

SPRING/SUMMER 2023

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THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE MASTERS OF FOXHOUNDS ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA



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Dear MFHA members,

As our 2022-2023 hunting season has come to a close, we are all looking to summer activities and to next season with thoughts of hound, horse and country conservation. Summer is also a great time to enjoy being with fellow hunters—particularly at lively events such as hound shows (results on the MFHA website) and the MFHA Field Hunter Championship Finals which were held Saturday, May 27th at Morven Park (results in this issue).

Summer is not only a time to reconnect with friends, but also a time to think of our younger hunters. "I believe that children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way" is a familiar lyric from the song Greatest Love of All. This particular verse stays in one's mind, not simply for the tune, but also for the relevance. Children are our future. The future of foxhunting rests with them. As foxhunters today, we are challenged with teaching them well such that they will lead.

In this issue of Covertside, one of the articles highlights the importance of connecting with youth and reasons to be encouraged as outlined by our Pack Junior Committee. I am most grateful for this committee's efforts and energy in the development of a program for engaging youth with foxhunting and with hounds, both on and off the horse. It is a revolutionary approach. You will be hearing much from this committee as the Pack Junior Awards Program and Junior Hound Judging Program officially launch.

I hope as you read this issue that you will discover much to take away and become inspired to re-focus on your youth. Our future.

All the best to you and yours for this summer,

Leslie Rhett Crosby, MFH

President, Masters of Foxhounds Association of North America



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Pack Up, Juniors!

MFHA Encourages Youth to Enter the Pack Junior

By Marcia Brody

Photography by Gomez Photography,
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Cultivation of the next generation of foxhunting enthusiasts is always top of the agenda for the MFHA. The association has long encouraged youth participation through its "Fairly Hunted" program which recognizes minors who participate in mounted hunting. Many individual clubs sponsor junior foxhunting days and offer outreach to local kids through involvement with local riding groups, Pony Clubs, 4-H, Scouting and FFA clubs. Looking for more in-depth opportunities to engage juniors with the hound side of the foxhunting equation, MFHA leaders are excited to launch the Pack Junior – a multi-tiered approach to learning about and building appreciation for hounds.

An energetic committee chaired by Susan Gentry, MFH, Cloudline Hounds, volunteered to brainstorm and develop these innovative programs. Susan was joined in the initiative by Martha Johnson, MFH, Iroquois Hunt; Dr. Luke Matranga, MFH, North Hills Hunt; Cameron Sadler, MFH, Moore County Hounds; and Virginia Voigt, member of Hillsboro Hounds.

The Pack Junior Committee has three major components underway. First to be rolled out is the Junior Hound Judging Program. The judging program will soon be joined by a Pack Junior Awards Program – a self-directed annual contest where participants earn points based on different activities, and submit their tallies with an essay for District-wide and National competition. The third prong is the development of an online resource to share success stories and strategies successfully employed by hunt clubs around the country to stimulate junior involvement.

The Junior Hound Judging Program was created by Hillsboro's Virginia Voigt with professional Huntsman Leilani Gray to teach juniors about form and function in evaluating hound conformation in a fun and educational format. The pilot program premiered to enthusiastic reviews at the Hillsboro puppy show last August. Approximately 15 juniors, ages 6 to 14, were treated to presentation of a stellar hound by Huntsman Gray. She highlighted the optimal points of the hound's conformation, and why those aspects are important to the durability of the hound and its success in sport.

Next, it was the juniors' turn to evaluate three hounds specifically selected for conformational deficits. Hounds were presented in hound show format – standing and moving both as a group and individually. Participants were asked to complete provided checklists comparing points



of conformation including overall condition, quality of feet, topline and depth of chest, and to rank the hounds when they were finished. They were then asked about their choices and reasons supporting them. According to Voigt, "The junior judges were very observant and serious, and their comments reflected that they took the time to learn, process and rank hounds based on breed standards. And most of all, they had fun doing it!"

The program is the perfect complement to any kennel visit. A full set of materials, including educational video, score sheets and judging guide is available from the MFHA website.

The Pack Junior Awards Program is the second major component to be unveiled. Running on a May to May calendar year, the awards program gives MFHA Pack Junior members the opportunity to earn points for various activities, and to create and submit an essay to compete for year end monetary awards at both the District and National levels. The program has been generously funded by a grant from Eleanor Menefee Warriner of the Hillsboro Hounds.

Younger participants (ages 12 and under) may select either the "Pony" or "Puppy" category, while the older group (ages 13 to

18) may select "Horse" or "Hound." Points are earned learning and demonstrating age-appropriate knowledge related to horses and hounds, as well as for participation in activities such as hound walking, hound shows and actual hunting days. A Master will sign off on each achievement, and to confirm when the threshold of 100 points has been met.

Pack Junior members will then submit an essay on the topic of "What does it mean to you to be able to participate in an outdoor sport, enjoying nature, horses, and hounds?" It is up to each individual junior to decide how to craft their essay in terms of length and content to include words, illustrations and photos to best convey their message. The submissions will be judged at the District level, and the winners forwarded to the National competition. More than \$10,000 in total prize money will be awarded to District and National winners.

The final part scheduled for the program is to compile and share success stories for drawing junior participants into hunting. Many clubs have evolved special relationships with juniors in their area. According to committee member Cameron Sadler, MFH, Moore County, "Hunts that seem to be most successful with juniors make the most effort to accommodate them." At Moore County that means that the hunt lets the juniors ride



where they can, welcoming them to the front to best see the action, rather than relegating all to the back of the fields. Sadler also takes the extra step of mounting the better-riding pony clubbers, whose horses may not be suitable to the hunt field, on some of her own hunters, and placing them directly behind her as she leads first field.

One focus of the program is to offer involvement for juniors who might not ride, or might not ride well enough to hunt. Sadler offered the example of a 7-year-old junior who shares wheel whip duties at Moore County with his grandfather, and also helps in the kennel – learning about the hounds first-hand. Although this junior doesn't ride, he is welcomed into hunting activities with open arms. Other hunts have organized junior days where the better-riding juniors are paired with huntsman and staff, and fields are tailored to the needs of riders at all levels, all the way down to leadline. Usually hunting is offered at no charge for juniors on these days. Some hunts extend the no cap policy for juniors throughout the season, which makes the activity a little more appealing to budget conscious parents.

Relationships between beagle, basset and foxhound packs also facilitate the involvement and development of non-riding juniors (and even adults) into mounted foxhunting enthusiasts. Learning about the hunting with hounds aspect of the sport without the distraction of a horse, or from the back of a trusted leadline pony in a smaller geographic area, instills confidence and deepens junior interest in the sport. Sadler reflects that this is essentially the path that her husband Lincoln took which eventually led to his role as Huntsman at Moore County. Two juniors who participated from the youngest age with the New Market-Middletown Valley Hounds on their leadline ponies also followed this path – one has graduated from the MFHA Professional Development Program and on his way to a professional whipper-in position, while the other has assumed a Mastership in the beagle community. Ironically it is the junior with the riding parents who went with the foot pack, while the junior whose parents hunt on foot has the passion for mounted foxhunting. Success stories like these abound throughout the hunting community.

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Other ideas under development are avenues to enhance interaction between juniors so that they can build their own community, with appropriate safeguards. Instagram and other social media platforms are also being explored. Hunts are invited to share their successful experiences with committee members to contribute to this resource.

Pack Junior Committee leader Gentry emphasizes that the awards programs are not one and done. Juniors are encouraged and eligible to participate every year, and are able to carry over their qualifications if it takes them more time. In the end, the goal is to cultivate an enduring interest in foxhunting, conservation, and the outdoors life. ❖

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Photography courtesy of the Museum of Hounds and Hunting North America

Huntsman to the Stars: The Life and Career of David Wendler

By Scott J. Tepper, ex-MFH (West Hills and Red Rock)

In May 2022, David Wendler, ex-MFH, was inducted into the Huntsmen's Hall of Fame in the Huntsmen's Room at Morven Park in Leesburg, Virginia. David's remarkable career as the West Hills' huntsman, spanned over 54 years.

I first wrote about David in the March 2007 issue of *Covertside*, at a time when we thought he was retiring. But that didn't happen and David served for an additional two years. West Hills had hired a new huntsman in 2007 to take the horn but that fell through just before the hunt season began when the replacement huntsman—trained in England and familiar with the hunt countries of the Eastern Seaboard—finally came west and realized he could not hunt the precipitous hills and big, rough country of the West Hills. He also found our hounds unmanageable. So David stayed on until my Joint Masters and I were finally able to find a huntsman who could handle the country and our hounds. The search took two years and led to Scott Neill, a huntsman who hailed from Australia and previously New Zealand, the latter place the most difficult hunt country in the world.

While David showed sport for over 54 years, starting in 1955, his first audience was his toughest - a group of rich and jaded Hollywood actors who had founded West Hills after World War 2, and had seen and done it all. In 1953, David was hired by MGM song and dance man Dan Dailey, West Hills' first Master, to care for Dan's horses in Northridge, a then-rural neighborhood of the northwest City of Los Angeles in the rugged San Gabriel Mountains. That work soon led to hunting the hounds.

Until David became huntsman, West Hills had been exclusively a drag pack, but it was well-known among western states horsemen, and in late 1953 it even hosted Prince (and subsequently, Emperor) Tsugu Akihito of Japan, who rode in the same field with Ronald Reagan, although the future President was consigned to the back because he was in ratcatcher that day. (See "Foxhunting - The Tie that Binds," *Covertside*, Winter 2016.)

To understand what David was up against, and his accomplishments, we have to go back to the beginnings of the West Hills and the men he had to please.

West Hills was founded in 1946 by a group of mustered out Hollywood actors and directors from Fort Riley, Kansas, who had been making war films for the Army. These motion picture men had gravitated naturally to the cavalry officers at the Fort and its Cavalry School Hunt because the actors and officers all shared a passion - horses and horsemanship.

