

Hark to the Line



Annette Dusenbury

OAK RIDGE FOX HUNT CLUB
MAY 2006

HUNTSMAN

Dr. Rita Mae Brown, MFH

JOINT MASTER

David W. Wheeler

PROFESSIONAL WHIPPER-IN

Dana Flaherty

HONORARY WHIPPER-IN

Dr. Mary T. O'Brien

MASTER'S REPORT

February, the longest month of the year despite what the calendar says, alternated between 50°F and 60°F days and those in the 20s with stiff winds. Hunting reflected this.

Three hunts are worth mentioning to illustrate conditions. Our joint meet with Reedy Creek on Saturday, February 11, was cancelled when snow began falling Friday night, continuing all of Saturday. Some places received more than twelve inches and as we're right by the mountains we usually get a bonus.

Sunday the clouds cleared by ten and the sky shone a brilliant robin's egg blue. However, no one could have driven a trailer over Route 635 and Routes 151 and 250 were still in the process of being cleared. However, Emily Schilling had left Flash here early Friday and then couldn't take him home as the storm intensified. Not one to wimp out, she pushed her trusty Outback (a good advertisement for Subaru) through Route 635, through the farm roads which hadn't been plowed at all. Onward she drove and arrived at the barn, tacked up Flash. Dana, Judy Pastore and myself, in correct turnout, mind you, hopped on our horses, rode to the kennels. John and Toot were home since we weren't officially hunting. Hounds were drawn and cast from the kennels.

According to the books, we shouldn't have been able to do squat. Well, we hit a line five seconds out right on the way to the cabin. Emily stuck with me and Judy rode with Dana. As Emily and I reached the trail from the cabin to the back farm road all the young pines blocked our way as they bent double under the weight of the snows. Well, hounds were singing; we blasted through. The pines snapped back up

dumping the show in every possible place, down your neck, in your boots, you name it. We laughed. Who cares if you're cold and wet in places when the music is that good?

They lost their fox down in the ravine but cast themselves, snow spraying up with every step. In some places a little snow swimming provided aerobic tests for the pack.

They shot up over the farm road, crossed into Poet's Corner, found the line again. Tucker opened and I waited as I am not always sure about him. He can become excited and open when he should be more prudent. However, Chaser seconded him. They ran a big loop in Poet's Corner, coming right back up the road. None of us saw the fox cross nor did we see fresh tracks. The minute they reached the road they began to fret. They'd lost the line again.

Fret? We were ecstatic. We figured February 12 would be a pretty trail ride. Pretty it was. The cold air sparkled. Each breath tingled. Toes and fingers tingled, too, although that sensation wasn't as pleasant as breathing.

Despite a major snow, the ground underneath wasn't frozen. In some spots our horses labored. Hounds kept working, working and picked up another line on Mrs. Woods' high meadow. We galloped, skidded, trotted and galloped again until we came right back to where the hounds threw up on the original line. By now, the exertions in the heavy going told on our horses. Fritz, a tough boy, was shaking. We'd been out for an hour and forty-five minutes, some of which pushed us hard. We slowly walked the pack back to the kennels and Fritz thought maybe he had rested enough. He wanted an-

other go. A gust of wind blew snow so thickly that you couldn't see the hand in front of your face. The hounds gaily played through it and when we came out on the other side, all were white.

Despite our mounts' recuperative powers and the hounds' keenness, we prudently put them back in the kennels with lots of rewards. Fed a bit more, happy, they curled up under their heat lamps and were sound asleep before we closed the door.

The horses followed suit, each glad to be rubbed down, blanketed, given fresh water and good hay. We, of course, were exhausted but exhilarated.

One remembers the purity and joy of such a day forever.

Well, from the sublime to the ridiculous is but a step. In this case, a few days. We looked forward to hosting our friends from Colonial on Sunday the 19th. The Oak Ridge people were all high anyway as we'd hunted the Snell Farm for the first time on Friday, the 17th, had a view plus the fixture is fabulous, simply fabulous.

