said!

Back to the tent with the ninja. Got punched in the back of the head at 3 am by said ninja in his sleep. Dreamt I heard someone riding a Harley around the camp site, but it turned out it was only Mark in the next tent, snoring.

### Tuesday

Emerged from tent to find Heidi washing his bike again with Wet-whipes. (Just as well. I peed on it

through the night) (Only joking) (It was a number two!) (Still joking! Honest!) I think Tuesday was one of the best days of the trip. We hit the road early and headed into the Austrian mountains after a quick coffee and croissant at a café on a street corner opposite the hospital.

We passed the road to Italy, but the barrier was down. Italy was closed!

We had a longer coffee break outside a café in a valley near the Swiss border (Restaurant Posta Veglia to be precise – it's on one of my photos!) and played 'guess the make of the motorbike coming around the bend'.

We felt we should have stuck our noses over the barrier so we could tick Italy off our list of countries visited. Heidi reckoned his spitting (not in a bad way! Fly in his mouth?) 'DNA' into it counted. Fair enough.

From there we headed into the snow-covered mountains – into the Alps proper. Mark's notes say this was Finsternunzpass, which lead us to St Moritz.

The temperature in St Moritz was now 32C. Time to sit down and have a brew in the car park. Chatted to an Italian motorbike couple touring the area.

The roads and scenery here were fantastic, but were about to get even better. Up through Julierpass (altitude 2284





metres.). Stopped on the way to play in the snow and take some pics. Then on via Tamins.

At some point today we crossed one of the only marked national borders – Austria to Switzerland. An official muttered something and waved us through.

We stopped for another quick brew in a side road by a large traditional brown timber Alpine house. Here we watched the sky blacken, and the weather duly started to change. We hung on as long as possible, but when the hail stones started, we slipped into our waterproofs. The temperature had now dropped to 3C.

We crossed the Oberalp pass with the weather at its worst and stopped only

long enough for Mark and John to take a photo of the ploughed 12 foot snow drifts.

At teatime we rolled, a bit cold and soggy, into the trendy Swiss ski resort of Andermatt. The resort seemed pretty full, and we got passed around a bit between hotels, but eventually got a single room each in the Kronen Hotel for 87 Swiss Francs (£52). (Worth it, not to sleep cheek to cheek with a violent ninja!)

Had traditional Swiss dishes in a nearby restaurant. An added bonus was an English-speaking waiter – at last!

A great day, but quite a tiring one, all in all. Heidi found it so tiring he was in bed at 8, after declining alcohol. The first day of his de-tox schedule.

(He had already decided only to drink alcohol during the day when he was riding!) (OK, just one small bottle.)

Mark went for a stroll round the town then joined John and me in the hotel bar in a lengthy discussion about whether the dog on the hotel's logo was facing us, or facing away! We did also take advantage of the fact that the staff here spoke English, too, and had a good chat about things other than dogs' bollocks.

### Wednesday

Woke up to more rain, but what the hell? The bikes got a wash. (Saved someone a little job!)

Gorged ourselves in the hotel's self-serve buffet restaurant, and nicked a stash for lunchtime.

All four wet bikes started no problem. And we were off again, over the wet cobbles. Auf weidersehen A n d e r m a t t .

We headed down the steep winding road of the valley in a storm. Thunderbolts and lightning – very, very frightening! We made it safely down to Brunnen on the picturesque Lake Luzern and the

rain eased off. Off with the waterproofs and time for a brew on the pavement. We picnicked in the park by the lake on our stolen goodies and fed the swans on the leftovers.

We were now heading across central Switzerland towards France with the Alps behind us. We rode some nice roads and eventually crossed the border into France. Hotels were looking a bit scarce, but when we eventually found one, it turned out we were back in Switzerland! My receipt says Hotel Cigogne, Miescourt. Swiss Francs and Swiss prices again! (90+ Euros for room and meal – CHF138 – 80 quid. Ouch!). French-speaking, however, so we were okay, coz we had Mark!

Not much else here apart from the hotel, so, as we couldn't find a TV to watch the Champion's League final (Man United and Barcelona) we were soon ready for yet another early night. (Not to worry – Amsterdam was getting nearer!)

### Thursday

Breakfast of bread, yogurt, smelly cheese and coffee. Filled our stomachs and pockets (again), then loaded up ready for off.

Back into France. Alsace region. Up and up a winding roads through the trees to Ballon d'Alsace, which road and hotel on the misty summit, was very reminiscent of Hartside.



Time for another brew – to the amusement of a group of 'mature' German BMW riders who rolled in out of the mist. Friendly sorts, out for a long day-trip. Had a bit of a chat across a bit of a language barrier. They had some nice gadgets, like bike-mounted cameras, but I didn't notice any Wal-oilers!