The men from Hollywood, including Dailey and Reagan, talked their Hollywood buddies into forming a foxhunt in the northernmost part of Los Angeles City and County, where many of them had horse ranches. Among those who agreed to throw in with Dailey and Reagan were Walt Disney, John Huston, Spencer Tracy, Forrest Tucker, Burgess Meredith, George Raft, Randolph Scott and Jose Ferrer. These were some of the biggest names in Hollywood after the War and this audience was, by any measure, a tough crowd to please.

David Wendler's early life was typical of middle America at the time. It gave few hints of the man who was to become one of America's greatest huntsmen for over half a century. David was born on a grain farm in Collinsville, Illinois in September 1935 and began hunting waterfowl with his family's bird dogs; deer and other game with guns; and racoons and foxes with coonhounds. At age nine or ten David began competing in gymkhanas, and he continued to ride, hunt and shoot until his graduation from high school. After high school, at age 17, David enlisted in the Army, serving in the Combat Engineers for two years.

Once he completed his military service, as a sergeant, David paid a visit to his sister and her husband, Clyde Kennedy - one of the premier horse trainers on the West Coast. Kennedy was training horses for a number of Hollywood actors and David eventually moved to Southern California to work for Kennedy in the summer of 1953.

One of Kennedy's neighbors with a horse ranch was Dailey, and David began to show horses for Dailey, learning to ride on those tiny English saddles. David also started to haul Dailey's horses. Little did David realize he would soon become huntsman to the stars and a Hollywood stunt rider and actor himself. Dailey sold his Northridge property in 1954 and moved to a new ranch in neighboring Chatsworth, at the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. Until Dailey's ranch move, the hunt had been a drag and the kennels had been located at Adohr Farms, a large Guernsey dairy farm in bucolic Woodland Hills, currently a heavily-populated suburban neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles.

Dailey had space for the hounds at his new ranch and built kennels. Like all good Masters, Dailey wanted to show good sport and he noticed that David seemed to have a way with hounds. Dailey asked David to start hunting the hounds, which David did commencing in 1955. While the hunt was still officially a drag, David began to hunt live with coyote and gray fox as his quarry. But West Hills did not formally abandon the pretense it was hunting drag until Harry Prentice, a transplant to Los Angeles from the Elkridge-Harford Hunt in Maryland, became Master in 1961.

In the mid 1970s, with the current Masters' permission, David changed the make-up of the pack from English hounds, primarily from the College Valley, to a more suitable pack of American hounds, mostly Orange County Red Ring-Necks and Julys, the latter from packs of night hunters in Texas, Oklahoma and Southern Illinois. John Glass, Keeper of the Stud Book, was kept working late into the night tracking down and confirming all of the pedigrees of the Julys, but was ultimately satisfied that those hounds and their ancestors had chased fox or coyotes for at least the required prior generations. The hounds were duly registered although it was a daunting task for a decade for anyone to trace the bloodlines. The stud book never had seen so many footnotes!

David was given free rein to rebuild the pack and, as a good huntsman should, he bred his pack to match his quarry - the coyote - and his country which was then quite large but also rough, mountainous, and semi-desert. David wanted hounds that would be able to hunt the dry, arid country but also hounds that showed grit as well. With a smile and a twinkle in his eye, David told me back in 2007 that "Ed Martin [West Hills' Master from 1975 to 1989] gave me free rein to breed as I saw fit because he knew that I knew what I was doing."

David showed excellent sport with his new pack of Red Ring-Neck July crosses. The Orange County bloodlines gave him the booming cry he needed in his big open country, where hounds could quickly be several miles away, and the July bloodlines gave him the low-scenting noses he needed in the desperately dry scenting conditions. The pack accounted for many coyotes on large ranches and, says David: "We had no major problem with deer. My biggest problem with the hounds had been getting John Glass to register them."



David Wendler in the middle with Angela Lansbury

David, the pack and many West Hills members also appeared in television's Murder She Wrote in 1984 when David was again the huntsman.

Between the *Auntie Mame* films David was also the huntsman in the foxhunting scenes in the Doris Day-Rod Taylor comedy, *Do Not Disturb* in 1965 and some "pick up" fox hunting scenes in *The List of Adrian Messenger*, which were shot in Los Angeles after the completion of principal photography in Ireland and the U.K. by director and West Hills member John Huston, in 1963.

David, the pack and many West Hills members also appeared in television's *Murder She Wrote* in 1984 when David was again the huntsman. The episode was called "It's a Dog's Life" (season 1, episode 6), starred Angela Lansbury and guest starred Lynn Redgrave and West Hills member Forrest Tucker. (I am the very handsome – dare I say dashing – young man who gets off the backrest of a couch in the hunt breakfast scene and tips his top hat to Angela Lansbury.)

As a stunt man, David doubled for Steven Seagal in *On Deadly Ground* (1994) and for William Shatner—himself a renowned horseman—in two *Star Trek* films, most notably *Star Trek Generations* (1994).

David was generous with his time and knowledge to the other hunt clubs in California and to the newly founded Red Rock Hounds of Reno, Nevada. He gave all of the huntsmen from the other hunts helping hands, loaning himself out to whip in to them and to train them in the science of foxhunting. As the premier steeplechase rider on the West Coast for three decades, he always brought the best horses to beat everyone else. But he always did it – and everything else – with great humor and humility.

Although now 87, as of this writing David has retired to his ranch in Montana, where he still rides and hunts, keeps a small herd of cattle and a few hounds whose music keep him company when they pick up a scent. ❖

In addition to the charismatic connection that David had with his hounds – the "invisible thread" often found in great huntsmen – David was also a superb horseman. He followed in the footsteps (or would that be stirrups?) of legendary West Hills MFH Tim Durant who was the oldest rider ever to finish the Grand National at the age of 68, in 1968, on Highlandie, after remounting following a fall. David dominated the West Coast steeplechase and point-to-point races for four decades, finally hanging up his silks in the late 1990s, "to give the youngsters a chance."

In part because of his skills as a horseman, and because he knew the right people in Hollywood, David also became an actor and stunt performer. He received his SAG card in 1958 when he appeared in *Auntie Mame*, starring Rosalind Russell and Forrest Tucker with David playing – who else? – the huntsman. He re-created the role in the Lucille Ball-Robert Preston musical remake in 1974, *Mame*. In each of those movies he hunted the West Hills pack over country that was actually hunted at the time in Thousand Oaks and Newhall, which despite Hollywood's set and special effect magicians, didn't resemble *Auntie Mame's* Mississippi at all.



Dog Daze 2023 will be returning Oct. 29! Save the Date!

Join us for our second annual gathering of working dogs and hounds as they display their unique skills. Watch a variety of talented canines demonstrate their prowess, from retrieving and herding to agility and military maneuvers.

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Photography courtesy of David Traxler

Kennel Corner Covertside Feature: THE HUNTSMAN'S CHOICE

By Sheri Buston



Bull Run Bellemaid | Photo Courtesy of William D. Kenner

*On a day's hunt, there is only one judge
and that is the Huntsman.*

I asked the question to several of our huntsmen: What hound in your kennel stands out to you above the rest on a day's hunting? Your hound choice can be past or present, a bitch or a dog, but what makes this hound your choice for best working hound and why? Now, tell me about your hound!



**Geoffrey S. Hyde, Huntsman of The
Elkridge-Harford Hunt**

How long have you been hunting this pack? 31 seasons

What do you look for in a pack?

Great voice, drive, tenacity with biddability

What hound have you chosen to nominate?

Danger '18, a dog hound

What age was the hound when it started to impress you?

What did it do to stand out?

He was always there, learning his job his first season. The whole litter was a bit keen at exercise and going first to covert, took some effort to get them to hold up! Came into himself his second season and gradually just got better and better. I don't like them too precocious early on; I think they make better hounds in the long run.

What trait makes this hound stand out on a day's hunt?

A good nose and voice, always busy and trying, picking up the line after a check when others have gone over it, speaking with authority and the pack flies to him.

*"I think they make better
hounds in the long run."*

~ Geoffrey Hyde

Tell us why this hound is your choice.

I always liked his hunting, so I took him to the Andrews Bridge performance trials two years ago. He was second overall placed hound, and Huntsman's Choice. It's one thing to really like a hound but when others judge him outstanding it means something.

Does this hound have a different personality in kennels than out hunting?

Pretty much a tough guy in the kennel but a team player out hunting.

Have you bred to him? Has he any progeny hunting?

He covered a couple bitches but only has one pup on the

ground to be entered this coming season. I used his sister who had a nice litter that entered this season.

Did you hunt his sire or dam?

Yes, both outstanding hounds. Goes back to Rattle '02 who was a great bitch with a booming voice who excelled in the hunt field and performance trials.

Any siblings?

He is from a large litter, all of which are excellent in their work. I always like to breed from a good family more so than a good individual from a mediocre litter.

Has he been to any hound shows or performance trials?

He was second placed hound overall and huntsman's choice at the Andrews Bridge performance trials 2 years ago.



**Charles Montgomery, Huntsman of
Mells Foxhounds**

How long have you been hunting this pack?

I'm at the end of my 4th season.

What do you look for in a pack of hounds?

The end result that I desire in a pack of hounds, is to have a pack that can put pressure on the game as a whole. To me a pack of hounds is not one individual hound or a group of individuals but an organism that works as a whole.

Who is your hound choice? Bull Run Bellemaid 2017

What age was this hound when it first started to impress you?

What did it do?

During her unentered season, she had just come back from a performance trial, and she began speaking out hunting—because of her age, I didn't entirely trust her, but within the next 10 minutes of her working a red fox was viewed and she was right on it.

What trait makes this hound stand out on a day's hunt?

