

# Teen rider Alex has valuable baptism of fire in Italy

## MOTORSPORT

**ALEX Gault finished in 22nd place when he made his European Superstock Cup debut in blistering heat at the Misano track in Italy alongside the stars of the world superbike circuit.**

The 16-year-old from Carlisle rode for MIST Suzuki, replacing unavailable regular rider Chris Leeson, in the 600cc race after gaining sponsorship from supporters.

He quickly familiarised himself with the track in free practice, while some of the faults on the bike became apparent in the extreme heat of up to 45 degrees. Nonethe-

less he still succeeded in posting an initial time of one minute 50.819 seconds, seven seconds behind the leader.

The teenage rider then set official qualifying times of 1:46.620 and 1:44.778 to take 24th place on the grid alongside two fellow British riders.

Dad Alex senior said: "I was pleased with that result as Alex was on a strange bike for the first time, in front of a huge crowd and riding in unbearable temperatures, so to be only three seconds off pole on that very technical track was OK."

Unfortunately, Alex made a poor start to the race and dropped back to last place as the riders came off the grid, but had worked up to 18th by the end of the first lap and reached a race-high position of 16th by the midway stage.

He eventually finished in 22nd place, his

fall back in position largely due to his loss of momentum when the rider in front suddenly missed a gear and forced Gault to brake sharply to avoid a crash, with four rivals then passing him.

The young rider and his team drew positives from his debut performance in the prestigious international race, however, and they are targeting a higher finishing position when he again deputises for Leeson by contesting next month's round at Brands

Hatch.

Dad Alex senior said: "Finishing 22nd is not a true reflection on how well Alex did.

"This was the first time he had raced in this sort of company and the first time he has been on a track with a temperature of 45 degrees.

"The first 10 or 12 riders in the race are professionals and everyone takes it very seriously, but I honestly believe that with the set-up and equipment we have, he could

be constantly finishing in the top 15.

"Getting into the top 10 would need an injection of cash and more experience from both Alex and his crew, but he learned loads in a very short period of time and constantly got faster as his confidence built.

"It was a very worthwhile trip, and despite the result Alex did a good job.

"Our thanks go to the MIST Suzuki team for their efforts and all who contributed to make the trip possible."