

The skirt tends to be longer in length than a traditional riding jacket to assist in keeping the rider warm and dry in inclement weather.

Traditionally women wear navy blue with plain buttons, men wear black. Charcoal gray is also accepted. Members of the field wear frock coats with three buttons and round corners. The huntsman, whippers-in and field masters generally wear scarlet coats, sometimes known as "pinques," with the hunt's colors on their collars. Some women field masters have decided to wear navy blue frock coats with brass buttons. For many years women were not allowed to wear scarlet or brass buttons.

Canary breeches are the traditional color for scarlet and formal coats. Today it is difficult to find this color, often white breeches are substituted.

All staff and any members of the field who wear scarlet coats should also wear black dress boots with tan or brown tops. (Women members who have earned their colors should wear black dress boots with black patent leather tops.)

Buttons and the shape of the front corners on a frock coat inform other riders who the wearer is in the hierarchy of the hunt. This identification system goes back to English military uniforms. A coat with five brass buttons on the front and square corners is the huntsman. Only the huntsman wears this many buttons on the jacket. Whippers-in and field masters wear four brass buttons and square corners on their coats.

Other members of the hunt who are allowed to wear scarlet coats are men who have earned the privilege to wear their hunt's colors and engraved brass buttons. Women members who have earned their hunt's colors wear the colors on the collar of their navy or black coat with engraved black plastic hunt buttons.

The fabric of formal hunting coats is determined by the type and amount of abuse that the jacket will undergo, be it from terrain or hounds and the climate. Traditional fabrics are cavalry twill and Melton wool. Cavalry twill is available in many weights up to 32 ounces, which is very heavy. Fabric is weighed by the yard, there is an average of two and a half to three yards in each riding coat.

Under the formal coat the rider often wears a canary vest. This vest can have brass buttons, plain or engraved. It may have wool front and back or it might have a satin type fabric in the back. This is determined by how warm the rider needs to be when hunting.

Generally a shirt with white cuffs is worn under the vest for formal hunts. A white stock tie is placed on top of this. A four fold stock tie is traditional. This style goes back to the beginning of fox hunting.

Those who either do not want the added bulk, maintenance or feel it is too difficult to tie, wear a version of a shaped stock tie. Unfortunately the shaped ties do not have the extra benefits the four fold offers.

The four fold stock is a piece of white fabric that is ten inches wide and two yards long. In addition to its use as an article of clothing, the stock tie has many other potential applications. It can be used as a bandage for animal or human, being white one did not have to worry about any dye leaking into the wound. Broken arms and collar bones were common injuries

while chasing the fox, making this piece of fabric handy as a sling or as a figure eight bandage. It can be used as an extra rein if a leather one breaks. And it can be used to lead an errant hound.

The stock pin ought to be a simple safety pin design in brass or gold. It is always placed horizontally. If used in a vertical position the wearer takes a chance of jabbing it into the throat if an accident should occur. This pin may be used to fasten the fabric when used as a bandage.

Many riders enjoy the comfort of gloves. They are worn to protect hands from weather or rough reins and to improve the rider's grip on the reins. During warm weather a glove with a crocheted back and leather palm is recommended. Formal hunts require either white string gloves or dark leather.

For formal hunting, most hunts require black dress boots, although some hunts are now willing to accept black field boots. Because most riders acquire their boots ready-made from stores or catalogs, the selection of styles and finish details are serviceable but somewhat restricted. If you decide to have your boots made to your own specifications, there are several key considerations.

For foxhunting boots, the best leather has the rough side out. This does require a bit of extra work on the part of the person polishing the boots. One must have an old bone that has been properly prepared for such work. Boots with the rough out are handy for they hide all scratches and small tears due to brambles.

When the polish is applied to the leather it is rubbed into the leather with the bone, thus eliminating the scratches and scuffs made during the hunt.

Shirts have the collar and cuffs that are snug enough to eliminate the possibility of cold air to flow down the neck or up the arm. A snug arm hole eliminates the bat wing effect. This allows the jacket to fit more comfortably and reduces the annoyance of the shirt pulling out of the breech's waistband.

Vests are to be long enough to cover the small of the wearer's back and their belt buckle in front. Once again a trim fit is recommended for comfort and aesthetics.

A properly fitted jacket has a trim silhouette on the body, this does not matter if the person is small or

large in size. Along the shoulder blades there is to be enough room to move the arms forward when jumping over a fence. The sleeve length allows for a small amount of cuff to be visible when the arms are bent at the elbow holding the reins. The back of the jacket is to fall at the crease in the top of the thigh where it joins the buttocks.

As you plan your foxhunting wardrobe, you have many options to prepare to "ride to the hounds." A few options are your local tack stores, online and direct mail specialty catalogs and consignment stores specializing in the needs of the foxhunter. For those who desire more selection there are custom tailors and boot makers. In the case of both boots and clothes, the expense can be greater when purchased as items made to your specifications, but the end result is a garment that fits you better and lasts longer. It can be well worth the investment, both in terms of quality and in the peace of mind that comes from knowing that you are every bit as well turned out as your mount.

*About the Author:*

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