And who doesn't want to hunt Cherry Hill? I'd intended to draw the north side but the cattle, many young, had bunched up on our coops. No point in getting the babies and mommas running about to push them off the coops. Hounds, myself and Michele Schultz, MFH and huntsman for Colonial, drew toward Niece Anne's. We hit in the back meadow but I, being stupid, assumed it was that nasty coyote that lives back there so I called them off. I later learned it wasn't coyote but a red fox that Roy and Anne occasionally see.

Okay, one down and I screwed up. But the hounds forgave me and found another line which teased and teased

but didn't come to much. We wound up on the high meadow next to Hardy Lincoln's woods and they worked and worked and finally got something going again. Over Hardy's first ridge they worked, in a line, speaking but not great music, really. Then they snaked back and it looked as though they'd return to us. But, no, half kept on toward us, half turned back. I'd love to tell you I know what happened but I don't. The hounds that turned back opened in a roar, slipping over the ridge and then we heard nothing. The wind made it exasperating. Well, I blew. I waited. I blew some more. Then we passed through the little red gate, straight down. I thought given the terrain and the wind they might be on the gray that often runs that way and we couldn't hear. To cut this story short, they came back hours later and did not smell of skunk or fox but did have battle scars. Whatever they tangled with over there has a good pair of fangs.

The hounds who turned away from that line found a fox who ran to Lem's hiding place.

But the day was frustrating. The breakfast wasn't. We also had visitors from New York, the Valley Crest Farm Crew (they really need to move to Virginia) and the humans at the outdoor repast certainly gave voice.

So when February 24th rolled around, the fixture being the Dairy Barns, the winds making one think of "The Wizard of Oz," I and the folks who turned out (smartly, too) expected nothing. We figured we'd be cold, cut to ribbons by the wind, for walk-around. The hounds take their cues from the huntsman so if I drag my nether regions out there so will they. Despite what my mind told me my heart is always the same: "Let's push

out a fox." You've got to try. With a little whoop and holler we rode down to the first thin line of trees, a trickle of creek in there. Feathering. That was encouraging because it's sheltered by the wind, but what really woke me up was Wiz, Chaser, Lulu and then the others came out of the covert onto the grass. Heightened interest. The wind was playing havoc but they kept those noses to the ground and when the line would get blown away they'd fan out like a scrimmage line and someone would find again. Chaser spoke but no one opened, not even Crochet right beside him. They were working so hard.

Progress was slow but there was progress. We crossed the main drive, trotting into the fields where we park during Opening Hunt. Wiz ran a big loop toward the house, then reversed, dipping down in the covert there. The rest followed her exact path but still no one opened. We moved to the thicker brambles and bushes up from the stone house, an old granary, down on the road. All hounds moved through the vines, brambles dropping into the deep ditch there. I moved along with them.

Bingo. Out popped the biggest, fattest, healthiest, red dog fox you'd ever care to view. But hounds, in the covert, hadn't cleared it yet. The wind, at that moment, chose to blow harder.

I pointed to Silver Investor's head in the direction of the fox's progress and called hounds to come out. Two couple did—Priscilla, Crockett, Lefty, and Barley—but the others were loathe to be lifted forward when scent was so good. Finally, they emerged and I put them where I thought the line had moved given the wind. They fanned out, found it, crossing the main drive back from whence we'd come. They'd lose it, find it, lose it, find it all across the large front fields, finally reaching

the original covert drawn.

He ran through the covert, down the railroad embankment and across the tracks. There are two ways across the tracks, one being the bridge and the other by the old railroad station. At this point both were equidistant and far. Figuring he'd eventually turn back to his den, I chose the crossing closest to his den, which was the station crossing and that was about a half-mile from his den. We galloped over, turned right, galloped through the millet fields, and, of course, he turned back over the tracks.

A train, down by Arrington, was on its way. After all these years of hunting Oak Ridge, I've got train telepathy. I can hear that hum on the tracks when they're at either Arrington or Shipman and it scares the bejesus out of me.

