



Ottawa Valley Hunt



Welcome to capping

Advice from a new OVH member

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Cyndi Morin joined the Ottawa Valley Hunt (OVH) as a senior hunting member a few years ago. Based on her experiences, she has kindly prepared a list of key advice for those who want to ride as a guest (or “cap” in hunting lingo). Give hunting a try – you may discover a new passion!

Parking: Be sure to check the website (ottawavalleyhunt.com) and contact an OVH Master (masters@ottawavalleyhunt.com) to get permission to attend, and check the start time/location.

There is always plenty of parking for trailers. Plan to arrive with time to unload, tack up and be at the stirrup cup 15 minutes prior to the start of the hunt.

Tack: If using an English saddle, it is best to have a white shaped pad. Have a bridle with a bit that will be adequate for controlling your horse in a group situation. You may use whatever other equipment (e.g., boots, martingale) you feel will help you and your horse be safe and have an enjoyable hunt. However, please note that equipment that can obstruct your horse’s view, such as fly masks, is not allowed. Most hunt horses are shod with caulks but there are also several horses that hunt barefoot.

Dress for the rider: Beige breeches, tall boots or short boots with half chaps, white shirt and dark grey, navy or black jacket, white stock or choker (that comes with your shirt), black or brown gloves and safety helmet. This is considered formal attire and is always correct.

In the spring season and in the fall on Wednesdays, you may also wear a light coloured or tweed jacket, coloured shirt, coloured stock or tie and brown gloves, and of course your safety helmet. String gloves are always acceptable and do give you better grip on rainy days. For cappers who don’t have all the attire, the OVH just asks that you wear the closest you have to the recommended attire. A guideline for you and your horse is to be “clean, neat, tidy and comfortable”.

The stirrup cup is a gathering of the horses and mounted riders before the hunt begins. All gather in a location to have a traditional drink of port (lemonade is also often offered as a non-alcoholic option). The stirrup cup is an opportunity to meet the other riders and ask questions. One of the masters or a fieldmaster make announcements, which include introducing the fieldmasters for that day’s hunt, thanking the volunteers who have laid down the drag lines, introducing cappers and any other relevant instructions for the hunt (e.g. to ride single file on a certain field). The huntsman and whippers-in (staff) will arrive with the hounds. A whipper-in is the horse and rider combination that assists the huntsman.

****The huntsman, hounds and whippers-in have the right of way and are yielded to when necessary. You are asked to always have your horse's head facing hounds.**

Heading out: The huntsman will blow a short note on the horn to indicate the start of the day. Huntsman and staff head out first followed by the fields (groups of riders). Your fieldmaster will let you know when your group is starting. At most hunts, an OVH vehicle (called a road whip) follows on the roads to assist as needed and handle emergency situations. We also encourage those not riding to follow via vehicle along the roads.

All fields 'hack out' to the start of the hunt. Hacking out is a walk/trot to the start of the first line. There is no jumping. Quiet talk is permitted. You may ride two abreast unless there is a vehicle that needs to pass on the road – at which time single file is mandatory.

Each field has a fieldmaster. This person is in charge of the group and is not to be passed. Do not get ahead of the fieldmaster. If you are having a difficult time keeping behind, you can do a wide circle (so as not to interfere the other riders/horses) and return to the back of the group. It is equally important, especially in the first field, not to be left behind. If you leave too large a gap between you and the horse in front of you, you will not hear any instructions that are shouted or may become lost.

First field follows closely behind the huntsman and hounds. It is the fastest paced field that jumps. Jumping is optional, but if you are not going to jump, you should ride at the back of this field so as not to interfere with those who choose to jump.

Second field follows first. They ride at a trot/canter and offer some small and optional jumps.

Third field follows a shorter route, but the fieldmaster will try to ride in a way that will allow the riders to observe the hounds working in the distance. The group travels at a walk/trot and may canter if all riders are comfortable with cantering. There is no jumping in third field. This field is often called "hilltoppers" and is a great place to start a horses and riders who are new to hunting.

Your fieldmaster will let you know when the huntsman is about to start "casting" the hounds. This means he will encourage the hounds to find the first line of the scent that has been laid earlier in the day. (The OVH is a drag hunt, so the hounds do not chase live animals.) When one or more hounds find the scent, you hear them "speak" or "give voice". Your hunt is about to begin! There is no talking when the huntsman is casting hounds, collecting hounds or when the hounds are on the line.

Lines: A line is a trail of the scent, also called the drag, that the hounds (and fields) follow. A line can be from 1 kilometre to 5 kilometres. It weaves through bridle paths, fields and other terrain.

Between lines there are checks: A check is a time for the huntsman to gather the hounds and give them a rest. Horses and riders also get a rest at that time. All the fields meet at the same location for checks. Talking quietly is permitted, and you have the option to change fields. If you would like to change fields, ask your fieldmaster for permission to join another field. Then speak with the master of the field you are joining, so they can welcome you.

Retiring: If at any time, you wish to retire/head back to trailers (lost shoe, had enough for one day) speak to your fieldmaster or ask a member of your field to get a message to the fieldmaster. It is important to ask to have someone accompany you back to the meet. Do not hack back on hunt territory. Stick to the roads. Landowner permissions are only given for the actual hunt, and you may cross a line that the draglayers have laid, thereby confusing the hounds.

Going home is the horn call that indicates “good night” or the end of the hunt. If there is a hack back to the meet from this point, please stay with your field. Quiet talking is permitted.

Hunt horses: Some horses can find hunting exciting the first few times. It can take many hunts for a horse to understand that they can relax and conserve energy. The rider needs to relax and be calm and help the horse understand the situation. Hunting is fun for horses and when the horse realizes that they can travel along with ‘friends’, over different terrain and it’s not overly demanding, they learn that it is quite wonderful! Don’t give up after the first or second time. Like anything, getting good at something takes some practice.

For the rider: The hunt field is a place to have a good time with your horse. Enjoy the freedom outside of a ring or arena and the fact that everyone is there to help each other. Try to not obsess about your riding. Let your horse figure out how best to run across the fields (and jump if you so choose). It is a relaxed environment where horse lovers ride together and enjoy time in the saddle outdoors. Because there are different fields, you can choose the pace/speed you would like to do. Often starting in the third field is best until you and your horse are comfortable and confident. It is a truly exceptional experience.

Since 1873 the Ottawa Valley Hunt has provided a setting steeped in tradition for horses and riders alike that creates an excellent outdoor equestrian experience.

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