



Proper Hunt Attire & Etiquette

Masters, officers, and staff endeavor to honor both the traditions of the sport and the practical considerations that help promote a safe and enjoyable day in the hunt field. Horse Country is presenting the traditional turnout for both rider and horse. Each hunt's traditions may vary from these paragraphs. If you have a question regarding turnout, etiquette, or other hunt-related considerations, please do not hesitate to ask one of the masters or the honorary secretary for a clarification.

A Suitable Hunt Horse: The most important quality in a hunter is safety. The horse should go quietly in a group, stop without a fight, stand patiently at checks, wait its turn at jumps, and jump without refusals. The surest way to avoid a kicking incident is to allow sufficient distance between horses to assure contact will not be made if a horse kicks out. A horse known to exhibit kicking behavior should be kept to the rear. Always point your horse's head toward hounds, never the rear end.

The horse should arrive at the meet clean, neatly trimmed, and properly tacked up. As cold weather approaches, the horse's shoes should be either fitted with studs or treated with borium to assure adequate traction on slick surfaces.

Proper Tack: Hunting tack is not fancy. Bridles should be flat without embellished stitching. A standing martingale and breastplate is appropriate if needed but neither is required. Running martingales, however, are not proper in the hunt field. The bit should assure sufficient braking power. Some horses stop nicely in a snaffle, even when the hunting action has the adrenalin pumping, but many need something stronger. Relying on the circling technique to stop a horse creates a distraction and, more significantly, poses a danger to others. Only fitted white cloth or natural wool (sheepskin) saddle pads should be used. Square pads or sheets, colors, and decorative elements such as initials are incorrect. The saddle should be brown leather (English style, of course). Synthetic materials or black leather saddles are not suitable. Bits, D's and hardware should all be nickel or stainless steel.

Proper Turnout: Attire varies according to three main variables—gender, colors, and cub hunting versus formal season. (There are also distinctions between adult members of the field, masters, huntsmen, and juniors but we are only addressing the turnout etiquette for adult field members here.)

Cub hunting: During cub hunting season in September and October, there is no distinction in attire between members who have been awarded colors and those who have not (or, for that matter, between the field, masters, and staff). There is also very little difference regarding the attire of gentlemen and lady members.

- Hacking jackets are worn by both ladies and gentlemen, preferably wool tweed or a linen material and in an earth tone color such as shades of brown or green. Subtle plaids, checks, herringbones and houndstooth patterns are correct. Jackets should have three buttons, all of

which are kept buttoned during the hunt. The jacket should be tailored specifically for riding with a single vent; a conventional sports coat is not an acceptable substitute. The weight of the jacket cloth depends on one's locale.

- Shirts and blouses should be a pastel color and muted striping or subtle patterns are allowed. Both men and women may simply wear a dress shirt and tie, either bow tie or long tie. Ladies may wear ratcatcher collars, either plain or with a stock tie. If a stock tie is worn, it should be colored and/or patterned but not a plain white or ecru formal stock. Gentlemen may also choose to wear a hunting shirt and stock tie. The ends of a stock tie should be secured to the shirt with safety pins to hold the tie in place. Gentlemen wear a 3" plain gold colored stock pin, ladies a 2 1/2" gold colored stock pin. Modern dress: In some hunts turtlenecks may be permissible and stock pins with embellishments are seen.
- Breeches may be beige, buff, rust, or canary. White breeches and dark colors, such as forest green or navy blue, are not correct. Modern dress: A darker beige and a khaki colored breech is allowed.
- Brown field boots are the most appropriate footwear for cub hunting, followed by black dress boots (without brown leather or black patent leather tops). Paddock boots with gaiters or any variation thereof are never proper in the hunt field for adult riders during either cub hunting or formal season. Modern dress: Some hunts allow black field boots.
- Regular hunt-style helmets should be worn (more about headgear under Formal Season). Bowlers with hat cords are also acceptable. Modern dress: Approved safety helmets are used.
- Gloves may be shades of light or dark brown, either full leather or with crochet backs. Pigskin, deerskin and leather are used. Modern dress: Black gloves are sometimes seen, but they tend to bleed and may stain the hands.

Formal Season: Once formal season begins, more distinctions apply based on the member's gender and whether or not he or she has been awarded colors. There are, however, four elements of proper turnout that are universal—headwear, neckwear, gloves, and vests—and we will consider these first.

