



THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Tango's Token Kiss

Overall Three-Gaited and Open Three-Gaited Horse Of The Year

By Erica Rae Faulkner

Few have won the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship at Louisville, let alone accomplished it as a three-year-old. Comprising an impressive show record that includes six wins out of seven appearances on the green shavings, along with wins from some of the most competitive shows in the country, Tango's Token Kiss is your People's Choice Open Three-Gaited and Overall Three-Gaited Horse Of The Year.

Owned by Grace Arnold and trained by Smith Lilly at Mercer Springs Farm, Tango's Token Kiss (Amos' as he is called around the barn) has accomplished more in his young life, than most horses will accomplish during an entire career. Sired by Tango's Parting Kiss, and out of the mare CF Deny Me Not, this champion was born with the bloodlines to be a great one. Bred by Harrison and Beverly Shiflet, he won his first World's Champion title in 2014, when he made his show ring debut, winning the Two-Year-Old Three-Gaited Div. II class at Louisville, with Matt Shiflet up, beating a field of ten quality horses.

Making quite an impression in his first time in the ring, Elisabeth Goth quickly purchased the young star and brought him back to Visser Stables, where Neil Visser would begin preparing him for the American Royal that year. Visser continued the horse's winning streak by leaving Kansas City that year with the Two-Year-Old Three-Gaited win. In 2015, Visser won both the UPHA Fine Harness Classic and at the Asheville Lions Club Charity Horse show and the UPHA Three-Gaited Three-Year-Old and Under class at the Midwest Charity Horse Show, before being sold to Arnold.

"I was gob smacked," said Arnold, regarding her first impression of the colt. "I greatly admired him when he first hit the ring with Matt Shiflet." She knew that she needed to act quickly if she wanted to purchase him; great ones always sell fast. But Elisabeth Goth beat her to the punch and bought Amos on the spot.

"I knew that I would be cheering for him from the audience for years to come," she said. However, it was less than one year later, before Amos became part of her life.

"Grace had asked to be on the lookout for a top young horse," Lilly said. "I saw



The face of a champion. Tango's Token Kiss marches out of Freedom Hall after his second Open Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship win, with Smith Lilly on board for the ride.

him at Midwest with Neil and I immediately called Neil and got a price." Knowing that Arnold had loved him the year before

at Louisville, he called her to see if she was interested.

"We were equally excited for the opportunity to make him a part of her string,"

said Lilly. It was a no brainer. Amos changed hands one more time and moved to Mercer Springs.

Lilly found out quickly just how talented a horse he added to his show string. His Mercer Springs Farm is known for turning out top competitors and Lilly is no stranger to working with the best of the best. He knows that great ones are tough to come by, and that finding one as great as Amos is harder still.

"He is a champion because he was born to be one," said Lilly. "He has a rare and tremendous combination of talent, conformation and heart."

The two of them got along right from the start. According to Arnold, Lilly had confidence in the colt, and in turn the colt had confidence in him. Their relationship got started on the right foot.

"He is an amazingly consistent horse, very much the same horse to work and ride both at home and at a show every day," said Lilly.

Lilly started to campaign Amos and it was not long before they were taking home tri-colors; including the Three-Gaited World's Grand Championship in 2015, as a three-year-old, and then again last year as a five-year-old. Exhibiting more than average strength and stature for a horse of his age helps him to stand out amongst the more seasoned horses. However, it is his natural ability to perform, and his growing confidence that comes out as a "look at me" attitude when in the ring that really sets him apart.

Amos spends his days at Mercer Springs Farm, in his double stall, loving on everyone. He fits the definition of a gentle giant, with his sweet attitude and calm manners in the stall. His groom for the past three years, Janaye Nasia Lykins says he is cooperative to work around and "is even reserved when taking treats."

"He loves having his cheeks scratched," Lykins says.

Lykins puts the hours in behind the scenes to ensure Amos is cared for like the champion he is. Arnold explained that Amos truly is dedicated to Lykins, as she is to him.

"I could not be more honored to a part of Amos' journey," said Lykins. "Standing next to him and Smith always makes me feel very proud and grateful."

