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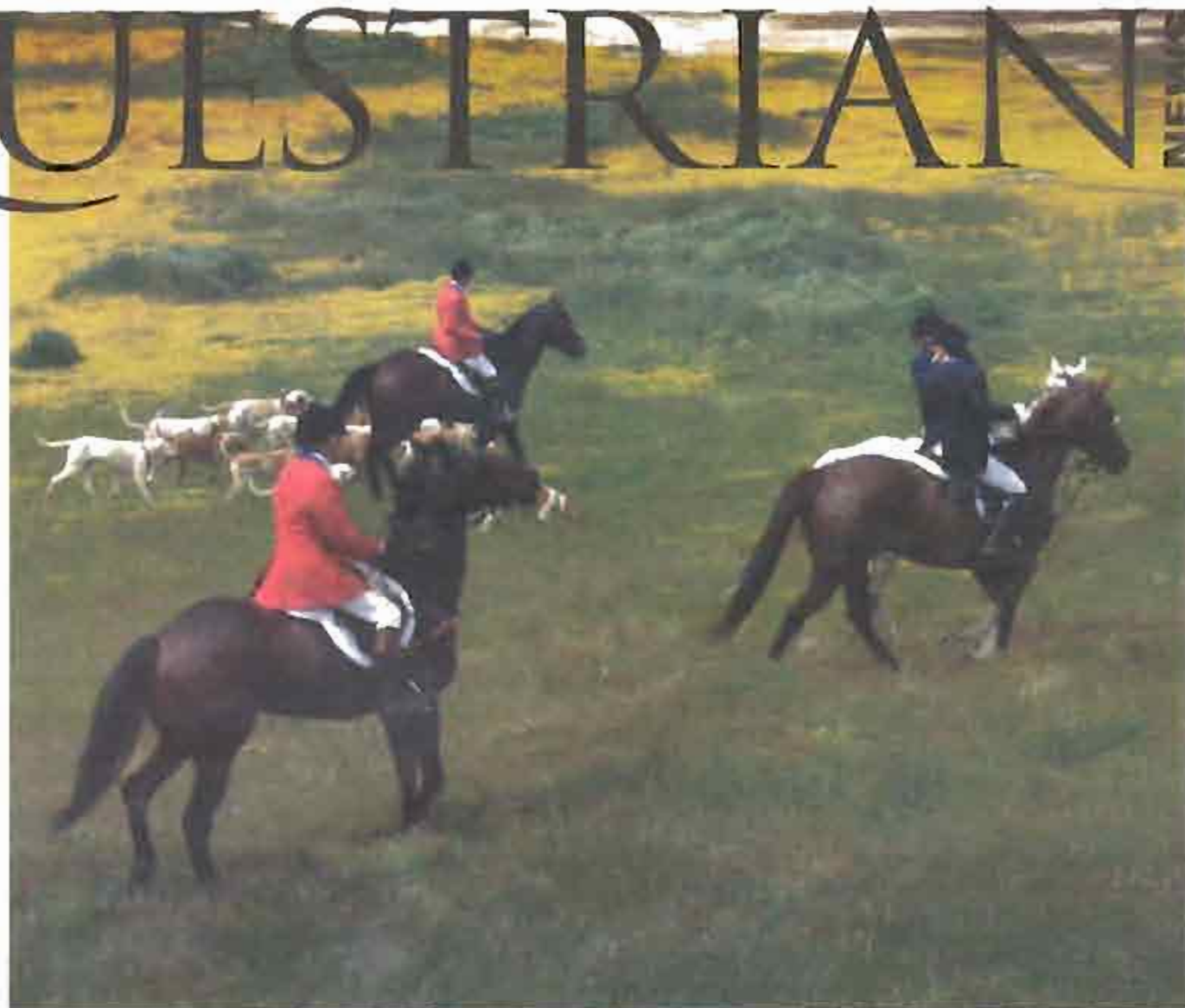
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*Riders from the West Hill Hunt Club enjoy the thrill of the hunt on a fall morning in Los Angeles.*

# Fox Hunting in Los Angeles

## *An Exhilarating Equestrian Tradition Starts with the Hounds*

By Regina Antonioli

The surroundings may not be a lush English countryside and there is a California coyote, rather than a fox, leading the chase, but those facts in no way diminish the excitement and tradition experienced by members of the West Hills Hunt. One of 170 English-style hunts currently in operation in the United States and Canada, West Hills hunt offers the full spectrum of rich tradition, the human connection to horse and hound and the exhilaration of galloping across open country.

