



"But we've always felt we would be the better source because we'll take anyone's equipment and bring it to the spec, so that no one has to buy new equipment," he added.

Of course, D'Anniballe is hoping Super Cat teams will buy his motors, which currently cost about \$45,000 a piece, this season and next. Between new motors and rebuilds, he hopes to move 80 to 90 Super Cat engines in 2004.

"We'll be giving APBA Offshore a little cash upfront, but payments are structured off the number of engines produced," he said.

The inability of APBA Offshore and Mercury Racing to reach an agreement for the spec-engine program was the latest example of the deteriorating relationship between the two entities. According to Tony Esposito, Mercury Racing's director of marketing, the company wanted assurances in the Super Cat motor contract that APBA Offshore would remain "a member in good standing" with APBA in Detroit. APBA Offshore LLC leases the APBA name from the sanctioning body, and at press time, the two entities were still battling over payment issues from 2002.

"We were looking for a guarantee that the LLC would remain

a licensee in good standing of APBA," said Esposito. "And they were unable to guarantee that. They asked if we might consider softer language, and we wouldn't. We didn't think it would be that difficult to assure us that they would be able to live up to the terms of that agreement."

"That's Mr. Esposito's spin on it," said Allweiss. "Our perception of what's going on is completely different. We've put it in the hands of our lawyers, and that's where it's going to stay. It's a serious enough issue that we've gotten lawyers involved, and the parties on the other end have been advised accordingly."

The sponsorship arrangement that makes Mercury Racing the exclusive supplier of drives for the Super Cat class expires at year's end. The company probably won't pursue renewing the deal.

"We're done," said Esposito. "Unless we can have assurance that the LLC will remain a licensee in good standing of APBA, we're not interested in extending that contract. We are not interested in sponsoring any racing organization that is not affiliated with APBA."

Though still in development, the Certified Racing Engine program for the Super Cat motor likely will take a different form than that for the Factory classes, which was administered by Innovation Marine in Sarasota, Fla., before the company became an official marinizer for GM Vortec in late 2002. Engines will be distributed "randomly," said Allweiss, to the Super Cat teams.

"That's the first part of what the program will probably look like," said Allweiss. "Number two, we're going to have a 'claiming rule,' where if someone thinks someone else is playing games with a motor, he can say, 'Here's my money, I want your motor' or 'Here's my motor, I want your money.' Third, since CRE has its own people who work for it, we will have backup shops and we will randomly pull engines for dyno runs and testing."

Within the Super Cat racing community, reactions to the single-vendor engine agreement ranged widely. And they didn't necessarily follow engine party lines—Sterling or Mercury Racing.

Billy Mauff, owner of the Mercury Racing-powered Super Cat *WHM Motorsports* predicted that the move will upset many of the Super Cat competitors.

"I've been with Mercury a long time, and it doesn't make me comfortable that I have to go out and buy Mike D'Anniballe motors," Mauff said. "I didn't like it when we had the No. 6 drives rammed down our throats, and I'm a Mercury guy."

"Now you've got guys who built Super Cat motors on the outside," he added. "What are you going to tell them? They can't feed their families? I understand what Mike (Allweiss) is trying to do. He's trying to make it so everybody is running the same stuff. I think he took it one step further than he should have."

"I have mixed feelings about it," said John Tomlinson, throttleman for the *Drambuie on Ice* team. "If it accomplishes what they're trying to accomplish, I guess it's a good thing. I think they're trying to restructure this thing so the motors get more races on them. But there are some guys out there who just want to do their own stuff."

"Now you're taking the premier racing class and making it 100 percent spec," he continued. "Is that what you want to do with the premier class? I don't know."—**Matt Trulio**