- Headwear: All members of the field should wear a hunt-style helmet which is defined as a brimmed cap with a black velvet covering. Safety harnesses are recommended and, if the helmet is so equipped, the harness should be kept latched at all times during the hunt. Ribbons at the back of the helmet should point up. (Masters and professional staff signify their positions by turning the ribbons to point down.) Top hats and bowlers are proper under certain conditions as will be noted below. Modern dress: Approved safety helmets are allowed.
- Neckwear: The only appropriate neckwear during formal season is a white or cream stock tie, properly tied and secured with a plain (i.e., no emblems, ornaments, initials, etc.) gold pin. The pin should be placed horizontally; only professional staff may place the pin vertically. Although faux stock ties are permissible, a full length, four fold stock is preferable both for the sake of

appearance and, more significantly, in the event it is needed as a bandage or sling. It is also recommended that the ends of the stock tie be secured to the shirt or blouse with safety pins to assure the ends of the tie do not work out from beneath the coat and flap loosely in the wind. Again, men wear a 3" stock pin, ladies a 2 1/2" stock pin in gold. Modern dress: Embellished stock pins are sometimes seen.

- Gloves: Gloves worn during formal season may be brown, either dark or lighter shades such as tan or buff, full leather. White or buff string gloves or chamois gloves are suitable for rainy conditions. Modern dress: Black gloves are sometimes seen, but they tend to bleed and may stain the hands.
- Vests: Appropriate vests are canary or tattersal (in various color combinations). A vest made from material matching the hunt's official color is also acceptable in that hunt field only. Canary is the most formal color.

Other elements of formal turnout vary according to gender and whether or not the member has been awarded his or her colors. These distinctions run as follows:

Gentleman Member Without Colors

Coat: Plain black, oxford, or dark navy hunting jacket with a single vent or frock coat, with plain black buttons.

Breeches: Beige or buff with black jacket, white with frock coat.

Boots: Plain (i.e., without brown leather tops) black dress boots with garters. Laced field boots are not proper. Modern dress: Rubber boots are sometimes seen, particularly under inclement weather conditions, provided they adequately replicate the appearance of conventional hunt-style boots. Garters are optional.

Gentleman Member With Colors

Coat: Black, oxford or dark navy hunting jacket or frock coat with black buttons displaying the hunt's emblem. A gentleman with his colors is entitled (although not required) to wear a scarlet coat with the hunt's color on the collar and with gold buttons embossed with the hunt's emblem. A gentlemen member of the field should wear a single vented jacket with three buttons. Masters signify their position by wearing four buttons and a huntsman, or a master who also hunts hounds, wears five buttons. (To get very technical, a field member's coat should feature rounded skirts while masters and huntsmen wear coats with squared skirts. This arcane practice is rarely observed today. However, when selecting a new scarlet coat, if there is a choice between rounded or squared skirts, choose rounded.) Scarlet is appropriate for special days such as Opening Meet, Blessing of the Hounds, and New Years Day. It is also proper to wear scarlet for a joint meet where one's hunt is the host hunt. However, scarlet should not be worn to a joint meet where you are the guest of another hunt unless the host hunt has extended the invitation for guests to wear their colors.

Breeches: Beige or buff is proper with a regular hunting jacket. White should be worn with scarlet or a black frock coat.

Boots: Black dress boots with brown leather tops are correct with both black and scarlet coats. Plain black dress boots are also acceptable with black jackets but not with scarlet or frock coats. Black garters are worn when wearing a black jacket. White garters are worn when wearing white breeches. Laced field boots are not correct. Modern dress: Rubber boots, as described above, are acceptable on inclement days.

Headwear: A standard hunt-style helmet (as described above) is proper with any attire. However, a top hat may be worn with a scarlet coat or black frock coat, especially on formal days such as Opening Meet and Blessing of the Hounds. A bowler is also correct with a regular black hunting coat. A black hat cord is worn with a black jacket when wearing a bowler or top hat and a red hat cord is used when a top hat is worn with a scarlet coat.

Lady Member Without Colors

Coat: Plain black, oxford, or dark navy blue jacket with plain black buttons. A lady without her colors may also wear a black shadbelly (with plain black buttons). Modern dress: Ladies may wear a frock coat.

Breeches: Beige, buff, or canary.

Boots: Plain black dress boots (i.e, without black patent leather tops). Laced field boots are not correct. Rubber boots, as described above, may be worn.

