

Martin's

Magic

BARRY MARTIN operates a hotel and a radio station, but it's his standout pacing filly who works the magic for him.

By Harold Howe • Photos by Scott McIntyre

Barry Martin is one of those people whose natural inclination is to go against the flow and in the process make a buck doing it.

A proud native of Sydney, Nova Scotia, he's succeeded at just about everything he put his hand to in the business world. Now he can also claim having bred and raced the best pacing filly in Atlantic Canada and in his mind that just might be his finest accomplishment.

The summer and fall of 2009 are cherished by Martin because of the exploits of Meridian Magic, a mighty mite of a filly who overpowered the opposition in 11 consecutive appearances. From mid August until early November, she won every time she stepped onto the track and concluded her impressive debut season with standings of 11-1-2 in 14 starts for \$76,362 in earnings. There is every indication that the summer of 2010 could be just as exciting for Martin.

"I had more fun than a barrel of monkeys. Having bred and raced her to get to that level, it's like seeing your child go out into the world and do well. It is a feeling that is so hard to describe."

It wasn't about the money. Her purse winnings were nice but a pittance compared to Martin's other life ventures.

For the past 17 years he has been a hotelier, owning the Martin Arms Hotel on the Sydney waterfront. It was formerly named The Meridian Hotel until seven years ago when Montreal based Le Meridian Group promised legal action if he did not change the name they had trademarked.





The move to the hospitality trade was an odd one for the then 40 year-old Martin whose background is in the financial sector.

"There were some people who knew me that questioned my sanity and more than a few times I did the same. Next to restaurants, hotels and motels have probably the highest failure rate among businesses," he admits.

"But it was something I had a hankering for and being in the position I was in I had a bit of insight to the situation that others might not have had."

In simple terms, Barry Martin was a banker of sorts. Actually, at the time that he bought the Martin Arms Hotel he was working for Central Guaranteed Trust where he served as vice-president of the internal audit team before basically promoting himself to a branch manager position.

"After graduating with a business degree in 1975 I moved to Halifax to work for what was then Eastern Canada Savings & Loan. Then it was with Central Guaranteed Trust and it was great schooling for going into business. Knowing how to work the financial side of deals was a big advantage. My specialty was risk analysis," he explains.

Barry Martin calls racing his outstanding homebred pacing filly Meridian Magic last year "more fun than a barrel of monkeys." The rookie daughter of Largo won her last 11 straight races in 2009 for trainer/driver Kenny Arsenault and hopes are high for her sophomore campaign.

"The hotel is in a great location on the waterfront and had been in foreclosure for three years. The water had even been turned off for all that time and I knew so little I was unaware of what happens to plumbing when that occurs. For the first six months after reopening it seemed like every day we were running around with buckets and mops."

The 64 unit hotel has grown and found its place in the community again. It bears a Canada Select three star rating and is a very viable business. More information on The Martin Arms, which also boasts a simulcast lounge called Pacers, may be viewed on their website by [clicking here](#).

Martin's other business ventures include a radio station. Now you may ask how does a banker/hotelier get into the radio game?

"I just thought Sydney needed a bit more diversity so I made application for a license and got it. CKCH 103.5 The Eagle is a country and western station; is there any

other kind? I just love the radio game and we've made a big effort to ensure it is not one of these canned stations. We have integrated ourselves to be part of the community and it's done well." To listen to the station, tune into their website through this [link](#).

There are some other properties and consulting work that Martin does to fill his days, when he's not thinking about horses of course.

Like so many people, he received his indoctrination to the horse game through his father who owned horses.

"It's in the blood. Somewhere along the line I got involved on a piece of horse with some old friends of mine after I came back to Sydney and have been involved ever since."

He has enjoyed some successes like Village Hero, a son of Carlsbad Cam Martin bought as a yearling and then subsequently sold. The horse won over \$238,000 in his career.



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Then there was Wilder Echo, a son of Ambro Operative who was turned over for a profit and then earned \$459,000.

Martin's interest however was in the breeding side of the game. This led him to buy the broodmare Hot Asset p,1:59.1h (\$19,566), a daughter of Apaches Fame - Dovers Sue Ellen bred by the late Bob Chapple of Chatham, Ontario.

"She'd had some foals before Meridian Magic but I wanted to breed her to Largo. I just liked the way the bloodlines looked to match up and I've admired the Largo fillies, so we bred her to the horse," he explains.

"When she was born she was not very big and still isn't but there was something about her. My wife Anne Marie and I decided to keep her to try and race."

Enter Jim "Champ" Gillis, a longtime friend and very well regarded horseman in Atlantic Canada.

"We've had horses together for years and he agreed to take her and it was not long before he discovered we had something and it was all because of her gait. She just floated across the ground."