I stood on a hill by the old cattle chute and blew hounds to me. Half came but the other half turned on the big red. Once I heard them come up out of the deep defile, I stopped blowing because everyone could hear the train now.

The hounds sat with me and waited. On the other side of the tracks, Dana, John, Teresa, Karen Osborne and Ryan Schilling watched the red hurry up out of the track defile, duck into the originally drawn covert, and move partly through it. Hounds were on and giving tongue even the train couldn't drown out. The fox, no fool, came up out of the covert, crossed the high fields and stopped upon reaching the fields right in front of the main house. He amused himself by watching hounds cast themselves each time they'd lose his scent thanks to the ever present wind. Once they reached the field in which he watched them he calmly trotted across the driveway and walked back to his den. After his exercise he must

have slept soundly.

After the tracks stopped reverberating, hounds and fields crossed the trestle bridge. You may ask, why wait? Well, if I can hear the reverberation your horse will hear it even more clearly and it can be unsettling to some. Better to wait a few extra minutes and then cross that high bridge.

John had picked up the hounds once the big red slipped back into his den. Half the pack jumped out of the party wagon and we headed straight behind St. Mary's Chapel. Once there, the earthwork, which was new to us, had taken out the wind break over the ditch. All those trees were bulldozed over. That drives foxes out, obviously, but I had hoped maybe they'd stay close so the hounds put in at the corner of the woods. But our day was done. We never did reach the dairy barns, thanks to the big red who gave us quite a display on a day which should have been a little yip here and a little yip there.

Don't you wish you knew what the fox knows?

Rita Mae Brown

STAFF HORSES

for loan or keeps

All hunt clubs must maintain fit horses for staff. Some clubs pay for staff horses via dues or special gifts from members. Others, like Oak Ridge, breed and train our own as well as receive donations.

Over the last three years Mrs. Mary O'Brien, M.D., has given the club and the master three young Thoroughbreds to properly bring along. Cindy Chandler has given Dana a young Thoroughbred, too. Without their incredible generosity we would not

be able to show you good sport. To be well prepared a staff member needs at least three suitable mounts, and four is preferable.

Staff horses must do much more than field horses. They often are alone. The huntman's horse must go first over any obstacle, so boldness is critical. All staff horses work harder because they go through all manner of terrain, whereas the field master may wisely deem that path unsuitable.

For the first time since Oak Ridge's re-birth we must loan or give away older horses to make room for the young ones we have been training. We bring our staff horses along slowly, exposing them to as many variables as we can. (So far no pigs, goats or llamas, but they've seen everything else.)

Below is a list of horses. If any of you would be kind enough to give them a home, we would request that you sign a paper promising never to sell the animal. If for some reason you are unable to provide care, we will take them back and look for another home. These horses have served you well even if you were unaware of their contribution. Please help them and the club, now.

Colophon

16.1h, 9-year-old Thoroughbred. Blind in one eye, broken withers which are healed. He can be trail ridden but will shy on the blind side, so, handsome though he is, you might want to remember that and make him a companion to one of your horses.

Crown Prince

16h, 12-year-old Thoroughbred. A beautiful gray, he whipped-in for years. He has growths on his neck that were removed once but after a period of three years have returned.

They aren't fatal, but we can't afford another operation only to have them eventually reappear. When he was in service he could be a hot tamale, but the horse could jump the moon. Again, he could be trail ridden but he, too, wouldn't mind being a lawn ornament.

Gunsmoke: For loan

16.1h, 13-year-old, light gray Thoroughbred. This fellow has been quiet on trails. He is a loaner, not a give-away, but he can be loaned out for one season to see if you get along with him. He's pretty easy, kind and fast. If something scares him he usually turns to stone and you have to baby him out of it.

Easy Able

16.2h, 14-year-old, bay Thoroughbred. This is another loaner. He raced, retired reasonably sounds but needs management. He is incredibly sweet and has been given time to recover from the track. The only reason we are allowing Easy Able to be a loaner is he's not a staff horse and we think he would really like being special in someone's barn. Here he was turned out to loaf and recover for two years, then put into light work. He's good on the trails, smart, and learns quickly but he wants someone to fuss over him and we can't do that if he's not staff.