We had ridden about 1000 miles by now, through five countries, plus a bit of England, but it wasn't until we had been in France for 5 minutes that people started flashing their Peugeot lights at Heidi, because his lights were a bit bright! And it was after only about 10 minutes that some old French git was winding down his window to give us some verbals! Arse! (..as one of us told him. Possibly me.)

Anyway, unperturbed, we headed for Nancy, where we spent a few hours back in the sunshine. Nice city – buildings,

fortifications, square, park etc. Bought some grub which we ate on the steps of the cathedral.

We were then on the road again across Alsace in the direction of Verdun. Mark's fuel was getting low, and he was almost dry when we pulled into St Miheil American cemetery. Generous to a fault, Heidi allowed Mark to siphon some petrol out of his tank. Equally generously, I gave Mark a piece of chewing gum to take the taste of petrol away!

Got directions to fuel and a little family-run hotel in the village of Saint-Maurice-sous-Cotes. The boys nearly lost me at this stage, but they'll have to try harder than that!

After Mark battled valiantly for some time with the French proprietor in her native tongue to describe the accommodation we wanted, and what was available, she suddenly cried "Oh, you're English! Would you like to see the rooms?"





Follow me and I'll show you."

The upshot was - one twin room, which Heidi and me took, and one double for the brothers. A bit more basic than we were getting used to, but at 51Euros all-in (for both B and B) we thought it was so cheap we would let them rip us off for an evening meal.

As we wandered around the village to stretch our legs we found a cemetery, almost hidden among the trees, containing the graves of Germans who fell in WW1. Another early night!

### Friday

The end in sight! John reported that if the snoring continues

one more night he may have to kill his brother Mark.

As we paid up, said our farewells and packed our bikes up, I had to pop back into the hotel as I had left my jumper at the breakfast table. The friendly hotel owner had observed that we had taken about a dozen bread buns – as had become our habit – but had left one behind. (Well, you can only carry so many!) She generously asked if I'd like that one, too! I said, "Er, okay!" and shoved it in my pocket! "Au revoir, madam!"

"Bon appétit monsieur!"

From here it was a short ride to the historic town of Verdum, where we had a coffee by the

river and a short stroll around the river bank and quay.

Then it was back onto the motorways and long, long ride through Luxemburg, Belgium and Holland to Delft and The Hague. A long, long ride!

Made it eventually. There must be a thousand hotels around here, but when we arrived – pretty much knackered after hours on the road, we struggled to find one. But... God bless Novotel, who had an establishment in the city centre. Took the bikes down to the car park in the lift and had leisurely showers/shampoos/shaves in quite plush surroundings.

Then it was out for a night on the

town! A pizza and a few beers.

The city was very lively and a marked contrast to what we had been used to the rest of the week. We had a couple beers, but John was clearly after something ... well, ... a little different!

He eventually got his hands on a hookah pipe – strawberry flavour, I think. We all (or most of us!) had a puff, desperately trying to feel we were getting something from it. John puffed so hard he nearly started hyperventilating, before a young Dutch dude, calling himself 'Derek', explained that the pipe just contained tobacco! Help was at hand,

however, and 'Derek' rolled John something special – on the house – that smelled just like old times. Obviously the real deal. John kindly gave us all (or most of us) a couple off – just to check it out!

We then did a bit of a pub crawl. We had a sing-along in one lively little local, as the natives swung the lightshades in time to the chorus, then introduced Heidi to heavy metal at full volume in the bar next door. The Heineken was a rip-off price, but who cared? It was 9 o'clock and way past our bedtime! When, a few Heinekens later, we realised it was midnight, the place was still swarming with beautiful

young blonde things. There were some smart girls, too!!

We realised, although it was the last night of our hols, we did still have to get up in the morning and ride our bikes, and we really ought to get Heidi back to bed, before it all got too much for him.

### Saturday

A short hop to IJmuiden for the ferry after a relaxing stroll and seat on the busy sea front – where, as it turned out, you could hardly move for hotels.

As we returned to our bikes Mark and John struck up a conversation with an American family (flirting outrageously





with the daughters, it has to be said) about cruiser-style motorbikes, while Heidi and I stroked the plastic our Hondas and told our beautiful machines just to ignore them. Americans! What do they know about motorbikes!

On, then, to the port, where the King of Scandinavia waited to take us home to Champion's League Newcastle.

With the bikes strapped down among the 100 or so others, and our cabin located, we headed up into the sun on the top deck to watch the band. We decided five quid for a bottle of Grolsch was a price worth paying to savour the last few hours of our trip (the thieving Scandinavian b.....ds!)