When she speaks a run will follow. Mells has a steep country - it is comprised of very steep wooded areas, it is cattle country, so these steep woods are surrounded by grazeable open, it is difficult to stay with hounds the whole time in this country. Here Bellemaid began speaking the woods surrounding the basset pond. I could not go directly with hounds and had to gallop around - due to fences and terrain - when I got back to the hounds, she was in an open cattle field working a cold line in 20 mph winds, she worked the line to the next woodline and when they got to the woods they hit the line away. It was impressing that she was still working the line when I got there and that she had the whole pack there and we were able to pressure the game.

Does this hound have a different personality in kennels than out hunting?

Yes, in the kennel she is a bit submissive, she loves people, but she does not suffer foolish hounds gladly.

Have you bred to this hound, making it a possible brood bitch? Does it have any progeny currently hunting?

Yes, twice. Her first litter is finishing their second season, and her second litter is finishing its first. I combined the Live Oak Foxhounds lines to the Midland Foxhound lines - using a dog given to me by Live Oak, Live Oak Galloper 2017, the steep nature of our country requires a very athletic hound - that is why I bred these two hounds.

*“This trait has also passed down to the daughters in both of her litters.”
- Charles Montgomery*

Does this hound choice have any siblings?

Bellmaid was drafted to me as an unentered hound by Mason Lampton at the Midland Foxhounds, we have since been drafted her littermate Buxom, and have her in our kennel.

What quality has this hound brought to your pack?

Low scenting ability. This trait has also passed down to the daughters in both of her litters. Low scenting is a very important trait to me, especially when it presents in such a way that it produces a run.

Who bred the hound? Midland Foxhounds



How long have you been hunting this pack? 2 years

What do you look for in a pack of hounds?

Biddability, voice and levelness

Who is your hound choice?

Genesee Valley Moccasin'20, Female.

What age was she when it first started to impress you?

What did she do? At 2 years of age she was drafted in and started hunting for me. Moccasin took to the line immediately and was very keen, turning out to be one of the strike hounds.

What trait makes this hound stand out on a day's hunt?

Her voice, consistency, work ethic, as well as her conformation yields her to maintain soundness, speed, and drive.

*“Her drive and determination has made her a dependable hound in bringing the pack together.”
- Steve Farrin*

Describe why this hound is your choice.

Moccasin is a very biddable hound with a tremendous voice. She is a consistent strike hound that follows the line methodically to the end. Her drive and determination has made her a dependable hound in bringing the pack together. The other hounds, young and old honor her without question. She is always aiming to please.

Does this hound have a different personality in kennels than out hunting?

She is very shy in the kennels and is more comfortable around "her staff."

Have you bred to this hound, making it a possible brood bitch? She is a bitch that will be bred next year? Did you also hunt its sire and or dam?

No, as she was drafted in.

What quality has this hound brought to your pack?

Cohesiveness, drive and biddability.

Who bred the hound? Marion Thorne of Genesee Valley Hunt



How long have you been hunting this pack?

Since 2006, when our professional huntsman left suddenly. I picked up the horn after just a couple hunts as an apprentice. It was a bit of a learning curve and I think I'm finally getting the hang of it!

What do you look for in a pack of hounds?

We have been working diligently on nose and biddability. Our hounds do not lack for voice and are good-looking, healthy and easy to work with.

Tell me about your hounds.

We have 19 couple hounds, all Crossbred, in our kennels at the moment. We had a big gap in our breeding program a few years ago and then two large litters in 2020; now our pack is a bit like two different packs. Where we struggled with biddability and deer-breaking our older hounds, our youngsters

are really responsive and have great voice. Joint MFH and joint honorary Huntsman, Stephanie Phillips, and I were very diligent about working with the puppies and it has really paid off, thanks in part to a loyal group of volunteer hunt members who come out to help. A major boost in our hound-training program came from leaning heavily on advice from Andrew Barclay and his wonderful resource, "Letters to a Young Huntsman."

Who is your hound choice?

Hound name and year: Rocky Fork Headley Hunt Ringo'17. A tri-color crossbred, he was at first an undistinguished dog hound in a litter of six couple.

What age was this hound when it first started to impress you?

What did it do?

Ringo, like his litter mates, was a late bloomer. In reviewing my hunt journals, I see that it was in October of 2021, when Ringo was five years old, that I first singled him out as an outstanding hound. He distinguished himself by finding, voicing, and leading for over two hours that day, remarkable because we were hunting our smallest fixture and it seemed as though he found a line and we viewed wherever he went. While we only viewed coyote that day, I wrote in the journal that I suspected he also popped a fox that we had heard at night down by the creek.

What trait makes this hound stand out on a day's hunt?

As impressive as his nose and voice are, Ringo is a true leader, and the rest of the pack honors him. Ringo is setting an excellent example for our young hounds.

*“Ringo is setting an excellent example for our young hounds.”
-Sally Crane Cox*

Describe why this hound is your choice

In the years that I have been hunting the RFHH hounds, I have seen many handsome hounds, many sweet hounds who are easy to handle, many brave and willing hounds, and some really eager strike hounds; but I have never worked with a hound who brings all those qualities to the table and is clearly respected by the rest of the pack, both in and out of the kennels.

Does this hound have a different personality in kennels than out hunting?

Yes and no. He is biddable and well-tempered in and out of the kennels, but he is clearly "on the job" in the field. He jumps out of the hound truck, looks you in the eye, puts his nose to the ground and gets to work. Frankly, Ringo deserves better—and by that I mean bigger—territory than we can offer at this time, as he could hunt longer than most of our pack. Sometimes we

keep hunting and just gradually pick up the straggling hounds while Ringo and a few others carry on. He would be the last man standing, as it were, if we asked it of him.

Did you also hunt its sire and or dam?

Yes. I would describe his sire, RFHH Pistol, as a "solid citizen." We also hunted Ringo's grand-sire, Magnolia-Waynesburg Shooter, briefly after he was drafted in as a relative unknown when that hunt folded. Ringo's dam, an American foxhound named Wiki (dam-sire Rolling Rock Mallard), had a great nose but was retired early because she lacked biddability and voice.

Does this hound choice have any siblings?

Of his 11 siblings, 9 are still alive and 8 of them still hunt.

What quality has this hound brought to your pack?

In addition to giving great sport, he has proved to be an excellent tutor for our young entry, whether hunting or being handled on the ground.

Has this hound been to a hound show or performance trial?

No. We have spent several years putting together an effective pack and look forward to showing some of our best and brightest.



How long have you been hunting this pack?

I have been hunting this pack for 15 seasons.

What do you look for in a pack of hounds?

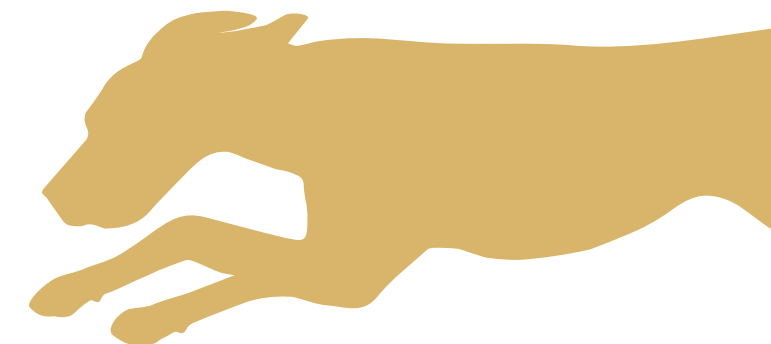
I look for heart. Here at Shakerag, we have smaller territories, so it is not unusual for us to need to stop hounds often during a hunt. Regardless of that aspect, the hounds must keep trying, and they must not have any "give up" to them. Heart is something that draws my eye to any pack and to any one hound.

What is the name of the hound and its year?

The hound I choose is a dog hound. Shakerag Temple '08.

What did this hound do to impress you on a day's hunting?

I was hunting with another hunt and the huntsman commented on how the dog wouldn't leave my side, why did I have it? Not soon after, a dog named Bluemont spoke, and Temple trusted



this hound, so in he rushed with incredible depth to his voice. I turned and said, "That's why." Then we proceeded to have one of the best hunts in sand on a grey fox that I've ever had. Temple was up front all day. During his first season he would only go in to the hounds that he fully trusted. He would wait. He had an uncanny mind, even at a young age.

"Heart is something that draws my eye to any pack and to any one hound."

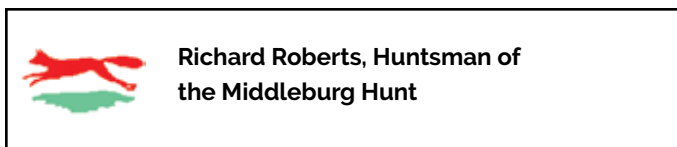
~ John Eaton

Does this hound have a different personality in kennels than out hunting?

Temple was no different in the kennels vs out hunting. He was goofy, personable, and a favorite to everyone. He was always great to take to schools/ 4H programs, he even made an appearance at a Boy Scout Jamboree which held over 3,000 kids! He loved kids and kids loved him. He knew how to smile, a trait he has passed on to some of his progeny. Temple is the backbone to the Shakerag pack. Many of his descendants hunt with us and with other hunts across the US. Temple retired with one of our whips and lived in luxury and happiness for many years. He managed to wrap most everyone around his "paw" but no more so than the whips mother who soon became trained to give cookies upon request.

Who bred this hound?

He was bred by David Raley at Red Mountain Hounds.



How long have you been hunting this pack?

I have been hunting these hounds for six seasons.

What do you look for in a pack of hounds?

An important quality in a pack of hounds is honesty, both with each other, and with their huntsman. Working as a team is paramount to getting the best result under all hunting conditions. On a hunting day, there are so many factors that contribute to a successful day, i.e., weather, land accessibility, property limitations, roads, topography, etc. Honesty is the glue which binds the team. When hounds are alert to each other and trust each other, the chance of a consistent forward hunt, where all hounds are participating and working together, is substantially greater. The importance of this trust, and the teamwork is critical for hounds finding their game well and for a good solid start.