All of these horses have good ground manners, and are easy keepers. If anyone is interested, call Dana at the barn: (540) 456-6156

CHRISTMAS GIFTS

If anyone did not receive a thank you note from me, I apologize. Some gifts were missing cards or identifying tags. You know I am grateful and if it was something to eat, it was devoured within twenty-four hours.

KENNEL PROGRESS

The weather caught everyone off guard this fall. We're hoping that Travis Critzer can start site work once the freezing and thawing stops, which is usually by mid-April. Cross your fingers.

MUSIC TO OUR EARS

the Ashland Bassetts

Those wonderful Ashland Bassetts paid Oak Ridge a visit on Saturday, February 18th. The Ashland staff arrived at noon so our staff could sit with them and compare notes. This turned out to be so interesting that we really wished we'd had more time together but cars filled the little lot around Headquarters in readiness for the hunt.

At two, Mrs. Christopher Reed (Mary), MBH, walked hounds to the level road; swampy area on the east side, drier to the west by the north branch of the Rockfish River and she put hounds in on the east side.

Both Mary and Al Toews, MBH, hunt the hounds. This day Al whipped-in, as did Kathleen King (Mrs. Toews), but she was on her hunter, "Fox." As the hounds covered a big chunk of territory it wasn't long before many envied Kathleen.

The Ashland Basset field masters, Ms. Camilla Moon and Mrs. Diana Dutton astonished us by motoring right along. Who needs a diet? Follow the bassetts. It should be noted no potguts were in evidence.

Miriam Anver, Mary Dobrovir, Frank Edrington, Sherood Johnson and Nancy Palmer whipped-in. Nancy took Emily Schilling with her and Emily declared she dropped three pounds in two hours. We all did.

That wonderful Aggie de la Garza, a basset whipper-in, couldn't make it so we missed her but the other whippers-in would have made Aggie proud. Those people fought through prickier bushes, vines, thorns, muck, swamp, high ground, fences and steep ravines.

After following bassetts, every Oak Ridge member must have gone home and kissed their horse!

Mary's husband, Chris, in splendid turnout, watched the tail end of things and every now and then we'd come up on him. Apart from his sense of humor he evidences a good sense of direction in strange and difficult territory.

The bassetts hunt, by gracious permission of the masters, the fixtures of Warrenton Hunt and Casanova Hunt. That

A GOOD BOOK

Lt. Col. Dennis Foster, ex-MFH, has written "Whippin-In." You can't read this book without being delighted and without learning a lot. Do buy it.

is more open, generous territory than Tea-Time. But even when down in a ravine, the whippers-in and field masters lost none of their aplomb, nor did they appear winded. Impressive.

The field masters took our own Sue Satterfield up with them, which had to be fun for all parties concerned. The field masters knew every hound, as did the whippers-in, which certainly showed what those summer walks and kennel labors accomplished. In fact, many field members could identify hounds. Of course, they are closer to the hounds whereas fox hunters are higher and moving faster. But any fox hunter who spends time in the kennels or walks out hounds will be surprised at how hounds will soon become full-fledged individuals to them. It greatly enriches the hunting experience.

Bassetts possess the second best noses in dogdom. Bloodhounds have the first and foxhounds have the third. To watch these bassetts work is a treasure. For one thing, they are not ponderous but well muscled—lighter than the bench dogs you see at the shows—and full of phenomenal drive. Let me say that again: full of phenomenal drive. And, of course, deep melodious voices, with the exception of one gyp, first-year entry who rather squeaked. She was, however, adorable and keen to get on terms with her quarry.

