



Drag hunting, 'Clean boot' hunting and Trail hunting

For those who think that some sort of 'hunting' should continue because it's a grand old British tradition – it can. Drag hunting and bloodhounds hunting (known as 'clean boot'), in which the hunt follows an artificial trail and not a live animal, involve many of the elements of the 'sport', but without killing wildlife. In fact, they have been a popular country pursuit for as long as other forms of hunting. They are not to be confused with trail hunting, which is a very different thing.

Drag hunting

Drag hunting (not to be confused with trail hunting) can provide an alternative to the use of a pack of foxhounds in the countryside while minimising the risk to wildlife. It was created in the 1800s.

The hounds hunt an artificial non-animal scent (mostly aniseed) pulled by a drag, laid down over a predetermined route. Because the route is predetermined the hounds can be kept safely away from livestock, vulnerable crops, roads and railway lines. The route can also be organised so that the risk to sensitive and fragile habitats can be minimised and the drag hunts kept away from areas where they are unwelcome and/or can pose a threat to other domestic and farmed animals. The drag is not laid in areas known to have foxes in them, and the location of the trail is known to the huntsman so he can stop the hounds if they accidentally follow a live quarry scent. All these precautions explain why it is very rare for accidental fox kills to happen during drag hunting.

Most fox, deer and hare hunts decided not to convert to drag hunting after the Hunting Act 2004 was passed.

Bloodhounds hunting

This is similar to drag hunting but bloodhounds are used instead of foxhounds, which are quite a different breed in both looks and abilities, and are known to have a

very acute sense of smell. Rather than following the scent of a drag, the bloodhounds search for the scent of running people (one or more runners) who will reward them at the end with praise or treats. This type of hunting is also known as “hunting the clean boot”, and it had already been in existence for many years prior to the hunting ban.

Because these hounds have never been trained to hunt non-human animals, incidents of the hounds chasing or killing foxes or hares are non-existent, making this type of ‘hunting’ the safest for wildlife.

Trail Hunting

Most registered fox and hare hunts claim to now be trail hunting – an activity that was not in existence or envisaged when the Hunting Act 2004 was drafted. It is an entirely new invention which purports to mimic traditional hunting by following an artificial animal scent trail (using fox urine from US fur farms according to the hunters) that has been laid in areas where foxes naturally occur, and not telling those controlling the hounds where the scent has been laid so if the hounds end up following a live animal scent the hunt can claim that they did not know. It is not the same as drag hunting, a legitimate sport which existed before the Act and although it also uses packs of foxhounds it is not intended to mimic animal hunting. During trail hunting, many foxes and hares are chased and killed, despite the claim from the hunts that these are all accidents.

The League believes there is no such sport as trail hunting and it is simply a false deceit to cover for illegal hunting. When a wild mammal is chased and/or killed during a trail hunt, it is passed off as an accident. Because the Act requires hunting to be an intentional activity, many allegations of illegal hunting end up not being investigated properly if the hunt claims that it was all an accident. If a defendant is able to raise the possibility that they did not intend to chase or kill a wild mammal and they did not stop the hounds because they did not know if the hounds were chasing the trail laid or a live animal (a problem that would not have occurred in drag hunting), the police or the CPS may consider that the case may be too difficult for prosecution. With the current form of the Hunting Act proving intent is very difficult if the trail hunting deceit is used, so this is why the League wants to see the Act strengthened by adding a recklessness cause that would prevent the use of this false deceit.

Many people, including the press, confuse trail hunting and drag hunting, which helps illegal hunters to confuse the authorities and the public in order to avoid prosecution. The following table shows the main differences:

Drag Hunting	Trail Hunting
Created in the early 1800s	Created in 2005
Objective is to practice a sport using hounds to search for a scent without the pursuit or killing of wild animals	Objective is to make an activity look as similar as possible to hunting before the ban
Long-lasting sport	Considered a temporary activity only undertaken while there is a hunting ban
Specific rules created by the MDBA	No written rules
Non-animal based scents	Animal-based scents
Hounds trained not to follow live quarry	Hounds still trained to follow live quarry
Hounds taken to search for the scent in areas where a live quarry presence is unlikely	Hounds taken to search for the scent in areas where live quarry presence is likely
Does not use areas, meets and fields where pre-ban foxhunting took place	Uses the same areas, meets and fields where pre-ban foxhunting took place
Huntsman and whipper-in always know where the scent was laid	Huntsman and whipper-in deliberately do not know where the scent was laid
Focus is on the riders following the hounds, who are encouraged to find the scent quickly	Focus is on the hounds searching for a scent rather than encouraging them to find it at the start so riders can join the pursuit
Scent laid only around 20 minutes earlier than casting the hounds to find it	No time limit on how much earlier the scent may be laid before casting the hounds to find it
No terriermen present and no need for terriermen	Terriermen follow the hunt and still pursue foxes underground
Hounds always kept under close control so no 'accidents' with chasing of live animals	Hounds left unsupervised for longer periods, which increases the likelihood of 'accidents' with chasing and/or killing of live animals