

Newer members did not have the privilege to know **Thomas C. Reck, MFH**, a long-time member and Master of the Mission Valley Hunt. Tom was an ardent foxhunter who knew and loved hounds, horses, foxes, and foxhunters. Never was born a more courtly, well-mannered and polite man, soft-spoken (though sometimes firm), always well-behaved, well-turned out and well-dressed – a 19<sup>th</sup> century gentleman, made the more remarkable because of the 20<sup>th</sup> century times in which he lived. Tom Reck epitomized a dedication to hunting and all of its traditions.

As the times become more informal, one might tend to lose sight of the protocols and practices, the history and tradition which have marked this sport for four hundred years. Over the next several months, we will share a number of short articles about these protocols, practices, and traditions. In the memory of Tom Reck, these articles will help to remind us all of the traditions which bind us to foxhunters throughout the centuries. Members should find enjoyment and have fun in continuing and preserving these traditions.

The preservation of the centuries-old foxhunting spirit depends, more than anything else, on the continued observance of the rules of etiquette that distinguish this activity from simply riding casually around through the countryside with a bunch of dogs. It is to the Spirit of Tom Reck that these articles are dedicated.

**1. A Suitable Hunt Horse.** The most important quality in a hunter is safety. One's horse should go quietly in a group, stop without a fight, stand patiently at checks, wait its turn at jumps, and jump without refusals. The surest way to avoid a kicking incident is to allow sufficient distance between horses to assure contact will not be made if a horse kicks out. A horse known to exhibit kicking behavior should be kept to the rear, and a red ribbon tied into his tail.

Always point your horse's head, and not his rear end, toward hounds.

***Let it be repeated that one is seldom kicked if he is not riding too closely to the horse in front. The Golden Rule: Leave space unto others as you would have them leave space unto you.***

At the jumps, wait for the rider in front to clear the obstacle. Do not charge the jumps. If your horse refuses, please move to the back of the line.

**2. Proper Horse Turnout.** One who cares about foxhunting shows the world that he cares by taking the time to do things right. That includes making sure that your horse is clean, mane and tail clear of debris and properly trimmed, hooves shiny, and shoes intact. The horse should arrive at the meet clean, neatly trimmed, and properly tacked up. As cold weather approaches, the horse's shoes should be either fitted with studs or treated with borium to assure adequate traction on slick surfaces.

At opening hunt, another tradition is for riders to braid their horses' manes and tails, as another sign of respect to tradition. Clean horses, tack and attire also show respect for the Masters, other members, and the landowners on whose land we are privileged to ride.

**3. Hunt Protocol.** Arrive at the fixture sufficiently early to be completely saddled, bridled and mounted well before the stated hour. It is always recommended to leave time for unexpected events, when you or someone else might need help. Repeated tardiness simply shows a lack of consideration for the hunt as a whole. If you do arrive late and the hunt has begun, do not ride into the country to find the field. Wait at the meet and, if the hunt comes back that way, you may join in. Alternatively, you may (quietly) seek out the field if you remain on hard surface roads and thereby avoid fouling a scent line.

If you are on time, you are late. Arrive early. Anticipate issues which might arise on the roads or with tack and other equipment.

**4. Upon Arrival.** It is proper to greet the masters before the start of the hunt (“Good Morning, Master”) and to announce your presence to the field secretary. If you have brought a guest, the secretary must be informed, the guest introduced, and the capping fee paid.

- **Order In The Field.** Members privileged to wear hunt colors are entitled to ride in front of the field behind the master. Generally, riders should go in order of seniority, always giving way to the senior members who have earned their place through years of service. Riders without colors should ride toward the rear, while looking for opportunities to open and close gates, and otherwise to be of help to the master.

- **No Tailgating.** Do not ride closely behind the rider in front. If your horse cannot be held back, take him to the back of the field, or retire and return next time with a more demanding bit. Leave a space at the jumps, and do not charge the jump.

- **Refusals.** If a horse refuses a jump, the rider should move to the back of the line before making another attempt.

**5. Be Quiet During Hunting.** Talking in the field should be avoided at most times. The correct prosecution of a hunt depends on good communication between hounds, huntsman, and field master. Chatting among the field can distract the huntsman and masters, thus detracting from the integrity of the sport. Attention should be paid to the focus of the day’s activity—i.e., hound work—and socializing should be kept to a minimum. Talking or other noises from the field can

distract the hounds from their work, make them raise their heads, and perhaps lose the scent. Hounds may confuse your voice with that of the huntsman, and best efforts could be lost. A valuable part of hunting is watching hounds work, which cannot be enjoyed while talking or making other distracting noises.

