

# My wife's TIGHTER WITH MONEY than I am!

Woman's money columnist Martin Lewis is making a big name for himself, but what's the man behind *The Money Saving Expert* really like?

EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW

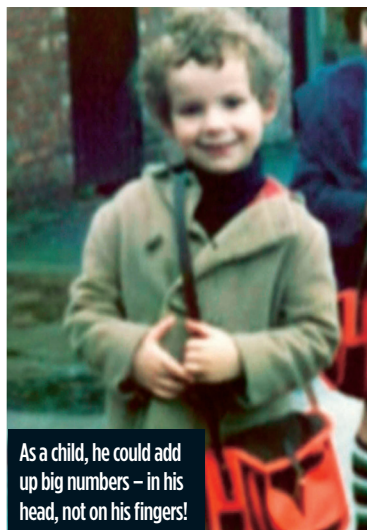
**H**ardly a day goes by without Martin Lewis from moneysavingexpert.com, appearing on TV, talking at a million miles an hour – to explain how we can all save money. It's something he does in his *Woman* column every week too. And now his site has become one of the biggest in Britain, with more than 10 million unique users every month.

'Whenever I walk down the street people come up to me. It's hard to get used to,' Martin tells *Woman*. 'Often they say, "You're going to tell me off, I just bought a new TV." But they'd be wrong.'

Yes, it might be hard to believe, but Martin doesn't want us to turn into mini-Scrooges – darned our socks so there's more thread than material or refusing to step out of the house in case it costs us a penny.

'People always have the wrong impression about me,' he laughs. 'The site's motto is "Cutting bills and fighting your corner". I don't tell people not to buy a new TV. Why would I? I'm all about trying to enable you to get that TV – but to make sure you've not paid a penny more for it than you need to and you're not borrowing unnecessarily.'

Martin follows his own advice too. He's just back from a New York holiday with his wife of two years, BBC weather presenter Lara Lewington or as Martin refers to her 'Mrs



As a child, he could add up big numbers – in his head, not on his fingers!



Martin's passionate about broadcasting his money saving message to the masses

MSE'. 'We got £18,000 worth of flights for £800 – just the taxes and fees. I'd spent on the right credit cards to earn airmiles. I have no problems flying business class, I just don't want to pay for it. For most products, like insurance and electricity, I have the best in the book – because, well I suppose I wrote the textbook.'

## It's not sexy...

And what happens when Martin and Mrs MSE go out for dinner? 'I don't always go to places that take vouchers, but when I do I quite religiously check my site to see what's out there. If I didn't there would be a queue of money savers in the restaurant asking me why not! But mostly I do it for me. I can't stand wasting money when there's no need to.'

Luckily for Martin, Mrs MSE, 32, is very understanding. 'She knew what she married,' he says. 'She knew she was marrying the Money Saving Expert!'

But it seems Martin and Mrs MSE have something in common. 'She may hate me saying this, but she's actually tighter than me,' he laughs. 'We did a quiz on my site called "How tight are you?" I scored 41%, but she scored 51% – things like transferring own-brand goods into posh brand's packaging (eg rice puffs in a Rice Krispies box). I wasn't surprised. I don't see myself as tight. I'm careful, but that's different.'

It's an attitude Martin's always had – and he's always been good at maths. As a

child he could multiply large numbers in his head – something he can still do today. 'Some people can do magic tricks, some can play piano from sheet music,' he says. 'I do numbers. I can look at credit card terms and conditions and find the flaws. It's not sexy, but what can you do?'

At university, Martin studied government and law – not maths – before doing a postgraduate in broadcast journalism. And it was then that he was in debt, for the only time in his life. 'I know I've been very lucky,' he says. 'But I worked before university and saved up. Then, as I finished my postgraduate course on the Friday, I started my new job – on a finance programme for the BBC – on the Monday. But I had to wait until the end of the month for my first pay cheque and I slipped into true debt.'

It was less than a few hundred pounds and I paid it back within a day. I wasn't the Money Saving Expert then, but I've never liked being in debt.'

So how did Martin become Mr MSE? After the BBC, in December 1999, he went to work for a digital channel called Simply Money. 'Until then finance was all about stocks and shares, but that doesn't mean much to most people. What matters to them is getting the best deal on their gas bills or making their money stretch until the end of the month,' he says. 'Companies spend millions on marketing research to sell to us, but we don't have any buyers' training.'

It was so popular that,

in February 2003, Martin opened the internet site moneysavingexpert.com paying £100 to get it designed – and moneysavingexpert.com was born. 'Very few people have the privilege of creating their own job,' he says.

## Financial champion

From that initial £100 and with just Martin on board, the site has grown. There are now 35 full-time members of staff – four of them whose sole job it is to find deals. 'The days when I had to tell everyone everything are long gone. Although I'm the only one who has to know about everything. They specialise and I have to keep up with them all,' he says.

That's meant Martin's been able to devote time to financial justice causes he feels passionate about – everything from reclaiming mis-sold PPI (payment protection insurance) and bank charges to improving mental health and debt. 'I can't count how many times I gave evidence in parliament last year – and this year will be the same,' he says.

All of which makes it hard to believe he has any free time. But Martin reckons the key to enjoying life is balance. 'I like Scrabble and bad puns,' he says.

'And the E4 show *The Big Bang Theory* because my current hero is the character Sheldon, played by Jim Parsons. He's so logical, he's my hero.'

'Sheldon hates Christmas because he says you can only get a zero return or a loss. If you get good presents back you've still had to pay out. More likely you end up with something you don't want. I've been saying that for years. Why not keep your money to yourself and spend time, not money? When I grow up I want to be him.'

## 40 and counting

Martin will be growing up a bit this year – he's turning 40 this May. 'How dare you?' he jokes. 'I've never been good with numbers!'

'Even now, I can't really believe it. But I've got a good job, and a wife who loves me so it's not the end of the world.'

And he's got a lot to look forward to during the rest of 2012. 'I'm going to keep campaigning and the site is going to keep evolving,' he says. 'But the most satisfying thing is knowing how many people come to the site and have sorted out their money. Every person who's done that should be very proud.'

## Myths about Martin

\* **His bank manager hates him** 'I wouldn't know. I haven't been into a bank for about five years. It's not because I'm scared. I internet bank. You get better deals,' he says.

\* **His site is for people in debt** '5% of people who use the site earn over £100,000. You can be money saving even if you earn good money. It's an attitude as much as a need,' he says.

\* **He always wears stripy shirts** 'It was my original TV uniform and a very conscious choice – a stripy shirt to suggest pinstripes and finance but untucked with jeans because it's casual. Then I was told to smarten up. I hated it at first but I started wearing tucked-in stripy shirts and jackets. And now, look closely, sometimes they're patterned!' he says.

\* **His advice isn't for everyone** 'Many people can save £1,000 by following the tips on moneysavingexpert.com – writing a budget, switching to cheaper providers and keeping a spending diary. But, if you earn over £700,000 after tax, then don't listen to me. It's not worth your time going through your finances. For everyone else, it could be the best paid day of your life,' he says.



Turn over to read Martin's money saving column →