

Let's go foxhunting

Every sport has its own uniform, rules and traditions and so it is with the sport of foxhunting.

Hopefully the following will provide you with information that will make the day out foxhunting a safer and more pleasant one for both you and your fellow foxhunters.

What to wear.

Riders should wear clothes appropriate to foxhunting.

Hair should not be seen under the hunt cap. Use a hair net. Longer hair should be neatly tied back. Jewellery is not part of the foxhunting habit.

Perfume is also not encouraged as it may interfere with the noses of the hounds.

Informal hunting attire - referred to as "ratcatcher", which is used for cub hunting at the beginning of the season, before opening meet, consists of a tweed coat in muted colours (no red tones) beige or tan breeches (no white) and brown or black boots or field boots. A plain or coloured stock, neatly tied, fastened with a simple stock pin or kilt pin, or a neckband.

Turtleneck shirts are for very young children only.

Black hunting caps with harness attached and secured are mandatory at all times.

This will be the dress code unless a Master decrees otherwise.

Ladies– formal (from opening meet to the end of the season)

White shirt. Black hunt jacket. Coloured members wear hunt buttons on the jacket, and the hunt's "colours" replace the normal black collar. A canary yellow vest may be worn underneath and coloured members may wear hunt buttons on it. Beige or buff coloured breeches.

Black hunt cap with safety harness secured.

Black hunt boots. If a coloured member – black patent tops may be applied to boots. Spurs - blunt, short and turned to the ground.

White stock, neatly tied and secured with a stock pin (usually a version of a plain safety pin or "kilt" pin).

Brown leather and white string gloves for rain or cold.

Men - formal

White shirt. Black hunting jacket -- if a coloured member, a scarlet jacket may be worn (referred to as hunting pinks) with the appropriate buttons and coloured collar.

Canary yellow vest - if coloured, with hunt buttons.

White or beige breeches.

Black dress boots - if a coloured member - brown tops may be worn.

Spurs - blunt, short and turned to the ground.

Black hunt cap with harness secured.

White stock tied neatly and secured with a stock pin or kilt pin.

Brown leather or white string gloves optional.

Children .

Children may wear jodhpurs with jodhpur boots.

An approved hunting cap with harness secured is mandatory.

Turtle neck sweater or shirt and tie with a tweed riding coat is encouraged by the Master's of Foxhunting Association up until the age of 16.

Lady member side-saddle;

Same as lady member astride except;

Dark melton or other cloth habit.

Top hat with a veil. A bowler, or derby may be worn but without a veil.

A safety hunt cap with harness fastened is also permitted.

Brown leather and string gloves.

Horse and rider

Firstly and most importantly for both horse and rider - be as clean as you can be.

Tack should be clean and appropriate to foxhunting.

White saddle pads only please and preferably shaped.

Bits should be strong enough to control your horse.

If a horse is under-bitted to the point of becoming a nuisance in the field, the member may be dismissed and told to "bit up" his horse for the next meet.

Whips should be short so not to interfere with other mounts nearby. Do not use a dressage whip. It may occasionally be necessary to use a whip to urge your horse over a trappy fence or through or over extreme ground conditions.

If a hunt whip is carried by a member of the field it should always be carried coiled up in the hand only the huntsman and his whippers-in have the thong dropped downward and hanging.

Manes should be pulled short and lie flat against the neck of the horse. In some instances the mane may be roached if it does not accommodate pulling.

Manes are braided for opening meets, joint meets and any other occasion the masters deem appropriate, i.e. parading of hounds.

If your horse kicks or you think it may kick, put a green ribbon in his tail and ride at the back. A green ribbon in a horse's tail denotes the horse is a novice to foxhunting and alerts other riders. A red ribbon means a confirmed "kicker" and this is not welcome in the hunt field. The universal sign to the rider behind you that your horse may be going to kick (especially if someone has ridden up on his heels) is an outstretched forearm horizontally held out behind you. You may also be advised to hold your horse's head up with your other hand to help prevent the kick.

Stock ties are multi-purposed. They keep the neck warm, act as an impromptu bandage or sling if needed, make a quick hound collar, and so on. The stock pin may be used to secure any of the uses the stock tie is put to.

Etiquette

Let's start at the beginning.

Call a master at least a day ahead if you would like to bring a guest to the meet. The breakfast host would appreciate knowing this also, and the information would be passed on by the master.

Arrive early! A good guideline is a minimum of half an hour before moving off time.

Did you know if someone is consistently and persistently late for a meet, it has been known that the master(s) will dismiss the member(s) from that day's sport?

If you have a guest or other business to attend to, see the secretary first and get the paperwork out of the way - after a pleasant "good morning", of course.

When mounted, move quietly to the area of the stirrup cup approximately 15 minutes before official "moving off" time (the time given on the fixture card).

A person on the ground will serve you a drink and when you have finished, they will retrieve your empty glass (never drop them on the ground for obvious reasons). If you have been able to identify the masters – greet them with a "good morning Master" (never by name).

There will be information given out during stirrup cup. This is usually given by the masters just before moving off, and the information provided can sometimes be invaluable during your day in the field - providing pertinent information.

Be sure to identify the field-masters and get into the correct field.

The first "field" (or group of riders) is the fastest and will gallop and jump.

The second field is for those not wishing to jump or go quite so fast and those wishing to enjoy the thrill of seeing hounds work from a distance and enjoying the countryside at a comfortable, forward-moving pace following behind the first field.

The third field is for riders and horses who only want to walk and perhaps see what hunting is all about. It also provides a place from which, as proficiency and understanding of the sport grows, the rider may move up to second or perhaps first field.

If you would like to change to another "field", please ask your field-master first.

There is never any pressure to "move up".

