

NEWS > CLASSIFIED > REAL ESTATE > ARCHIVE > JOBSPRESS > WHEELSPRESS > MYCONNECT

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[Contests](#) | [Lotteries](#) | [Horoscopes](#) | [Comics](#) | [Tides](#) | [Bookmark us](#)

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NEWS

- ? [Front page](#)
- ? [Metro](#)
- ? [Nova Scotia](#)
- ? [Canada](#)
- ? [World](#)
- ? [Business](#)
- ? [Sports](#)
- ? [Entertainment](#)

OPINIONS

- ? [Editorials](#)
- ? [Columnists](#)
- ? [Letters/Feedback](#)



BLOGS

- ? [Kidney Foundation of Canada](#)
- ? [A Little Good News Today](#)
- ? [Quinpool Kid](#)
- ? [Direct From Afghanistan](#)
- ? [The Daily Dexter](#)
- ? [Art aMusement](#)
- ? [Blossoms and Blizzards](#)
- ? [It's always sunny in Hubbards](#)
- ? [Musings](#)

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Wiener of a movie

P.E.I.-born director's documentary a year in the life of fastest and furriest

By ANDREA NEMETZ Entertainment Reporter | 4:41 AM

They may have seven-centimetre legs, but they go like lightning in pursuit of their favourite chew toy, running at up to nine metres per second.

And when denied their spot in the Wiener's Circle, the competitors in the Wiener National Championships can fall to pieces.

"When Hailey lost, she was so depressed she went limp, her whole demeanour changed," says Shane MacDougall, who chronicled the journey of six racing dachshunds duking it out to be top dog in Wiener Takes All: A Dogumentary.

The movie, the first for the Prince Edward Island-born and -raised MacDougall, has its world premiere Sunday at noon at Park Lane Cinemas in Halifax as part of the Atlantic Film Festival.

The following week the hour-and-a-half documentary whose tag line boasts it is "a year in the life of the fastest and furriest," makes its U.S. premiere at the San Francisco Documentary Film Festival and then heads to BendFilm, dubbed the new Telluride, in Bend, Ore.

Wiener Takes All is a compelling tale of underdogs and egos, of a world rife with infighting and "racism" where some of the athletes come complete with entourages and racing silks bearing monikers like Pretzel, the Brown Bullet and a controversy that San Diego sports reporter Troy Hirsch said was the biggest he could recall in his community.

In Wiener Takes All, the characters in the fictional Best In Show mockumentary become real. One industry veteran says people will spend up to \$100,000 a year to get their pooch to the top of the competitive dog show circuit. The winner of the national championship gets a parade, and there's even a "muttrimonial" performed by a licensed minister, complete with a dog bone-decorated multi-tiered cake, tuxedo and veils.

But mostly, says MacDougall, who lives in San Diego with his wife and four cats, Wiener Takes All is about the heart of the darling dachsies.

"I never realized dogs had such a competitive spirit," says the first-time filmmaker, who is thrilled to be able to combine a showing at the film festival with a visit with his parents, who live in Middleton.

"They really want to win, you can see it in their eyes. Heidi Roo shakes as she watches the other dogs race. Vinnie Babarino tries to stare down the other dogs.

"I'd adopt any of them. They're lovable, affable, loyal dogs . . . just awesome."



Dachshunds race in the Wiener World Championships in San Diego, Calif. P.E.I.-born director Shane MacDougall's Wiener Takes All chronicles six racing dachshunds. The movie plays at noon Sunday at Park Lane Cinemas in Halifax. (Kevin Nibur)

- ? CATO
- ? The Grey Zone (for Seniors)
- ? Terry Fox Foundation
- ? The Near North
- ? Country Boy
- ? Hockey Girl
- ? Boularderie Blog
- ? Soulseeker
- ? NS Expatriate

MacDougall, who attended TUNS in Halifax to study computer science, has had a varied career including stints in standup comedy and as a writer for children’s television shows including Rescue Heroes and Franklin.

He is now based in San Diego, and when he heard the Wiener National Championships were being held a mile from his house, he couldn’t believe it was a real event.

"So I went to watch and there were thousands of people there. I decided in about a minute to do a documentary following dogs on the circuit that would be called Wiener Takes All."

He sat on the idea until his wife Marion Law, a co-writer and co-producer on the movie and who also composed the music, pushed him into bringing his idea to fruition.

The three-year project included filming in California, Arizona, Texas, Ohio, New York, Michigan and Illinois. Dachshund racing is popular on the West Coast and in the southern U.S., while owners prefer to participate in dog shows in the northern and eastern U.S., says MacDougall, who couldn’t find any large-scale dachshund races in countries like Canada, the U.K. or Australia.

- FEATURES**
- ? Living
- ? Travel
- ? At Home
- ? Books
- ? Religion
- ? Science
- ? The NovaScotian

Besides its gripping race story and some humorous encounters with aficionados, the movie, produced by Infant Monster Productions in Middleton, touches on the history of the breed — pictures resembling dachshunds have been found on ancient Egyptian wallpaper and during the First World War the dogs (along with German shepherds) were rounded up and killed for their perceived ancestry.

It also shows the fears some people have for the dogs’ safety due to some breeders’ practices and a growing concern that dachshund racing could replace greyhound racing with all its attendant problems. The film includes some horrifying footage of what happens to greyhounds that are no longer racing and MacDougall agonized about whether to leave that in the final cut.

MacDougall is at work on his next project, A--holes, a Scientific Study of Jerks, which, he says, "attempts to answer the age-old question, are jerks born or made? Is it nature or nurture?" He is also networking while here for the filmfest with an eye to moving back to Nova Scotia.

- ANNOUNCEMENTS**
- ? Births
- ? Cards of Thanks
- ? In Memoriam
- ? Milestones
- ? Obituaries

Devoted dachshund owners can check out wienertakesall.com for a video from the movie or can send their own pictures to showusyourwiener.com.

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- FOOD FOR THOUGHT**
- " It's just hard not to listen to TV: it's spent so much more time raising us than parents have. "
- Matt Groening

[Back](#)

[Back to top](#)

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