

# Introduction to The Pit Bull

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# Introduction to the Pit Bull

By Mary L. Harwelik CPDT, Presented by The Real Pit Bull

## Introduction

In an effort to provide factual and accessible information on the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT), The Real Pit Bull, Inc. ([www.realpitbull.com](http://www.realpitbull.com)) presents, "An Introduction to the Pit Bull". This booklet was designed to give a general outline of the breed's history, traits, and true nature. It will give the reader a basic understanding of the breed, some thoughts to consider before a Pit Bull is brought into the home, address myths and Pit Bull problems, plus provide sources for more information on the breed.

The Pit Bull is a very misunderstood and maligned breed. In the past several decades it has been the victim of a huge amount of bad publicity. The public, running in fear, has been misinformed about the breed's true nature by the sensationalistic (and often inaccurate) material presented by the media, as well as other groups. The resulting perception of the Pit Bull as a "bad guy" dog has attracted people to it that do not understand nor have the breed's best interests at heart. This in turn has elicited more bad publicity. The breed is truly a victim: of overpopulation brought about by excessive and unscrupulous breeding practices; of irresponsible and criminal people; and of severe misrepresentation. Popularized for the wrong reasons and made out to be a demon among dogs, it is now facing the wrath of those who would punish an entire breed for the sins of others. The public needs to have its fears quelled and to understand that the "Pit Bull Problem" is, in the strictest sense of the term, a "People Problem", and the dogs are just supporting characters in a sad, dramatic storyline.



Allow this booklet, "Introduction to the Pit Bull", to be a starting place in your journey towards understanding this unique breed and a tool for educating others. Whether you are a guardian, an admirer, a rescue worker or a shelter employee, please copy and distribute this booklet, free of charge, to anyone who may benefit from its contents.

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**A note on the use of the term "Pit Bull"**

This booklet uses the term "Pit Bull" when referring to the American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT) breed ONLY. However, the media, legislators and others use this same term *incorrectly* to describe a certain group of dogs that actually includes several breeds and types. Included in this group are: American Pit Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, and Staffordshire Bull Terriers, sometimes Bull Terriers and American Bulldogs, mixes including a percentage of any one of these breeds and dogs that simply look like these breeds. Understandably, many people are confused about what a "Pit Bull" actually is, since the popular public definition is so wide and the breeds above actually share similar history and physical characteristics.

The broader use of the term "Pit Bull" is a fairly new development, and seemingly the roots of the redefinition lie with the misinformed media. Along with the myriad myths propagated by careless reporting came misapplication of the nickname "Pit Bull". The American Pit Bull Terrier literally had its name stolen and applied to all manner of breeds and mixes that had never before been called thus. Indeed, ask a Staffordshire Bull Terrier, Bull Terrier, or American Bulldog guardian if their dog is a "Pit Bull" and you will hear a resounding, "No!" The American Pit Bull Terrier is the only breed with the words "pit" and "bull" actually in its name, and the only one of the above breeds that is most commonly, correctly, and historically, called a "Pit Bull".

"Pit Bull" and "APBT" will be used interchangeably in this booklet.

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## The Pit Bull

To start with, the Pit Bull is just a dog. It is a specific breed of dog, and like any breed of dog, it has its own unique traits. But the core of the animal is all dog, and although some sensation-seeking media representatives may wish to lead you to believe otherwise, do not be fooled. The Pit Bull has no special powers, no basic biological uniqueness separating it from other breeds. It is not psychotic, nor does it suffer from any "syndrome" that causes it to go from sweet and innocent to Jack the Ripper in the blink of an eye. It is not a wild animal, nor does it act like one. It is a domesticated dog, like a Poodle, a Golden Retriever, or a Dachshund. It is a dog, and like any other dog, responds to kindness, feels pain, and can learn many behaviors and perform many tasks.

**History:** What, by definition, is a Pit Bull? The term "Pit Bull" is most correctly and commonly used to describe the breed of dog known as the American Pit Bull Terrier. This breed was developed in 19th century England by mixing the bulldog of the time with game terriers, but its ancestors go back much further to the war and combat dogs of Roman times. The bulldog (not to be confused with the short, squat AKC show Bulldog) that makes up most of the Pit Bull's genetic history was a versatile animal (more of a type than a distinct breed), characterized by the work it performed: catch work, bull and bear baiting, farm work, and dog fighting. The terriers that were crossed into the bulldog were rough and hardy little ratters and fighters. These original mixes were selectively bred over many generations and eventually formed a breed: the American Pit Bull Terrier.

The Pit Bull was created to be the ultimate canine warrior, mainly for dog-on-dog combat, but has traditionally been used for purposes similar to that of the bulldog, mentioned above, and also served as companion to home and family farm. The dog Jack of Laura Ingles Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie* novels was a Pit Bull-like bulldog that performed the function of farm and companion dog, and Pete the Pup of *Little Rascals* fame was a children's playmate, protector and best friend. These two dogs epitomize the breed and are representative of its earlier years, both functionally and perceptively.

The Pit Bull is an extremely versatile breed, one that excels at many tasks. Aggression towards humans is not a part of the history of this breed. It was never bred for any tasks that necessitated aggression towards humans. Such aggression was typically carefully selected against early on in the breed's development. The Pit Bull has always been involved in work that required a close working relationship with its handler (who, for instance, would literally be in the pit next to the dog as it was fighting an opponent). Indeed, only in recent years have Pit Bulls been in the spotlight because of supposed aggressive tendencies towards humans.

Today, ethical breeders strive to produce American Pit Bull Terriers faithful to the human-friendly, amiable, and athletic roots of the breed, while breeding for modern day functions – namely that of companion. The Pit Bull is a truly wonderful dog, safe and submissive with humans, yet a strong and extraordinary working dog partner.

**What does a Pit Bull look like?** Because the American Pit Bull Terrier is a purebred recognized by established registry organizations, the breed has its own unique standard. A standard is a written description of a particular breed which outlines the ideal specimen, physically and temperamentally. The United Kennel Club (UKC, founded in 1898) and the American Dog Breeders Association (ADBA, founded in 1909) each have similar written standards that describe what their version of the ideal Pit Bull should look like. (These two organizations are the oldest, most sought-after, and reputable Pit Bull-registering bodies, and their standards are the most respected standards.) The standards list desirable traits as well as faults. Dog show judges use standards to judge dogs in the show ring, and responsible breeders follow the standards closely when selecting breeding stock. Pit Bulls (as well as other breeds) maintain a certain amount of uniformity in looks and in temperament because breeders follow standards.



