



## FOXHUNTING IN MARYLAND

by Jean du Pont McConnell

A sport that has come down through the ages, one in which a man and his horse and his hounds can find pleasure in being together, is enjoyed throughout Maryland and neighboring states in the form of foxhunting.

The earliest pack kept exclusively for hunting the fox was in England in 1690. Although the first pack was not organized in America until 1776, hounds were brought to Maryland in 1650 by Robert Brooke.

Foxhunting is divided into three categories:

First are the farmer-hunters, who use a single, slow, deep-voiced hound—their object being to shoot the fox in its runway.

Second are the groups that hunt their hounds in small combined packs. Better known as “night hunters,” their pleasure is found in the speed and good “cry” (yelp) of the individual hounds. From this division of hunters come the Fox Hound Trial Associations.

Third are the groups that hunt for the sport of the chase, patterned after the English style of foxhunting. Here, the customs of management and dress add to the color and enjoyment of a day's hunting.

Once a pack is established, the “master” (who is in charge of the sport) may apply to the Masters of Foxhounds for formal recognition. A prescribed territory is assigned to each hunt, and its boundaries are looked upon as

sacred. An identification of colors to be worn on the collar of the hunt coat and a button with the seal of the hunt are most coveted by hunt members.

Maryland has ten recognized hunts: the oldest established in 1892 and the youngest in 1971, with four applications pending. The hounds vary in bloodlines. English hounds were imported in the beginning; later, they were crossed with other breeds, establishing the Crossbred hound. Further breeding developed the American hound, which includes several registered breeds. Each has different traits; some have speed; some are slower; some run easily as a pack; and others are individuals, following their own abilities, thereby making excellent trial hounds.

In choosing a particular breed of hound, a master pays close attention to the one best suited to his terrain and the type of hunt he wishes to conduct. Hence, on the Eastern Shore we see the Penn-Marydel (Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware) hound, which was developed with an excellent nose, a good cry, and the instinct to pack well. It is well adapted to rough, swampy, wooded land where it is impractical to follow very fast. The more open western area allows for speed. Trig and Walker hounds excel there. The remaining Maryland areas have representative packs of English, Crossbred,

Birdsong, Maryland July hounds, as well as the “Red Bone” hound from Virginia.

The “quarry” for the most part is the red fox, imported to Chestertown, Maryland, in 1730, and known as “straight-necked” because of the long, straight distance it will run. The gray fox, native to America, is called “ring-necked” because it runs in circles. A good hunt depends on the best of “scents,” for unless hounds can follow the “line” (track) of the fox there will be a “blank day,” when hounds fail to find a fox. A good pack will “account” for the fox and “mark him to the ground” if he has “gone to earth” (the den). A fox may also be “worried” (torn to bits).

The hunting horn is the signal between masters and staff and hounds and riders. The American horn, a natural cowhorn, has a melodious tone. The English, of brass and copper, is sharp and clear.

The “hunter” is not a breed, but any horse that has the emotional stability and jumping ability, combined with physical substance and strength, to carry an adult for a day's hunting. This “day” may last four or five hours, covering as much as thirty or forty miles, with countless jumps. For the most part, the terrain is uneven, with streams, ditches, steep hills, bogs, and rocky areas. The fitness of both horse and rider is essential.