

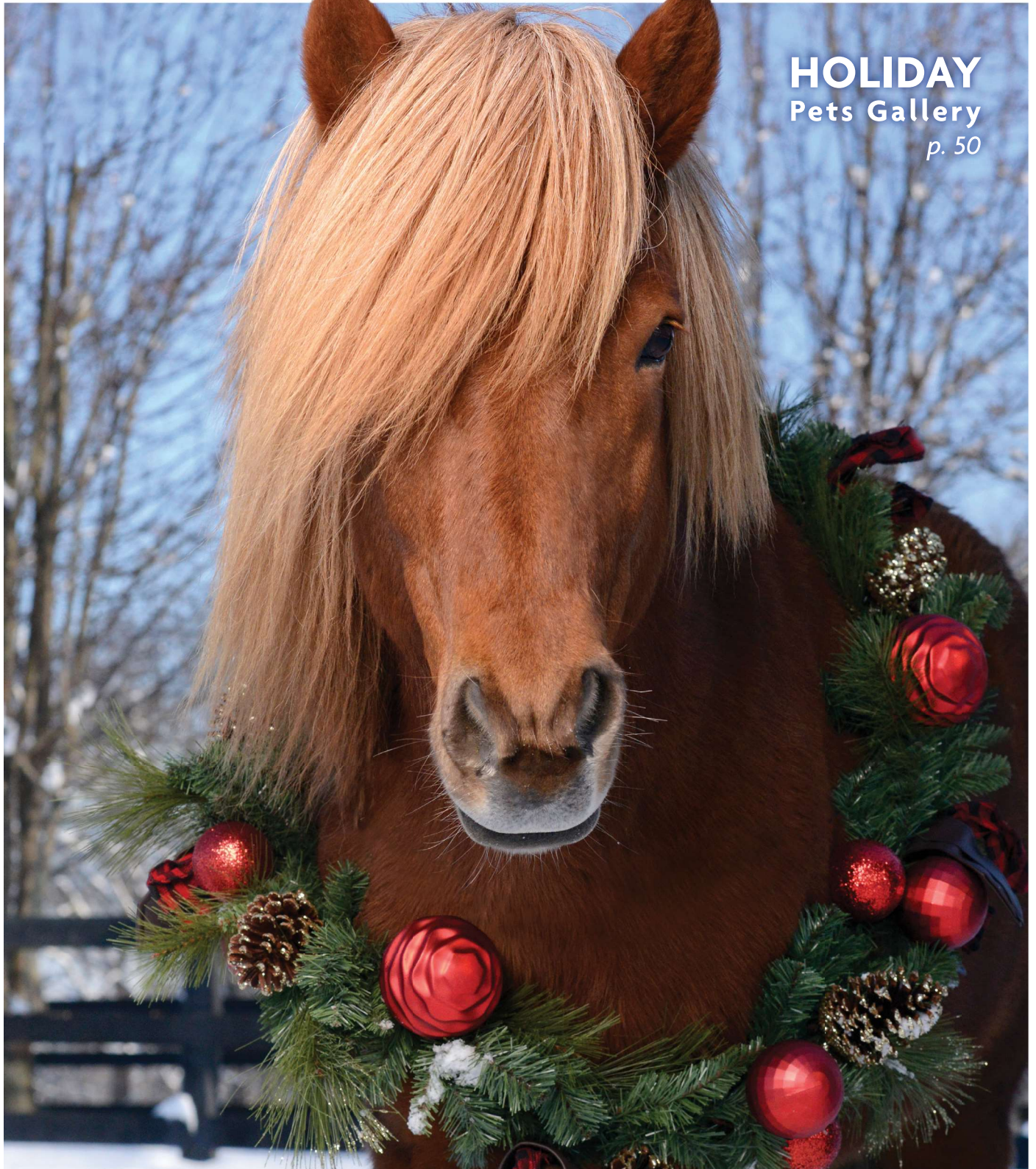
# THE CHRONICLE *of the* HORSE

FOXHUNTING ISSUE

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Tot Goodwin, pictured while huntsman and MFH at Green Creek Hounds, exemplifies wisdom, humility and patience in the field. *MONICA STEVENSON PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO*



A man in a red fox hunting jacket and helmet is riding a dark horse through a forest. He is surrounded by a large pack of hounds. The forest floor is covered in fallen leaves, and the trees are bare, suggesting autumn. The man is looking towards the camera, and the hounds are scattered around him, some looking in different directions.