- **Withdrawing Early.** Everyone should come out with the intention of remaining for the duration of the hunt, no matter how long the day lasts. However, situations do arise—lost shoe, lame horse, rider injury, illness, etc.—that necessitate heading back in while the hunt is still in progress. When such a situation occurs, word should be passed to the master or field secretary so that he or she is aware of the departure. The withdrawing member should also ask the master or secretary for directions back to the meet, even if he or she knows the territory, to avoid interfering with the work of hounds. Care should be taken not to ride home through areas where the hounds are likely to work. Where possible, the return route should follow hard-surfaced roads.

**6. Proper Rider Turnout.** Proper attire varies according to three main variables — gender, colors, and cub hunting versus formal season. The proper attire for hunting was developed over many years, mostly for utilitarian purposes, and to ensure a pleasing, uniform look to the field.

Approved safety helmets are required at any MVH event where riding is involved.

**Cub hunting.** Hacking jackets are worn by both ladies and gentlemen, preferably wool tweed or a linen material and in an earth tone color such as shades of brown or green. Subtle plaids, checks, herringbones and houndstooth patterns are correct. Jackets should have three buttons, all of which are kept buttoned during the hunt. The jacket should be tailored specifically for riding with a single vent.

Shirts and blouses should be a pastel color and muted striping or subtle patterns are allowed. Both men and women may simply wear a dress shirt and tie, either bow tie or long tie. Ladies may wear ratcatcher collars, either plain or with a stock tie. If a stock tie is worn, it should be colored and/or patterned but not a plain white or ecru formal stock. Gentlemen may also choose to wear a hunting shirt and stock tie.

Breeches may be beige, buff, khaki, rust, or canary. White breeches and dark colors, such as forest green or navy blue, are not correct.

Brown field boots are the most appropriate footwear for cub hunting, followed by black dress boots (without brown leather or black patent leather tops). Paddock boots with gaiters or any variation thereof are never proper in the hunt field for adult riders during either cub hunting or formal season.

**7. Proper Tack.** Hunting tack is not fancy. Bridles should be flat without embellished stitching. A standing martingale and breastplate are appropriate if needed, but neither is required. The bit should assure sufficient braking power. Some horses stop nicely in a snaffle, even when the hunting action has the adrenaline pumping, but many need something stronger. Relying on the circling technique to stop a horse creates a distraction and, more significantly, poses a danger to others.

Only fitted white cloth or natural wool (sheepskin) saddle pads should be used. Square pads or sheets, colors and decorative elements such as initials are incorrect. (the only exception is a blue pad with yellow piping, with the Mission Valley Hunt seal.) The saddle should be brown leather (English seat style) Synthetic materials or black leather saddles are not suitable. Bit's, D's and hardware should all be nickel or stainless steel.

**8. RSVP.** From the French *répondez s'il vous plaît*, meaning “reply please” or “please respond”. While this is not technically a matter of foxhunting protocol (and it should not be a necessary article for this column), the topic deserves review. When a host or hostess is planning an event, it is important to know how many will be attending, so that sufficient food and drink can be obtained – and so that these items are not wasted because the host made an incorrect guess as to how many guests would appear for the event. Emily Post (“Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics and at Home”) and Amy Vanderbilt (“The Complete Book of Etiquette”) point out that an RSVP is not optional, and that the failure to respond is “rude,” “inconsiderate,” and a sign of “bad manners.”

While society has become more casual, the need to respond is still as important as it ever was. So, show **R**espect for **S**omeone who has **V**olunteered to **P**rovide a meal or party for your diversion, by hitting “reply” and sending an RSVP for every MVH event. You can bet Tom Reck always did.

**9. Members Privileged to Wear Colors.** At their discretion, the Masters may award “colors” to a member who has, for several years, shown a facility and love of foxhunting, and has worked for the benefit, maintenance and operation of the hunt club. This means that the rider is privileged to wear the hunt colors on the collar, and to wear the hunt buttons, on the coat. Mission Valley Hunt colors are navy blue, with canary piping. Members of the hunts across the Country may be identified by the unique registered colors associated with each hunt. Mission Valley hunt buttons (brass for men, black bone for women) bear the registered seal of the club, a fox head surrounded by a stirrup leather with buckle, on which the words “Mission Valley Hunt” are inscribed.

The wearing of the colors is a privilege. It means that the member has earned the right to ride at the front of the field. Riders without colors should ride behind members privileged to wear colors. Riders without colors should open gates, move obstructions in the trail, and otherwise pitch in to help, both on hunt days and at any other time when assistance is needed. That is the best way to earn the privilege to wear colors. Riders who no longer belong to a hunt are no longer privileged to wear the colors of that hunt.