*(An example of an ADBA-registered Pit Bull.)*

To become more proficient in the identification of the Pit Bull, it is beneficial to read and study the breed standards. To obtain copies of the standards, write to the breed clubs listed in the resource section at the back of this booklet, or visit [www.realpitbull.com](http://www.realpitbull.com).

The American Pit Bull Terrier was originally bred to be a working dog. When breeding stock was selected emphasis was placed on functionality and temperament rather than looks. It did not quite matter what color a dog was or exactly how much it weighed. The main concern was whether or not it was an athlete capable of going to work and so there is great variety in size, color, and general appearance in the Pit Bull. It is because of this variety that many people have a difficult time identifying the breed. Unless one is familiar with all the

variances, many Pit Bulls may be overlooked as Pit Bull mixes or completely unrelated breeds. The average (standard-sized) Pit Bull is around 60 pounds, but may also weigh as little as 25 or 30 pounds, and is for all intents and purposes, a medium-small dog. Recently, the trend has been towards breeding dogs that are oversized (an over-sized dog would generally be considered any dog over about 70 pounds). These dogs are not considered standard or typical, and usually are the products of unethical and uneducated breeders. Some of these dogs may not even be purebred, but rather Pit Bulls crossed with larger breeds such as the various mastiffs, and misrepresented as purebred APBTs.



*(A UKC-registered APBT)*

Pit Bulls come in almost every color imaginable. An exception would be the color merle which is a disqualifying color that appears only in dogs that have mixed breed heritage. For instance, it is believed that the Catahoula Leopard Dog (a breed that carries the merle gene) was used by some Pit Bull kennels to introduce the color merle into their bloodlines, creating in effect mixed breed dogs. Because merle will not spontaneously appear in a breed, when the color shows up it means that it must already exist in the gene pool, or else has been introduced via an outcross (by mixing a new breed into the gene pool.) Because there is no historical proof of merle Pit Bulls and they have only begun to show up recently in the kennels of questionable breeders, experts assume that merle Pit Bulls are a new “invention” arising from mixed breeding.

Form follows function, and for this reason, there are certainly some very recognizable physical traits of the Pit Bull in general that one can take note of in the identification of individual dogs when no pedigree or papers are available. The Pit Bull head is probably the most readily identifiable feature, with broad skull, square muzzle, and large jaw muscles. Pit Bull ears normally hang down and out to the side of the head like a Greyhound's (called “rose ears”, which is

the ideal ear carriage for the breed) or stand half-erect with the tips flopping down (called half prick). Fully erect ears (like on a German Shepherd, called bat or prick ears) are not unheard of, although relatively uncommon, as are other ear variations such as full-drop (like a Coon Hound's ears), button (like a Fox Terrier) or hung close to the head (like a Labrador Retriever).

Ear cropping (oftentimes used to hide an undesirable ear set) is a common practice, and is allowable but not preferred according to the standards. Cropping is ultimately unnecessary and painful, performed mainly for the vanity of the human and not for the benefit of the dog (show dogs typically have their ears cropped). Tail docking is not correct for this breed.

The body of the Pit Bull is compact, with a long, strong back and slightly sloping loin. The dog should appear slightly rectangle in shape rather than square. Skin is tight fitting. There should not be excessive wrinkling or jowls. Well-muscled and short-coated, the breed gives the impression of an animal of great strength that is ready to work.

**What is an American Staffordshire Terrier (AmStaff)?** The American Staffordshire Terrier is a breed recognized by the American Kennel Club (founded in 1884). This breed springs directly from American Pit Bull Terrier stock, is bred to very similar standards (temperamentally, the two are nearly identical), and no other breed was used to develop the AmStaff.

In the 1930s, some Pit Bull fanciers decided to petition the AKC for recognition of the American Pit Bull Terrier. The AKC granted recognition in 1936. So why is there currently no AKC breed known as the "American Pit Bull Terrier"? Because the AKC only recognized the APBT under the stipulation that its name be changed to "Staffordshire Terrier" (the word "American" was added to the breed's name in 1972). It is important to realize that there was not a desire to create a new breed when the Pit Bull fanciers petitioned the AKC, but simply to register APBTs with the AKC. Still, the fanciers agreed to the name change and proceeded to register their Pit Bulls with the AKC under the moniker "Staffordshire Terrier". Eventually, the AKC ceased allowing new Pit Bull registrations, closing the studbook. They then allowed ONLY the registration of offspring of already-registered Staffordshire Terriers. And so a new breed formed. Or did it?

Currently, ONLY those dogs registered with the AKC can rightfully be called AmStaffs. ONLY dogs that have AmStaff parents registered with the AKC can be registered as AmStaffs. Pit Bulls registered with other registries such as the ADBA or the UKC cannot be registered with the AKC. However, all AmStaffs can be registered as APBTs with the UKC and the ADBA.



*(An AKC-registered AmStaff.)*

Some people consider AmStaffs and Pit Bulls to be one and the same breed since all AmStaffs can be registered as Pit Bulls with the UKC and ADBA. However, others maintain that AmStaffs have now diverged into a separate albeit very similar breed because Pit Bulls cannot be registered as AmStaffs with the AKC. (All AmStaffs are APBTs but not all APBTs are AmStaffs.)

It is interesting to note a key difference having to do with color in the standards of the American Pit Bull Terrier and the American Staffordshire Terrier. The Pit Bull standards have no color faults or disqualifications, except for merle. Otherwise, all colors are equal. The AKC standard for the AmStaff places no disqualifications on color, however certain colors are indeed penalized (and faulted within the standard). Dogs that are more than 80% white, black and tan dogs, and red/red nose dogs are very undesirable (particularly the latter). Red/red nose dogs were always extremely popular in Pit Bull circles (indeed, a very famous line of pit dogs was red/red nose, and the color is very closely associated with the breed in general). However, AmStaff breeders shied away from this color, so much so that today there is virtually no such thing as a red/red nose AmStaff although they certainly have existed and can still exist.

Blue, a color that is extremely popular right now, is most often associated with the AmStaff. There is a popular, although not truly correct, line of thought that suggests if it's blue it must be an AmStaff, and if it's red/red nose it must be a Pit Bull. Registered blue Pit Bulls can, indeed, most often be traced back to AmStaff bloodlines. Blue, before the AmStaff, was not a common color in the Pit Bull breed.