# NOBODY KNOWS HOUNDS LIKE TOT GOODWIN

After more than five decades of foxhunting, the legendary master and huntsman—like his hard-driving hounds—is still pushing ahead.

By **Martha Drum**

Foxhunters are notorious for having differences of opinion about nearly every aspect of their sport. If a group at a hunt breakfast was asked to name the traits that make a superlative huntsman, the list would be long and varied. Hound breeders would require knowledge of bloodlines. Staff could insist on years of training as a whipper-in, and diehards might demand game-tracking instincts.

There's one point they'd agree on, though: If any single person hunting hounds today possesses all those qualities, it's Tot Goodwin, huntsman and master of Goodwin Hounds in North Carolina.

"I don't know if I've ever seen anybody better with hounds," says Larry Pitts, veteran huntsman of Bedford County and Potomac hunts in Virginia and Maryland.

Tony Leahy, Masters Of Foxhounds Association

president and huntsman and MFH at Massbach Hounds and Fox River Valley Hunt (Illinois), agrees. "Tot's the epitome of a dog man," he says. "He has an absolute gift."

Former MFHA president and Live Oak Hounds MFH Marty Wood says, "Tot is probably as consummate a houndsman as you'd ever want to see."

And at age 75, he's running the latest pack to be recognized by the MFHA with no plans to slow down. "It just makes my day to get up at 4 o'clock and go hunting," says Goodwin. "That's just the way I am."

### FROM BEAGLES TO BEN HARDAWAY

Goodwin didn't grow up in horse country, and for an African-American raised in Georgia, mounted foxhunting wasn't an obvious career choice. His grandfather and father hunted rabbits with

He may be a man of few words, but when Tot Goodwin speaks, foxhunters hang on every one.

ALLISON HOWELL  
PHOTO



a beagle pack, though, and between beagling from age 8 and hunting deer and raccoon to feed the family (Goodwin was one of 16 children), he gained a keen understanding of animal behavior and how to read natural conditions.

Goodwin didn't even learn to ride formally until age 19, after a chance encounter on foot earned him an incredible job opportunity. He flagged down a truck on the road before it could hit two errant hounds. The hounds belonged to Ben Hardaway, the celebrated huntsman, MFH and influential breeder at Midland Fox Hounds.

Hardaway brought Goodwin on as a groom, and his trainer Anne Ticehurst soon invited the teenager to help break young horses. Naturally athletic and patient, he was a quick student in the saddle. Hardaway then hired him as a whipper-in, a position Goodwin held for 20 years.

More than just a job, whipping-in to Hardaway was a tremendous opportunity to watch, listen and learn. Hardaway traveled regularly to hunt across the United States, Ireland and Great Britain. Goodwin took advantage of every trip to soak up knowledge from the best packs in the world. "I really loved being in Ireland," he says. "Even the kids that couldn't afford a horse were running around with their boots on; everybody was chasing the fox. They treated me like a king."

Leahy, who grew up in

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Ireland, recalls, “We had all heard of Tot as kids. He was like a myth almost. There was this wonderful woman down in Waterford, Elsie Morgan, who hunted and developed an incredibly good pack. Tot was sent there and picked up a lot from her.”

Morgan turned her charges loose on the Irish hills for exercise and trusted they’d return—they always did—and Goodwin developed a similarly calm and soft but effective style. “Being quiet works perfect for me,” Goodwin says. “I don’t like a whole lot of noise. That’s just the way I am. Any pack of hounds adjusts to what you do. It’s just my way of doing it.

“I like to teach a huntsman to pay attention to the hounds,” he adds.

“If you watch the hounds, they’re going to tell you what’s going on. You’ve got to be able to trust your hounds, too.”

That relaxed manner impresses Pitts: “The quietness might be the key,” he says. “He probably trusts hounds more than most people, and that tells hounds more than screaming or hollering at them. I’ve never seen him holler at a hound. He talks to them like he’s talking to somebody’s kid, you know, just quietly.

