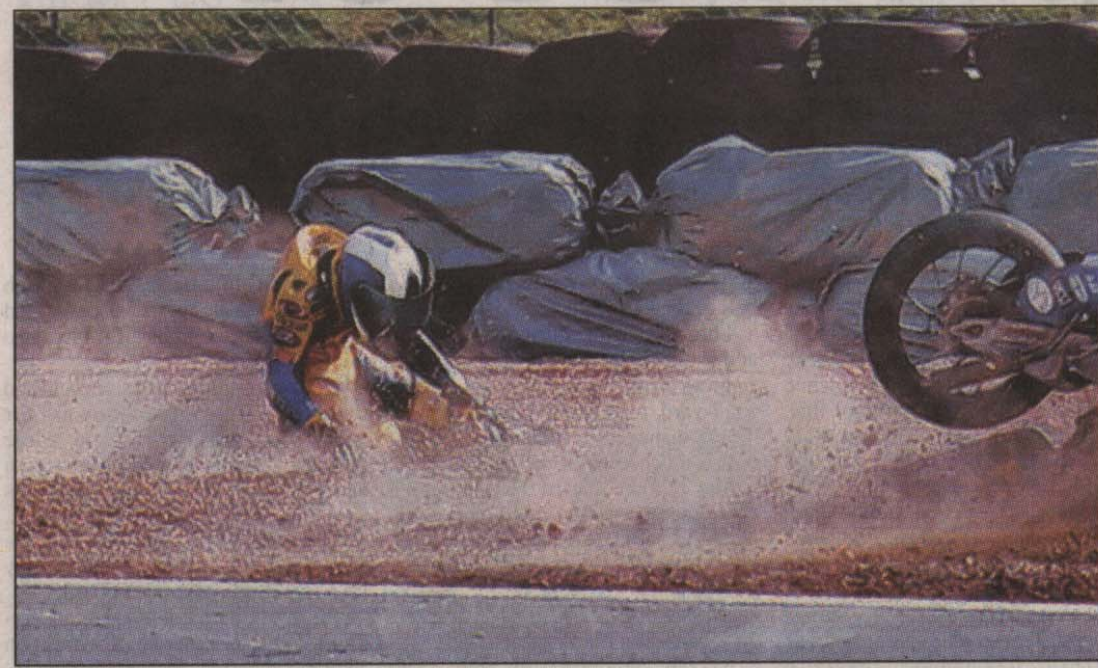


Bike ace Alex's engine blows his Championship race hopes



CRASHING OUT: Alex Gault suffered a sprained ankle after this engine-related accident in practice, and the resulting mechanical problems forced his early retirement from the race.

THE second round of the British Championship proved to be a nightmare experience for Alex Gault as he was forced to retire on the seventh lap.

His debut at Thruxton was more difficult than the 14-year-old and his crew from Team Barrus Malaguti expected, with the problems stemming from a crash in the second qualifying round.

Alex successfully negotiated 10 laps of the 2.3-mile circuit, reputed to be the fastest in Britain, in his opening session... but the race weekend went wrong from then on.

The engine on his new bike blew up after only three laps of the second session, throwing the

Carluke youngster from his seat and resulting in a badly sprained ankle.

He received the green light from a doctor to take part in Saturday morning's timed qualifying session; but the prognosis was not so good for his new Italian bike.

Despite spending their budget for the next three months on repairs following that crash, the engine management problems persisted.

Alex was forced to retire on the seventh lap of the first session while the bike stopped after only half-a-lap on the second.

The youngster finished 45th in the overall standings and only secured the final place on the 44-man grid due to another competitor's withdrawal.

Alex raised hopes of a big-occasion resurgence with an encouraging per-

formance in the morning warm-up — but although he began cutting his way through from the back of the grid, he started to slow and was forced out of the race after seven laps.

His father, Alex senior, said: "The difficulty with the engine management system was getting worse and due to the nature of the problem it was getting dangerous to continue.

"A change of direction is called for as we do not go racing to qualify last by default or retire through no fault of our own."

And he offered the frank admission: "All in all, it looks like we are starting to pay the price for being under-funded, under-prepared and under-equipped."

The team will hope to be back on track in this weekend's third round of the championship at Mallory.