



Learning to hunt

Most ringers begin ringing continuous changes with plain hunting, often on five with a cover. Some pick it up quickly, while others struggle for a long time. Is this the best way? In fact there are many variants of the exercises we can use to help someone learn to hunt, and this month we think about their pros and cons.



Learning to hunt?

Skills involved

Hunting seems trivial when drawn on paper, but 'doing' it is far from trivial until you have learnt and internalised a whole bag of skills, to be able to manoeuvre your bell to be in the right place, at the right time, every time.

This bag of skills includes the ability to:

- Ring at one of three different speeds
- Change speed within one blow
- Change speed by the right amount
- Be aware of position during changes
- Compensate for errors while changing

These skills are more or less hierarchical, in that each one relies on a degree of competence in the ones above it. In particular, speed change is the core skill on which hunting (and all method ringing) rests. If you are teaching anyone to hunt, you will be most able to help them over problems if you can observe and diagnose which of these skills are inadequate.

Helping the learner to learn

A teacher can't reach inside the learner's brain to change the wiring, but you can influence learning in two ways: by what exercises you ask the learner to do, and by what you say (before, during and after the exercises). Explanation, encouragement and giving feedback are quite big subjects in themselves, which we may return to in a future article. So let us look here at how several different exercises relate to the bag of skills. 'Hunting' exercises can be grouped by:

- Number of places the learner moves
- Number of bells in the compass
- Number of bells learner changes with

- Covered or uncovered
- Live or simulated bells

There are a few supporting exercises too.

Number of places moved

Let's start at the simple end, with two bells. Hunting on two bells amounts to continuous place-making, which is one of the core exercises in *Kaleidoscope Ringing*. Even in towers that don't use the Kaleidoscope approach, it is a small step beyond call changes – continually making and reversing the same change (at hand or back stroke, to give a feel for changing at both).. Moving on to three, and then progressively more bells, adds complexity in small steps, which is generally a good thing to do for learning.

Hunting on two certainly stretches the 'change within one blow' skill, because there is a change of direction every whole pull, but are they really 'speed changes'? When is the learner ringing 'at a different speed'? It doesn't really stretch the 'ring at three speeds' skill. On a lightish bell, it is quite possible to make continuous places, with the help of a little brute force, and no feeling at all for the different speeds of hunting down and hunting up. Even hunting on three, the 'sloping bits' tend to get lost among the 'corners'.

Involving more places means more actual hunting, and gives the learner time to experience each new speed, in order to feel the difference from Rounds speed. It is also easier for you as the tutor to diagnose (and help with) any speed related problems.

Number of bells in the compass

In most ringing, the time it takes each bell to turn doesn't vary a lot with the number of bells ringing, so more bells need to ring closer together, and fewer bells need to ring farther apart. That has an effect on the physical process of hunting (and ringing changes in general). With few bells ringing, there is a bigger difference between the speeds for hunting up, hunting down, and Rounds than there is when many are ringing. As a learning exercise, they provide different things.

Hunting with say four bells ringing, means the places are well apart, so the learner has a bigger margin for error before getting into the wrong order. The listening is easier, and therefore more likely to be effective. Also because the bells strike further apart, the ropesight is clearer. Along with those effects, the bell also has to be moved further to move between adjacent places. That might seem a disadvantage, and on heavy bells with a learner who is not very strong it is, but with most learners it too is an advantage. Because the speed changes are bigger, a learner who doesn't latch on to the speed change aspect, will show up clearly. If you know there is a problem, you can help the learner to do something about it.

Now think about when six or more bells are ringing. The gaps between places are much less, so a smaller error will get the learner out of sequence. Listening is more likely to break down, and ropesight is harder because the vertical separation between ropes is less. All of these make it harder for the learner. The speed changes are smaller but that might not help. With an experienced ringer, it translates into less effort, but a learner is quite likely to use more effort anyway, and it can be difficult to tell whether the speed change skill is being acquired, or whether the bell is just being dragged between places by brute force.

Number of bells changed with

When the learner moves fewer places than the number of bells, there is a choice about how many different bells to involve with the learner. Say the learner is hunting three places with six bells ringing.

If three bells hunt together, then only they are involved as 'players' and the rest (whether in front or behind) can be thought of as the static fence bounding the playing field. The stability of the fence, and the fact that there are only two moving players as well as the learner, make things simpler, especially ropesight.

If on the other hand, the learner hunts three places, and the other bells ring a suitable method that fits in around the hunting (eg Bastow Little Bob, aka Cloister, aka St Helen's, aka Stedman quick sixes) then the handling and listening are similar, but ropesight is different.

Live or simulated

These days any tower can equip itself with a simulator as an additional training tool. A learner who has already rung rounds with the simulator as part of early training, will be familiar with the experience, but anyone who has not had this advantage would need some time to adapt. A simulator can help learning to hunt in two ways. By removing the visible cues of ropes to follow, it forces the learner to make conscious speed changes, and to think a blow ahead. Learners who have already tried hunting with live bells often move too little and too late at first, showing just how dependent they are on the visual cue, rather than knowing where to go and going there. The second advantage is of course that it can be done 'off line' with just an instructor, so the learner can get extra practice.

Other exercises

Given the centrality of accurate, effective speed change, any exercises related to speed provide useful for preparation. For example, deliberately ringing Rounds at widely different speeds (including raising and lowering in peal) helps to develop familiarity and fluency with different speeds. Dodging exercises, even just with another single tied bell, are good practice for the 'corners' needed to change speed quickly by a significant amount.

The best approach?

There is no single 'best sequence' to learn hunting. Be aware of each exercise's strengths and weaknesses, and use them according to the learner's needs. But there are some principles:

- Use preliminary exercises to develop the learner's ability to change speed rapidly.
- Start on low numbers for simplicity.
- Use a low compass (4 bells) to emphasise the speed changes
- Use higher numbers (6 or 8 bells) to give experience of sustained 'down' and 'up' speeds.
- Use a simulator if you have one as well as hunting with live bells.
- Vary the bells involved, to prevent undue dependence on remembering the rope order.
- Ring without a cover to reduce dependence on leading off the Tenor.

Tail End

Kaleidoscope Ringing – A Change Ringer's Alternative to Called Changes is available from CC Publications.