“And he’s not going to lie to them, ever,” he adds. “He’s not ever going to tell them a story. You should treat your children the way he treats his hounds.”

As Goodwin’s experience grew, visitors to Midland began to take note of the hard-riding but soft-spoken whipper-in who always seemed to know where to find game. Wood began hunting in the early 1970s at Midland, and Hardaway sent him out with Goodwin. “I had just started foxhunting, and over the course of the next couple of years Ben made me a whipper-in,” Wood says. “I learned what I know about whipping-in from Tot Goodwin.

“Watching Tot was a real learning experience,” Wood continues. “He was a consummate woodsman, understood game, understood his quarry and what it was

likely to do. A lot of times Tot knew where the fox was going before the fox knew where he was going!”

### EXMOOR + JULY = GOOD SPORT

Goodwin maintained a personal pack of hounds to hunt on days Midland didn’t go out, and they attracted plenty of attention in their own right. Like Hardaway, Goodwin built a reputation for finding successful crosses between bloodlines others might not have considered. His breeding choices have been described as “eccentric” and “unusual.”

But they work.

Leahy observes, “He’s got a real green thumb for

breeding. He’ll really get families of hounds to nick well together. He’s made some kind of wild outcrosses over the years, and we’ve shared a lot of blood, which has been a blast. His instincts are so true and so correct.”

Goodwin explains that he always has a plan in mind. “I got my training from Ben Hardaway,” he says.

“He made all kinds of crosses, and I kind of grew up with that.”

He prefers a Crossbred pack. “They’re a little more aggressive hunter, and I like speed. I like a fast pack of hounds,” he says.

Drawing from his exposure to British packs, Goodwin identifies the famously deer-proof Exmoor as one of his favorites on the English side. “I like to cross them with my hounds,” he says. “They kind of stick on the line, and they run hard in the process. They give my hounds a lot of drive.”

For the American component of the Crossbred, Goodwin includes plenty of July blood. “The July is a night-hunting hound that came over from Ireland to Georgia. They hunt a little like a sighthound does; they’re looking,” he explains. “Once they come out of the woods into an open field, they’re looking and trying to spot the game. They don’t just run to track. A lot of people don’t

*You should treat your children the way he treats his hounds.”*

—Larry Pitts

like that, but I love that. It's a kind of odd cross, but all my life I've been doing odd crosses. I guess I like that."

Wood acknowledges Goodwin's unique program, but quickly adds, "You breed your pack to suit your country, to suit your quarry and to suit yourself if you're the master and huntsman. You want hounds that you like, not hounds that somebody else likes, and Tot has done a great job with that."

## MASTER GOODWIN AT GREEN CREEK HOUNDS

When Goodwin moved on from Midland in the late 1980s, the Green Creek Hounds were just getting organized near Tryon, North Carolina. Dick and Peg Secor hired him as professional huntsman in 1989, and he was named joint-master in 1997. At Green Creek, Goodwin continued his signature hunting style: Take out lots of hounds and trust them to do their job.

Just how many hounds? Anne Shue worked for Goodwin in the kennels from a young age and whipped-in to him for nearly two decades. She recalls mornings when it took three people a solid hour to put tracking collars on all the hounds Goodwin wanted to take out.

"We used to hunt *a ton* of hounds!" she says. "We'd have the kennel list [of which hounds were hunting that day], and I'd go in the morning with my friend Chrissy, and we'd start putting tracking collars on hounds. Now you could ask Tot, out in the hunt field, how many hounds he had, and his standard response was, 'About 80.' And I would know for a fact that we had 98 hounds out, because I had collared them that morning. But the answer to the question, whether we had 65 or 125, we always had 'about 80.'"

Keith Gray, MFH at Mill Creek Hunt in Illinois, recalls being overwhelmed by the number of hounds during a visit to North Carolina. "As a whipper-in at Mill Creek, it's my habit to count hounds before the start of the hunt," he says. "When Tot opened the trailer to let hounds out, I stopped counting at 35 couple, aghast as they kept coming out!

"Later in the day, I sidled up to Tot to ask why he hunted with such a large pack," Gray continues, "and in that charming Southern accent he said, 'They can't learn noth'n sitt'n in the kennel.'"