What is the name of the hound you chose?

Middleburg Stylish'17 is my choice for this title. She is a true professional. At home in kennels, she is easy to manage and gets along well with all other hounds. During walkout, she consistently checks in with me but is not solicitous nor does require a lot of attention from the huntsman. Out hunting, she is keen, draws every inch of ground, and has an incredible work ethic. In the year I entered her, 2017, she went directly into a large field of corn without any hesitation. She is bold, confident, and was easily taught the rules. Stylish is as honest as they come and a hound which I often rely on and look to for information throughout a hunting day. She is a true talent in the hunting field through her perseverance, nose, and her teamwork. She is respected by the pack and is a class act. Like her name implies she is STYLISH.

Who bred the hound? I did

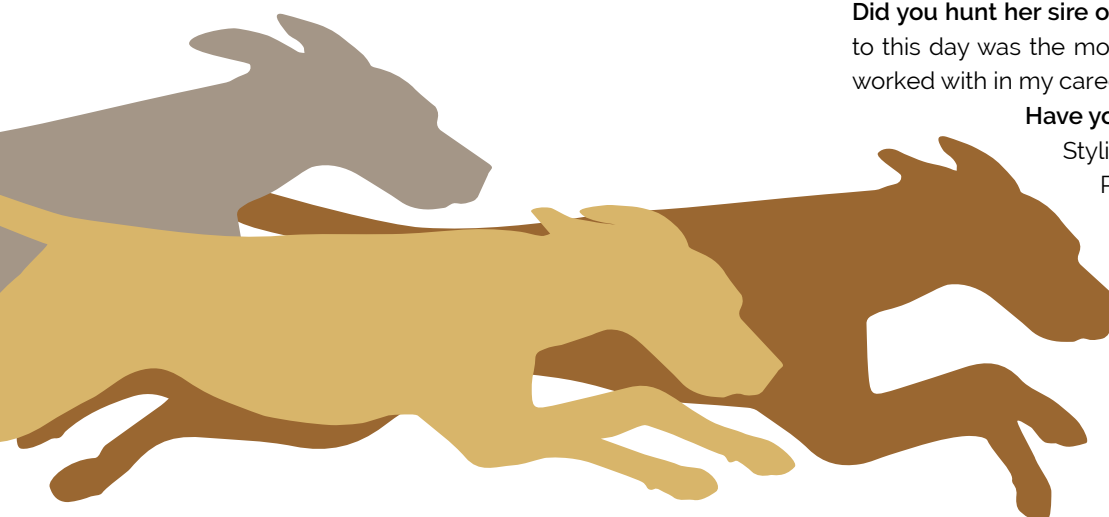
Did you hunt her sire or dam? I hunted her dam, Beatrix, who to this day was the most talented and genuine hound I have worked with in my career.

Have you bred to this hound?

Stylish has had 2 litters by Middleburg Pilgrim; bred to same dog hound twice due to outstanding progeny.

Is there any siblings hunting?

Stylish was 1 of 12 in her litter and some of them remained at Deep Run Hunt while other littermates ended up at Warrenton, Blue Ridge, Rose Tree-Blue Mountain, and Genesee Valley. Many went on to be bred and have litters.



Has this hound attended any hound shows or performance trials? Stylish has participated in the Virginia Hound Show.

"She's a hound which I often rely on and look to for information throughout a hunting day."

~ Richard Roberts



How long have you been with this pack?

I've been hunting these hounds for four seasons.

What do you look for in a pack of hounds?

Steadiness and biddability

Who is your hound choice?

Bull Run Potus'21, dog hound

What age was this hound when it first started to impress you?

What did it do to impress you?

I actually started hunting Potus the end of 20/21 season. I was instantly impressed with how steady he was especially for being so young.

What trait makes this hound stand out on a day's hunt?

You can always count on Potus to get something going on a tricky scenting day. If the other hounds are struggling on a windy day Potus is a life saver. His nose and determination set him apart from the pack.

"I was instantly impressed with how steady he was especially for being so young." ~ Tim Michel

Does this hound have a different personality in kennels than out hunting?

Potus is a goofball in the kennel. You would think he was someone's house pet the way he acts! His stern is always wagging, going up to every stranger for a pet or head rub.

Have you bred to this hound? I haven't bred Potus yet but I definitely will in the future. His bloodlines are so proven, you can't go wrong.

Did you also hunt his sire and or dam?

I don't have the sire. I had the dam. I have hunted both, they are solid hard packing hounds.

Does this hound have any siblings? Yes, Pocket and Postman are in my pack and are both great hounds.

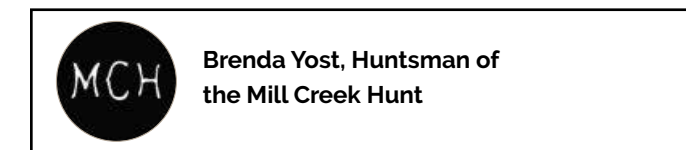
What quality has this hound brought to your pack?

Great drive, which is important to me.

Who bred the hound? I did, here at Bull Run.

Has this hound been to a hound show or performance trial?

Yes, he won the Entered Crossbred class (under 35 couple) at Virginia Hound Show in 2022. He also placed 4th overall at the Belle Meade performance trial.



How long have you hunted this pack?

I have hunted hounds for the Mill Creek Hunt Club since 1995. I look for a hard-working hound that is biddable, one that wants to work well with the pack. We have tight country divided by busy roads so a fast, independent hound will not work well.

What is the name of the hound you chose?

Mill Creek Golding 2010, a dog hound

What age was this hound when it first started to impress you?

Golding was a busy hound right from the start. Often frustrating to the staff but effective in getting game moving. He was confident and steady enough that I took him to the Moingona Hound Trial during his second season. During the trial while the pack was trailing a line, Golding made a sharp turn away from the group but when no other hound followed, he turned back to the pack which had lost the line. The pack swung back to recover the line which they did directly where Golding had turned off. I was impressed that he turned off from the pack and believed if he had more experience he would have continued and helped the pack recover the line sooner. Golding was a hound that never stopped working but was quick to respond to staff and easy to handle in the pack.

What trait makes this hound stand out on a day's hunt?

Golding worked hard all day, never giving up and pushed deep in the cover. One day when the pack was running a coyote, the pack checked at a creek. The hounds were looking along the creek with little luck when I noticed Golding on top of a tree that had fallen across the creek, opening as he trailed the line along the log and leading the pack back to the chase on the other side of the creek.

currently hunting and a new 2-week-old litter that go back to Goldings littermate Gorgeous.

Did you hunt its dam and sire?

Goldings sire and dam were both bred and hunted at Mill Creek.

What is did this hound bring to the pack?

He brought drive and voice without speed.

Who bred the hound?

Golding was bred by me at Mill Creek

Has this hound attended any hound shows or performance trials?

I took Golding to the Moingona Performance Trial in 2012 and 2013, Belle Meade Performance Trial 2014 where he earned Huntsman's Choice and Champion Hound, and Belle Meade Performance Trial 2015 where he defended his title and finished Champion Hound. ❏

Watch out for the MFHA monthly e-newsletter, when we feature Kennel Corner, currently running a series on huntsman's choice of Stallion Hounds.

"Golding was a busy hound right from the start."

-Brenda Yost

Did this hound have a different temperament in kennels compared to out hunting?

Golding had a great personality and was charismatic in kennels and out hunting.

Have you bred to this hound? Does it have any progeny currently hunting?

I did breed to Golding twice and while both litters produced good hounds, I did not breed to them. I do have hounds

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MISSION

The Masters of Foxhounds Association of North America's mission is to promote, preserve and protect the sport of mounted hunting with hounds.

VISION

The Masters of Foxhounds Association of North America welcomes a diverse and growing membership of foxhunters and supporters of all ages while fostering relationships and partnerships with likeminded organizations and the community. Emphasis is placed on animal health and habitat conservation for the betterment of the sport. The MFHA promotes, preserves, and protects the sport of mounted hunting through a tradition of high standards and education to empower its members.

Join the MFHA today and be part of our mission to promote, preserve and protect.

Our memberships offer something for everyone - individuals, families, your favorite dog or field hunter and opportunities for businesses to show their support.



Foxhunt Mongolia

Riding to Eagles in the Land of the Eternal Blue Sky

Story and Photos by Amy Engle



My journey to Mongolia started with an unlikely question asked via Facebook Messenger: "Hey, my friend Mary Williams from Grand Canyon Hounds is looking for someone to go on a foxhunting trip to Mongolia and write a story about it. Are you interested?" There are times in life when you know to jump in with both feet. "Hell yes," I replied. "Where do I sign up?"

Over the next many months, I fielded questions from friends and had plenty myself: "You're going where? Why? To foxhunt? Where is Mongolia, exactly?" It's okay, I get it. This is a niche trip. You do not need to be a foxhunter to sign up, but you do need to be able to ride hard, fast and for days at a time (100+ miles in a week of riding), and be okay traveling to a remote place with (gasp) little-to-no cellular data or Wi-Fi. It's not for everyone. Months after that initial message and lots of question to Mary later, I was off on a west-bound plane, first to Seattle, then to Korea, and finally on to Ulaanbaatar. It's far. Really, really far.

After a few days exploring UB (as it is known), Mary and I meet up with our travel companions—two New York-area foxhunters, one member from the hunt I belong(ed) to in Santa Fe (whom I had never met), and an ex-hunter from Kansas City. We are about as dissimilar a collection of individuals as you could get, but we all share one commonality: a love for foxhunting and a willingness to travel far afield to experience it in a new light. The next day we pack up and head to Bayan-Ölgii, the westernmost aimag (province) in Mongolia and the home of the Kazakh eagle hunters who will be our hosts and guides for the next leg of this once-in-a-lifetime adventure: seven days of hunting with eagles, followed by two full days at the Golden Eagle Festival to cap off our journey.