**Pit Bull Personality:** The Pit Bull personality is often described as “clownish”, “fun-loving”, “happy-go-lucky”, and “sweet”. This is a very people-friendly breed,

gladly accepting of love and attention from family and strangers alike. Every new person met will be considered a friend, and it is because of this very trait that Pit Bulls oftentimes are easily stolen. They also make for poor guard dogs. Pit Bulls are, however, known for their keen ability to accurately read situations, and will react to a real threat to their person's well-being. Special training for protective behavior is never necessary. They are good judges of character.



In the home, the Pit Bull is eager to be in the center of all the action. They love positioning themselves on feet, couches next to – or on top of! - their people, or under the covers in bed at night (with their head on a pillow, of course!) This is a breed that needs to be in the home with its people, not left for hours on end in an empty yard.

The Pit Bull is extremely smart and is what is termed a “thinking breed”. They are problem-solvers and for this reason can be difficult to confine in otherwise dog-proof pens/yards. Latches that securely lock and enclosures with tops and cement bottoms are one of the safest ways to keep your Pit Bull in your yard when not on leash, as well as protect him from would-be dog thieves. (Supervision when out of doors is always advised.) The breed takes very well to obedience training, particularly when the method is positive reinforcement-based. Pit Bulls do not do well with training methods that are based largely on physical corrections as they tend to “shut down” or ignore their trainer when heavy-handed tactics are used. But the Pit Bull will learn to take advantage, so a guardian that knows how to draw the line will best suit the breed.

Because of their lovable and sometimes babyish personalities, it is very easy to be tempted to spoil your Pit Bull and allow behavior that could cause problems

in the future. Underneath that silly exterior is a headstrong dog that will work hard get its way. The Pit Bull needs a strong, firm, fair guardian who will show the dog its proper place in the home, a guardian that will remain in control at all times. The attitude of a leader is an essential trait in guardians of this breed.

**Pit Bull Temperament:** The “temperament correct” Pit Bull is sublimely friendly towards people: family, friends, and strangers alike. Known for its sound character, strong nerve, and great intelligence, the breed makes an ideal companion animal. The soft and sweet nature of the breed does not leave it incapable of being strong and vigilant enough to protect its loved ones if need be. It is never necessary to embark on guard or attack training with this breed as they are naturally attuned to their environment and intuitive about real threats. Although never aggressive towards people without real need, *the Pit Bull is prone to exhibiting dog-directed aggression*, and may exhibit such behavior to varying individual degrees. The properly socialized and trained Pit Bull should not be an instigator, but the temperament correct dog would never shy away from a challenge. The breed is known for its high prey drive and so due caution should be exercised when cats, rabbits, domestic fowl and other such animals are present. Dog-directed aggression should not be viewed as a fault, although excessive, uncontrollable aggression is neither desirable nor correct. *Cautionary note: Aggression in any of its forms when directed at humans should be viewed as a serious and dangerous fault.*

The Pit Bull is a very human-friendly breed. Although in recent years some people have misused the breed and the media have misrepresented it, aggression towards humans never was and still is *not* what the Pit Bull is about. Human-aggression is a serious matter, and not something that should be taken lightly. Human-aggressive dogs (dogs that bite/attempt to bite humans) are NOT CORRECT. Growling (i.e. over food, when moved off the sofa, bed, etc.) should be considered a warning and possibly a precursor to biting. It is imperative that guardians seek professional help if their dog is exhibiting these precursor behaviors or human-directed aggression in any of its forms.

*When animal welfare organizations choose dogs to rescue and place, any dogs that exhibit incorrect temperament should be considered unsuitable candidates for rescue/adoption, and should therefore be humanely euthanized.*

Because the Pit Bull is such a people-friendly breed, they generally make poor guard and protection dogs. Many members of the breed will allow strangers to enter the home or yard without a fuss, whether the guardian is present or not. It is best to stay away from any sort of guard or protection dog training because this is not what the breed was created to do. A good dog can be ruined quite easily by incorrect training, making for a wary, untrusting animal that may become a danger to humans. Do not try to make the Pit Bull into something it is

not. If a serious guard or protection dog is what you desire, look to one of the breeds that have been specifically created for that type of work. Such breeds typically exhibit wariness or aloofness towards strangers, are not likely to allow people into their territory without the guardian present, and are nervy and defensive. Such traits are desirable and necessary in breeds bred to guard and act as attack dogs, and help such breeds to better perform their work. But these are traits that would be extremely undesirable in Pit Bulls. Pit Bulls that exhibit guarding and/or "protective" behavior in the absence of true (not perceived) threat should be considered incorrect.

Pit Bulls have a general temperamental tendency towards dog-directed aggression, although the degree of aggression will vary from dog to dog. Pit Bulls also have a very strong prey drive. Small animals such as birds, squirrels, and cats are often viewed as prey, and Pit Bulls may even view large farm animals as prey – remember the bull-baiting history! ***(Please note that aggression and prey drive behavior directed towards other dogs and animals has no connection to aggression directed towards humans; from a behavioral standpoint, these are two entirely separate issues.)*** Because of the temperament of the breed, it is necessary for the Pit Bull guardian to take certain precautions in the housing, training, and socialization of their dog.

The young Pit Bull should be socialized in a supervised, strategic way from early on with many types of animals and other dogs (and of course people, as well). Basic early obedience training is a must. However, you cannot socialize or train away inherent tendencies. Because of selective breeding conducted over the centuries, Pit Bulls may be more apt to show dog-directed aggression than some other breeds. Socialization and training can help lessen the likelihood of such aggression, and certainly make a dog easier to control and live with. Environment and learning play huge roles in behavioral development, but a dog is born with certain temperamental tendencies that can not be eliminated.

Dog-directed aggression and prey drive is a tricky thing. Even dogs that have never shown such behavior may, at some point, fire up and engage in a fight with another dog or direct inappropriate attention towards the family cat. Many Pit Bulls will never start a fight, yet will not back down if challenged. It is important to realize that aggression and prey drive are normal and natural in dogs, and guardians should be prepared to deal with these issues, no matter the breed they choose to keep.

Pit Bulls should never be left unattended with other dogs or animals. Guardians should keep their dogs on leash while out in public. Dog parks where multiple unacquainted dogs are allowed to run loose and mingle can create dangerous situations for any dog, however they are definitely not recommended

for Pit Bulls.