The West Hills Hunt had been in existence since 1947. One of its founders, Dan Dailey, the celebrated song and dance man of many famous MGM musicals of the 1950s, served as Master from 1952 to 1960. In the Club's early days, its membership consisted of a large number of Hollywood luminaries, including Ronald Reagan, Randolph Scott, John Huston, Burgess Meredith, Spencer Tracey, and Walt Disney.

Today the membership is made up of horse lovers of all ages and from all walks of life who enjoy the outdoors and the thrill of watching hounds work a scent line. The purest devotees of the hunt consider knowledge of the hounds as the most important aspect of the sport. Members should know the verbal and horn language of the "master" as well as the sounds of the pack, whose excellence is measured by its ability to pick up a "cold" trail then follow it with spirit and courage.

West Hills Hunt member Lizi Ruch-Plotnick described it this way: "There is such beauty in watching hounds work a line from an opposite hillside—and all that follows when they find the scent—the pursuit of the hounds as they run the open country is unpredictable and uncertain and the ride is never the same. Personally, I believe my horse enjoys the

experience as much as I do—he squeals with delight when we get moving."

West Hills Hunt chases coyotes rather than foxes, and the goal of the hunt is to chase, not catch, these coyotes. Member Mitch Jacobs explained, "After one of these coyotes has been chased by a pack of domestic dogs, that coyote learns to associate the 'domestic' dog smell with danger rather than with food. So, West Hills serves an important purpose at the ranches it rides, making coyotes steer clear of small domestic animals that the coyote would otherwise try to eat."

West Hills Hunt meets twice a week, usually on Wednesday and Saturday morning. The hunt season begins with "cubhunting" in early September. The formal season, where the members who have the right to do so wear their scarlet coats, begins just before Thanksgiving and ends sometime in April, weather permitting. Members and guests enjoy the majestic beauty of riding their horses on large cattle and sheep ranches throughout Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and Kern Counties. West Hills is also a social club, hosting numerous trail rides, horse competitions, hound shows, parties, balls and other activities throughout the year.

West Hills is actually the third hunt club in Los Angeles County. The first, the Valley Hunt Club, was founded in the 1880s near the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena. The Valley Hunt Club has had a great impact on tradition here in Southern California. One day, more than 100 years ago, they decided to have a parade and horse competition on New Year's Day. They named the parade after a flower—though it's rumored the orange was also considered—thus planting the seed for what are now the Rose Parade, Rose Bowl and nationwide college football bowl games, all undeniably great traditions.

This past December, Morgan Rosenberg experienced her first hunt as a guest of West Hills. "It was so fun!" she said. Normally a show ring rider on the amateur hunter circuit, Rosenberg was

first impressed with the friendly family and community feeling she got from the group. Hers was a small hunt, only about 15 riders and 30 hounds, riding in Tejon Ranch. After tacking up and enjoying a bit of sustenance, the riders started out at a trot to warm up the horses. Then the hounds picked up a scent and the group took off. "It's an amazingly different style and feel from the show ring," Rosenberg explained. "You are really galloping and you have to trust the horse to take you." She loved the independent communication with her mount, combined with the connection and joint purpose of the others in the "field." Even for a first-timer she was in awe of the hounds, noting how they move like a "flock of birds"—one unit made up of so many individuals.

When long-time hunt members were asked what drew them to the hunting experience, there offered various responses, from "it's the clothes" (the richness of the traditional hunt attire that is considered to be "properly turned out") to "it's the camaraderie," the shared experiences of riding side-by-side in open country and enjoying parties to relive these moments. Many spoke of the thrill of a great gallop on a fit horse while on a "gone away"—riding across vast lands and being connected to nature. Even those individuals for whom the horse is their greatest joy, seemed to return to a common theme, that for all the great elements of the club, the hunt, and the sport, it really all starts with the hounds. ♠

*Don't Miss it!*

The Hollywood Dolls  
**RIDE FOR ST. JUDE**  
Saturday, March 11, 2006

*See details on page 8 inside.*