



MULTI-WORLD CHAMPION OTTO RETIRES AT JINGLE BELL

by Leeann Mione

Editor's Note: The following speech was read by announcer Eric Tasker Saturday, Dec. 3, 2017 at the Jingle Bell Horse Show.

Ladies and gentlemen ...

Please put your hands together and make some noise for multi-titled world and grand national champion Otte Van T Riethof, better known as Otto, presented today by Mr. Dick Martin.

We are here to honor one of our great show horses from the West Coast: Otto.

Otto has been a familiar face for many years at all the major horse shows. He exits the ring today with champion and grand champion ribbons from every horse show the West Coast has to offer; Monterey, Diamond Jubilee, Carousel, Woodside, Charity Fair, Santa Barbara and Jingle Bell.

Otto was purchased in the Netherlands by Joan Fernandez in February of 2004. Joan and trainer Lance Bennett saw something very special in this small-but-mighty Friesian. His charisma and amazing disposition led them to purchase him and his brother Wodon. Because of these special individuals owners Joe and Joan Fernandez founded their Friesian Focus.

Otto made his USA show ring debut at Jingle Bell in December of 2004 winning the Friesian Park Saddle and began what has been an amazing show career that spans 12 years. Joan and Lance were so taken with Otto and his show ring presence that in 2005 he was shipped from California to Lexington, Va., to compete in the Friesian Grand National/World Championship Horse Show. It was here that Otto won his first world title, the park saddle stake, with assistant trainer Cathryn Hager riding. Cathryn and Otto dominated the park saddle division in their two show seasons together.

Otto's wins then continued in 2007 with trainer Lance Bennett and for the next five years they were virtually undefeated at every major show they went to. They were the 2007 Friesian Open Park Saddle Grand National Champions and reserve world champions and in 2008 they came home from Saint Louis with three titles. They were the Friesian Park Saddle World Champions, Friesian Open Park Saddle Grand National Champions and the Senior Friesian Geldings Six and Over World Champions in-hand. They repeated their park saddle world championship and grand national under saddle wins in 2009 and were reserve world champions in the senior geldings in-hand division.

Otto won the Friesian Park Saddle World Championship for the last time in 2010 with Lance Bennett showing. It was decided then that 14-year-old Otto would make his final victory passes in the park saddle division as a many-times world and grand national champion.

Otto returned to the show ring in a new division in 2012 with his then-76-year-old amateur driver Dick Martin. Since then Dick and Otto have been the mainstay of the Friesian fine harness division under the Rancho Vista banner and added four more wins to their credit this season with qualifier and champion-

ship wins in the Baroque Horse fine harness division at Diamond Jubilee and SCHC Labor Day Classic.

Otto turned 20 in February of this year and it is time that this great champion will say goodbye to the show ring and live out his life on the green pastures of Rancho Vista.

A heartfelt and special "thank you" to Joe and Joan Fernandez of Friesian Focus for purchasing this magnificent horse and making him the pinnacle of the mighty show string of Friesian Focus. Thank you to Otto's only trainer in the United States, Lance Bennett, who states that it has been a true honor and privilege to develop and work this once-in-a-lifetime horse.

Thank you also to Cathryn Hager for the early rides and wins in Otto's career and to Dick Martin for the final drives and wins with the amazing Otto.

A special thank you goes to Otto's personal groom Luis Bautista. Luis has been responsible for Otto's care and show ring appearance for his entire show career since he landed in the United States in 2004. With deep appreciation we also acknowledge veterinarian Dr. Donna Stevens for his health and longevity and for his magnificent trot and cadence say "Thank you" to farriers Dan and Jim Kelly.

It is with this fantastic team that the little horse with the big presence leaves the show ring a multi-decorated champion and ready to enjoy retirement. Thank you to all the fans and friends of this special horse.

Ladies and gentlemen, for the final time please put your hands together for world champion Otto.



Trainer Lance Bennett and Otto posed for the appreciative crowd after the multi-world champion had been untacked for the final time.



Dick Martin showed Otto for four years in the Friesian fine harness division and they amassed numerous wins under the direction of Lance Bennett.



Luis Bautista has been Otto's only caretaker since he arrived in the United States from the Netherlands in 2004.