Pit Bulls are not necessarily looking to show dominance or obtain rank by aggressing. Even submissive individuals cannot be trusted to remain out of trouble at all times. Allowing a Pit Bull to “work out rank” with other dogs is dangerous and may very well result in a bad fight. Although neutering may help in some cases, particularly with younger males, do not count on the operation eliminating the possibility for aggression. Both sexes can show dog-directed aggression, although males may be fierier. Same-sex aggression is a problem, and many have stated that female fights are far worse than male-on-male bouts. Regardless of the sexes involved, same sex households are not a good idea for the novice guardian. However, mixed sex households are not necessarily exempt from problems related to dog-directed aggression.

The Pit Bull is considered fully matured at approximately 3 years of age. Before this age, it is difficult to accurately assess the level of dog-directed aggression a dog may exhibit. *Guardians and others should avoid making assumptions about a dog's temperament based on the behavior of that dog prior to maturity.*

Pit Bulls can and do interact peacefully with other dogs and animals. Individual temperament, early training, and socialization all play important roles in determining a Pit Bull's behavior. Many people successfully keep multiple Pit Bulls and other animals in the same household, but success is based on careful supervision, proper management and training, and the individual animals involved.

**Dog-directed Aggression & the Pit Bull:** Some people claim that Pit Bulls are no more prone to showing dog-directed aggression than any other breed. These people firmly believe that all breeds are born with the same tendencies, and that environment plays the only role in the development of aggressive behavior. For instance, according to this line of thought, a Pit Bull (a breed created for dog-on-dog combat in the pit) would be just as likely as a Beagle (which is a breed created to work in packs amicably with other dogs) to show dog-directed aggression, and environment is the only factor that determines how aggressive either will be. Such people back up their claims by pointing to the fact that there is no scientific proof to suggest that Pit Bulls as a breed are born “dog-aggressive”.

It is true that there is no scientific proof that Pit Bulls are a “dog-aggressive breed”. Labels that attempt to pigeonhole a breed into a specific behavioral category (i.e. “fearful”, “aggressive”, “outgoing”, “shy”) may be setting dogs up for failure. But that doesn't mean we cannot make certain generalizations about

common breed personality to help guide people in the selection, care and training of dogs.

Studies on aggression and genetics are still in stages of infancy. But what we know now suggests that while dogs aren't born knowing aggressive behavior, they come equipped with the means to quickly learn it. Aggression in nature is a very normal and natural survival trait.

Pit Bulls were used and indeed created and selectively bred for dog-on-dog combat in the pit. They were bred to fight long and hard, to fight regardless of what the other dog did, to ignore the other dog's signals suggesting it might not be interested in a fight and is not a threat. They were, essentially, during the development of the breed, bred away from the tendency to exhibit normal dog survival traits. For a comparison, we can look to the wolf in the wild. Wolves are pack animals. They must be able to live harmoniously in a family group and work together. Lone wolves do not survive. And although fights do break out in wolf packs, these fights usually are not serious and end quickly. A large part of the wolf's repertoire of body language consists of signals that help it *avoid* a fight. Fighting is detrimental to the well being of the pack. Domestic dogs are similar in that they, too, look to avoid fights. Norwegian dog behaviorist Turid Rugaas has identified no less than 30 "calming signals" in the domestic dog. These are signals dogs use to avoid conflict. It is important to understand that dogs are not animals that look for conflict with other members of their species.

When compared to other breeds of dog, Pit Bulls show an increased tendency to ignore or misinterpret calming signals. And while all dogs can potentially get into fights with other members of their species, Pit Bulls may fight more often. They become aroused easily when interacting with other dogs, and rough play sessions can easily turn into fights. While dog fights in general tend to result in minor damage to either dog and may be easily broken up or end quickly on their own, Pit Bulls fight with a strong determination. They are also likely to do extensive damage rather quickly; they bite deep, hard, and are not easily convinced to release. Speaking from the standpoint of *how* a Pit Bull fights and not even *how likely* a Pit Bull is to fight, caution when keeping the breed around other dogs would be warranted.

Does this mean that all Pit Bulls will fight, and fight often with great seriousness? Does this mean Pit Bulls like to fight, and wouldn't avoid a fight if they knew how? No, it does not. Each Pit Bull – like each dog in general – is an individual. This fact should not be overlooked. And even Pit Bulls that demonstrate severe dog-directed aggression show, after some behavior modification and once they understand other behavior is available to them, that they are quite willing to use non-aggressive behaviors with other dogs.

But please consider the following. The work the Pit Bull was originally created to do required an increased tenacity and fight drive, along with physical attributes that can provide the means to do more damage. Guardians need to be aware of this fact so that they may take precautions with their dogs as well as focus strongly on socialization and obedience training. The latter will not erase certain tendencies, but will make a dog easier to control and live with, or circumvent the appearance of dog-directed aggression altogether.

The role environment plays in the development of behavior is an extremely important one. Proper socialization and training can mean the difference between a dog that is fun to be with and easy to control, and a dog that is nothing but trouble and difficult to handle/manage. Environment acts upon genetics. Genes are nothing without environment, and vice-versa. Both work together to help a dog learn behaviors. If a dog is PRONE to developing dog-directed aggression, the environment it is raised in can mean a great deal in whether the dog actually develops dog-directed aggression – proper environmental influences can certainly circumvent problems. Raised properly, a Pit Bull can be well mannered and under control around other dogs and even get along with them as well as any other breed. But raised poorly or with a lack of proper socialization, the dog can end up with behavioral issues – just like any dog. Guardians of Pit Bulls, a breed prone to developing dog-directed aggression, would do well to preemptively socialize and obedience train.

It is so very important to note that inherent tendencies do not disappear due to training or socialization. These tendencies may manifest themselves to a lesser degree, or may be circumvented in certain situations. But the tendencies will always be there. For this reason, just because a dog is “raised right”, does not mean he will always act the model citizen.

Pit Bulls may be trained to be obedience trial champions, show dogs, agility dogs, even stock/herding dogs. They do search and rescue work, and other jobs that necessitate a dog that works off lead and in the presence of other dogs. Pit Bulls that perform such tasks are a testament to good training and socialization. They also demonstrate individuality within the breed (there are some dogs that, no matter how much training they undergo, will never be able to perform certain tasks because they do not have the aptitude for it). It is important to note that many Pit Bulls, even titled show and working dogs, may potentially show dog-directed aggression. But they are under control and well mannered, taught to ignore other dogs in the presence of their person and under certain circumstances. It does not mean that given the opportunity these dogs would not engage in a fight – but these dogs still live normal, healthy lives without causing harm to anyone or anything. And do note - most dogs under certain circumstance will indeed fight. Dogs require savvy humans to help and guide them, and keep them out of trouble.