To the land of the Eternal Blue Sky

Descending the jet bridge in Ölgii, I feel like I am in a James Bond film. The airport is a tiny, Soviet-era building on the outskirts of a mid-sized town full of crumbling cinderblock and skinny street cows. Out front we meet our guide, Dauit, and load our bags into two burley, Russian Furgon vans, compact cab over engine vans which bear a striking resemblance to a loaf of bread, and look more off-road capable than most modern SUVs. Dauit is compact and handsome—when he's not taking groups of Americans to ride with the Kazakh Eagle Hunters, most of his guiding work involves mountaineering, mountain biking and fishing. His eyes sparkle with genuine interest and kindness. I like him immediately.

We are finally on the extremely bumpy road to our first ger camp, and the excitement is palpable. This is what we've come

for—the expansive valley views, the distant, glaciated peaks of the Altai Mountains, pop music from the radio fading to static as we drive further into a barren landscape dotted with herds of cashmere goats, sheep, cattle, and, of course, horses. About 45 minutes into our drive, we spot a man in traditional Mongolian dress astride a tiny grey, herding a rag-tag group of horses along at a swift pace. "I wonder if those are our horses," said Mary. And indeed they were.

Much is made about the size of Mongolian horses. Yes, they're small. No, they're not ponies. Mongolians find the categorization offensive, and besides, it's inaccurate. Although, height-wise they are technically ponies (most are between 12 and 15 hands), they are one of the oldest breeds of horse in the world, and, as such, hail from a time when equines were not bred to be taller and stouter for battle and then later for show rings and racetracks. And don't let their small stature fool you. These are the most badass equines you could ever have the pleasure of riding.

As our horses run the last ten or so miles to camp, we carry on in our vans across the steppe, crisscrossing feeder creeks of the mighty Khovd river, and marveling at the bright white slopes of Tsast Uul (literally "snow-covered peak" in Mongolian) beginning to take on hues of pink and orange in the fading autumn light. At last we see a handful of gers appear in the distance: our first camp.

It is difficult to describe the utter vastness of the Mongolian steppe. If you've ever been to Montana, you may have an inkling of the experience, but the scale is so much bigger that it seems unfair to even draw a comparison. The landscape is limitless. The mountains in the distance could be hours or days away. I find it hard to calibrate my eye to the openness, even though I live in one of the largest high desert valleys in the world.

Here we are introduced to our camp staff: Medine and Isalau, our cooks, and Nurka, our driver and all-around helper. Shoman, our first eagle hunter of the trip, arrives soon after with our horses. Shoman is 24-years-old, and shy. His father, Bottei, is a renowned and well-decorated hunter and race horse breeder, having won or placed highly numerous times in both the Golden Eagle Festival, as well as smaller festivals in Sagsai and elsewhere around the region. We are set to ride first with Shoman and his young eagle, and then later in the trip with his father and the 7-year-old eagle that he has been competing and hunting with successfully for the past many years.



Although there is little doubt that eagle hunting, especially during festivals and trips like this which take place before the real hunting season (and very cold weather) begins, are designed to entertain tourists, foxhunting in Mongolia still serves a very real purpose. First, of course, is the income hunters can bring in by participating in festivals or tour trips. Second, there are the beautiful fur hats, coats and other garments made from fox and hare pelts that can be worn during the cold winter or sold. And finally, there is the meat from the foxes themselves, which is vital in keeping the eagles well-fed and willing to continue to hold up their end of the partnership.

We are giddy and exhausted, and we spend the evening reveling in the pink wash of sunset and the ambient tones of the freestone creek layered softly behind the meditative notes of horses cropping grass and the distant bleating of goats. After our first homecooked meal of the trip, we waste no time in settling into our cozy gers, pre-warmed and generously appointed with cozy linens and vividly colored decorative panels called tuzkeez ("wall hanging" in Kazakh) lining the walls. Despite being anxious to finally put a foot in the stirrup tomorrow, sleep comes easily. There is a peacefulness here unlike I have ever experienced. I sink deep into my down bag and blankets thinking about rainbow horses galloping through the shallow water of freestone streams. Tomorrow will be a very good day.

We're not in Virginia anymore.

In the morning we meet our horses. They are a mixed group—two somewhat dumpy-looking sorrels, three taller bays and a petite grey. We all have one or two in mind, but Dauit and Shoman have somehow sized us up already and are certain they know which mounts will be best suited to each of us. I get one of the dumpy little sorrels, and Mary gets the tiny grey Shoman used to herd the horses to us the day before.

In Mongolia horses are not named, but rather described by their physical characteristics and any other identifying marks. Considered livestock, they may be an honored and central component of Mongolian culture, but they are still animals that exist to serve—as transportation, as sport, and yes, food. Mares are milked to produce the infamous airag (fermented mare's milk—an alcoholic "wine"), and geldings are used for work until they are no longer able, at which point they usually end up on the dinner table.

But we are a group of Westerners and horse lovers, and it makes us uncomfortable to think of our pets, even our temporary ones, ending up as food. And, let's face it, we like to name everything. So each of our Mongolian mounts receives a name: Gustav, Frankie, Freddy, and Arturo/Rudy. Mary names

her little grey Lamb Chop, and I name my sorrel Bilbo (a.k.a. Bill). I hope he will be reasonably well-behaved and fast. The opportunity to do some flat-out racing was billed as one of the highlights of the trip, and truth be told, I don't like to lose. He doesn't look fast. But as we all know, looks can be deceiving.

We watch as Shoman and Dauit saddle the horses with a curious jumble of Mongolian and English tack, most of which has been imported by trip organizers over the years to save foreigners from having to negotiate Mongolian saddles—a narrow wooden tree with high pommel and cantle, padded minimally with leather and occasionally cloth, and very short stirrups. Never in my life have I been so glad to see an ancient Wintec. Before mounting up, we are given the basic speech that applies to all Mongolian horses—they are broke but not tame. Do not approach from behind. Do not try to pick up their feet. Do not expect them to behave like your horses at home.

This is all a bit hard to take in, especially as turnout-obsessed foxhunters. I can tell by looking around that we all desperately want to groom these feral-looking creatures. But we do as we are told, accept our preselected mounts, and climb aboard with ample help from our guides, who seem suspicious that any of us know the first thing about riding, despite signing up for a trip billed as a "gallop flat out with the eagle hunters" adventure.

This first day in the saddle is designed as a "get to know your horse" day, a trail ride into Tsambagarev National Park where we will adjust our tack, acclimate to the terrain, and learn the cues our horses are used to and how to get them to respond to our foreign riding styles. We spend the day making a big loop around the base of the mountains, stopping for lunch near a herding camp and climbing high into the foothills to check out a Golden Eagle nesting site where a friend of Shoman's captured a fledgling (or *eyas* in falconry terminology) just last year.

There are three methods for acquiring eagles for hunting: one, purchase a started bird the same way you might buy a green broke horse; two, rob the nest; and three, capture a young, but mature bird after it has already learned to hunt in the wild. For Shoman and Botei, this third method is preferred, as they believe that an eagle learns to hunt best from its parents, not from its human captors. I am curious about the actual method for taming such a strong, wild bird after it has been caught, but as it turns out, the fundamental principles are much the same as for any type of animal training: building trust and positive reinforcement (in the form of meat).

In addition to serving as an eagle education prerequisite, this first day of riding teaches me everything I need to know about my horse. He is one of the most surefooted, catty, and overall impressive equines I have ever ridden, and that is coming from a lifelong horsewoman who has ridden everything from

Grand Prix dressage horses to BLM mustangs. I do not say this lightly: Mongolian horses are spectacular. They will gallop up and down the most intense terrain without ever putting a foot wrong or questioning whether you really want to go that quickly. I would gladly take a dozen home to use on our ranch.

And as it turns out, my tiny red horse is also fast. Surprisingly so. But not nearly as fast as Mary's even tinier grey, who came from behind to beat all the other horses in our first race of the trip. Bill came in second. As I said, looks can be deceiving.

The hunt is on.

After our evening meal, we hear the drone of a four-cycle engine and emerge from the kitchen ger just in time to witness two Kazakh men and an eagle arriving on motorcycle. One of the two men is Botei, father of Shoman, our host and eagle hunter for the second leg of this trip. But for this evening he has simply come to welcome the American guests, drink a little vodka, and deliver his son's eagle for our hunt the next day.

Shoman's eagle, named Tirnek, is young—just two years old—and chatters constantly. She spends most of our ride the next day flying in circles on her short tether, flapping her massive wings in Shoman's face and generally making a commotion. She's still learning the ropes and seems intent upon proving that while she may be Shoman's eagle, she still calls the shots, much like the quintessential "red mare," a term that seemed to fit her best, despite her rich brown and gold plumage. And oh boy, is she ever in charge.

During breakfast on the third morning at camp, we notice that Tirnek, who had not stopped squawking since her arrival, is uncharacteristically quiet. We ask Dauit who informs us, in a somewhat embarrassed, hushed tone, that she got into the bag of meat Shoman had for her meals and rewards and





helped herself to everything. She is fat, happy, and—finally—quiet. For our second day of hunting, our huntsman strike out with a much calmer eagle perched on his arm.

Each day the intensity of the riding has increased significantly, and today is no exception. The hunt I belonged to when I lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico (Caza Ladron) is known for its challenging fixtures—volcanic high desert plateaus full of crumbling clay arroyos and cholla cactus forests. And the terrain around my home, a ranch in southern Colorado, is equally imposing. I am no stranger to steep slopes covered in deadfall, or chasing rogue cattle straight up, or down, rocky mountainsides. But the riding in Mongolia puts all of this to shame. In true hunt fashion, there is no stopping when the hounds, or in this case the eagle, strike. You follow the huntsman, and you try not to think too hard about where you're asking your horse to go. It is equal parts challenging and thrilling, just the way I like it.