Then it was a (relatively) cheap curry, rather than the over-priced restaurant meal, followed by a quiet seat under the captain's bridge to watch the sun set on our holiday.

Me and Heidi turned in early-ish (hell, we'd had one late night this week!) but Mark and

John headed for the casino to get rid of the last of their Euros.

### Sunday

Journey's end and home for breakfast with our better halves!

But not before Mark got pulled at customs for ... well, looking like a drug-smuggling outlaw, we presumed. We listened for the snap of latex gloves in preparation for the intimate body search by a couple of heavy-weights, but he seemed to get away with quick cross-examining by a pretty young brunette! (It's tough living on the edge!)

### Result:

Great trip!

1700 miles

Counties visited:- England, Holland, Germany, Italy (as DNA test will prove), Switzerland, France, Luxemburg, Belgium,

All back safe and sound.

Group hug. (Check your wallet's still there!)

Must use that frying pan next time!

Next time! ??

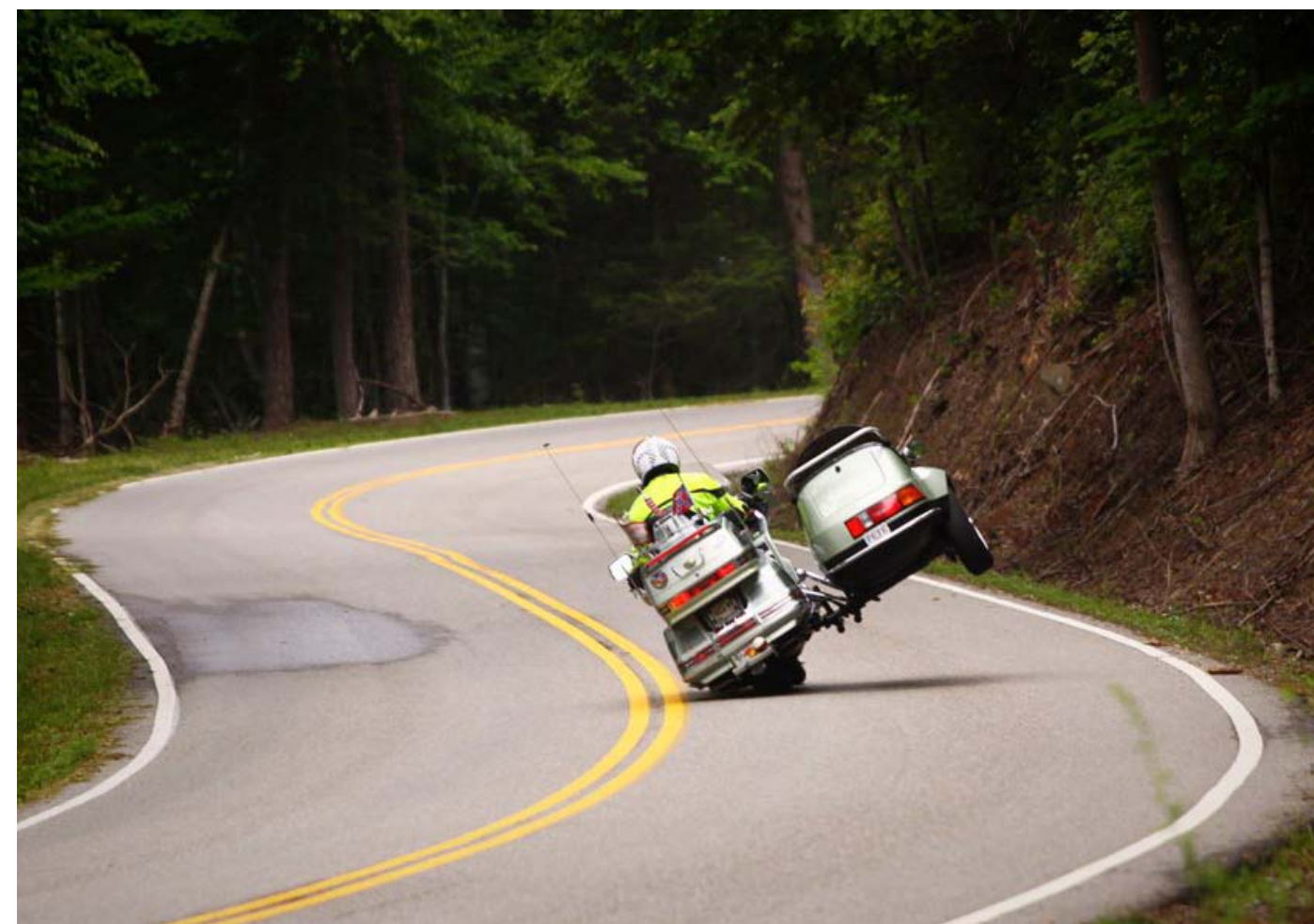
### Post Script

I just thought of all the clichés we encountered:

- English couple talking about the weather.
- Angry, gesticulating Frenchman.
- 'Derek' the Dodgy, doped Dutchman (canny lad, really)
- Friendly Chinese food-people
- Dumb blonde
- Cow bells and edelweiss
- Me and John even spotted a traditional buxom Bavarian barmaid with blonde bunches and a huge pair of jugs. (..of beer!) (Behave!)