## Guardianship

Pit Bulls make wonderful companions for the right people. They make an ideal house dog for an active person, but are also content to lounge around the house, provided they receive daily exercise of some sort. This is a very athletic, strong, thinking breed, and Pit Bulls can be destructive (i.e. chewing and digging) if not given outlets for their energy. They thrive on human companionship and should be considered house dogs. They are good with children but because of their energy and strength may inadvertently harm a small child by knocking them down or hitting them in the face with an always-wagging tail (supervision between dogs and children is always required, regardless of breed). Pit Bulls must be kept carefully confined when out of doors behind a sturdy fence (no less than 6 feet high), or in a kennel (with top/bottom), etc. They are known to be escape artists. The confinement method must keep the dog in, as well as keep people and other animals out. Obedience training and lots of socialization is a must for any Pit Bull.

**Pit Bulls and Children:** Because Pit Bulls are known to have a high pain-threshold and such a stable temperament, they can often make ideal companions for households with children. They tend to be quite tolerant of the rambunctious young human who may accidentally step on a tail or pull an ear. However, care should always be taken when bringing an adolescent or adult dog into a home with children under the age of 17 if the dog's history is unknown or if it has not been thoroughly evaluated by a breed expert.

A dog that was not properly socialized to children at an early age or one with improper breeding may have less tolerance for a child. Also, no matter the breed or dog, kids and canines should always be supervised when in each others' presence. Many tragedies could have been averted had parents simply kept a closer eye on their child. Never allow your child to be left unsupervised with a dog of any breed. Never allow your child to approach a strange dog, or a dog that is tied up, caged, cornered, or in the possession of food, bones, toys, or other objects.

**Pit Bulls and other animals:** Breed novices should carefully consider their current situation if bringing a Pit Bull into the home means having to share space with other animals. Because of breed inclinations towards dog-directed aggression and strong prey drive, multi-animal households can require tricky maneuvering and very careful supervision on the part of the guardian. If you are not prepared to keep a Pit Bull separated from other animals when not under a watchful eye, a multi-animal household that includes a Pit Bull is not recommended.

Some keys to maintaining a peaceful multi-animal home:

- 1) With dogs, opposite sex pairings are a safer bet than same sex pairings.
- 2) An older Pit Bull (over 3 years of age) may be a wiser choice than a puppy. A mature dog that has been properly temperament-assessed will offer less surprises than a pup that can mature into just about anything (physically and temperamentally!)
- 3) Always supervise when your Pit Bull is with other animals. This means having your attention on the animals, not on dinner cooking on the stove while the animals romp around in the yard unattended.
- 4) When you are not able to concentrate on the interaction between a Pit Bull and other animals, the Pit Bull should be safely confined in a separate part of the house, a crate, etc. Separation is an absolute must when you leave the house.
- 5) Be prepared to break a fight if need be. Understand proper protocol and have a game plan in mind in case of the worst case scenario (please see Breaking a Fight, to follow).
- 6) Be mindful of the environment in which your animals reside. Possible fight triggers should be kept out of sight and out of mind except when dogs are separated. Triggers could include toys, bones, treats, food and food bowls, even water bowls, beds and anything else one dog might value and become possessive over. Food left around for cats would be included in the trigger category.
- 7) Feed your dogs separately (in crates or different rooms, for instance), and at specific times of the day. Do not free feed.
- 8) Have good voice and physical control over your dogs. Obedience training is a must! Your dogs should look to you for leadership, not be running amok and wreaking havoc without a care in the world.
- 9) Have a backup plan should a problem relationship arise between your Pit Bull and another animal. Do you have the ability to keep two animals in the home permanently separated? Many a guardian has been caught off guard by situations with which they were not prepared to deal.
- 10) Understand that keeping a Pit Bull in a home with other animals (particularly small dogs and cats) requires a big commitment of time and energy.
- 11) KNOW YOUR PIT BULL – know your dog's limits with other dogs, learn to

recognize stress signals that could indicate your dog has reached the point where he no longer wishes to engage with another dog, and intervene through time-outs or separation.

12) ALL dogs can fight and potentially harm each other!

**Breaking a fight:** Understand what to do *now* to prevent tragedy *later*.

1) Have a break stick handy and know how to use it. A break stick is a small, hammer handle-sized piece of wood or other tough material with a flat end that can be inserted into the corner of the mouth of a Pit Bull. A twist of the stick will cause the grip of a Pit Bull to be released. Pit Bulls have strong jaws and once seriously engaged in a fight, they may be difficult to convince to let go of another dog. You can order a break stick from [www.pbrc.net](http://www.pbrc.net).

2) Stay calm. Screaming, yelling, hitting, kicking, throwing things, etc. can only make the situation worse.

3) If the dogs have just started fighting, you may be able to startle them into stopping by dumping water on them or squirting them with a hose, or dropping something startling (a pot or pan, for instance) next to them.

4) Be careful not to get bitten. Dogs that are fighting are not paying attention to their surroundings. They can be frightened and lash out at anything close by, or grab a hand when they are meaning to go for a furry scruff. Pit Bulls generally do not redirect aggression onto humans; however dogs in general will do so. So be mindful of where your hands go. Attempt to grab dogs from up above, by the collar, so you may pull up and away while controlling the head.

5) In a situation which involves one Pit Bull, one other dog, and only one person, always attempt to secure the Pit Bull first. Once a fight begins between a Pit Bull and another dog, the other dog will usually only wish to run away and save itself while the Pit Bull will persistently keep going after the other dog.

6) Holding onto the collar from above, straddle the Pit Bull from behind, close your knees around its waist, and then proceed (using a break stick if necessary). If you are able, snap a leash onto the Pit Bull, tie it securely to a fence or piece of furniture, or move it to another area.

7) If the dogs are "in holds" (one dog latched onto another), never attempt to pull them apart as this could result in serious injury. Use a break stick on the Pit Bull (never on the other dog, as this could result in a bite to the human).

8) As a preventive, teach your dogs the "out" or "leave it" command. This can

give you an edge in a serious situation. Obedience training would also be a help.

