

Outraged skipper vows to fight Cape-to-Rio race ban

Daily Dispatch Correspondent

CAPE TOWN — A Swedish skipper banned from entering his famous maxi racing yacht in the Rothman's Cape-to-Rio race as it is sponsored by a product which helps people give up smoking is outraged at the decision and has hit back at the race committee vowing to fight the ban.

Ludde Ingvall, skipper of the 71-foot, Nicorette, which won the famous Fastnet race in Britain last month by 25 hours to complete a rare handicap and line-honours double, said from Switzerland he was "really upset" at how his yacht could be banned by the race committee "in the interests of South African sailing".

The yacht would be a leading contender for both line and handicap honours and Ingvall said when he entered in January the race committee had welcomed him with open arms and encouraged him to promote the classic race in Europe.

"Suddenly, after months of preparation I find out through the back door sorry, I must find another name to enter my boat in a decision made without any discussion with me or even a phone call. My sponsors are Nicorette until 1997."

He said five young South Africans would have been given the chance to sail on the yacht and he would have spent about R400 000 of his R750 000 race budget on South African sails in a campaign promoting health and the environment.

"How can Nicorette be seen to be a competing product of Rothmans? They say they use the same principles which would apply to another cigarette brand but it is a medicine for people who have already decided they want to stop smoking or have to stop. We are not anti-smoking lobbyists, smokers are potential clients."

"This could cost us our entire winter budget. I cannot believe my friends on the race committee have done this on sporting grounds," Ingvall said.

Mr Jerry Gilbert, marketing director of Rothmans, referred comment to the Cruising Association of South Africa (Casa) saying they were not involved.

Mr Eric Wells, chairman of Casa, said Nicorette, which contains nicotine, was seen as being similar to a tobacco brand. "If Ludde changes the name of the boat we will welcome him with open arms but every race organiser who has a sponsor is obliged to protect that sponsors interests".