David Walton

## Caption competition



FANCY yourself as a comic? Want to flex your funny muscle? Send in your funny captions for the picture above to [NamEditor@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:NamEditor@hotmail.co.uk)

## It's a funny old world



This picture was sent in by Jim Knowlton who suspects the line painter may have had a late night



NAM now has it's own facebook page. It is a great place for sharing pictures of rideouts, details of upcoming events and attracting new members. It can be viewed by anyone, even if you don't have a facebook account, though it only takes a minute to set an account up if you do want one. If you currently have a facebook account please go to the NAM page and click the like button.

[www.facebook.com/NorthumbriaAdvancedMotorcyclists](http://www.facebook.com/NorthumbriaAdvancedMotorcyclists)



# Equipment Test - visor bag

- Equipment - Visor Bag
- Make - Crivit (Lidl branded product)
- Cost - free with helmet
- Period of test - February - July
- Number times used >400

Over the years I've bought a number of helmets, all of which came complete with one of those wee bags to keep them in. The bags were usually cast aside or stored for later use (i. e. cast aside). Given that I have never noticed other riders carrying helmets around the place in bags, I presume that most of you do the same. I preferred the "arm through the visor hole" carrying technique. This allowed me to still both hands for carrying / gesticulating / scratching itches.

Now, I'm not simply a fair weather biker; I use my bike daily for my commute to; during and from work. This means that my helmet gets a fair amount of handling and is on and off my head up to ten times daily; all the more reason to not bother with the clart of taking it out of and putting it back into the bag. Or so I thought. The problem was that with all that handling and carrying around, in and out of service users' houses, visits to supermarket (including



accidental contact with other people's wire baskets), the visor and helmet shell picked up a lot of scratches. So, not that long after buying a helmet, It was soon time for a new visor, if not a new lid.

A few months back, February to be precise and having picked up one too many scratched on my current visor, I started an experiment to see if I could be bothered to use a helmet bag and to find out if it made any difference to the longevity of my visor. So I bought a new helmet from Lidl (I'm not made of money, you know!) and set myself the goal of always using the provided bag whenever I was carrying the helmet or stowing it in my top box.

I was surprised to find that I quickly adapted to the routine of using the bag when stowing the helmet in my topbox. I also found that it made carrying the helmet a lot easier.

Both helmet and visor are still in excellent shape. No sign of gravel rash from accidental contact with a spar coated wall, no autographs from supermarket hand baskets. And an unexpected bonus is that I very rarely have to clean the visor. All of this, despite daily use in a variety of weather and traffic conditions including damp dual carriageways, blizzardy B roads and leafy lanes . I don't think I could have exposed the visor to worse conditions unless I'd taken up motocross or enrolled in the Paris Dakar.

The reason for this dramatic reduction in the need for helmet



Other types of helmet bags available



housekeeping may be down to the material used to make the bag. Not only does it protect the helmet and visor from scratches, it appears to absorb water from the surface of the helmet and visor, thereby reducing/eliminating water marks when the helmet dries. The light friction between the fabric and visor during the putting in and taking out of the helmet might explain the seemingly automatic cleaning that goes on.

I've taken to keeping a micro fibre cloth in the bag in case of smudges, but I've only ever really needed to use this on the inside of the visor, because this side doesn't make contact with the bag.

At this rate I may never need the spare visor that came with the helmet.

The helmet bag is getting a bit worn, but as I mentioned earlier, I have a few spares somewhere.

Safety notice - The visor bag should be removed before you put on the helmet!

*Martin Trainor*



## Do we have your correct info?

(Home address, email address and contact number)

If not you could be missing out on important communications. Contact Membership Secretary Martin Trainor by email: by email: [martinjtrainor@hotmail.com](mailto:martinjtrainor@hotmail.com) or speak to him at the next monthly meeting.



# Into the Czech Republic

Michael Goodwin

Don't you think the Euro is really useful? You can travel vast areas of Europe and know that the unleaded petrol in Holland is expensive, compared with Germany. You know instantly that the coffee and cakes you bought in Belgium are cheaper than in France. And, when you go to another Euro country you don't have to get rid of all those annoying little coins that you collect, whose value you have no idea about.

