

**Book Extract:**  
**The Year that Ended in a Seven**  
**By Graham Morris**

*Graham Morris has written and published this match by match account of the Swindon Robins assault on the 2007 Elite League title. This was the year that the Robins put together a side that was immediately named as favourites to win the title for the first time since 1967.*



And so to heat eleven. Heat eleven of Reading versus Swindon in the Knockout Cup semi-final. Potentially the most disastrous heat in the history of Swindon speedway. The heat when the number of unfit riders in the Swindon team rose from three to five – with just three days to go before the play-offs began. And this wasn't just a crash that involved possible ramifications for the team. This was a crash involving human beings. And it was one of the worst looking crashes ever seen at Smallmead Stadium.

Travis McGowan was leading the race. With the score at 28-32 in favour of the Robins, a drawn heat would be enough to ensure Swindon's first ever senior league Knockout Cup final. Leigh Adams and Andrew Moore were riding round together, with Leigh shielding Andrew from the pressing Krystof Buczkowski. Travis seemed comfortable at the front. Leigh had taken the option to support the Swindon reserve rather than chase after the rider who had now become the skipper of the Racers in the absence of so many others.

Everything was normal. Or as normal as things can be when 500cc motorbikes are being ridden at full speed without brakes. Travis was leading. He was close to the safety fence heading down the straight. The smooth style of Leigh and the dogged efforts of his partner were side-by-side behind him. At the back, Krystof Buczkowski was still looking for a way through. The team-riding was solid. It was safe. There was no point taking chances going after McGowan with the tie now secure.

It hadn't been an eventful match. The gathering of Swindon supporters on bend three were there, as always, but smaller in number than the masses that gathered for the league match a couple of weeks earlier. They were content. This tie was "in-the-bag" before it even started. Leigh Adams was looking as stylish as ever and, as all three riders put their wheels in line and headed down the home straight, he took a glance behind to check on the position of Buczkowski. There was just three days to go now before the crucial tie with the Panthers.

No chances had been taken.

Everything has been played safe.

The Knockout Cup final was also guaranteed if the race finished this way.

Travis had taken the straight too wide. His bike became caught up in the safety fence, stopping him dead in his tracks. His own momentum threw him from his bike and into the middle of the track. Directly behind him, Moore immediately shut down the throttle and tried to steer his machine to the left. Leigh Adams turned his head back to look forwards, and was confronted with the stricken McGowan and his bike lying directly in front of him. He, too, shut down the throttle and tried to steer to the left.

With no time to stop or take evasive action, Adams and Moore rode straight into the fallen bike and rider. What followed wasn't so much a speedway accident as an explosion of men, machinery and pieces of safety fence as Adams and Moore were catapulted past where McGowan and his machine had been lying and onwards towards the first bend. Behind them, Buczkowski, in a remarkable manouvre, had just enough time to steer his bike to the left and escape the melee by riding onto the centre green.

The crowd, in unison, let out a gasp and then fell silent with the sudden shock of what they had witnessed. A female fan on the pits bend cried out: "Oh no!" She looked at around as though looking for some support and reassurance. There was none. "No," she repeated, this time in a hushed tone. People who had never met before looked at each other and shook their heads in disbelief. They had seen many accidents in their years of following speedway. Few had seen one as shocking as this.

The aftermath of the crash was spread all the way from the starting gates to the first bend. Paramedics were quickly onto the scene. The pits gate swung open and people ran out and across to where the riders lay. The Swindon fans on the third bend watched in disbelief, many with their hands over their mouth in apprehension as to what the outcome of this would be. Fears were not for the play-offs. They were, at this point, for the very lives of the three riders involved. Edward Kennett spoke to some supporters through the fence at the top of the pits. "I'm glad I didn't see that," he said.

Leigh Adams was first to emerge from the carnage. He rose to his feet and began walking back across the centre green like a lone survivor emerging from the wreckage of a plane crash. There was momentary relief despite the paramedics still tending to the stricken Moore and McGowan. Thoughts suddenly turned to the play-offs. At least Leigh, it seemed, was okay. But soon it became clear that something was wrong. A

couple of times Leigh had to stop and kneel on the ground for a rest and was cradling his left arm as he entered the pits to the applause of the Robins fans on the bank. He looked towards his followers and gave a shake of the head to indicate that all was not good.

McGowan and Moore remained on the track for many minutes. The Reading rider was eventually loaded into an ambulance and taken back to the pits whilst Moore returned to the pits barely able to walk – his body supported by a worried Alun Rossiter and a female paramedic. Cory Gathercole came out of the pits and took over from the medic, and as Moore came into the pits aided by his team manager and team mate he, too, received a huge round of applause, managing a slight wave of his left hand in reply.

With Lee Richardson now out of his kevlar and barely able to walk in the pits, the Robins were down to just two fit full time riders – Seb Ulamek and Charlie Gjedde – with three days to go to the semi-final. The announcements were made. Leigh Adams and Travis McGowan had shoulder injuries that needed hospital treatment. Andrew Moore had also gone to hospital to be checked over. With a lack of ambulance cover now available, and the hospital being particularly busy on this Friday night, the match was abandoned.

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