



# Durham Advanced Motorcyclists

Formed 1996

## News Sheet

Issue 002

July 2020

Welcome to all members and associates alike.

Bikers, Motorcycle riders or Motorcyclists, whatever you wish to be known as, the bottom line is you are on two wheels and enjoying the freedom that comes with the experience.

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### Coming out of LOCKDOWN

As the lockdown of our liberty has eased since the China Virus appears to be abating, we in the motorcycling community are and have been in the unique position to be able to socially distance due to the nature of the beast. Not only are we distanced from our fellow riders, but we also have the advantage of wearing a helmet, even an open face helmet normally means a neck-tube or scarf for face covering and either a visor or goggles as eye protection.

In our area, D.A.M. we have had arranged by members, small groups for rides during the week as well as the normal diarised ride-outs as the easing of lockdown has permitted. These smaller rides have been well received and are becoming popular with regular following.

Some of the ride-out photos:



Squires



St Mary's Loch



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### The Nook Café & Farm Shop, Alston



D.A.M. members attended a 'Biker Down' promotion at the Texaco garage in Alston, Cumbria, as this was the first opportunity we have had this year to market the IAM RoadSmart course.

The weather was not at its best and a speed trap in the area did nothing to help matters. The general consensus is that although the Fire Brigade and Ambulance Services were at the promotion, the Police presence, along with the speed trap did not go down well. On the upside there were several inquiry's for Advanced Training, which we hope will be followed up.

### Motorcycle Communications Review

Wireless communication devices are getting better and better. The biggest complaints about them was unreliable pairing, especially in groups of three or more, poor connectivity over distances and in some areas, controls that are hard to use with gloves on and poor audio quality.

I've been testing Cardo's new top-of-the-line Packtalk Bold and have good news; you can probably cross most of those issues off your list. It is not perfect, but technology rarely is, however it is it the best such device I've tested thus far. Here is my take on it.

Founded in 2002, Cardo was one of the first communication systems available specifically for motorcyclists. Cardo released its first dedicated motorcycle communication system, the Scala Rider, in 2004. Over the last 16 years, it has released about 11 models of communicators, including its most recent model, the Packtalk, brought to market in 2015. Over the past few years it has made software and firmware updates, the latest iteration being the Packtalk Bold Black.

I've had a Cardo Packtalk system Cardo's DMC mesh communicator for a little while now; I have it installed on my Schubert C4 modular helmet. The Packtalk Bold features new upgraded JBL speakers. The 'mesh' system



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along with the new JBL speakers, the newest version of Cardo's communication also features voice activation, so I don't have to mess with buttons to make simple adjustments or commands to my Bluetooth-connected phone.

The group I was riding with had a total of 6 riders, so we were well within the 15-rider maximum capacity of the Packtalk connectivity. After downloading Cardo's newer smart-phone app, and linking my phone to my communication set, we started the process of pairing all the headsets. We all huddled in a circle waiting for each headset to pair. And we each grabbed our gear and headed out to our bikes.



As soon as the group of us were gathered outside the pub, saddled up and ready to go, everyone was talking with each other.

Mesh technology is the next generation in bike-to-bike communication; rather than connecting in a relatively simple Bluetooth "daisy chain" that means just one lost connection breaks apart the whole group, DMC connects a group in something like a web. Riders can come and go, disconnecting and reconnecting at any time, without affecting the rest of the group.

This is especially helpful on group rides when you might get spread out over many miles, or when you head into a built-up area and slower riders fall behind. On our first test ride with the Packtalk Bold, my group of 6 riders were split up. As the three of us in the lead pulled ahead and the hills closed in, the remaining 3 were disconnected.

The thing was, both groups could still communicate amongst themselves. Then when the back 3 caught up, they automatically reconnected with us and viola! We were one big happy riding family again. The riders at the front were able to call out any problem debris, potholes or vehicles in the road, which was very helpful.

Getting out into the twisties was where Cardo's claimed 1.5 km reach was challenged. There were plenty of roads that twisted and turned so quickly, between the hills, that it was easy to lose line of sight on a rider ahead of or behind me. The riders farther back, even though they were easily within a mile of me, weren't coming through my headset, revealing where the Cardo's weak point of needing line of sight to maintain communication. As soon as we all met up at our lookout point, we were in communication again.



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At one point the rain came down, however the Cardo Packtalk Bolds kept us connected, since they're properly weatherproof.

There were times when any one of us could be heard saying, "Hey Cardo, radio on!" or "Hey Cardo, next station!" As long as we remembered the specific terms to differentiate between playing the radio ("Hey Cardo, radio on!"), playing your most recently used music player, or any of the other functions available with audio command, the system was responsive and easy to use. This continued throughout the day, with no buttons to press and no fussing with re-pairing at stops.

We continued our ride through various twisty roads, until we ended up at the destination for lunch.

After enjoying fish and chips, we set out again, this time taking a straight route back to the Dun Cow, where we would end the day. We had plenty of opportunity to chat with each other and test out the audio quality of the newer JBL speakers at high speeds.

While the Packtalk Bold features DMC mesh technology, it also has Bluetooth capability and can be paired to Cardo or other brands' Bluetooth communicators. It also uses Bluetooth to pair to a GPS, motorcycle or phone.

Private conversations with another mesh group member (like your passenger) require the app, or by pairing with them in advance separately using Bluetooth, then you can both press a couple buttons on each unit and temporarily check out. You can also mute yourself from the entire mesh group if you wish. Another good feature is what Cardo calls Natural Voice Operation and operates the Packtalk Bold with voice commands. The feature is always on, so at any time you can say, "Hey Cardo," followed by the command: "volume up," "mute audio," "music on," "next track," even "battery status." It even allows for "Hey Siri" and "OK Google" commands to your phone. I found it worked reasonably well, as long as I spoke at a normal level; shouting distorts your voice so it doesn't always get recognized.

The sound quality at higher speeds is not the best as the wind noise affects the sound also mic noise from other users sometimes has the effect of 'open mic'. The new Packtalk Bold definitely delivers louder audio with the JBL speakers. I would argue that the system could go a couple of clicks louder, but I understand if there's a concern about eardrum safety.



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As with just about everything these days, you'll need to download the free Cardo app for your phone in order to make the most of your Packtalk Bold, including setting volume levels for things like music, system prompts and intercom, adjusting the sensitivity of the automatic volume control (which adjusts volume based on ambient noise) and choosing regular, bass boost or vocal EQ profiles from the JBL sound system. I chose bass boost, the JBLs are a marked upgrade. The Packtalk Bold's shortcomings are few: while "Hey Cardo" commands worked most of the time, I did find "Hey Siri" to be less reliable, and the maximum volume level, even with the JBLs, is not quite loud enough for highway speeds.

<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Complete installation guide included in package, Very thorough and detailed installation instructions and diagrams, Dynamic mesh communications, Good 2-way radio sound quality, Great sound quality on radio and music playback, Unit integrates well into the helmet with no noticeable discomfort, Good battery life, Waterproof, Offers voice activated function, Works well with multiple riders- up to 15	Air/helmet noise can cause an open mic situation, Control wheel can present challenges, Pricing could be an issue for some riders