

Farmington Hunt Shows Sport, Peak Foliage, and Hospitality

by Norman Fine

LATE OCTOBER IN THE FOOTHILLS of the Blue Ridge Mountains near Charlottesville, Virginia. The autumn foliage had burst into color practically overnight. The woods were aglow in the yellow, orange, and russet tones of the hardwood maples and oaks that populated the hillsides. Hounds were drawing ahead of us, and the only sounds were the muted footfalls of our horses on the rain-softened rides. Tony Leahy turned in his saddle.

"It's like a cathedral, isn't it?" he said quietly.

The MFHA directors and a few lucky others were guests of the Farmington Hunt Club, hosts this year of the annual fall meeting of Association officers and directors. Farmington members graciously held back, allowing the guests to follow Field Master Ken Chapman and get a view of hounds working.

A deep-voiced hound opened, alone, but confident. Presently another joined in, then another, and one by one, the others affirmed that he had indeed found a fox they could hunt. The cry swelled as they trailed up on the line, and the horses lightened their stride across the grass.

With early morning temperatures suddenly in the seventies after a couple of weeks of cool weather, hounds struggled in the abruptly changed conditions. They worked well for huntsman Daron Beeney, however, and pushed their fox on through the woods.

The terrain at Farmington is more than rolling; it's hilly, but not mountainous. We crossed over ridges, climbing and descending, and forded streams in the low places. Anxious to stay in touch with hounds, we suddenly found ourselves precisely where the huntsman would rather have not seen us. Hold hard. The good news was the field got a chance to see some nice hound work.

We turned to see hounds come over the ridge and work their way down the hill in our direction, feathering stems and speaking to the line. We had clearly overrun the line. Hounds came to our trail, checked, and tried back. We had clearly foiled the line. I've heard said that the sign of a good huntsman is when his pack gets it right without his help. After trying back to no avail, hounds cast themselves forward on their own, picked up the line on the other side of the trail, and ran on.

In the open, we ran across beautifully manicured hayfields that I would have been proud to



Farmington huntsman Daron Beeney prefers Crossbred hounds for his country.

EVELYN C. COWLES PHOTO

call lawn. Late morning sun broke through, igniting the autumn hues on the wood line as the black rain clouds retreated behind the glowing trees.

The temperature rose, scent evaporated, and Beeney drew every stick pile in desperation, hounds trying all the while. They marked a fox at home in one of the stick piles but couldn't push him out.

Later, I commented to Beeney on the wonderful cry of his pack.

"Yes, it's great for the field to hear, and good cry like that really pulls the pack together and improves the hunting," Beeney observed.

Daron Beeney came to Farmington directly from hunt service in England. He was huntsman to the Eglinton there and had previously hunted hounds for the Surrey Union.

At Farmington, Beeney inherited a pack consisting of twenty-percent American hounds of the old Bywaters breeding and Crossbreds drafted by the Live Oak Hounds to the late Jill Summers, MFH. A long and powerful bond of friendship existed between Jill and Daphne Wood, and one can be certain that the Live Oak drafts were good ones!

Beeney found the Crossbreds to better suit

his hilly and wooded country, and he continued Jill Summers' program, breeding the Bywaters bloodlines to the Live Oak Crossbreds.

"We don't have enough open country for the faster American hounds," he surprised me by saying. "Others might disagree, but that's my opinion."

He keeps twenty-five couple of entered hounds in kennel, and hunts a mixed pack. (See "Ask the Experts...", page //??// for more on this subject.) In addition to the Crossbreds, Beeney has one American hound from the Orange County, one English hound and some Penn-Marydel crosses.

Our day with the Farmington hounds ended at sunset, at the hunt's clubhouse perched high on a hill behind the kennels. A veranda runs the length of the clubhouse, the view from which makes it obvious why Thomas Jefferson chose the heights of nearby Monticello for his own home. To the south, the moon waxed bright in its first quarter; a nearby mountain glowed in all its glorious color to the southeast; and between the two, a green valley stretched before us to the distant mountains. Welcome to Virginia, said Farmington Masters Carol Easter, Patrick Butterfield, and Joy Crompton. 🐾