**Is the Pit Bull the right breed for me?** Use this checklist to see how you score!

- Do you want a housedog?
- Do you want a companion, first and foremost, not a guard, watch or protection dog?
- Are you physically capable of attending to the needs of a strong and active dog?
- Do you have the time to spend exercising, training, socializing and loving an attention-demanding breed?
- Can you accept the fact that Pit Bulls can be prone to dog-directed aggression (even directing such aggression towards other dogs in the home), along with high prey drive, and are you prepared to take precautions to prevent problem interactions between a Pit Bull and other dogs and animals?
- Can you provide an escape and theft-proof enclosure (yard, kennel, etc) for a Pit Bull when it is outside, and will you closely supervise the dog at all times while it is out of doors?
- Will you always use a leash while off your property?
- Have you checked with your homeowners insurance policy to make sure there are no breed restrictions? (Many insurance companies refuse coverage when certain breeds are in residence.)
- If you rent, do you have express, written permission from the landlord to bring a Pit Bull onto the property?
- Do you live in a town/city/state that allows Pit Bulls with no restrictions? (Many areas around the world have made Pit Bulls illegal, or require muzzling, expensive insurance coverage, and special licensing for Pit Bulls.)
- Can you withstand the dismayed glances, rude remarks, and public fear that Pit Bull guardians must often endure?
- Have you thoroughly researched the breed, understand and accept its history, and embrace the special requirements and precautions of Pit Bull guardianship?

If you have answered “no” to even *one* of these questions, the Pit Bull is *NOT* the breed for you.

***“The Pit Bull is the perfect breed for me, now what?”***: You’ve done the research, you know that there is no other breed on the planet as perfect as the Pit Bull, and you would like to bring one into your life. Now what do you do, and where do you go?

First, know your breed. Know what to look for, what you should expect, what is “correct” and “incorrect” for a Pit Bull. Seek out knowledgeable breed people at dog shows, on one of the many online forums or email lists (see resources at the back of this booklet). Start asking a ton of questions. Ask for referrals. Ask to visit dogs at the homes of breeders, at shelters, and at rescues. Next, decide where you should get a Pit Bull: should you adopt or buy?

***Adoption*** (from a reputable Pit Bull rescue or shelter) is the ideal choice for the person seeking out their first Pit Bull to love. If you are not interested in conformation (breed) showing (which requires a pedigreed, registered dog), buying from a breeder is not necessary. With all the beautiful Pit Bulls dying daily for want of homes, why not choose to adopt? There are so many Pit Bulls available through rescue groups and at shelters across the country that you are bound to find the perfect dog via adoption.

Especially for those new to the breed, adopting from a rescue group with an impeccable reputation is the absolute best choice. Such rescues know the breed well, carefully evaluate each dog’s temperament and health, and essentially act as matchmakers for dogs and potential adoptive “parents”. For some recommended rescues and resources, please see [www.realpitbull.com/pbra.html](http://www.realpitbull.com/pbra.html).

***Breeders*** can also be a source for obtaining a Pit Bull. The problem with breeders is that there are so many of them yet *so very few truly ethical and responsible ones*. Many breeders seek to take advantage of uneducated buyers, charging outrageous prices for sick, unsound, or mixed breed dogs. Because so many buyers seeking out Pit Bulls are uneducated, this truly is an unethical seller’s market.

If you do decide to buy a Pit Bull from a breeder, it is imperative that you ***a)*** know exactly what you want in a dog (conformation, temperament, etc.) and can choose one based on your wants, and ***b)*** know a good breeder from a bad breeder. There are many, many websites dedicated to education of buyers, including The REAL Pit Bull website (see, [www.realpitbull.com](http://www.realpitbull.com)). Please, before you buy from a breeder, educate yourself. Approach breeders armed with knowledge so that you may turn away from those unethical people who would

take advantage of you.

***Want ads, dotcom businesses, and pet stores/commercial breeders*** should be avoided at all costs. Most people selling dogs through want ads are unethical breeders or “backyard breeders”. Businesses that sell dogs online to anyone with a credit card do not care about their animals and prey on the ignorant. Pet stores and commercial breeders are profit-seeking entities that view animals as product. They seek to sell large quantities, and quality is not an issue at the forefront of their minds.

*Before you bring a Pit Bull home*, regardless of where you are getting the dog, ask for references. Ask the numerous online Pit Bull communities if such-and-such a person or group is respected and ethical. There is a huge amount of good information available on the breed online and potential guardians just need to tap into it.



**Arm yourself with knowledge:** There are many uneducated people and scam artists in the Pit Bull world. Keep your eyes and ears open at all times, and beware the following!

1) The “Attack/Protection Pit Bull” Breeder: Some unethical breeders are producing large/aggressive Pit Bulls for use in attack and protection dog work. The dogs these breeders are producing are not typical Pit Bulls. They are bred for aggression towards humans, wariness towards strangers, and may even be mixed with mastiff or bulldog breeds to enhance size and make for a dog more suitable for attack or protection training. The Pit Bull was never intended to be an attack breed. Pit Bulls that display the suspicious and wary attitude that many guard dog breeds display are incorrect in temperament. Breeders who are trying to produce guard and protection Pit Bulls are a detriment to the breed and should be avoided at all costs. *Beware any breeder who calls their dogs “protective”.*

2) The “Blue Pit Bull” Breeder: This breeder leads people to believe that blue dogs are somehow special, unique, or rare. “Blue” (which is actually a slate grey) is a color that appears in Pit Bulls and American Staffordshire Terriers extremely frequently. Dogs of this color are characterized by grey or light tan/gold/hazel

eyes, and have “blue” noses and eye rims that match the color of their coats. While there is nothing wrong with the color blue, many unethical breeders boast of “special”, “rare”, or “such-and-such blues” and charge unknowing buyers ridiculous prices for dogs that are neither special nor rare. Blue is a big time fad color right now with unethical breeders. Many of these breeders have kennels filled with blue dogs, and breed blue dog to blue dog, generation after generation. Most ethical breeders will agree that blue on blue matings produce dogs more susceptible to serious skin problems. Avoid “blue kennels”, or breeders who will attempt to lead you to believe that blue is anything more than just a color. (In fact, while you are at it, avoid ANY breeder that uses color as a selling point. Also, beware any breeders that are producing white or merle Pit Bulls – RUN away from such breeders; white dogs are prone to deafness, and merle dogs are mixed breeds and merle is NOT an acceptable color according to the registries.)

3) The “Oversized, Low-rider, Shorty Bull, or American Bully style” Breeder: Unethical breeders capitalize on the public’s current infatuation with bigger, better, and meaner looking dogs by breeding (sometimes mixed breed) Pit Bulls with exaggerated features. But Pit Bulls aren’t meant to weight 100 pounds, hobble around on short, stubby, fiddle-fronted bodies, or struggle to breath through shortened muzzles. Stay away from those breeders who produce “monster”, “giant”, “low rider”, or “short” Pit Bulls, American Bullies, or any Pit Bull produced at a “Pit Bull farm”. Such breeders may claim to be cutting “Edge”, but they are really just uneducated at best and scam artists at worst.

