

How to hold a Mock Hunt – Orville Redenbacher Style
by Freddy Davis, Davis Creek Pony Club, Charleston, WV

We have staged many "mock hunts" and they are always a favorite activity, since the closest "real" hunt is about a 3-4 hour haul.

Depending on the number of adults, we usually have one Pony Club member and one adult take on the role of the Fox. The Pony Club member is usually a C or above who has been an outstanding member – this is his/her reward. The Fox should dress in a very bright shirt! The Fox will carry popcorn (movie theatres will give you an old bag) and that is how the "scent" is left. The Fox can be very tricky. A number of other Pony Club members are the hounds. (We even made ears out of furry brown remnants and elastic to fit over the helmet.) The hounds must follow the "scent" and will only "give tongue" when they can see the popcorn.

A riding adult fills the role of Fieldmaster for the jumping field. (He or she should also have a clear idea where the fox is going, so if the hounds lose the scent, he/she can cast them again in about the right direction). If necessary, another adult leads a group of "Hilltoppers." Other adults or Pony Club members act as whips. **Before we start, everyone's role is explained** (*see the following script*). Anyone in the field should dress appropriately (stock tie tying 101). We even serve a stirrup cup – usually hot cider with lots of cinnamon in cold weather, lemonade during the summer.

For the kids not ready to canter on in a group, we have a flight that goes on a walk-trot ride that hunts for "hippomunchers." These often resemble white socks balled up with faces drawn on them with markers. Each child keeps count of how many he sees and then reports in at the end of the ride, and the one with the closest count gets carrots for his pony.

Note from the author: *A Mock Hunt with Davis Creek Pony Club was my first "hunting" experience when I was an adult-friend. I thought it was great -- so now I go to Ireland every year to hunt with the Galway Blazers. Life is short so enjoy!*

Mock Hunt Sample Time Line:

8:00 a.m. The Fox and the Hunt Staff (Huntsman, Fieldmasters) meet with organizer to lay the “drag.”

9:00 a.m. Riders arrive at Meet, groom, tack up, receive safety check

9:30 a.m. Mount up; “Blessing” is given. The Fox leaves; Stirrup Cup is served (Fox misses the stirrup cup!)

10 a.m. General Introduction of Staff and explanation to visitors. Huntsman casts his/her hounds. The Fieldmasters (first field is jumping, second field is Hilltoppers) follow and the fun begins. Some athletic parents are welcome to help lead the younger riders who are hilltopping. When they settle down and gain confidence they might join the non-jumpers without a lead line.

After the Hunt: Cool out horses. A “Hunt Breakfast” will be served. During the breakfast there will be a question and answer session.

Dress: Weather permitting, anyone who has formal attire may wear it. Others should wear well fitting polo shirts (or warm jackets if the weather is cold). Spectators should be prepared to walk cross-country so they should wear sensible, casual and comfortable clothes.

Mock Hunt Sample Script:

(Open with a horn call) “Good morning, everyone. We have heard rumors that there is a fox sneaking around _____ Farm (location of the mock hunt), and she is up to all kinds of mischief. We thought it would be fun to have a Foxhunt right here for you, so we brought some hounds and we are mounted up and ready to go. We are going to stretch our imaginations to make this feel like a cool fall morning in the misty fog, with the scenting conditions at their best. Our fox in question is surely out and about somewhere close by. Let’s hope our hounds are well rested and ready to go with their noses honed in to good scenting. Now, we want to assure all of you that we only want to CHASE this little fox around a bit, all in the name of good sportsmanship; not do any harm to her. We want to keep her around for many seasons to come so we can have the sport of the chase many times over.

As you can see, our kids are dressed in proper attire for the mornings hunt (or not – depending upon the weather). Their ponies are clean and they are mounted up in a timely manner. All are ready to go when the huntsman sounds the horn. (Pause for a horn call.) This alerts the field and the hounds that they are about to leave the Meet. The hounds are anxious and ready to go to see if they can find that fox. As they leave the Meet, the field falls in behind the Huntsman and follows through the country for a morning (or afternoon) of sport. On any given day, they may encounter gates and jumps of various kinds. Mainly these jumps are coops and stone walls. When necessary, the field will go through the gate or choose to jump the obstacles. This is part of what makes hunting fun and exhilarating to all who participate.

The hounds must use their noses to try and find a TRAIL the fox has left. This is how they find the fox and follow it during a chase. As the fox runs, it leaves behind a scent from the pads of its feet. The hounds then try and find this trail of scent, but the fox does not make it easy for them. The fox is quite smart and does all kinds of tricks to fool the poor hounds. The fox may run through some water so there is no scent, or it may double back and take another way. The fox may also go up a tree or run through some cattle to cover the scent up. This is no easy task for the hounds, but it is their instinct to follow the scent as best they can. Some days they may never find a scent anywhere. It may be a dry day, or the fox just may not be out on that day. This is always a chance we take when going out for a morning of hunting.

If and when the hounds find a scent, they must try and follow it. Giving tongue – or speaking – only when they actually have the scent at their noses. The scent will travel away in the wind or the leaves on the ground may turn over and not give off any scent. The hounds then must try to figure out where to go from there. Often times the chase will be fast and furious, yet other times it may go round and round, or back and forth very slowly. One never knows. The riders just try and follow the hounds as they are doing their job. All the while, the fox may be watching what goes on and laughing at the hounds as they lose the scent and get more and more confused. Hopefully our hounds are figuring things out, but remember, that our fox is very devious and has a bag full of tricks.

Then all of a sudden, the hounds are all on. They have a good line of scent and they are moving on at a faster pace. The chase is on!! The hounds speak and follow a good line of scent. After a

while the fox goes to ground. At this point the hounds are gathered up and move off in another direction. The fox has outsmarted them yet again and has a good chuckle.

As the morning wears on, the dew lifts and the sun comes out, leaving very little chance of any more good scenting. The hounds are tired and the huntsman calls it a day, so the group returns to the meet. The kids have had lots of fun, the hounds have done very well and are tired, as well as the ponies. The day has been a good one. We've all had lots of good sport and our fox is back roaming the countryside up to her usual mischief, chasing chickens and mice around looking for her next meal. We hope to return to chase this little vixen around more another day.