Leahy also once asked Goodwin why he brings out so many hounds. "He'd reply, 'It just sounds better, Tony,' and I would think, 'This is going to be chaos,' yet it all kind of works for him."

Even on the inevitable days with less satisfying outcomes, Goodwin remains philosophical about letting hounds learn from their own mistakes. "I remember one day with him at Green Creek," Leahy recalls. "The hounds jumped a bobcat in kind of a fishbowl of a covert, a nice round, thick covert with a couple hundred acres of beautiful big hayfields all around it. It was glorious.

"The hounds slid in there easy as pie and then just exploded, and the roar, the singing in that valley was just incredible!" he continues. "The bobcat came out on our side, and I was sitting there with Tot thinking, 'This is perfect.' There's 40 couple of hounds coming screaming right towards us.

"And just as they came to the edge of the covert, they turned, and they ran just as hard straight back on heel [following the quarry's scent, but in the wrong direction]. I would have been pulling my hair out!" Leahy says, "But he just kind of smiled and laughed. 'That's the way it goes sometimes.' That's Tot. He has that quiet sense of confidence."

Shue recalls hunting at Lowcountry (South Carolina), when Goodwin wandered out into the marsh after the hounds, which had chased something there. "He got way out, and I called, 'Tot! Watch out for alligators!'" she says. "He started hurrying back, and [Lowcountry huntsman] Anthony Gibbs said, 'Oh look, Tot's walking on water!' because Tot was trying to get back so fast when we reminded him about the alligators!"

## FORM AND FUNCTION

In addition to earning top scores at performance trials, Tot Goodwin's charges also shine in the show ring. They collected an armful of ribbons at last spring's Carolinas Hound Show (North Carolina), with Goodwin's Green Creek Raquell taking the blue for top performance trial hound—a conformation class open only to hounds that placed well at MFHA trials in the preceding year.

Goodwin has also judged the Mill Creek and the Why Worry Hounds puppy shows.

"I love showing hounds," he says, "but you always breed for hunting."



Tot Goodwin doesn't hesitate to dismount and encourage his hounds into covert on foot when necessary.  
 MONICA STEVENSON PHOTOGRAPHY PHOTO

## STILL HUNTING AFTER ALL THESE YEARS

When he retired from Green Creek in 2017, Goodwin continued to invite friends to hunt with his personal pack. He applied to the MFHA to formally register Goodwin Hounds, and it's now the newest pack in the association.

"He's a treasured resource, without a doubt," said Sedgefield Hunt MFH and huntsman Fred Berry, the MFHA Carolinas District representative who assisted with the registration process. "It's a blessing to have somebody with his background, his experience, his history as part of our community. We did everything we could to get him registered as quickly as we could. He's a cherished elder, as far as I'm concerned."

Goodwin also perseveres as one of a handful of black huntsmen and masters. He acknowledges receiving skeptical looks and comments from strangers—until they see him in action. Asked how to encourage others, Goodwin replies, "I've been trying to get more of my folks out. I think the ones that have done it seem to be very popular."

Melvin Cox relocated from southern California to

North Carolina in 2018 and credits Goodwin and his wife, Colleen Goodwin, for easing the adjustment. "For an African-American raised in the flatlands of Oakland, California, to have the opportunity to hunt under the direction of a black MFH," Cox said, "this is truly a BIG DEAL—and something that I will always cherish."

Cox adds that the Goodwins are enthusiastic supporters of the annual Day of the African Equestrian, a celebration of contributions made to equestrian sport by Africans and people of African descent. This year, the evening gala was preceded by the Tom Bass Seminar on Diversity in Equestrian Sport, an educational roundtable that included Julian Seaman, media director for the Badminton Horse Trials. Seaman met Tot at the seminar and invited him back to the U.K. to attend the Badminton CCI5\*-L as a special guest of the organizers.

"Tot is a global treasure," says Cox. "Having Tot Goodwin as a friend, mentor, 'guidance counselor' and resource extraordinaire, is, to my mind, akin to being a baseball-crazed kid in the late 1950s and having the great Willie Mays as a neighbor and friend of the family."