***There are some tell-tale signs of breeders that lack ethics and knowledge.***

***Beware of the breeder*** that does not health test nor certify their dogs with established canine health registries like the OFA, CERF, PennHip, etc.; does not register with the ADBA or UKC, (or AKC for AmStaffs); does not offer lifetime guarantees on health/temperament; does not show and/or compete with their dogs in legitimate ADBA, UKC or AKC-sanctioned shows and sports; attempts to send you home with a puppy that is under 8 weeks of age; does not ask for references and/or do a home check; accepts credit cards as a form of payment; has more than one litter at their kennel; has a large number of dogs; will not let you interact with the sire and/or dam of the litter. Avoid any breeder who registers with the American Bully Kennel Club (ABKC).

***And yes, there are unethical/uneducated rescues as well.***

***Beware the rescue group/shelter*** that does not talk to you at length about breed temperament; adopts out dogs with human aggression; uses phrases such as “he’s a little shy, and doesn’t like strangers”, “she doesn’t like

men/children/ladies with big hats, etc”, “he’s not good around kids, but loves adults!” to describe dogs, as such statements often belie serious temperament problems; will attempt to force an adoption, excessively encouraging you to take a dog that may not be suitable; does not ask for references and does not do a home check; tries to place a very young (under 4 months) puppy; tries to place an adolescent (under 2 or 3 years) dog with you when you have other animals at home without informing you of the risk of dog-directed aggression and high prey drive; does not require you to sign a contract.

### **Pit Bull Myths Debunked**

*Myth 1) “Pit Bulls have locking jaws.”* The jaws of the Pit Bull are functionally the same as the jaws of any other breed, and this has been proven via expert examination.

*The few studies which have been conducted of the structure of the skulls, mandibles and teeth of Pit Bulls show that, in proportion to their size, their jaw structure and thus its inferred functional morphology, is no different than that of any [other] breed of dog. There is absolutely no evidence for the existence of any kind of ‘locking mechanism’ unique to the structure of the jaw and/or teeth of the American Pit Bull Terrier, says Dr. I. Lerh Brisbin of the University of Georgia (from the ADBA booklet, “Discover the American Pit Bull Terrier”).*

*Myth 2) “Pit Bulls chew with their back teeth while gripping with their front teeth.”* As stated above, the Pit Bull’s jaws are, functionally speaking, the same as all other breeds.

*Myth 3) “Pit Bulls don’t feel pain.”* Pit Bulls have the same nervous system of any other breed, and they can and do feel pain. Historically, those dogs that would tolerate or ignore discomfort and pain and finish the task they were required to perform were the dogs that were bred and the sort of dogs breeders strove to produce. This is the trait of “gameness” that so many breed fanciers speak of, which may be defined as, “The desire to continue on and/or complete a task **despite** pain and discomfort.”

*Myth 4) “Pit Bulls have more bite pressure per square inch (PSI) than any other breed.”* This is 100% untrue. There have been no exhaustive studies conducted to prove that Pit Bulls have the strongest jaws of any breed. There likely could not be any truly conclusive testing done to measure something like strongest breed bite pressure PSI. A reason for this lies in the fact that dogs bite with varying pressure depending upon the situation, and the internal and external factors driving the bite at that particular point in time. A dog cannot be instructed to bite down on a measuring device as hard as possible, so a tester could have no way of knowing whether or not a particular dog being tested is actually using its jaws to capacity in any given testing phase. There is also large

size variation in any breed, and one must assume strength varies as well. A very large (but not typical or standard) Pit Bull may bite harder than a small Rottweiler, German Shepherd, or other breed, while a standard sized Pit Bull may not have as much jaw power as a larger, typical sized Rottweiler, etc. Also, if one breed is to claim "highest bite pressure", all breeds would have to be compared. And there are hundreds of breeds.

Dr. I. Lerh Brisbin of the University of Georgia states, *To the best of our knowledge, there are no published scientific studies that would allow any meaningful comparison to be made of the biting power of various breeds of dogs. There are, moreover, compelling technical reasons why such data describing biting power in terms of 'pounds per square inch' can never be collected in a meaningful way. All figures describing biting power in such terms can be traced to either unfounded rumor or, in some cases, to newspaper articles with no foundation in factual data.* (From the ADBA booklet, "Discover the American Pit Bull Terrier".)

Additionally, Dr. Brady Barr of National Geographic conducted a comparative test between a Pit Bull, a Rottweiler, and a German Shepherd. The Pit Bull had the **LOWEST PSI OF THE THREE, measuring in with a bite of 320 pounds per square inch of pressure.**

*Myth 5) "Pit Bulls attack more people than any other breed."* Bite statistics are difficult to obtain accurately. Dogs that are referred to as "pit bulls" in statistical reports actually are a variety of breeds and mixes all lumped together under the "pit bull" heading. Also, many people have a difficult time properly identifying a true Pit Bull, so added to the statistics are those dogs that have been misidentified. Considering these factors, the actual number of attacks attributable to American Pit Bull Terriers is considerably lower than represented. Also important to understand is the extreme popularity of the Pit Bull and similar breeds. By some estimates, numbers-wise they are the most popular of all dog breeds. It is only logical to assume that the breed with the higher number of individual dogs would be represented with a higher number of bites. Viewing older statistical reports from the Center of Disease Control, one will see that trends in breed popularity reflect in the number of bites attributed to a specific breed during a specific period of time.

*Myth 6) "The brains of Pit Bulls swell and cause them to go crazy"*. Prior to the boom in Pit Bull popularity, the Doberman Pinscher was rumored to suffer from an affliction in which, as the dog grew, the skull became too small to accommodate the brain. This would, according to the rumor, cause the Doberman to go crazy or "just snap" out of no where and attack its guardian. This rumor could never be proven, and indeed had no merit whatsoever. Now that the Doberman fad has run its course the Pit Bull has inherited the swelling brain myth. It is no truer now than it was during the Doberman's fad days.

*Myth 7 "Pit Bulls 'turn' on their guardians."* Dogs, as a species, do not perform

behaviors “just because”. There are always reasons for behavior, and when aggression becomes a problem the reasons can be such things as improper handling, lack of socialization or training, a misreading of dog behavior by the guardian, or disease. Aggression, when it presents in dogs, follows specific patterns. First come the warning signs, then more warning signs, and finally, when those signs are continually ignored or misinterpreted, the dog resorts to using its teeth. When a guardian is startled by a sudden, aggressive outburst, it is because they have been unaware of problems that were brewing. This is true of all dogs, not just Pit Bulls.