Headwear: Standard hunt-style helmet. A bowler may also be worn with a regular hunting coat. A top hat is correct with a shadbelly.

Lady Member With Colors

Coat: Black, oxford, or dark navy blue jacket or frock coat with black buttons imprinted with the hunt's emblem in white and with the hunt's color on the collar. A black, oxford, or dark navy blue shadbelly may also be worn, with the hunt's color on the collar and black buttons with the hunt's emblem, and is particularly suitable for formal days such as Opening Meet and Blessing of the Hounds. (A lady only wears scarlet if she is a master or huntsman, both of which are gender-neutral titles.)

Breeches: Beige, buff, or canary.

Boots: Black dress boots with black patent leather tops and black patent garters. Laced field boots are not correct. Modern dress: Ladies with their colors may wear plain black dress boots. Rubber boots, as described above, may also be worn.

Headwear: Standard hunt-style helmet. A bowler with a hat cord may also be worn with a regular hunting coat. A top hat with a hat cord is correct with a shadbelly. Modern dress: An approved safety helmet may be worn.

Miscellany: Here are a few other general considerations regarding proper turnout and etiquette.

- **Ladies' Hair:** Long or short hair should be restrained within a hairnet (preferably matched to hair color). If a lady's hair is long enough to be braided and can then be tucked down into the back of her coat, this is also acceptable. However, long hair hanging out loosely from beneath the helmet, braids, pigtails, or ponytails are not proper. Hair clips and ribbons are also not appropriate but, then, there should be no hair showing to which such embellishments could be attached. Some masters require gentlemen with hair below the collar to wear a hair net.
- **Ladies' Jewelry:** Only a minimal amount of jewelry, if any, should be worn in the hunt field and what is worn should be plain. Dangling earrings or loose bracelets that could catch on tree branches or other objects should not be worn. **Perfume/Cologne:** Fragrances, particularly heavy applications thereof, should not be used on a hunting day. This applies to both ladies and gentlemen.
- **Sunglasses:** Modern dress: There is no hard and fast rule regarding sunglasses but the more ardent proponents of proper turnout argue against their use as it is felt they detract from the classic hunter look.
- **Flasks:** Ladies may carry a pocket flask in a coat pocket or in a leather sandwich case secured to the D-rings along the back right side of the saddle. Gentlemen may carry either a pocket flask or a bayonet-style flask in a holster case affixed to the front of the saddle. Gentlemen may carry a sandwich box affixed to the back right side of the saddle. Modern dress: Sandwich cases may hold medicine for bee stings and a cell phone for emergencies.
- **Rain Gear:** Although the hunt is likely to be cancelled if heavy rain is falling, there are occasional days when the sport goes forth even if some precipitation is coming down. On such days, the masters may choose to allow hunting coats to be replaced by rain jackets. If so, the jacket should be a rubber lined MacIntosh with leg straps, a Barbour, or similar style, preferably in a tan, green or brown color, and should not have loose pieces that flap in the wind. All other elements of attire remain the same as on any other hunting day.
- **Braiding Manes:** It is correct to braid manes for formal days such as Opening Meet and Blessing of the Hounds. It is also proper, although not required, to braid for joint meets. If a horse's mane is braided, it should be done neatly. An unbraided mane that is nicely trimmed is preferable to a poorly done braiding job.
- **Juniors:** A junior is defined as anyone under the age of 16. Juniors wear tweed jackets, paddock boots, and jodhpurs during both cub hunting and formal season. For those aged 16 and above, the adult rules of proper turnout apply.
- **Upon Arrival:** It is proper to greet the masters before the start of the hunt and to announce your presence to the field secretary. If you have brought a guest, the secretary must be informed, the guest introduced, and the cap paid.