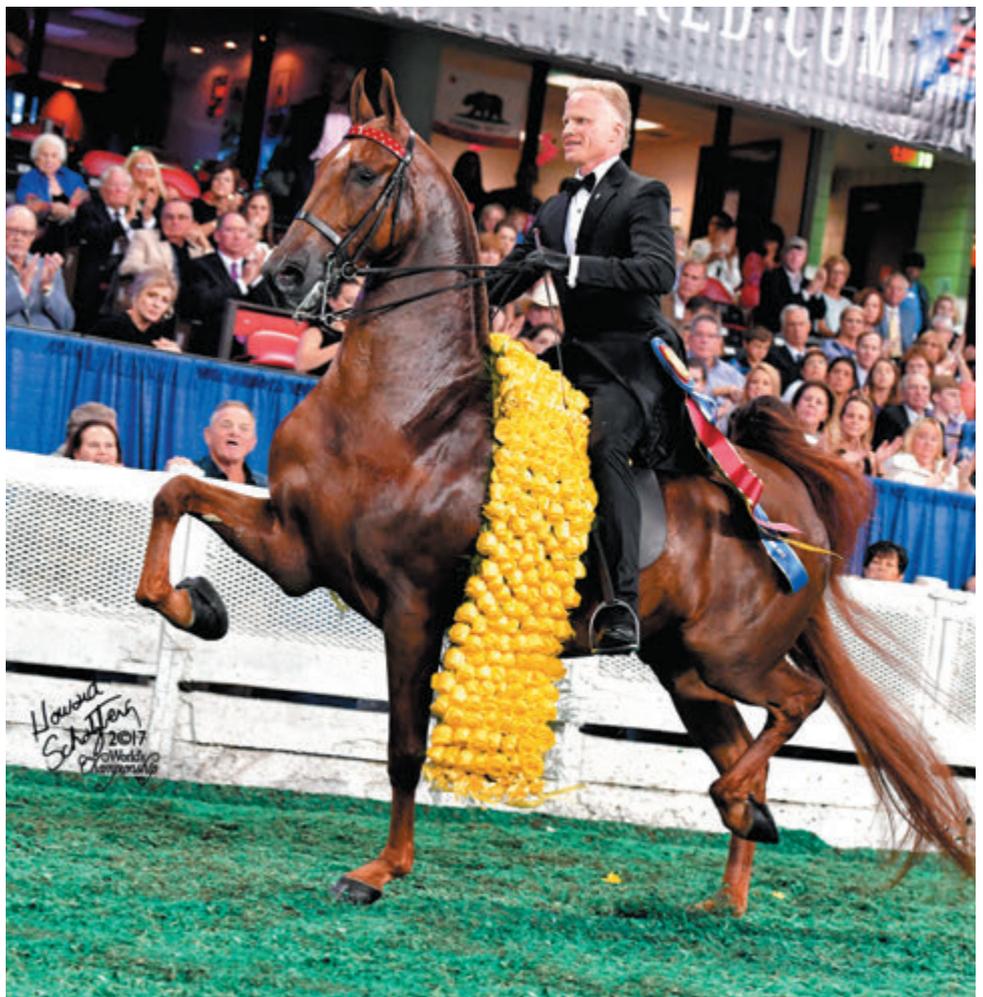
With a horse as impressive as Amos, it's no surprise that Lilly can't choose just one ride as his favorite or most memorable.

"When you have the opportunity to show a truly great horse, every ride and every show is special and cherished," said Lilly. "Great horses are so exceptionally rare and the longer you are involved in the sport the more you learn to savor every moment with them."

The coming 2018 season should provide more moments for Lilly to savor. The 2017 UPHA Open Three-Gaited Horse Of The Year and your Open Three-Gaited and Overall Three-Gaited People's Choice Champion, Tango's Token Kiss is sure to continue his winning ways this year.



Tango's Token Kiss parks out for the judges at the 2017 World's Championship Horse Show. Lilly attributes some of the horse's natural ability to his impeccable confirmation.



Tango's Token Kiss, a picture of perfection as he takes his victory pass at Freedom Hall with Smith Lilly.