Equally useful is all the languages you know. Ah! you might think, I don't know any languages other than English and even that may be in doubt. You, like me, may have day dreamed your way through four years of French and or German, avoiding the teachers eye in case you were asked to speak the language and therefore face instant ridicule from classmates. The result was a useful ability to ask in French, the name of someone's cat, or in German, to state that the bell is ringing and the teacher is coming into the classroom. But no, don't despair, you might know more than you think. For instance, I don't giggle any more when I see the word *ausfahrt*. I know it's not rude and means exit. I can even manage *Bonjour* and *Merci* in French. I know numbers and days and

the difference between the words for butcher and baker. I know more than I think and perhaps you do as well.

The reason I mention all this, is perhaps I didn't appreciate how much foreign language I knew until we followed the River Elbe into the Czech Republic. It immediately became clear that I could not read and that I couldn't understand anything said to me. April and I were bemused to say the least.

We had realised rather late that the usefulness of the Euro was going to be denied to us and that we were going to have to do the old exchange thing. We stopped in a small border town trying to find somewhere to exchange money. Within two seconds of stopping we were approached by a young woman, dressed very casually who may have been begging or was a car park attendant. We have no idea which, because no meaningful conversation could take place.

We hadn't a clue about any of the signs or shop names. Nothing was recognisable, even to make a reasonable guess as to what it meant.

Eventually we did find a bank in another larger town, but this was thanks to "The Bitch" otherwise known as the Sat Nav. Again, our lack of planning was exposed. April worked the ATM machine perfectly and got it to give us 400 Czech shekles. Of course, what we didn't know was, how much is 400 Czech shekles worth? It sounds a lot, but when April looked in a shop window and saw that a tube of toothpaste was 59 shekles it dawned on us that we may have to revisit the bank, before our time in the Czech Republic was over. It turned out we had withdrawn the grand amount of £13.06. Then there is the problem of what to do with all those little Euro coins we've collected!

I know I said I didn't giggle at *ausfahrt* anymore but I may have lied judging by this photo I couldn't resist taking. And yes I know it's childish!



# Regional Observer Training Event

Saturday July 20th

First of all many congratulations to Paddy Jarvis, Mel Leitch, Geoff Spencer and Jack Stewart who are the first in our Group and among the first in the country to achieve the new independently accredited National Observer qualification. Mick Goodwin is due to sit his National Observer test on his return from holiday (no pressure!) then other Senior Observers will follow by taking the national qualification when they come up for their usual three year renewal.

It was good to spend some time with IAM staff Examiner Graham Buxton who came up from Nottingham to carry out the tests and while he was here 'dropped in' at the slow riding course at Heighley Gate

and was our special guest at the regional training event on the Saturday hosted by NAM at The Wheatsheaf.

There was a good turnout of 30 Observers with representatives from five other groups travelling up to Tyneside. The morning session consisted of a presentation on Associate training and 'adult learning' by Ian Scott, Chief Observer from the Cleveland Group followed by observed rides in groups of three in the afternoon with riders taking turns to be either an Associate or an Observer in order to practice briefing skills and identification and correction of difficulties being experienced by the Associate.

When we meet up with IAM

affiliated groups from other areas I am impressed how similar our approach to advanced riding and training is, so 'the system' does work. However, this type of event always helps to raise our standard of riding and makes sure that we are up to date with training know how and information. It is worth noting that members of our own Training Group hold the highest level of civilian qualifications for advanced motorcycling including 'ROSPA gold'.

Malcolm Lonsdale asked for feedback at the end of the event and suggested that a two day event may be possible next year.