- **Order In The Field:** The generally observed custom is that members with their colors (or buttons) are entitled to ride in front of the field behind the master. This may be referred to as the right of colors or a privilege awarded to those members who have not only been consistent and knowledgeable foxhunters but who have worked diligently in the interest of the hunt for some time (see Awarding of Colors). This is not to say that a hunting member who has not yet been awarded colors cannot ride in the front with those who have but suggests that in the case of a chase the regular hunting member should give way to a member wearing colors. However, if the member with colors does not keep up with the pack during a chase, then the regular member has the right to pass in an open field and move to the front behind the master provided he or she does not interfere with or impede the member with colors or, for that matter, any other rider. Courtesy and safety to all other riders should be foremost in our thinking.
- **Refusals:** If a horse refuses a jump, the rider should move to the back of the line before making another attempt.
- **Chatting:** Given the social nature of this sport, there is always a temptation to engage in conversation, a practice referred to as “coffeehousing.” It should, however, be avoided at most times. The correct prosecution of a hunt depends on good communication between hounds, huntsman, and field master. Chatting among the field can distract the huntsman and masters, thus detracting from the integrity of the sport. This does not mean absolute silence must be observed at all times but attention should be paid to the focus of the day’s activity—i.e., hound work—and socializing should be kept to a minimum. Attempts to engage the field master in conversation, particularly when he or she is trying to monitor hound work, should be especially avoided.
- **Withdrawing Early:** Ideally, everyone should come out with the intention of remaining for the duration of the hunt, no matter how long the day lasts. However, situations do arise—lost shoe, lame horse, rider injury, illness, etc.—that necessitates heading back in while the hunt is still in progress. When such a situation occurs, word should be passed to the master or field secretary so that he or she is aware of the departure. The withdrawing member should also ask the master or secretary for directions back to the meet, even if he or she knows the territory, to avoid interfering with the work of hounds. Where possible, the return route should use hard-surfaced roads.
- **Arriving On Time:** The hunt waits for no one. Hounds move off at the appointed time and hunting begins immediately. Certainly, the unforeseen impediment befalls us all eventually but every effort should be made to arrive at the meet with sufficient time to be mounted and ready to move off with the field. Not only is it simply rude to arrive late when everyone else has made the effort to be there on time, but riding through the hunting territory to catch up with the field can cause problems for the hunt. The line of scent may be crossed, hounds may be distracted, and a collision could occur if the field is riding hard in one direction and suddenly comes upon a tardy member riding the other way. If something has occurred to cause sufficient delay, it may simply be best to forego the day’s sport rather than risk ruining it for others. Repeated tardiness

simply shows a lack of consideration for the hunt as a whole and will not be tolerated. If you do arrive late and the hunt has begun, do not ride into the country to find the field. Wait at the meet and, if the hunt comes back that way, you may join in. Alternatively, if hard-surfaced roads are available, ride forth but stay to the roads until you have located the field and then approach with caution. Once you have joined up with the field, the first obligation is to apologize to the master for your tardiness.

- Excusing A Member From The Field: It should be noted that the masters and honorary secretary are empowered to excuse riders from the field if a sufficiently egregious transgression has been committed. Riding with the hunt is a privilege, not a right. Although rarely exercised, the authority does rest with masters and field secretary to send a rider home if he or she deems such action is necessary. A faithful observance of proper etiquette is the surest way to avoid such an unpleasant occurrence.

Does it really matter what we wear when riding to hounds? Absolutely! For one, it is only through the graciousness of the landowners over whose property we ride that we are able to engage in this sport. A properly turned-out field honors the landowners, shows them we take our sport seriously, and displays the appropriate spirit of tradition as they watch us ride by. (And don't forget to wave or tip your hat and greet the land owner in an appropriately cordial manner.)

In a more subtle sense, it is an appreciation for that tradition that has led most of us to take up this sport. The preservation of the centuries-old foxhunting spirit depends, more than anything else, on the continued observance of the rules of etiquette that distinguish this activity from simply riding casually around through the countryside.

Besides the landowners, we also depend on masters and huntsman for the enjoyment derived from a long season of hunting. The leaders of the hunt work hard to provide members the opportunities to follow hounds and nothing cheers the heart of a huntsman or master more than to gaze upon a well turned-out field of riders who conduct themselves properly. This demonstrates the members' recognition of their efforts on behalf of the field, especially the huntsman who devotes long, hard days of work to give members a few hours of sport.

The Awarding of Colors

The requirements for awarding colors vary from one hunt to another, particularly regarding the minimum length of time before a member is eligible for consideration. However, the following policy statement, borrowed from a representative Virginia hunt, is fairly typical of what is expected:

The award of colors is made by the masters at their sole discretion to hunting members who have made an ongoing significant contribution to the continuation of the hunt's tradition of sportsmanship.

Those considered are typically members who have hunted regularly at least three years and hunted primarily with the jumping field; who have been exemplary, well turned-out and on a groomed horse; who have participated in and contributed to the success of the hunt's activities; and who are a credit to the hunt's reputation.

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