By the second day of actual hunting (and our third day in the saddle), we are starting to get the hang of hunting to eagles instead of hounds. With hounds, the work of locating the game falls to the noses of the pack. But with eagles, the burden is shared more equally. The overall method involves climbing to the top of the rockiest outcroppings and ridgelines while the

eagle rests, hooded and waiting, on the arm of its hunter. Another rider, who we dub the whipper-in, takes his horse on a path around the midline of the mountain and attempts to scare up game by any means necessary: shouting, slapping a rope or whip on the side of the saddle, etc. The hunter will also shout and make noise, but his job is mainly to keep an eagle eye out for anything that moves.

I am surprised to learn that it is the hunter, not the eagle, who does most of the scouting. Occasionally, Shoman and later Botei would remove the hood from the eagle and let her scan for movement, but for the most part, it is the human, not the eagle, whose job it is to catch a flash of fur, identify the quarry—generally fox or Pallas's cat (a small wild cat native to the Asian steppes), though some hunters do chase hare as well—and then remove the hood, release the eagle and give chase.

On this day we discover the flip side to the old adage "a hungry wolf hunts hardest." Shoman's extremely well-fed eagle, full and feeling lazy after her evening of indulgence, has absolutely zero interest in hunting. Despite being out all day, covering 14 miles of tough, rocky terrain and viewing four beautiful foxes in full winter fur, Shoman's young eagle simply will not hunt. And why would she? Eagles don't hunt for sport. It's only humans who seem to enjoy the thrill of the chase.

Winter is coming.

After the meat bag fiasco, Shoman must have placed a call for backup, because when we arrive at our second base camp of the trip, we have a new eagle waiting for us—Ana, Botei's six-year-old veteran hunter, an experienced animal with a solid understanding of her job, and a long list of festival titles to prove it. And yes, it is also a she—all eagles used to hunt in Mongolia are female because they are bigger and hunt harder than their male counterparts. The women hunters on the trip all agreed that this is as it should be.

From our second camp we explore the craggy mountains to the east side of the valley and encounter the most challenging terrain of our trip, along with some excellent hunting. Botei's eagle got on one fox, but it escapes down a narrow canyon. She tries to give chase as best she can, but the canyon is too narrow and too steep, and she eventually loses elevation and has to land. To witness this close call, I had to ask Bill to push himself to the limit: galloping flat-out up and down steep slopes covered in loose rock. In situations like this you learn to stay balanced and trust your horse. By this point in the trip, I trust Bill explicitly, and I am willing to put my life in his hooves to keep up with Shoman and witness what we came here to see.

En route to our third camp at Botei's autumn place on the banks of the mighty Khovd river, we finally have success: two foxes and two kills. By now the weather has shifted. The sky is overcast, winds howl constantly, and there is moisture in the air. Perhaps the impending arrival of winter added a notch of urgency to the Ana's prey drive, or perhaps we just got lucky, but on this perfect fall day at the tail end of September, we are treated to the ultimate thrill of watching an eagle soar confidently from the arm of her hunter, swooping down to account for her quarry instantly in the grip of her massive talons.

The timing of our most successful day is perfect; the next day the weather turns even colder and the wind, which had been constant but tolerable, picks up and became near gale-force, making the hunting nearly impossible and the riding unpleasant. While hounds struggle to find scent in strong winds, eagles struggle to fly. Despite spotting a few more fox over the next few days, Ana is unable to give chase—each time she launches from Botei's arm, the wind would catch her massive wingspan and send her in the opposite direction of her quarry.

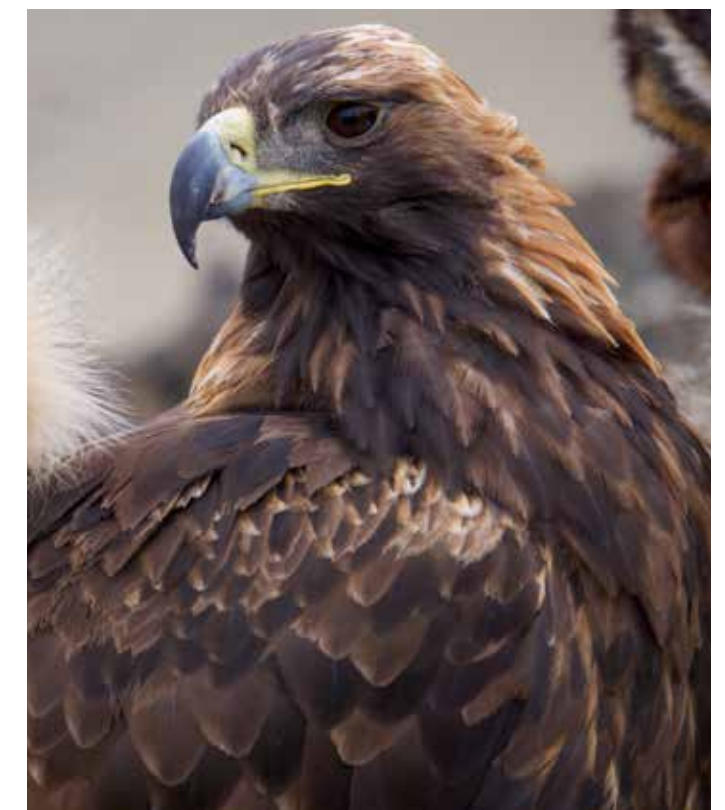
The home place.

With little hope of successful hunting, we spend our final day of riding following the Khovd upstream to Botei's winter place, where we ride amongst his herd of 60 horses, fat from a

summer of grazing and enjoying the last sweet grasses of fall. By now there is a light dusting of snow on the ground, and the poplar trees along the banks of the river are alight with gold, red and orange. Sea buckthorn, a deciduous shrub with bright orange berries, grows thick along the riverbanks, and we stop now and then to harvest handfuls of the tangy, slightly sweet berries.

Riding through the forest, breathing in the musky sweetness of leaf litter and familiar layout of shelters and corrals designed for tending animals, I cannot help but feel at home. In the past few weeks, I have developed a deep appreciation for the Kazakh people, their rich culture, and the way they balance a traditional lifestyle with the realities of the modern world.

For our last evening at Botei's, we celebrate with a traditional Kazakh meal and plenty of vodka. Botei serves us a beautiful tray of meat and boiled vegetables alongside the usual accompaniments—dairy in a dozen different formats, traditional breads, candies, cookies, jams and spreads. It is truly a feast. Botei raises a glass to thank us for coming and staying with him, for experiencing his way of life and joining him at his table. And we, in turn, give thanks to him, to Shoman, to Dauit and to the entire crew, for the incredible hospitality, the warmth they have shown us all over the last ten days, and for an experience none of us will soon forget. Tomorrow we would move one last time, to our final camp, and trade our horses for vans as we journey to our last stop: The Golden Eagle Festival.





Golden Eagle Festival

Imagine a county fair or rodeo where spectators and competitors dress head to toe in furs and ride horses everywhere. Add vendors selling their wares on brightly colored tuzkeez, dozens of gers with streams of coal smoke pouring out their chimneys, adventure vans, SUVs and motorbikes of every shape and size, and you will have a picture of the Golden Eagle Festival. A brilliant tapestry of colorful chaos in the form of horses, humans, handicrafts and eagles, something almost too alive, too frenetic, too perfect to be real.

The Golden Eagle Festival is a neo-traditional event, meaning that it was created for outsiders like us, and is a major tourism draw for Bayan-Ölgii as well as for Mongolia as a whole. The events and awards are designed more for tourists and spectacle, rather than to showcase the very best hunter/eagle teams. Eagles that hunt best are usually taken from the wild as mature birds, like Shoman and Botei's eagles, and are not likely to perform well in new situations or in front of noisy crowds. Birds taken from the nest as eyasses, however, imprint on people. These birds might not be the best hunters, but they excel in festivals where they are less likely than their wilder counterparts to be put off by the noise and the throngs of people.

But the crowds are no match for Botei's training abilities and the bond he shares with his eagle. He scores well in both the Eagle Calling and Fox Catching games (a lure-based event where the hunter drags the pelt of a rabbit or fox, and the eagle must fly down from the mountain top to "catch" it, comparable perhaps to drag hunting). Eagle/hunter teams are scored based on time and distance—the playing field is marked by three circles, each one slightly farther away and smaller than the one before. A handler rides to the top of the nearby mountain with the eagle, and then as each hunter takes the field, releases their eagle as the hunter either calls or drags an animal for the eagle to catch. This sounds much simpler than it is; many eagles simply fly off, to be tracked down later by their hunters, and many more circle forever, never actually committing to landing anywhere at all, before the judges call time. But Botei's eagle wastes no time. She knows her job, and nothing can distract her from doing what is asked of her.

At the close of the Festival, we bid farewell to our hosts, staff and guides, and return to Ölgii, for a final night of feasting, a local performance of Kazakh music and culture, and a well-deserved hot shower and sauna. Although we leave before the awards ceremony, we learn that Botei had taken second overall, a fine performance for our new friend. We raise one last toast in his honor. ❖

A Good Cause

This foxhunting adventure is not just a great time, it also supports a very worthy cause: the Flagstaff International Relief Effort (FIRE), a non-profit, non-government organization (NGO), based in Flagstaff, Arizona that works to improve health and education outcomes in Mongolia and Nepal. In addition to being a fundraiser for the organization, FIRE's foxhunting trips also provide a dozen or more Mongolians with well-paying jobs. Because of this, a portion of the trip cost is tax-deductible.

Fast Facts:

Dates: September 18 – October 3, 2023

Trip Duration: 15 days

Group Size: 6-8 guests per group

Riding Time: 7 days riding, 6 hours per day

Skill Level: Advanced Riders

Learn More & Apply: www.fireprojects.org/fox-mongolia





Photo Credit: Warner Granada

THE FUTURE OF CONSERVATION

By Karin Winegar

Loss of habitat is the acknowledged greatest threat to American hunting. Lately, some dynamic juniors are showing special aptitude for forming landowner and legislator alliances and taking action critical to preserve that habitat.

