Chain non-smoker taken from Marlboro country

By JENNA PRICE

Police used bolt-cutters to remove an anti-smoking protester from the Art Gallery of NSW yesterday after he chained himself to a racing car advertising Marlboro cigarettes.

Mr Rick Balzon, 32, of Darlinghurst, was one of about 20 BUGA-UP (Billboard Utilizing Graffiti Against Unhealthy Promotions) demonstrators protesting against the sponsorship of art by tobacco companies.

The 12 millimetre-thick chain which Mr Balzon used to fasten himself to the car had been hidden under his coat when he entered the gallery. He was dressed in white overalls with anti-smoking stickers.

While Mr Balzon stood chained to the car, other BUGA-UP demonstrators chanted “Ashes to ashed, butts to butts” and emptied sacks of cigarette butts, some damp matches and cigarette packets on and around the car.

The racing car is part of an art and technology display at the gallery sponsored by Phillip Morris, makers of Marlboro and Alpine.

The company is also sponsoring the Edward Hopper exhibition at the gallery.

Smoking is allowed at the gallery only in the designated recreation areas.

Mr Balzon read an open letter to the trustees of the gallery.

He said: “The art gallery is a public, cultural institution, visited by thousands of people each week, many of them children. It is a sad state of affairs when such an institution is vandalised by advertising, particularly for the promotion of tobacco products.”

There was applause from the crowd when a BUGA-UP member called out: “Three cheers for BUGA-UP...”

One visitor to the gallery, Mrs Joan O’Brien, of Matraville, said she and her husband were non-smokers: “I don’t like to see smoking advertised in the gallery, it should not be allowed.”

Others objected strongly to the protest, including the gallery’s director, Mr Edmund Caslon. He described the demonstration as the “epitome of banality.”

“I might draw the line at the PLO sponsoring art, but not tobacco companies,” he said.

Police later charged a man with causing serious alarm and affright.