The pack hunted well together as a pack and got a little bit here and a little bit there but it was a difficult day. It was cold, temperature dropping and still, strangely still. Apart from two cur dogs that joined the pack, no game stirred. I pay great attention to the types of birds, if I don't see them I can identify their call but this Saturday apart from a little flurry of disturbed (and crabby) finches in low bushes, nothing. We didn't see deer tracks, which is highly unusual. We passed numerous fox dens, occupants inside and they didn't even stick their noses out to see what we were doing. When a fox isn't curious, you have to wonder what's afoot? The only tracks we did see were bobcat tracks. Now, that bobcat couldn't have been everywhere that we were. Granted when a forty-pound big boy cruises through, the prey animals will

disappear. Even small predators will get out of his/her way, but again, the silence became unsettling.

As it is mating season for many species, including the bobcat, the bunnies may have decided to sit very tight. We did get one run close to home, the hounds sounded glorious but finally Mary, wisely, picked up and we repaired back to HQ for more chat, food and drink.

We can't wait for Ashland to return and next season let's go up to see them hunt on their turf. You can see more and they are easier to follow.

I bet if we invite ourselves and set a date, Al and Mary will put up with us. Apart from the hunting, the Ashland people are like Oak Ridge people: easy-going, tough, and a lot of fun.

Who could ask for more?



Annette Dusenbury

Dr. Mary O'Brien, Opening Hunt

Hilltopper/²ND Flight Adventures

A few seasons ago, Rita Mae asked me to help out with leading hilltoppers. After recovering from the shock and honor of it, I realized that I had a lot to learn. Fortunately, I had already ridden behind some of the best: Gretchen Robb, Bob Taylor, and my bride, Miz Sue. Nevertheless, when you're "it" for the first time (or even the 50th), you're always looking for new ways to show good sport and get folks home safely.

In fox hunting, the field (1st flight) is expected to go anywhere, cross any terrain, jump any obstacle, go at any speed, do whatever it takes, to keep up with the huntsman. The hilltopper or 2nd flight is there to provide sport to those who are not yet ready for the first "field." This 2nd flight is for people who have green horses, horses who can't or don't jump, riders who are new to fox hunting, riders who don't feel comfortable jumping, and those who want to hunt at a different pace.

As a hilltopper master, there are many factors to consider as he flight forms on the day of the hunt. Who's in the field? What's their experience level? What's the horse's experience level? A brief introduction of new riders to Oak Ridge helps a lot at this point.

If you have a guest, please introduce him or her to the appropriate field master!

As the hunt moves off, the hilltopper master keeps an eye on the field and determines horse and rider capabilities as the hunt progresses. This early evaluation helps the hilltopper master determine how hard that day's field can hunt. Our preference is to "move on" at whatever speed we need to.

In the interest of providing the best sport possible, the hilltopper master will try to stay as close as possible to the field and the huntsman. This provides the field with opportunities to watch the hounds work, hear the huntsman's calls, hear the pack if they hit a line, have a chance at a "view," and, in general, to feel "close" to the hunt.

As the hunt progresses, fences that are jumped by the field often cause the hilltoppers to find a "go-around," usually a gate, but sometimes a long alternate route. Dealing with gates or go-arounds can be slow, so the hilltoppers get separated and can find themselves well behind the field. This is where it gets really interesting!

Once separated, the hilltopper master has to rely upon a combination of several aids: the huntsman's horn, the music of the hounds, the huntsman's tendencies, knowledge of the territory, and footprints. In almost all cases, the hilltoppers catch up and rejoin the hunt. In cases where this doesn't happen, the hilltopper master is either drawn-and-quartered or simply hung in effigy. (I prefer the latter, thanks).

This rejoining often means that the hilltoppers will have to "boogie" (ride like Hell) for a long stretch. This will often elicit yells like "Yee Haw," or worse, from the likes of fellow hilltopper master Pete Osborne. By the way, even if it's a slow hunting day, Pete can entertain you with his quick wit or even a song or two.