Martin Trainor





# Rider's Review - The Oxford Strap Nav

Charles Wood

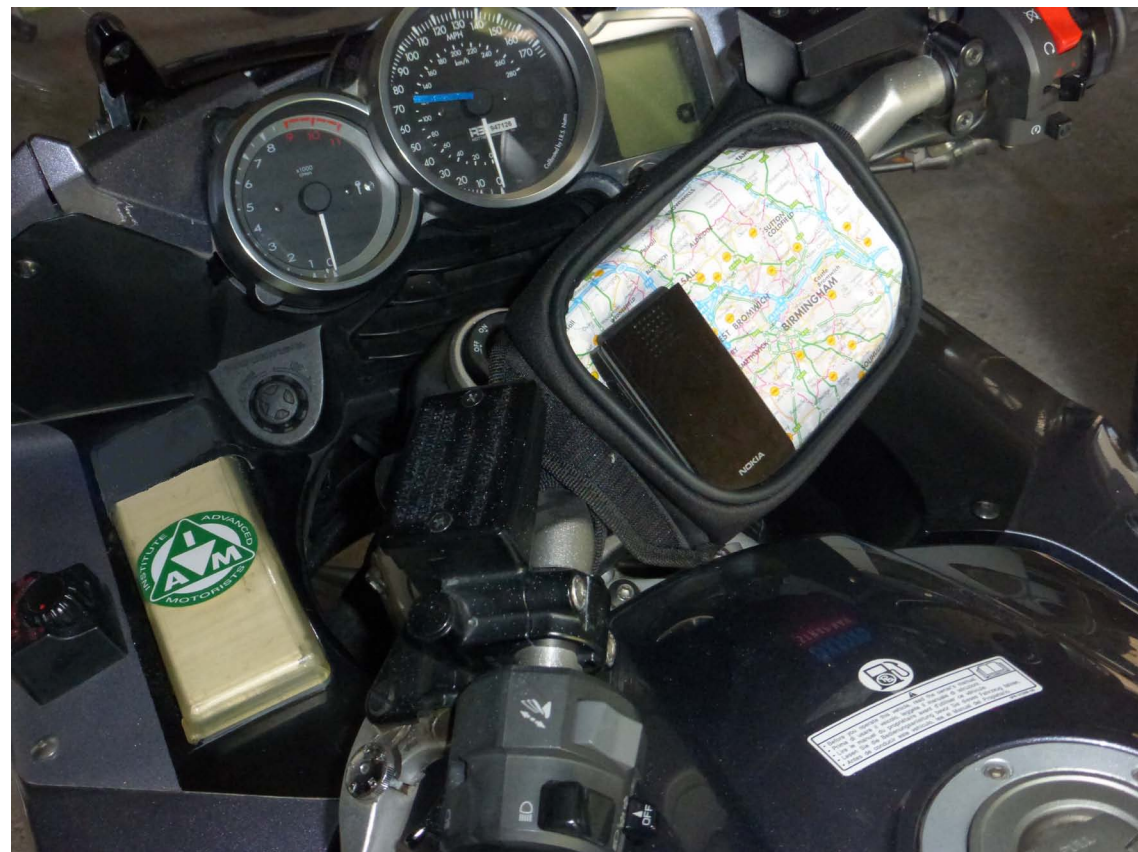
So, you've zipped up your skin-tight leathers and quickly admiring yourself in the hall-way mirror slip out of the house, helmet and gloves in one hand whilst balancing your wallet, mobile phone and house keys (which includes a key that you are not quite sure of but are loath to throw away) in the other. The bike sits patiently ready for the road and the rider to take it there. But where to put that bunch of keys, the wallet, the mobile phone – surely you don't want to ruin that silhouette? Well, that's where the Oxford Strap Nav comes in.

Measuring up to 145mm wide x 95mm high x 30mm deep and designed primarily as a

weather proof by a durable zip. The outer casing is made of the same man-made fibre (with clear viewing panel) but wraps around the 'inner box' by use of velcro panels. The Strap Nav fixes easily to the handle-bars using two double-sided velcro straps which can be adapted to fit any type of handlebar. Of course, if you want to put a sat-nav in the inner container and connect up to a 12v supply, then the inner holder features a concealed power outlet for routing power cables (and headphones).

All in all, this is a well designed piece of kit. Marketed on-line and in-store for between £28.00 - £30.00, it is easy to put on and the double

sided velcro straps hold The Strap Nav securely in place. If anything, the straps are too long but nothing that a pair of scissors wouldn't solve. The Strap Nav is as it says on the box – weather durable and having used it to put everything from wallet and mobile to satnav and visor cleaning kit in, everything was as dry coming out as when it went in. This accessory wouldn't be for everyone and in truth, if I am stopping for more than a few minutes I do remove it but it has served me well – particularly when I have used it to carry a sat-nav! When not in use, it is easy to take off and sits ready for when I am next faced with that dilemma, 'Now, where do I put my wallet, 'phone and house keys?



# 10 Years with an FJR

Geoff Toscano

I bought my first FJR in October 2003, (and am now onto my fourth, with a purchase in April of the most up to date model). I'd just completed my first two up tour of Spain with my wife on a Kawasaki Drifter, the one that looks like an old Indian Scout. I liked that bike but it was a bit of an uncomfortable experience for my wife. So on our return we decided to try and find something that would be good for long European tours, whilst being fun to ride as well.

It was obvious early on that there really wasn't a lot of choice. Bikes like Honda's Goldwing were just too big and heavy, and the Pan European I found was too bland, though it was very comfortable. There was the Triumph Trophy but at the time it was fairly crude, looked like a barn door, and crucially had chain drive. So at that time the FJR stood out as a leading contender.