"I am only 15, but I have some strong opinions about land and wildlife preservation," said Mia Valdez of Richmond, Virginia, a junior member of Keswick Hunt Club, who nominated her hunt successfully for the annual MFHA Foundation's Hunting Habitat Conservation Award. "We only have one planet, one Earth, we don't have the right to waste it, and we want to see upcoming generations enjoy things we do."

The purpose of the Hunting Habitat Conservation Award is to recognize those hunts who have made significant and enduring contributions toward the preservation of habitat and biodiversity of its flora and fauna. The MFHA Foundation recognizes hunts who work to preserve land and habitat for the future of the sport. The 2023 award, consisting of a trophy plate and \$5,000, was presented at the General Members' Meeting in New York on January 27. The award has been donated annually since 1997 by C. Martin Wood III and Daphne Flowers Wood, MFH, Live Oak Hounds and Chair of the Conservation Award Committee. A full list of previous winners can be found on the MFHA website.

Valdez cited Keswick's fruitful efforts to preserve land via conservation easements, which began in the 1960s and focused on The Green Springs District in Louisa, Virginia. The area was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1974 and is home to 50 original eighteenth and nineteenth century historic properties. It is comprised of 14,000 acres, half of which have been placed under conservation easement. In addition to crediting Keswick's long history of conservation efforts in that region, she also noted the alliances and activities that added 28 juniors to Keswick membership in the past three years.



Photo by Sheri Buston

Presentation of MFHA Hunting Habitat Conservation Award to Keswick Hunt at annual member meeting, January 2023. Pictured: Murdoch Matheson, MFH, Keswick Hunt; Mia Valdez, Keswick Hunt; and Daphne Wood, MFH, Live Oak Hounds.

"Riding through this countryside we all love, I meet people with different opinions, and it pushed me further to submit for this award," Valdez said. "If we want to keep our sport alive, juniors are the only way to continue this sport."

Valdez began hunting on an Arabian-Welsh pony named Kismet and is now an eventer as well. She is a Mountain Skyline Pony Club member and was preparing to take her D ratings when she spoke on the urgency of land conservation during the sixth annual "Junior Fox Hunting Day" at the state capitol in February. Mike Pearson, lobbyist for equine activities, set up appointments with delegates and senators for a group of juniors.

"I try to find creative ways to make the legislature aware of how hunting with hounds is part of our rural heritage and tradition," said Pearson, owner of Hume Stables in Hume, Virginia. "Young people are the best way. They present themselves in a positive fashion with respect for property rights and activities with animals. It's a good move to honor the Department of Wildlife Resources for its efforts, too. Now legislators ask me 'when are the young people bringing the hounds?'"

"I'm excited that Mia will intern with me next session," he added. "She will learn that being a lobbyist means developing relationships of trust as well as understanding the legislative process. This makes me feel more confident about the future of hunting."

Hundreds of thousands of acres are being preserved through the efforts of hunts in states across the country.

We are real believers in this—it is so important!" said Daphne Wood. "Second to founding this pack 50 years ago with my husband, my life's work has been land preservation. Each year we worry we're not going to find a worthy award recipient like those in the past. Then often you get a submission that knocks it out of the park, and Keswick did."

"This has been an effort over decades, a lot of those who made what has happened happen are gone, and the amount of land they have protected is impressive," said Wood.

Keswick members hold positions with the Virginia Outdoor Foundation, the Albemarle Easement Authority Committee and the Piedmont Environmental Council, she noted. Rachel Jones, a Keswick member on the Board of Supervisors of the Green Springs District, helped prevent development of a large parcel of Green Springs land.

These are not just 10-year covenants, but permanent protection, she explained. "That is the only solution as land gets passed down from generation to generation and people move away or don't want to spend the money to preserve their farms." That's the reason easements are the best solution, Wood believes. They provide the assurance "that what you worked so hard for will be preserved."

"A lot of it is how many rights you as owner preserve, which depends on what organization is holding your easement," said Wood. Depending on the size of the property you can partition it, build on it, farm it, cut timber, hunt on it—this varies with every land trust. In addition, donating an easement can provide tax deductions."

Organizations like the Land Trust Alliance, the Piedmont Council, and many non-governmental organizations are working hard and spending money lobbying in Washington, D.C. to educate and communicate the urgency of the situation. "An extremely important part of the solution are the juniors: as in hunting, they are our future. So to have their juniors go to Richmond and talk to the legislature about conservation was extraordinary."

For more information about the Hunting Habitat Conservation Award or to learn more about how to apply for the 2024 award, please visit the MFHA website. ❖



Photo by Tisa Della-Volpe

2022-23 MFHA PERFORMANCE TRIALS

By Crystal Brumme Pickett, ex-MFH

Beyond the contest of the hounds versus scent, foxhunting is not inherently a competitive sport. But mankind is inherently competitive. My horse is faster than your horse. My dog hunts better than your dog. Thus, the MFHA Performance Trials!

The current performance trial format was originally conceived as a way to celebrate the centennial of the Masters of Foxhounds Association – but they were so much fun that they stuck. Twenty-six years later, the judging and the scoring system have evolved, but the premise remains the same: performance trials are an attempt to measure whether individual hounds have certain traits universally considered desirable in a good hunting foxhound, which in turn are considered necessary in a good pack of foxhounds.

Performance trials are not – nor are they meant to be – a definitive declaration of the best pack of hounds in the country. The best pack is the pack of hounds that have been bred and developed to hunt your territory, your quarry, with your huntsman and staff. Within your framework, your pack would have developed a structure that utilizes all the different strengths, talents and notes of each individual hound – like a symphony orchestra.

Performance trials are, however, a great way to learn more about individual hounds, and are a great place “to shop” for breeding prospects to improve your own pack. Plus, they are fun! Performance trials harken back to the days before structured clubs, back to when farmers kept a few hounds, and they would come together after the crops came down, throw the hounds in together and off they’d go! These were not the fine-tuned packs like we have today. Perhaps ironically, they were a bit more like today’s performance trials, in which hounds must quickly adapt and fall together as a pack in order to have good sport. Off we go! Also like ‘unting of ol’, today’s performance trials bring together old and new friends for sport, adventure, and camaraderie!

With today’s performance trials, we take select hounds from a variety of fine-tuned packs and join them together. Not their huntsman, not their staff, not their territory, not their established pack structure – and not their buddies. This somewhat contrived (or throwback) situation allows desirable individual traits

to now stand out in starker relief. These more high-performing hounds from the same pack at any given performance trial yields that weekend’s “top pack.”

Judges are looking for four traits universally considered critical in any good hunting hound: hunting (the persistent search for game); trailing (the act of actually following the game at distance while giving voice while simultaneously driving towards the quarry); full cry (this is the actual chase; this is what gets our blood up, raises the hair on our arms, makes our soul tremble and brings tears to our eyes); marking (accounting for the hunted quarry, causing it to go to ground).

In terms of judging, hounds are marked in two phases: primary and secondary. “The whole scoring system is designed to give every hound every point he or she deserves,” explains Epp Wilson, MFH of Belle Meade Hunt, host of the longest running performance trial. “The difference between primary marking scores and secondary marking scores are an example of that. The first wave of hounds deserves more points. They are the ones who did the most to accomplish their mission. The second wave of hounds deserves credit as well, but not as much as the first wave. So they get points, but less than the primary marking points.”

Hounds are also awarded exemplary points when showing extreme talent, but likewise can be penalized for inappropriate behavior on one day, no matter how stellar the behavior on the other day.

Six clubs have embraced the opportunity to host performance trials this past season. The top packs from each are eligible to compete in the Performance Trial classes in the MFHA-sanctioned hound shows.

“Performance trials attract many of the keenest and passionate fox hunters from all around,” notes Wilson. “They are good for our clubs and good for our great sport. If you have never experienced one, we invite you to attend. You will be well-fed and well-watered. And you can’t help but have fun!”



J. Robert Gordon Sandhill
Field Trial Grounds
Photo by Mark Jump

WYE ISLAND NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AREA

Owned by the State of Maryland Department of Natural Resources, Wye Island provides a unique and some would say ideal venue for a performance trial. 2,400+ acres with plenty of cover, loaded with game and surrounded by water, there is no worry that quarry or hounds will cross a road. The flat open vistas provide good viewing for foot and car followers and for all fields without a lot of effort.

Fun fact: there were no red fox in the "new world" until brought from England to Maryland in the mid-1700s by farmers tired of hunting the native grey fox. So it is fitting that the red fox was the quarry for the first All Maryland Performance Trials, March 4-5, 2023. Photos by Tisa Della-Volpe

Also, as the name implies, the footing is sandy, draining quickly after the rains (but beware of any spots that are bright green). Drainage ditches abound, providing great cover for the quarry but challenging sight lines for judges, followers - and photographers!

Plus, the amenities! A spacious, comfortable clubhouse, plenty of bird dog kennels and a 60-stall barn. Fun fact: judges for pointing dog trials are mounted.

Photo by Karen Kandra



J. ROBERT GORDON SANDHILL FIELD TRIAL GROUNDS

It is unusual, to say the least, that two different foxhound performance trials (the Moore County Hounds Performance Trial and the Sedgefield Performance Trial) would be held at the same fixture - unusual, until one understands the appeal.

The J. Robert Gordon Sandhill Field Trial Grounds near Hoffman, NC, is a state-managed property consisting of 9,000 acres, mostly pine barrens with miles of sand roads and firelanes, making it easy for mounted and unmounted followers to keep up with hounds.

As the facility is primarily for bird dogs (stocked annually with 3,000 quail), the quarry of choice for foxhunters are not frequently hunted, considered by some to be the premiere grounds on the East Coast. Well-fed fox and coyote hunted but a few times per year provides a unique and ideal location for a foxhound performance trial!