Stay with the field and follow the field-master! Never, ever pass him/her!

The sequence of riders in the first field is field-master, senior coloured members, senior members and children. The same goes for the second and third fields.

Members bringing guests out to foxhunt are responsible for them and ride at the back.

If the guest is a master, staff or proficient senior coloured member of another hunt, he/she may be asked to ride up front - but only on invitation from a master.

On rare occasions young proficient riders are also invited to ride "up front".

There is one hunt horn at the hunt meet, carried and blown by the huntsman only

Don't come between the huntsman and his hounds. The hounds are in the care and control of the huntsman, with assistance from his whippers-in. Always try and have your horse's head (not back legs) turned towards any hounds that come by. Do your best to never tread on a hound. No one but the huntsman and the whippers-in speak to the hounds.

The phrase "headlands please" indicates that riders must ride single file around the perimeter of the field.

Gates are not to be jumped. They are to be opened and closed.

Do not jump unnecessarily or ride away from the field to canter in circles and 'school' your horse. This is considered "larking" and is not tolerated.

If you notice damage to a fence line or gate left open, quietly report it to the field master at the end of the day.

On a farm, walk only when down the lane or near the barns or driveway. If livestock start to run or scatter, slow to a walk until you are well past.

While hunting, the universal sign to stop quickly and stand still, is a rider's hand held up at a 90 degree angle with or without the phrase "hold hard".

Keep a safe distance between you and the horse and rider in front of you. Please don't stop your horse on the backside of the one in front of you (remember the proper bit helps). This is asking to get kicked.

If your horse refuses a fence - immediately move out of the way and go to the back before trying again.

Try not to cut off another rider - if this does happen, a polite apology is in order.

Warnings are given in the following manner: "Ware hole", "Ware car", "Ware wire" etc.

If you have the luck to see a fox or coyote and there is no field master present, turn your horse in the direction the quarry is running, stand up in your stirrups, remove your hunt cap (men only) or just use your hunt whip - pointing it with an outstretched arm in that direction and "holler" (a loud shout that has to be learnt!).

If a rider has a fall, one or two members should stay behind to see him/her safely remounted or to get help. The rest of the field should "hunt on".

When whippers-in are riding or galloping back and forth in close proximity to the field, they may call "whip please". Make room for them to pass by.

From time to time someone in the field may be asked to open or close a gate. When passing through the opened gate a quiet "thank you" to the gate person is appropriate. Also the kind gesture of the last one or two horses through waiting for the gate opener to remount would be appreciated.

When hounds have been put into a covert, be especially quiet and alert. The hounds will be hunting and you may see game.

Talking while in the hunt field is frowned upon. You may be given a stern order to 'hark' or 'hush' by the master, field-master or other senior member of the hunt.

Smoking in the field is not allowed.

Should the huntsman and his hounds have to turn around in a wooded area where horses are in single file, you will be asked to 'reverse'. This means letting the huntsman by, then following - single file - the horse and rider in front of you. Like this everyone keeps their place in line. This avoids any pushing to get back into the same place you once were.

At a check (when the huntsman stops to check his hounds) is a good time to check your horse and tack, socialize with fellow field members and generally catch your breath.

The huntsman or huntsman and master(s) will decide when to end the day's hunting. The hunt horn is blown by the huntsman to indicate this.

Hacking back to the trailers is pleasurable and a time for visiting. Masters at the front, everyone else following.

Once back at the trailers, it is appropriate to thank the Master(s) for the day of hunting.

Back at the trailers.

Be sure your horse is securely tied, sponged, blanketed, fed and watered.

"Breakfast" is the meal eaten after coming in from hunting.

Etiquette at the hunt breakfast;

An informal hunt jacket (tweed or the informal hunting jacket of the individual hunt club) should be worn.

Ask the host of the breakfast if you may leave your hunting boots on in the house and during breakfast, otherwise remove them.

Everyone is expected to bring their own drinks. The Masters will be the first to eat. Following Masters are Huntsman and staff, (if back in from the hunt), guests (if any) senior coloured riding members, senior members, young riders and non-riders.

Always be sure to thank the hosts. Preparing a breakfast for the hunt and providing a venue is a big undertaking, for which hunt clubs must be very grateful.

Now, on the road again, having experienced a day of foxhunting and comradeship, have a safe journey back home.

I hope these tips will hold you in good stead in the hunt field and add to the enjoyment you will derive from being a 'foxhunter'.

These rules, of course, are merely common sense and common politeness applied to hunting field conditions. When the rules are broken it is usually because that person doesn't know. Knowing the rules translates into safety and enjoyment for all.

Post-script.

The best book I have found for everything you should know about hunting is "Foxhunting in North America" by Alexander Mackay-Smith.

Originally in the hunting song 'do you ken John Peel'

The lyrics went 'do you ken John Peel in your coat of grey'. The words were changed to "coat so gay" when London tailor John Pink introduced scarlet coats to the sport. Called Hunt pinks in his honour, they caught on and stayed to become traditional because the huntsman and masters could be more easily kept in view. Coloured gentlemen members adopted the scarlet coats as well, because it was thought they were knowledgeable members if needed in the field.

Did you know there are three types of foxhounds?

The english, the american and the Penn-Marydel foxhounds.

Did you know brown boot tops for gentlemen foxhunters came about so that when gentlemen crossed their legs the black boot polish didn't come off on their breeches?

Difficult to keep white breeches clean now, but back then - I guess almost impossible.

Ladies did not ride astride, so were not asked to dismount to open gates etc.

The horn handle on a hunting whip is used for opening gates and perhaps picking up something that has fallen.

Enjoy your hunting and remember – if you ever have any questions – a Master or member of staff will be happy to answer them.