The FJR was a unique bike at the time, having been developed from the ground up, and sharing no parts with other Yamaha models. It was the natural progression to

the FJ1200, a model that dated back to the early 1980s and ceased production in 1996. Fans of the old FJ were always asking for improvements to what was a truly great bike, especially shaft drive. Yamaha clearly listened intently to what was being said, but still took 5 years to bring out the FJR, which first saw production in 2001.

There have been changes over the years the model has been in existence, some being improvements, others rectifying faults. By and large, however, even after 12 years, it is possible to ride one from 2001 and feel little difference to one produced now.

From a touring point of view the really strong points are

- 1) L u g g a g e capability. The

panniers are now so much copied that it's easy to forget how in 2001 they were a fantastic design achievement. They blend into the bike as though build in, but are easily removable, leaving no untidy framework behind. Originally the panniers were an optional extra, but it became clear that they were so much an integral part of any purchase that they came to be supplied as standard. The top box is still an optional extra; I found that Givi offered better top box options and have since always used them. The only downside to the Givi is that it does require another key, rather than being able to rely on a single Yamaha one.





Shaft drive. To many it seems trivial but I have seen so many problems caused by poor chain maintenance that I really do see shaft drive as a major requirement.

3) Retractable screen. It doesn't sound much but in the heat of Spain the ability to roll the screen down on the move and get that blast of air to cool you is a must.

Problems on the early models were few and I never experienced any but there were several cases of faulty valve guides. All bikes were repaired under warranty without quibble. The only issue that owners complained about was heat from the engine being shunted back onto the rider's legs. I never found this, but probably because I used to wear fairly thick trousers, especially leather. However, if you like to wear shorts when you ride.....

In 2006 there was an extensive upgrade. Heat problems were addressed, there was new instrumentation, and there was a general overall tweaking. Two teething problems emerged

1) The readout on the fuel consumption was faulty and resulted in all the clocks having to be changed.

2) The throttle position sensor (TPS) was found to be faulty and resulted in poor running at altitude. Again readily fixed under warranty, but caused many a worried owner in the Alps or Pyrenees to wonder what was wrong!

Servicing is best left to the dealer, as there is so much bodywork to be removed to get even at the spark plugs. Having said which, the FJR was the first bike to have the oil filter fixed on the side, making oil changes very easy

indeed. There is a very good FJR owners club which even has a dedicated service centre, though being based near Bristol not a great deal of use up here! There is, however, nothing that those guys don't know about FJR's, and as a source of advice they can be invaluable.

Tyres are a source of great debate. I used Bridgestone 020s for a while, but have gone with Michelin Road Pilot 3s for the last few years, and found them to be excellent. Longevity is about 9000 miles back and up to 13000 front. This always depends on riding style of course, and some members report even bigger mileages. The latest model has Bridgestones fitted as standard, and I must admit that they feel as good as the PR3s.

Performance and handling are probably more dependent on



the rider than the bike. Top speed is reported to be over 150mph, which is likely to be academic for most people. For me the ability to be able to cruise comfortably between 70 and 90, without significant vibes, is what's important and this it does easily. It is undoubtedly the smoothest bike I have ever ridden, though this does mean that care has to be taken to balance the wheels when tyres are changed. Handling isn't quite in the same league as a sports bike, or even modern adventure bikes, but that simply means more rider input is needed, with greater levels of satisfaction from actually having to think about push steering.

Fuel consumption is very good for the size and weight. Actually this is something that really has improved as the model improved. In more recent years reviewers seemed to take a bit of a dislike to the FJR, describing it as 'slow and lardy'. This was ridiculous, of course, but there's no doubt that it was perhaps a little heavier than the opposition. Now those bikes themselves have become heavier, whereas the latest incarnation of the

FJR has shed a little weight (down from 261kgs to 259kgs – wow!), so it is back in favour with the reviewers. More importantly, Yamaha brought the price down to £13500, from a ridiculous £15500 for the old model, which did leave it uncompetitive for some time. As well as shedding a little weight, Yamaha made some engine improvements, including raising the gearing, which resulted in a very real improvement in fuel economy over earlier models. The earliest models were the most thirsty, though even so were capable of over 50mpg in real life conditions. With similar riding the latest model returns about 60mpg!

On the subject of gearing this is something that has changed over the years. The FJR has always had just 5 gears. It has never needed another gear, torque being such that overtaking seldom needs a gear change, but it did need better spacing between, and this Yamaha have done. The first model, as I recall, did 70mph at 4000rpm. This increased to 76mph in 2006, and the latest model now does 80mph at 4000rpm. This is one reason for the improvement in fuel consumption.

