



JUST DESSERTS

Two decades *INTO THE BUSINESS*, Eric and Lenore Prince
have captured their first real taste of *SUCCESS*
with the speedy homebred *ARTASHACK*.
It's been a *LONG TIME COMING*,
and following years of *REHABILITATION*
after a *DEVASTATING* (and nearly deadly)
motorcycle *ACCIDENT*,
the *SUCCESS* of this couple seems that much
SWEETER.

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B

ack in the spring of this year, Eric and Lenore Prince set a price for their home-bred three-year-old colt, Artashack. Potential buyers scoffed at the figure for a horse that was just starting out; he was still green and as of yet, unproven. The couple made the decision to start his racing career.

Through mid-November, Artashack had made 18 starts and claimed victory in 13, including seven in a row. By this time, some of those same buyers, and many others, had offered that asking price and then some. But Eric and Lenore are so taken by their sudden good fortune that they won't even divulge the original figure, much less the most recent offers they've received. "I'm not saying," laughs

It's Monday, June 1, 1998, and Eric leaves his farm around lunchtime on his 750 Suzuki motorcycle. He's on his way into town to cash a cheque before heading to a shift at Southwestern Regional Centre, where both he and Lenore are developmental service workers caring for the mentally challenged. It's a clear, sunny day, and just a few miles down the road, a neighbour is sitting in a pickup truck, collecting mail from the mailbox across the street from his house.

Flipping through the envelopes, that neighbour turns the truck and heads for his driveway, but he crosses the street directly into Eric's path. With no time to stop, Eric's motorcycle T-bones the truck and he instinc-

That 'thing' was actually an external fixator; shaped like a cylinder, it's made of two rings at either end, joined by four rods — and it saved Eric's leg, which was broken in 27 places. The muscle was severely damaged and almost all the skin was torn off. Doctors screwed the fixator into his bones and used a muscle from his back and skin grafts from his upper legs to rebuild it. Eric couldn't walk for six months and had to keep the fixator on for eight.

Just a month after the fixator was removed, Eric broke his right leg again simply walking into the bathroom at home and was forced to return to the hospital for a full leg cast. "They took me down to put this cast on and gave me

"There were some *MIGRANT WORKERS* across the road," Eric recalls being told by witnesses later. "They got a tarp and covered me up because they *THOUGHT I WAS DEAD.*"

Eric with a trademark one-liner, "because I'd look foolish not taking it. We're a bread and butter stable, and all of a sudden we've got a dessert horse!"

Whatever the offers were, they were enough to make the couple seriously consider selling Artashack. "This colt is like a dream come true for us," says Lenore. "We've never had anything like him... and he has already surpassed our goals. We're just delighted with him, and he just keeps us happy. It's surreal, the whole thing. We're just a small stable; we don't usually have any horses that people notice a lot."

Eric, 71, and Lenore, 55, own just seven horses on their small farm in North Buxton outside of Chatham, Ontario. They've barely pocketed \$100,000 from their horses over their 20 years together, so the more than \$46,000 that Artashack has brought in this year alone is far and away their best haul ever.

tively holds onto the handlebars, tearing both rotator cuffs in his shoulders before being launched through the air, bouncing off the pavement and landing in a field. His left leg is broken in two places, and his right is shattered between his knee and ankle.

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Still alive, though, he's taken to Old Victoria Hospital in London and undergoes surgery that very night. The doctor tells Lenore he doesn't know if he can save Eric's badly damaged right leg.

"When I woke up after about the third or fourth day, this thing was down on my leg and I didn't know what it was," says Eric. "I told my kid to go down to my truck and get my toolbox and take it off. The doctor that put it on didn't find that funny at all."

a shot of morphine, but the morphine didn't have time to work," Eric laughs, once again recalling the humour in a horrible situation. "When I got in the car and we were coming home... that's when the morphine kicked in. I told Lenore to stop the car because I wanted to get out and carry it — that's how high I was at that point."

Eric spent three months in three different hospitals recovering and undergoing rehabilitation before coming home for good.

After the accident, Lenore had no choice but to earn her trainer's license and take over the horses — while working full-time and caring for Eric. The stress on the pair was so great, at some points, that Eric told her to sell the horses, even though he'd been raising and racing horses since his college days. "It was killing her," he shakes his head. "I told her to





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sell them when I was lying in the hospital. But she didn’t.”

One of Eric’s daughters from a previous marriage, Cyndi, had just graduated from Carleton University in Ottawa and moved back home to help out on the farm and with her father, who still couldn’t do much for many months after being released from hospital. “I was certainly concerned whether or not he would be able to do all those things

he loves so much still,” says Cyndi, who now lives south of the border in Maine. “He didn’t for a long time until he did start to get better, but it’s great he’s able to do those things now. It was a hard time; it was a hard time for all of us.”

Lenore eventually decided against selling the horses because she found her time with them therapeutic, and they also helped Eric through his recovery, getting him outside and

giving him something to do.

One of the things Eric loved most before the accident was driving his horses, which he can no longer do (though he’s still able to jog them). He drove for just three years prior to the accident, and even then only at local fairs, but more than 12 years later it’s clear that part of the business still has its grip on him. “Oh God, I miss that part of it; I miss that part a lot,” he admits. “Maybe I’m one



“We’re a *BREAD*,
and *BUTTER STABLE*,
and all of a *SUDDEN*
we’ve got a
DESSERT horse!”

of those guys who lives for that ‘bang!’ moment. It’s kind of exciting when the gate goes: slam! You’re in control all of a sudden. It’s just a high.”

Today, he can only experience that from the other side of the rail, but his ‘dessert horse,’ at least, has made those moments that much sweeter, especially with his recent winning streak. The Princes didn’t sell their horses 12 years ago during the worst of times, and now, they insist, they won’t sell their best horse during the best of times. “These people raised this horse, and they’ve been through plenty in their time,” says 52-year-old Mark Williams, Artashack’s driver and a long-time friend of Eric’s. “When you’ve got a horse like him, it’s not so much about the money. Nothing can compare to the thrill he has when that colt spins around and I come back (after winning a race); I make a point to stop him and stand him so Eric can get on the cart... Nothing compares to that.”

As tempting as the offers Eric and Lenore got for Artashack were, they’ve now thought thrice about selling him and have decided for good they just can’t let him go. And it’s easy to see why. Above their kitchen table, the wall is covered with framed photos of their victories, most of them of Artashack, and they point them out frequently during our conversation.

They talk about him and his wins like they would of one of their eight grandchildren, and when they play me a video of one of his



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races, which he leads from wire to wire, they look like they’re watching him race for the first time.

For years after the accident, doctors told Eric he could still lose his leg someday. Today, he has to wear a fitted boot brace, but he walks without a noticeable limp, and he has almost full use of his left arm, though not much of his right. Although the surgeries

(eight in total) and rehab are long over with, he still visits the gym to exercise at least three times a week, just to keep his shoulders and legs from stiffening up — a situation which, on bad days, can prevent him from even getting out of bed.

But the traits that got him through the accident are the same ones that make him a perfect fit for industry he loves. “One thing

about Eric is that he knew what he was facing — he’s not unrealistic,” Williams points out. “He has never got anything but an upbeat attitude, and that goes hand in hand with this business. This business is not for the faint-hearted. And one thing’s for sure, Eric Prince is not faint-hearted. He’s courageous in every way.” **T**