

Whizz-kid Flint rises to new heights

It proved to be lucky 13 for Leon Flint as the Berwick-born Bandits' star reeled off a five-ride maximum to win the British Under-19 Championship at Redcar, *writes George Dodds*.

Because of the draw, which gave him the number 13 race jacket, Flint faced back-to-back races in heats four and five but comfortable victories underlined his standing as hot favourite to win the title with two of his big rivals, Scunthorpe's Jordan Palin and Dan Thompson of Leicester, missing through injury.

He was largely untroubled on a night when his gating was first class, especially in heat 19 when Flint faced Belle Vue's Jake Mulford, also unbeaten going into the race.

Another perfect start saw the 19-year-old born in Ashington, Northumberland, lead into the first bend and pull away to claim victory, grandad Tony and father Gary – team manager and promoter at Shielfield Park – among the welcoming party which greeted him at the pits' gate and gave the popular teenager the traditional victory bumps.

It's not his first time on a national podium either as Leon finished second to Dan Bewley in the 2020 British Under-21 Final, raced behind closed doors at Shielfield Park during the COVID pandemic.

And he was also British 150CC Champion in 2015, 250CC title winner in 2016 and 2017 and 500CC in 2018, the year he made his National League debut with Birmingham, aged 15, a year before breaking onto the Championship scene with his home-town club.

Leon has also been named in the starting 16 for this year's

British Championship at Belle Vue on 1 August and the Under-21 Final at Birmingham on 31 August.

Mulford, probably better known for his grasstrack exploits, matched Flint win for win on a night of competitive racing at Redcar until the decisive penultimate heat.

Former Berwick Academy rider Luke Harrison, who has just turned 15, scored an impressive seven points while former 125 team-mate at Shielfield Sam McGurk had three points to his credit before taking a spectacular tumble after clipping the fence on the straight and having to withdraw.

Harry McGurk beat Sam Hagon and Nathan Ablitt in a three-man run-off for third place.

Berwick Bullets' Ace Pijper, one of five 15-year-olds in the field, scored a creditable five points on his Championship debut.

But the night belonged to Flint (pictured on the podium with Harry McGurk and Jake Mulford by **Dick Barrie**) who had spent the early part of the week recovering from a back injury sustained in a heavy crash at Glasgow last Friday evening.

He showed little sign of the injury, or nerves, and stamped his authority on the meeting with back-to-back victories in heats four and five and gave a gating masterclass while Mulford was forced to work hard for his points.

But there was little time for the new champion to celebrate as he headed back to the workshop to prepare for another busy weekend in Bandits' colours as they travel to Edinburgh on Friday night in the Championship Jubilee League, host the Monarchs the following night and then travel to table-topping Leicester in a rearranged Championship fixture on Sunday.

"It's a good feeling," Leon admitted after receiving his trophy. "The way some people were talking in the build-up made

it sound as if all I had to do was turn up and the title was mine, but I never thought it was a foregone conclusion.

“The support team was focussed on getting both me and the bikes right and making sure there were no surprises on the night. It was my last year at this level so it was good to get my name on the trophy and I’m proud to do it as a Berwick rider.”