At least most of the time. There was a

Martin poses in front of his hotel, The Martin Arms, a hotel on the Sydney, Nova Scotia waterfront he has owned for the past 17 years.

disturbing incident one day at the Sydney track when she stumbled to the ground and in the process tore open both knees.

"A transport truck hit its air brakes and startled her. She jumped and down she went. We lost three months with her and did wonder at the time if there was any permanent damage but she got over it," recalls Martin.

Enter Kenny Arsenault, one of the top horsemen in Atlantic Canada, based in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island. A relationship already existed with Martin, Gillis and the Charlottetown trainer. Given the traveling schedule the filly would have it was decided that it was best to have her on Prince Edward Island.

"I'd never saw the filly until the day she got here and her knees still were not pretty. But Champ is a real solid horseman and if he says a horse is going to make it I believe him but she sure did not

impress me in the beginning," offers Arsenault.

"She was all over the track, kicking and just not the kind you want to like. But after a few episodes she changed and started to show the talent that these guys were talking about. She is very smart and showed that she could reach her top speed like right now but I was concerned that with very little effort she would be speed crazy. So I treated her like we had all the time in the world. That paid off because by mid-season you could and can drive her with two fingers."

Anyone who watched the filly race last season can attest to Arsenault's comments. In short, she just overpowered her rivals week after week after week. She won her last 11 consecutive appearances after three losses at the start of her season. Once she was dialed in there was no stopping her.

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p,2,1:54s, 3,1:50s, 1:48.3-1:51.1s (\$1,165,604)
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“While she has a big stride for her size the big thing is she wants to do it and she can go from first gear to third in a heartbeat. She can slip around our half-mile turns pretty easily and all that makes her very tough to beat.”

- Kenny Arsenault

“She stands all of 14 hands something,” Arsenault points out.

“But she gained so much length last summer. I began wearing a 54 and a half inch hopple on her and by the end of the season I’d stretched it out to 57 and a half. While she has a big stride for her size the big thing is she wants to do it and she can go from first gear to third in a heartbeat. She can slip around our half-mile turns pretty easily and all that makes her very tough to beat.”

In the Maritimes they have their own Triple Crown for pacing fillies: the Island Breeders, Maritime Breeders Futurity and Atlantic Breeders Crown. Meridian Magic swept them all including a track record effort at Truro Raceway in the Futurity.

“I may be wrong but I think she will wear pretty well as a three-year-old because of her gait. She barely touches the ground. I keep talking about her desire but when you’ve had ones that won’t try it makes you appreciate those like Meridian Magic that do,” says Arsenault who has a team of 15 at Charlottetown Driving Park.

“After the season I turned her out at Ian Moore’s farm and she just loved it. When I brought her back in on January 22 she was a very happy filly and has slipped right back into her work like she never left it. I’ll qualify her in May several times because with her money she can’t get a start other than against older horses which is not fair to a three-year-old filly.”

Until then Barry Martin will be waiting with baited breath although he does have some others to watch over. However, there is no brother or sister.

“Last fall we elected to sell her Justice Denied half-brother at public auction. Gilles Barrieau bought him for \$14,000 and that was the last foal. The mare Hot Asset was put down because of a debilitating foot problem. We could not let her suffer so made that decision which is a real loss given the way Meridian Magic has turned out,” says Martin.

“The horses are a nice diversion for my wife and I. It was wonderful last year traveling all over to see Meridian Magic race. It was particularly interesting because in the Martin Arms Hotel we host the local simulcast outlet called Pacer’s Lounge. We’ve put a bunch of her memorabilia in there which is great for all those people who follow her and racing in general,” says Martin.

“No one is going to get rich racing horses in the Maritimes but we all love it. Getting a horse like this filly is a privilege. She is racing her heart out for us and there are not many times in life that something like that happens.” 

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REAL ARTIST

p,2, 1:52; 3, Q1:51 (\$424,947)

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In 2009 Real Artist was once again among the leading money winning sires in North America with progeny earnings of over \$10 million!

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>> LEADING THE WAY

- **Ginger And Fred** p,2, 1:52f; 3, 1:50.3f (\$881,340)... winner of the Tarport Hap, Adioo Volo and an elimination of the Jugette.
- **Keep It Real** p,3, 1:50.2s (\$338,650)...won the Burlington Stakes defeating Well Said in the process and was 3rd in the final of the N.A. Cup.
- **Nova Artist** p,2, 1:53.2f (\$116,333)...two-year-old PASS winner.
- **Dali** p,2, 1:50.2; 3, 1:48.2f; 4, 1:49.1s (\$1,200,303)... Woodrow Wilson at 2, Matron at 3 and multiple WEG Opens at 4.

OVERALL NUMBERS >>

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