Photo by Dr. Allison Howell

BLUEGRASS PERFORMANCE TRIALS

Long Run Woodford Hounds aptly named their February 2023 event the Bluegrass Performance Trials. Located just outside of Louisville, LRWH's Simpsonville kennels are in Shelby County, 25 square miles of rolling pasture with open, wooded creeks offering spectacular views of the hounds in full cry. The country is paneled with coops and post-and-rail.

BELLE MEADE TRIAL

Golfers may flock to Augusta, but foxhunters flee a bit more west to Thomson, Georgia, drawn to Belle Meade's mild winters and 3,500 contiguous acres flowing forth from their kennels, allowing the pack to hunt undisturbed covert multiple days each week without ever having to trailer to another fixture. Large timber tracts rim the perimeter of rolling fescue and mature pines "dashed with streams and ponds," and paneled with coops and post-and-rail. While the Sedgefield Trials might be the largest (12 packs, 60 hounds, over 155 mounted participants), the Belle Meade Trial is the oldest, at 22 years of running of the current generation of performance trials. The January 2023 trials were the second largest, with entries from 10 packs for a total of 50 entered hounds. Both coyote and fox are acceptable quarry.

Bluegrass Performance Trials
Photo by Dr. Allison Howell



THE VARIED TERRITORY OF PERFORMANCE TRIALS

If you enjoy hunting different territory with different packs of hounds - and you enjoy traveling with your horse and socializing with other foxhunters, consider road trips next season!

ANDREWS BRIDGE

The Andrews Bridge Performance Trial on October 6 & 7, 2022 hosted eight packs, 40 hounds. Andrews Bridge's home country of 2000+ acres of rolling hills in Pennsylvania's Lancaster and Chester Counties yields not only fine views of the hunted quarry but also the horse-drawn buggies so iconic in Amish Country. And while followers at other trials might be in trucks, jeeps and tractor drawn wagons, here they follow stylishly in carriages, enjoying the autumnal splendor against a backdrop of woodlands and cultivated lands. The quarry here is exclusively red fox and the territory offers plenty of paneling.



Wye Island Natural Resources
Management Area
Photo by Tisa Della-Volpe



Chris Moll, frequent judge or judge president, helped to develop the current, multi-faceted scoring system which heavily relies on time stamping. Photo by Tisa Della-Volpe

Epp Wilson, MFH, Belle Meade Hunt, one of the driving forces behind contemporary performance trials and frequent judge president at events. Photo by Allison Howell Images

Fred Berry, Jr. MFH and Huntsman (retired) Sedgefield Hunt, runs and judges performance trials around the country. Photo by Tisa Della-Volpe

“It is always interesting to see how quickly these hounds from so many different packs learn to honor and trust each other.”

JUDGING

Modern field judging includes tracking collars, GPS mapping and digital recorders - preferably with time stamping, but if not, judges must have a reliable watch and not only record their observations but the time of each observation. Often while at a full gallop. Judges must be fluent in the 15 pages of rules regarding scoring. They need to stay close enough to the hounds to be able to observe their numbers, but not so close as to foil the line or interfere with the hounds (or huntsman).

With the exception of exemplary points, performance trial judging is not subjective. The judge is merely recording which hound exhibited one of the desirable traits or behaviors at any given moment. However, hounds may also awarded exemplary points if, in the opinion of the judges, the hound illustrates extreme talent. Likewise, a hound can be penalized for inappropriate behavior on one day, no matter how stellar the behavior on the other day.

Catch Them Doing Something Right

We always like to start by drawing coverts with open fields on at least three sides. We want the best chance possible to see what they are running. We want to catch them doing something right. But, if they are doing something wrong, we want to nip that in the bud.

It is always interesting to see how quickly these hounds from so many different packs learn to honor and trust each other. Quality recognizes quality in nearly every walk of life. And so it is with hounds.

Synchronizing Watches

A hunting score is more valuable later in the day, and certainly more valuable later in the second day of a performance trial event... let's say that on the other side of a covert is a judge seeing the exact same event, by recording the time, the computer program is able to sort out and award points based on that moment in time, to make sure a hound is not double scored or neglect a score-worthy moment by one of the other hounds.



Photo by Mark Jump

What It Means

Hunting means trying. Hunting means, "Boss, I don't smell anything yet, but I'm gonna keep sniffing around and I'm going to try to make something happen."

Trailing means that hound has found a line, and he starts to speak. He opens. It's a joyful, wonderful, ecstatic sound for all huntsmen - tells the huntsman he has found the quarry. Not a rabbit. Not a deer. Not a squirrel. It is a sound that is true, deep and definitive. Boom. Found the quarry.

Good hounds will honor the hound speaking, will go towards that hound, look for the line, pick it up, the line develops, the confidence grows, the tempo increases, and they get the quarry moving, and all the voices come together into full cry. Full cry is full bore on, running, screaming with lungs on fire.

For More Information

For more information about past or future performance trials, visit MFHA.com

To learn more about the Apprentice Program for Judges, contact Steven Thomas, MFH & Honorary Huntsman of Fort Leavenworth Hunt at flhdoc@gmail.com or 913-636-3778.



Photo by Mark Jump

Hound Shows 2023



Photo Credits: (1) New England Hound Show (PC Suddenly Still Photography) (2) Bryn Mawr Hound Show (PC Karen Kandra) (3) Southern Hound Show (PC Keri Fulford) (4) Virginia Foxhound Show (PC Karen Kandra) (5) Virginia Foxhound Show (PC Liz Callar) (6) Photo courtesy of Central Hound Show (7) Virginia Foxhound Show (PC Joanne Maisano) (8) Bryn Mawr Hound Show (PC Karen Kandra) (9) Bull Run Hunt Schooling Show (PC Clay Chase) (10) Central Hound Show (PC Clay Chase) (11) Bryn Mawr Hound Show (PC Karen Kandra) (12) Maryland Puppy Show, (PC Karen Kandra) (13) Southern Hound Show (PC Keri Fulford) (14) New England Hound Show (PC Suddenly Still Photography) (15) Bryn Mawr Hound Show (PC Karen Kandra) (16) Bryn Mawr Hound Show (PC Karen Kandra) (17) Photo courtesy of Southwest Hound Show (18) New England Hound Show (PC Suddenly Still Photography) (19) Bryn Mawr Hound Show (PC Karen Kandra)

THANK YOU TO COMPETITORS FROM THE MFHA FHC COMMITTEE

Dear Competitors,

On behalf of our entire team, thank you for the effort you made to participate in the Masters of Foxhounds Association Field Hunter Championship Finals.

Many of you travelled a long distance to compete and hopefully all of you felt, even if you did not come away with a ribbon, that the experience was an accomplishment. Not only did you qualify to participate, but all of you completed the phases – a 100% success rate.

By competing you supported our sport and celebrated the special relationship we have with our horses. You put the spotlight on our equine partners who deserve that recognition of their athleticism and noble mindset. Their physical ability and character are key to a successful and enjoyable day's hunting.



Photo by Joanne Maisano

The Finals drew quite a crowd of spectators, people interested in foxhunting and the tradition it represents. The effort that you made to compete was a gift to the sport we all love and we are grateful.

We thoroughly enjoyed having you with us. You were excellent ambassadors for foxhunting. Please keep up the good work and pass the word!

Happy Hunting!

With all best wishes,

The MFHA Field Hunter Championship Committee
Penny Denegre, Chair
Viviane Warren
Tracey Cover
Kay Redditt



Photo by Joanne Maisano

RESULTS OF THE 2023 MFHA FIELD HUNTER CHAMPIONSHIP FINALS

Name of Mount / Owner	Name of Rider	Placing	District Qualifier/Hunt Affiliation
HUNTER DIVISION			
Hero-Owner/Rider	Jazz Johnson	Grand Champion	New York-New Jersey/Essex Fox Hounds
Lancelot – Owner/Rider	Dr. Rae Stone	Reserve Grand Champion	Northern Virginia-West Virginia/Orange County Hounds
Bram-Virginia McNeil	Rebekah Robinson	3rd Place	Pennsylvania/Radnor Hunt
Super Nova-Owner/Rider	Adair Frayser	4th Place	Virginia/Deep Run Hunt
Bang the Table-Owner/Rider	Anna Dunlap	5th Place	Midsouth/Iroquois Hunt
Pepino-Owner/Rider	Kori Pickett	6th Place	Maryland-Delaware/Goshen Hounds
HILLTOP DIVISION			
Princeton – Owner/Rider	Cathy Gomez	Grand Champion	Carolinas /Goodwin Hounds
Gotta Question-Carroll Bowman	Anna Sterling	Reserve Grand Champion	Central/Rocky Fork Headley Hunt
Marchwood-Owner/Rider	Kate Poole	3rd Place	New York-New Jersey/Essex Fox Hounds
Zimarron-Owner/Rider	Jennifer Donaldson	4th Place	New York-New Jersey/Monmouth County Hunt
The Candy Man Can-Tess Fleischli	Abri Fleischli	5th Place	Great Plains/Bridlespur Hunt
Privateer's Buck-Owner/Rider	Beth Dombrowsky	6th Place	Northern Virginia-West Virginia/Middleburg Hunt
BEST TURNED OUT			
Privateer's Buck-Owner/Rider	Beth Dombrowsky	Adult Champion	Northern Virginia-West Virginia/Middleburg Hunt
Princeton – Owner/Rider	Cathy Gomez	Adult Reserve Champion	Carolinas /Goodwin Hounds
Gotta Question-Carroll Bowman	Anna Sterling	Junior Champion	Central/Rocky Fork Headley Hunt
JUNIOR CHAMPION			
Gotta Question-Carroll Bowman	Anna Sterling	Grand Champion	Central/Rocky Fork Headley Hunt
The Candy Man Can-Tess Fleischli	Abri Fleischli	Reserve Grand Champion	Great Plains/Bridlespur Hunt



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