The newest model features a few improvements on earlier models. As I said above, weight has been reduced (I believe the cats have been

reduced from four to two), but there are a number of other significant changes. ABS now comes as standard, rather than optional extra, traction control also, cruise control, completely new fairing and screen, and new clocks that display all the information you could ever want.

Lastly, a quick note about comfort. As with all bikes the FJR comes in one standard size which has to fit all riders. Many find that the handlebars are a little too far forward and there are plenty of risers and angle changers on the market. Seat height can't be adjusted but it is possible to change between soft and hard in the suspension, though overall suspension is a little on the crude side. There is a range of adjustment in the suspension, both spring and damping, though I tend to find it's best left alone once the ideal setting has been found. Standard seat comfort is good, in my opinion, but there are many owners who like to change it. The owners club have some very good offers for people wanting to do that. There are also options for lowering the height of the bike, though that can cause problems in other areas, such as ground clearance and side stand.

Overall then a fine bike that is unlikely to leave a buyer disappointed.





# Northumbria Blood Bikes

Northumbria Blood Bikes has had a busy first year . We had set out to raise £20,000 this year; it was intended that this would cover the cost of a fully liveried and equipped, new motorcycle. However, after six months of fundraising it was clear that we were a considerable way away from being able to purchase, livery, equip and run a new motorcycle, whilst still maintaining appropriate funds for contingencies; consequently, and because it was felt a liveried bike would aid fundraising, it was decided to purchase a used motorcycle. A suitable ex-Strathclyde Police bike was identified on eBay and we were the successful bidder at £3,500. The bike was fitted with blue lights and liveried with the national orange and yellow standard used by blood bikes.

### Other Highlights

We achieved full membership of the Nationwide Association



of Blood Bikes;

We gained publicity in a variety of local media, including the Sunderland Echo and Sun FM;

We attended and spoke at a number of bike rallies and

meetings, including: the Norton Owners' Club, the Frank Steele rally, Triumph RATs and the Widows Sons rally;

Shared stand (with RealRider) at Bikewise;



Two collections in Asda (Boldon);

Registered for fundraising on the Virgin Money Giving and BT Giving sites and for text donations on Justtextgiving;

Obtained and had liveried two mini-motos for use in fundraising;

Held three Open and Members' meetings to increase the membership numbers and to keep existing members informed about progress;

Established good links with our neighbouring groups Bloodrun (Redcar and Cleveland) and North West Lancs and Lakes and picked their brains unmercifully!

Auctioned a motorbike,

kindly donated by Morpeth Motorcycles.

### NAM Lends a hand

As well as providing many of our volunteer riders NAM has also helped out by donating a first aid kit for the blood bike. Huge thanks to NAM in particular the committee for this generous and useful donation.

### Want to volunteer?

Northumbria Blood Bikes is always looking for volunteers. All Riders have to hold an advanced riding qualification such as IAM, ROSPA or Police. Though we don't need just riders, help is needed with fundraising activities (such as supermarket collections or bag packing) and with the

administration of the charity. If you can help please get in touch.

You can email [membership@northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk](mailto:membership@northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk)

### Keep up to date

You can find out more about Northumbria Blood Bikes on the website, Facebook and Twitter.

[www.northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk](http://www.northumbriabloodbikes.org.uk)

[www.facebook.com/NorthumbriaBloodBikes](https://www.facebook.com/NorthumbriaBloodBikes)

[www.twitter.com/NorthumbriaBB](https://www.twitter.com/NorthumbriaBB)

**Barry Bullas**



# New members

NAM is pleased to welcome the following new members

- Paul Steel
- Julie Baker
- Mehmet Balaban
- Paul Cain
- Simon Drennon
- Ian Du Rose
- Stuart Elliot
- Guy Gannie
- Christopher Hickling
- Brian Hudson
- Mark Lees
- Alistair McDonald-Smith
- Keith Miller
- David Murphy
- John Oakey
- John Parish
- Nigel Parker
- Robert Scott
- Adam Slater
- Lee Wright

# Awards

Congratulations to the following members on passing the advanced test

- Graham Mitchell
- Robert Scott

Congratulations to the following members on passing the new IAM National Observer accredited qualification in July

- Geoff Spencer
- Paddy Jarvis
- Mel Leitch
- Jack Stewart

---

# Easy fundraising

Easy fundraising is a simple and easy way for you to help raise money for NAM at no cost to yourself.

1. Join easyfundraising (link below) and select your cause , in this case NAM
2. Follow links on the website to over 2000 leading online retailers (Ebay, Tesco, Asda, Amazon etc ) and shop as normal
3. Online purchases earn an automatic donation to NAM.

Easyfundraising has already raised £409.91 for NAM so far.

<http://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/nam/>