

**Countryside
Alliance**



The voice of the countryside



A newcomer's guide to hunting

The Hunting Act

The Hunting Act came into force in February 2005, but hunts are still hunting within the confines of the law and you can join them. You do not need any special knowledge, kit or clothes and everyone is welcome whether on a horse, following on foot, on a bike or in a car.

You can also support your local hunt in other ways by attending social functions such as the open day and joining the Hunt Supporters' Club.

Continue reading for answers to some frequently asked questions and some top tips for an enjoyable day's hunting.



What should I wear?



The main thing is to be warm, tidy and comfortable out hunting.

The weather can often be unpredictable and, if out all day, can change quite considerably by the time you are hacking home. Turnout is important and the general rule of thumb is to dress as you would if you were going to a competition, so pale breeches, stock or tie, jacket and polished boots or gaiters/half chaps. A dark silk cover and gloves are also recommended as the reins might become slippery when wet. Most children and some adults choose to wear body protectors.

Top tips



To keep toes warm put pop socks underneath your normal socks



Wearing a v-neck wool jumper under your jacket is a good extra layer



Invest in a thermal stock shirt



Put a bit of chocolate or sandwich in your coat pocket for sustenance, hunting is hungry work





How should I turn my horse out?



If your horse normally wears a stronger bit for competing then use it for hunting. Horses tend to get excited and can be stronger than normal. Alternatively take another bit with you and leave it in the trailer/lorry so that you can change if necessary.

It is totally your choice whether you use boots or not. It is important to mention that they will be on for longer than normal and therefore if you think they may rub or slip then best to leave them at home. If your horse is prone to knocks and is used to wearing boots then keep them on!

Dark, inconspicuous colours are best out hunting so opt for black or brown boots and numnah. Generally as long as your horse looks clean and tidy then you will feel perfectly at home!



Top tips



If your horse kicks tie a red ribbon in its tail and stick to the back of the field



Always turn your horse to face hounds – kicking a hound is unforgivable



If you have a young horse tie a green ribbon in its tail



If your horse is new to hunting then an experienced companion is often a calming influence



If your horse is a good traveller saddle up before you go, it can be difficult to tack up an excited horse when you arrive. Put the bridle on before you unload



Q How fit does my horse need to be?

A

Fitness depends on a number of factors relating to the country, the ground conditions and how long you want to stay out hunting for. Generally it is important that your horse has a good level of fitness so that he/she can canter for a relatively long period and cope with varied terrain plus any jumps. Remember that you can leave whenever you want so if your horse is not very fit then say 'good night' after a couple of hours.

Top tips

- Always say 'good morning' to greet people at the meet and then 'good night' when you leave, even if it is only 1pm
- If your horse tends to be a bit fidgety, park further away from the meet so that you have taken the steam out of him/her before you get there
- Autumn hunting is the perfect place to introduce a young horse or to help your horse get fit for the season. Things tend to happen at a slower pace

Q I see lots of pictures of people jumping enormous hedges – will hunting suit me as I don't like leaving the ground?



A

The Hunt Secretary will be able to advise you of a suitable meet depending on your abilities. More often than not there will be other people who do not want to jump so you can follow them to find a way around any obstacle. Also, the majority of hunt jumps are between field boundaries where there will be a gate.





What happens if I don't have a horse? Can I still go hunting?



A




If you do not have your own horse but are a competent rider and would like to follow a mounted pack the hunt secretary will be able to recommend a good local hireling service and put you in touch with them. The service will normally include delivering the horse to the meet all ready to go and collecting him/her at the end of the day so that you don't have to do any of the hard work!



Alternatively if you are not a keen rider you can follow on foot with a beagle, basset, mink or Fell pack. Beagles and bassets are small hounds which traditionally hunted the hare. Following them is good exercise and a great way to watch hounds work. Fell packs operate in the Lakeland fells of Cumbria where the terrain is unsuitable for mounted followers. There are 7 Fell packs in total and they traditionally hunted the fox. The mink hounds normally hunt from April to September and follow the course of the river. The pace tends to be quite a lot slower than other forms of hunting on foot.

As is the case with mounted foxhunting, it is best to contact the hunt secretary in the first instance out of courtesy to let them know that you are interested in attending a meet and they will be able to give you further details.

Top tips





-  Sturdy, comfortable walking boots are a necessity
-  A stick can help with the steep terrain of the fells
-  Carry binoculars

Q You often see a lot of cars following the hunt, can anyone follow and how do I get involved?

A Those following hounds with a car or motorbike are referred to as 'foot-followers'. Anyone can follow the hunt in this manner but generally those that regularly do will follow one particular hunt and be members of the Hunt Supporters' Club. Foot-followers normally give a small contribution at the meet and are staunch supporters of the hunt even in the wettest of weathers. The Hunt Supporters' Club will raise vital funds for the hunt throughout the year by organising various social functions. This is a great way to meet people that are involved in your local hunt and is an important social hub in often isolated rural communities.



Top tips

-  Introduce yourself to other foot-followers at the meet and get an idea of which direction hounds are expected to travel
-  Do not park your car anywhere which will impede the passage of other road traffic or of the huntsman or mounted field
-  Avoid parking on newly mown verges or in people's drives and do not assume that you can take your 4x4 off road
-  Keep your engine switched off when parked so that other followers can hear hounds and huntsman










Who are the important people I need to look out for?



Firstly at the meet find the secretary and pay, unprompted, what you owe (cap) for the day. This varies depending on the hunt so make sure you ask how much it will be when you first contact the secretary. Don't forget to greet people with 'good morning', using 'good morning master' as appropriate. Familiarise yourself with the field master as you will follow him/her – he/she is responsible for making sure the field does not get too close to hounds and they cross country in a responsible manner. The huntsman will blow the horn and will move off from the meet first followed by the whipper(s)-In.

Top tips

-  Give way to masters, followers and cars if they are trying to get past you – you will often hear the call of 'hounds please' so move to the side as quickly as you can to let the hounds and huntsman through
-  When passing through an open gate say 'gate please' –this alerts the people behind you to a gate and lets the last person through know that it needs to be shut
-  Wait your turn politely when lining up to jump and if your horse refuses let others past you
-  Follow the field master at all times and do what they say – 'hold hard' means stop now
-  Chat politely but do not yell, especially when hounds are working as the field master will be trying to listen to get an indication of the direction in which they are travelling



Many hunts hold newcomers' meets and activities so look out for the Countryside Alliance's annual newcomers week normally held in the autumn before the opening meet.

A newcomers' meet gives those who are new to hunting the perfect occasion to try it for the first time. You will be welcomed at the meet and then throughout the day guided by an experienced hunt follower or Master who will explain the day's hunting to you, and answer any questions that you may have.

The best person to contact in the first instance is the Hunt Secretary. To find out more information about your local pack and newcomers' week, please contact the Countryside Alliance

email

hunting@countryside-alliance.org

To join the Countryside Alliance, please call our membership hotline on

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