## FEW WORDS, SHARED WISDOM

Tot, like many huntsmen, is a man of few words, but he never hesitates to share his knowledge with others. Shue recounts one of many times they hunted on foot together. “It was a Christmas Eve, and it was starting to snow, and they called the hunt meet. I was going to go to Charleston to see my family, and Tot said, ‘Do you want to go hunting before you go?’ And I said, ‘Hell yeah!’

“We went out, and the snow was starting to fall so the ground had a little cover, and as we were walking through the woods, he was able to show me different tracks and tell me what was what,” continues Shue. “What’s really interesting is to hear him, if you get to sit beside him on his horse, he practically knows where the game is going to run. He can orchestrate it. It’s almost like it’s choreographed. I guess he’s done it so long that he knows what’s going to happen and how it’s going to happen.”

Tot emphasizes that he only offers positive instruction. “One thing I do not do is, I don’t criticize anybody,” he says. “I watch them, and I can encourage them if they want to be encouraged, but I do not criticize them, people or their hounds.”

Sometimes Tot’s mere presence is instructive. When Tommy Gesell of Wiggins Hounds (South Carolina) hunted the competition pack at Moore County Hounds’ performance trials in October, he worried when a judge’s horse was injured just as hounds worked up a hot coyote line. But the sight of Tot calmly listening to the pack from a nearby ridge told him the hounds were on the right track.

“I saw Tot sitting close by, and I’m like, ‘OK, we’re in a good spot. I can get off and help the judge get situated, because Tot’s going to do the right thing,’” Gesell says. “Knowing that Tot was up there, I knew that I was in good shape.”

Gesell was a newcomer to hunting when he met Tot about 10 years ago.

“I never got a chance to meet Ben Hardaway, but this is as close as I could get,” he says. “Hunting with Tot is one of those things that you hold onto. You listen to every word that he says, even though it’s not your style or you might do something a little different. You can always take something away from Tot.”

Back to that list of ingredients for an ideal huntsman: Tot has them all, but is his success due to experience, or is there an intangible connection with hounds that sets him apart?

“I really think it’s a combination of both,” says Leahy. “He grew up with a pack of beagles, so all of the instincts in him were very well honed from a very early age. And then I think his experience traveling around and seeing

different places [is a factor]. People talk about that 10,000-hour rule to become an expert in their field, and Tot’s done that several times over. He’s a true craftsman.”

Tot doesn’t dwell on puzzling out the answer. As he works to open more territory, he’ll keep honing the loud, fast pack that he loves. “I don’t quite know how to explain it,” he says softly, as he heads home from walking a potential new fixture in South Carolina. “I got a lot of experience. And I’m always looking for new ideas. I’ll never stop looking.” 🐾

## GOODWIN’S GOOD ADVICE

**Wind And Weather:** “When the wind’s coming out of the northwest, that’s time to go hunting. When a front is coming, you can’t do much, but after it passes through, that’s good for hunting. The east wind is no good for anything.”

**Where To Find Game:** “You need to stay around the streams and creeks. That’s where the game feels comfortable. And the fox and the coyote both love the corn field. I really love hunting in the corn.”

**Horses:** “Nothing less than a Thoroughbred. I like a rank horse—especially as a whip horse, he’s got to be rank. I probably should do round pens, but I don’t. We put them to work. I guarantee you, a wet saddle pad’ll make a difference.”

**The X Factor:** “I can walk in your kennel and pick out a stud hound in a minute. I look over, and I know exactly which one I want to breed to. It would take me five minutes. For some odd reason, he’ll catch my eye. It just pops out at me, ‘I want to breed to this hound right here.’ He has it. Conformation is all right, but you gotta look for something else, too. It just pops out at you.”

**Being A Master:** “You’ve got to be able to listen to the neighbors and landowners and try to work with them. You don’t want to go in and try to throw your weight around. If you can be patient, you just might get anything you want.”

**Challenges To Foxhunting:** “Finding country to hunt. You just can’t hardly find any country now that you can really let a pack of hounds hunt, with all the roads and stuff. You’ve got to have a very biddable pack of hounds to be able to hunt now. That does bother me, because I like a pack of hounds to really go hunting.”