**10. Headwear.** ASTM-approved safety helmets are required at any MVH event where riding is involved. Ribbons at the back of the helmet should point up. (Masters and professional staff signify their positions by turning the ribbons to point down.)

**11. Coat.** Gentlemen privileged to wear colors may wear a scarlet coat with the hunt colors and hunt buttons. Ladies privileged to wear colors may wear a black coat or shadbelly, with the hunt colors and hunt buttons. Riders not privileged to wear colors must wear a black hunt coat. Members should wear three buttons; masters wear four buttons; the huntsman wears five buttons. All buttons should remain buttoned throughout the hunt.

**12. Breeches.** Beige or buff is proper with a black hunting jacket. White should be worn with scarlet or a gentlemen's black frock coat.

**13. Neckwear:** The only appropriate neckwear during formal season is a white or cream stock tie. The stock tie originated with the 17th century cravat, worn by gentlemen as part of their daily attire. The tie should be properly tied (the subject of another *Spirit of Tom Reck* article) and secured with a plain (i.e., no emblems, ornaments, initials, etc.) gold pin. The pin should be placed horizontally; only professional staff may place the pin vertically. It is also recommended that the ends of the stock tie be secured to the shirt or blouse with safety pins to assure the ends of the tie do not work out from beneath the coat and flap loosely in the wind. The stock tie and pin have their uses, as well, as they may be used to bandage an injured horse, or as a bandage or sling for a rider.

**14. The Stock Tie.** During formal hunt season, riders are required to wear a white stock tie. Neck ties, ratcatchers, or plain shirts are not appropriate. Colors, stripes, and patterns are not appropriate. The stock tie is used in the hunt field as it keeps the rider's neck warm where the hunt coat is open. The stock tie became a part of hunting tradition because it is functional, as it can be used as a bandage (for horse or rider) or a sling. In an emergency, stock ties are used as stirrup leathers or even reins, when unexpected breaks occur in the field.

For a step-by-step picture explanation of how to tie a stock tie properly, see <http://www.horsecountrylife.com/catalog/huntingstock.html> or <http://www.horse-rider-etc.com/foxhunt/tiestocktie.html>

Even better, watch how the stock tie is tied on *Horse Girl TV* on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKnGnyF7LwY>

Remember to fasten both loose ends of the stock tie to your shirt so that it does not fly free and out of your coat when hunting.

## 15. Proper Rider Turnout

**Vests:** Appropriate vests are canary or tattersall (in various color combinations). Canary is the most formal color.

**Boots:** Black dress boots are required at all times. Gentlemen privileged to wear colors should wear brown leather tops on their boots, while ladies privileged to wear colors should wear black patent leather tops on their boots. Black garters are worn when wearing a black jacket. White garters are worn when wearing white breeches. Laced field boots are not correct during the formal hunt season.

**16. Proper Rider Turnout- Formal Hunting (Miscellaneous).** Having covered proper horse turnout and tack, as well as proper rider attire, there are several other areas to discuss.

- **Hair Nets.** Ladies' hair should be worn in a hairnet or snood, tucked into the hunt cap.
- **Jewelry.** Only a minimal amount of jewelry, if any, should be worn in the hunt field and what is worn should be plain. Dangling earrings or loose bracelets that could catch on tree branches or other objects should not be worn.
- **Perfume/Cologne.** Fragrances, particularly heavy applications thereof, should not be used on a hunting day. This applies to both ladies and gentlemen. For the same reason, smoking is prohibited in the field, as any scents can throw off the hounds at their work.

## 17. Proper Rider Turnout – Formal Hunting (Miscellaneous).

- **Flasks.** Ladies may carry a pocket flask in a coat pocket or in a leather sandwich case secured to the D-rings along the back right side of the saddle. Gentlemen may carry either a pocket flask or a bayonet-style flask in a holster case affixed to the front of the saddle. Gentlemen may carry a sandwich box affixed to the back right side of the saddle.
- **Rain Gear.** Only the Masters can give permission to wear rain gear. A proper hunt coat is tightly woven and will seldom allow the rider to get wet. One should not assume that rain coats will be permitted simply because it is raining or it looks like it might rain. If a rain coat is permitted, it should be of a McIntosh or similar style, preferably in a tan, green or brown color, and should not have loose pieces that flap in the wind. All other elements of attire remain the same as on any other hunting day.
- **Hot and Cold Weather.** On very rare occasions, the masters will announce permission to dispense with vests and/or coats in events of extreme heat, or to wear overcoats in addition to or in lieu of formal coats in events of extreme cold. Without the announcement of such permission, it is to be assumed that formal and complete attire is to be worn.

Respectfully submitted by Nick Badgerow, 2012

