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## Belle Meade Hosts Popular Foxhound Performance Trials

 Martha Drum

Belle Meade Hunt (GA) welcomed hounds from five other packs at their annual Foxhound Performance Trials on January 20-21. Sam Clifton, Green Spring Valley Hounds (MD) huntsman, carried the horn through two days of challenging weather conditions. Bull Run Hunt (VA) proved victorious, with their Spree earning top scores from the judges. Mounted and unmounted guests who traveled to Thomson, Georgia for the event enjoyed Belle Meade's famous hospitality in the clubhouse, as well as myriad options for staying close to the action in the field.

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*The triumphant Bull Run team. Photo by Jean Derrick.*

Charles Montgomery, Bull Run's professional huntsman, and his wife Boo, honorary whipper-in, shared some of their strategy in selecting hounds to compete in the tumult and excitement of performance trials. "First and foremost, you choose hounds that you know are steady - and that hopefully can handle the pressure of the field trial. By pressure, we mean working in unfamiliar country, with strange hounds, while being handled by an unknown - to the hounds - huntsman and staff. This requires a pretty high level of resilience within the hounds. Secondly, we chose our best - not just hounds that we know are capable of running up and pushing the front end of an established line - but hounds that are exemplary in their hunting and trailing ability. Meaning that they



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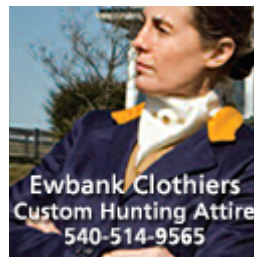


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have a business and spark in their work while working up to a blistering line. It is those scores that, particularly on a slow or tough scenting day, will help you win a field trial, just as it is that work that can make a tough scenting day at home a great one."

Boo continued to explain the performance trials' importance in evaluating their hounds. "The other objective - and this was primary to our personal choices of who to bring to this field trial - was to bring hounds that we are considering using to expand the existing Bull Run Hunt hound families in our breeding program. Over the past three years, we have drafted in some entered and unentered hounds that we hope to use in our breeding program. We have found these hounds to be outstanding in their work at home and many have developed and are developing into leaders in our pack; we thought that the Belle Meade Trial would be a good platform to see how they performed in comparison to other outstanding hounds in the country. Essentially we were using the trial as a metric to evaluate the hounds that we hope to introduce into the Bull Run family lines that we are carrying forward in our kennel."

Performance trials huntsman, Sam Clifton, relished his challenging role. "The weekend was definitely a great experience, and I would like to thank Epp Wilson and Charles Montgomery for the opportunity. I think the biggest thing that stood out was how well the hounds worked with me. Six different packs, 18 couple of hounds in unfamiliar country - I really wasn't sure what to expect, but they were straight to business. I think that's a huge testament to the competing packs and the quality of their hounds."



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*Riders prepare to move off in the beautiful Belle Meade country. Photo courtesy of Andrea Guzinski.*

Riders in the numerous fields, offered to accommodate every pace, had a great time. Elizabeth Tatum of Shakerag Hounds (GA) said, "The Belle Meade Hunt staff has quite a knack for putting on a seamlessly organized event, from the meticulously planned schedule of stirrup cups, moving off, hunting, awards ceremonies and dinners, to the incredibly welcoming community. Sam Clifton showed his brilliant expertise in working the hounds from different packs, and the field masters of 1st, 2nd and 3rd (I was in 2nd) kept us in the action with great runs across 22 miles of wonderfully challenging terrain. Being fairly new to the sport, I was most fascinated by how beautifully the hounds from different packs worked together - amazing!"

Stephanie Guerlain traveled with a large group from Farmington Hunt (VA), competing for the first time in the Performance Trials. "It was a blast! Belle Meade was incredibly accommodating of all of us, and it was nice to have everything in one place, clubhouse, stabling, hounds, and the hunts! Great southern food was prepared each day and plentiful drink was available. Each hunt was allowed to have one judge, and there was an independent huntsman from Middleburg, I believe. Most other huntsmen tried to stay incognito, so as to not distract their hounds. The hounds ran very well as a group and were very responsive to the huntsman."

To view complete results from the Performance Trials on the MFHA website, [click here](#).



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