What you can expect that your hilltopper/2nd flight master will do:

- Maximize your opportunities to see hounds work and to view the quarry
- Keep you as close as possible to the hounds and the action
- Lead at a level that is doable and safe for the least experienced horse and rider
- Find the safest route to keep you close
- Find the best way to get you across the nasty creek crossings
- Provide as much fun as possible with your clothes on

What you are expected to do as a member of the 1st or 2nd flight field

- Always give way to the hounds – they are the stars of this show
- If you are new or have a new horse, introduce yourself or the horse to the master
- If you have a guest, introduce him/her to the master, then ride with them
- Put ribbons in horse's tail to show a green horse (green) or a kicker (red)
- Green horses and/or green riders should be in the back of the field
- Slower horses should also be at the back of the field
- Keep up (if you can't, tell the master)
- If you have a problem or need to leave the field, let the

master know

- Keep quiet unless you are far removed from the hounds —your chatter can make the hounds raise their heads, preventing them from doing their job
- Continue to observe, ask questions, read, etc. to enhance your understanding of and enjoyment of this sport
- Obviously, we all need to work on improving our riding skills and the skills of our horses to enhance our enjoyment of the hunt

The overall objective is to provide the best sport for everyone on a given hunt. If you are thoughtful and realistic about your horse's capabilities as well as your own, and follow the expectations above, we will all have a good hunt experience and a grand time.

Gretchen, Pete, and I look forward to hunting with you in the 2nd or 3rd flights!

Bob Satterfield

and now...

the dirt sandwiches

by Pete Osborne

Song for the fall on February 26, 2006
to the tune of "Teddy Bears Picnic"

If you ride out in the woods today you're in for a big surprise.
If you're in second flight today you'll wish you were in disguise.
'Cause everyone who rides behind the man in red perched on his
behind will share a laugh and some of the wine he buys them.
Flagrant failure on his mount. The master cannot count
the strands of wire across the trail.
See him launching through the air his turning torso there now find-
ing the ground and stone.
See the flight in disarray. They all cannot display the laughter they
feel inside.
At 12 o'clock they'll dust him off and Chico struts away feeling
smug that he saved the day.

by Lucy Rolston

I fell...oh well...it hurt like _ _ _ _ (heck).

Footnote: Results were 6 broken ribs and darn proud of it.
At least I was going for glory and did not wimp out.

by Kathleen King

...with due apologies to the memory of
William Gilbert, now says of her day Decem-
ber 23, 2005:

I was so proud
To be allowed
To join with you
For hunting too.
But hunting pride
Was soon decried.
Indeed, my pride,
It was denied!
The hounds they spoke.
And I awoke,
The hue of grass
It colored my ---.
To make amends
To my new friends,
I proffer here,
Not one, but two!
By this all know,
I am paid enow!

by Becky Birnbaum

February 24, 2006

...with apologies to Country Joe and the Fish

And it's one, two, three,
What are you bucking for?
Fell off again, but don't give a damn.
Get back on and get on the lam.
And it's five, six, seven,
Hurry up, don't be late.
Well there ain't no time to wonder why.
Whoopee! We're all gonna ride.

and now...

the dirt sandwiches *continued...*

by Bob Satterfield

Double Double

Like the straw stirs the drink, the Staff stirs this brew
So when it falls in, the payment is two
Spare the Staff and spoil the Master
Here comes payment for this double disaster

Double, Double, Bob's in Trouble
Not just once, but Double, Double

Though hunting often, far and wide
Even on many a brand new ride
For 2 seasons, nary a trouble
In one week, suddenly trouble double

Double, Double, Bob's in Trouble
Comes now the Tale of First of Double

The first fall came hard by Rucker's Run
Where many good souls have come undone
At first there was Hope, then there was none
Hope abandoned Bob, then ran on to Flight One

Double, Double, Bob's in Trouble
Comes now the Tale of the Second Double

The second fall came at beautiful Snell
As is his way, the Dutch Lord fell
There's no doubt why he's called Elastic
For sure his legs are made of soft plastic

Double, Double, Bob's in Trouble
Comes now the time to pay for this rubble

Now we end this tale of the Double Double
Made Double in the Doing, Payment doubles for the
Trouble
The Master asks double for staff who fall
So now we pay our debt in front of one and all

Double, Double, Bob now pays off his Trouble
From our caldron rises Bubble, Bubble