

Baptism of fire as Alex gets in gear for sponsorship

By Judith Tonner

ALEX Gault faces the challenge of finding a new sponsor to support his British championship dream after a tough debut season at the top domestic level of his sport.

The 14-year-old motorcyclist from Carlisle is no longer being backed by the UK importer of his Malaguti bike, the Italian manufacturer with whom he is 12 months into a three-year contract.

He has also been dogged by mechanical failures which have forced him out of several races, most recently the final round of the season

at Brand's Hatch, due to the constant struggle to attract support since stepping up from the ranks of the Junior Racing Association.

The teenager's father, Alex senior, said: "In the British championship, riding ability goes hand-in-hand with bike preparation, set-up and having the correct backing, and it's very difficult for a lad-and-dad team to cut it at this level.

"Everyone says that it's good to see young talent and different types of bikes on the grid, but nobody is interested when it comes to helping pay for it.

"The sponsorship we've had has come from when we were racing minimoto, but at that time the outlay was around £5000, whereas it's much more expensive to compete at the British cham-

ampionship.

"I purposely haven't counted it up, but it's a minimum of £25,000 — that's easy when you say it quickly, but it has to be expendable income and we desperately need to get sponsors if he wants to race at that level next season.

"With Malaguti, the problem is whether we should promote the brand in the UK when the importer isn't giving us any support; we're going to visit their factory next month and they'll decide whether they want to keep him on."

Despite his baptism of fire in the British championship, Alex still managed to demonstrate his considerable talent by finishing in a respectable 11th place in the Academy Cup, the

25-strong sub-category of the competition for riders aged between 14 and 17.

He was also in invincible form when he returned to the familiar territory of regional races, with his many successes including setting a new lap record at the Three Sisters track, but the Carlisle family say that their sights are still set on the higher national target.

Alex senior said: "Going back to club racing serves no purpose, as he just wins all the time — he wants the challenge of the British championship.

"We've learned a lot from this season, which will stand us in good stead, but I don't know if I'd say I've enjoyed it; it's almost been too big a challenge, and Alex hasn't been happy with his results.

"However, if he wants to race next season, he'll be racing — we'll find a way."

The season came to a sobering end with the deaths of two good friends of the team; first the tragic loss of 14-year-old Chris Jones in an accident at the penultimate championship round, then the death of ZPF Minibike founder Pier Franco Zanetti, who established Alex's career after recognising his talent and signing him as the firm's UK rider, a partnership which yielded eight major titles in three years.

Morale was therefore low as the final round of the championship approached, but the Carlisle team eventually decided to travel south to compete at Brand's Hatch.

The tone was set as the engine seized after just four practice laps, with more mechanical problems developing after a further two.

Despite never previously having raced on the famous track, the teenager still managed to qualify in 17th position the following day, only for more engine and handling problems to push him back to 22nd place on the final grid.

Alex made a promising start to race day with the 11th-best practice time and with five blistering opening laps to the race itself which saw him move up to ninth place.

However, he was forced to retire after a further five circuits after the rear brake master cylinder and foot peg hanger detached.



SPONSORSHIP SEARCH: Alex Gault finished 11th in the Academy Cup in his debut British championship season, but faces a new race to gain sponsorship for next year.