*Myth 8) “The only thing Pit Bulls are good for is dog fighting.”* Unfortunately, a large amount of attention has been brought to the fact that the Pit Bull was originally created for fighting other dogs in the pit. Since the breed was selectively bred for and excelled at this task, there is a common assumption that fighting must be all for which the breed is good. The truth of the matter is that the Pit Bull is one of the most versatile of canines, capable of excelling at just about any task its guardian asks it to complete. This breed is routinely used for: obedience trialing, conformation showing, weight pull, agility, and has even been known to participate in herding trials, search and rescue work, and a variety of other tasks including police and armed services work. But fanciers will argue that the task this breed performs best of all is that of beloved companion.



*(A Pit Bull performs the agility portion of a working dog trial.)*



*(A therapy Pit Bull makes the rounds at a nursing home.)*

## **Dog Fighting**

A person may wonder why anyone would want a dog that was originally bred and used for fighting other dogs. The truth of the matter is that there are many breeds that have been created for purposes directly related to killing other animals. Since these breeds have not received the type of bad publicity that the Pit Bull has, the general public is unaware of the fact that they may share their home or their neighborhood with a "fighting dog" or a dog bred for similar purposes. Almost all of the terrier breeds have been bred to hunt and/or kill small game. The Akita was traditionally used as a fighting dog, and many other popular breeds such as Boston Terriers, French Bulldogs, Pugs, and Mastiffs share fighting dog heritage. Even the mellow and sweet Bulldog was once used for the bloody tasks of bull and bear baiting. Breeds such as Greyhounds and other sight hounds were created to chase down game. The list goes on and on.

Each breed has been created for a specific purpose. Some of those purposes were noble, some not so noble. However, today dogs of all breeds share our lives with us as companions first and foremost. A breed's original purpose shaped personality and temperament traits, as well as size, shape, color, etc. The fact that a certain breed was used for hunting, or blood sport, or vermin control, does not mean it is incapable of performing other jobs as well, even if that job is simply "companion animal". In fact, some of those traits that were necessary for a breed's original purpose actually make for a better companion.

The majority of Pit Bulls today are bred to be loving companions, show dogs, and working dog partners. The average Pit Bull is many generations removed from its fighting dog ancestors. And distasteful as it may be, the Pit Bull's history is what shaped the breed and made it into the loving, stable dog it is today.

**Ex-fighting dogs:** Because dog-directed aggression and aggression towards people are two distinct behavioral issues, ex-fighting dogs can and do make safe, loving companions despite their violent past. Dog-directed aggression can be an issue with the Pit Bull regardless of whether or not a dog has ever been fought. No great differences in handling are necessary when dealing with a fighting dog vs. a Pit Bull that has never been fought, generally speaking. Fighting dogs may or may not be more aggressive towards other dogs than individuals that have never been fought. It is prudent to take each dog on a case by case basis. And fighting dogs can certainly be responsive to behavior modification, just like any other dog.

**Fighting Dog Myths Debunked:** Because of the gruesome nature of dog fighting, many people fear the Pit Bull, thinking it must be as violent and horrid as the sport in which it was originally developed to participate. Besides the "traditional" myths like those mentioned earlier, there are other misconceptions

held specifically about dogs used in fighting. These myths only serve to increase public fear. It is important that potential guardians and others understand that these myths have no truth to them, and learn the reality-based facts instead.

*Myth 1) "Fighting dogs (or dogs that are aggressive towards other dogs) are vicious towards humans."* The behavioral fact is that aggression towards other dogs is not the same thing as aggression towards humans. The two traits are SEPARATE AND UNRELATED, and the presence of one does not mandate the presence of the other. There are many breeds of dogs (most of the terriers for instance) that are naturally prone towards dog-directed aggression, yet these dogs are routinely kept as companions and this practice is viewed as perfectly acceptable. Pit Bulls are no different in this respect.

*Myth 2) "The way to train a dog to fight is to encourage it to kill puppies and kittens." or "Pit Bulls are trained to fight."* Encouraging a dog to kill small animals will do absolutely nothing for its fighting ability. The use of so-called bait animals was never a part of historical dog fighting as it was an absolutely useless waste of time, and could actually be counter-productive to developing a champion pit dog. In rare instances today, some disgusting individuals have allowed their Pit Bulls to maim and kill small dogs and animals in the name of "fight dog training". In all reality this has nothing to do with training a dog to fight (even if an individual mistakenly believes it does). Dogs in general are born with the ability to protect themselves in a battle, although due to selective breeding the Pit Bull is more adept at performing the function of a fighting dog. Environment plays a big role in developing behavior in a dog, and a Pit Bull that is constantly encouraged and allowed to attack other dogs will develop problem behavior that another dog might not. However, environment always acts upon genetics; environment simply helps to bring out innate characteristics and abilities in a dog.

Many times shelters and rescue groups will refuse to adopt out a Pit Bull when it is believed the dog has been fought because of the mistaken belief that such dogs cannot be retrained or taught to behave like a good companion. This is an unfortunate situation, and many excellent dogs have been put to death due to this line of thinking. The truth is that Pit Bulls as a whole are prone to developing dog-directed aggression, and fighting dog or not, many individuals will manifest this tendency to some degree. If a prospective guardian is not prepared to deal with this tendency, the Pit Bull should be considered an unsuitable breed for such an individual.

*Myth 3) "Once a dog gets a 'taste of blood' it will be vicious and turn on its guardian."* Dogs are carnivores, naturally, and blood (i.e. meat, etc.) is a very natural, normal thing for a dog to eat. Eating meat is an everyday occurrence for some dogs that are fed natural diets, or a diet called BARF (Bones and Raw

Food). This type of diet is routinely fed by guardians, breeders, trainers, etc. and to a variety of breeds. Getting a "taste of blood" will no more make your dog vicious than eating a juicy, rare steak will make a human a serial killer.

*Myth 4) "Fighting dogs cannot be 'retrained' or re-homed."* It is a shame that shelters routinely destroy many loving, stable dogs simply because they have been labeled "fighting dogs". Pit Bull rescue organizations and breed-savvy shelters have re-homed numerous ex-fighting dogs successfully.

### **Pit Bull Problems**

**The 'Dangerous Breed' Dilemma:** Irresponsible guardians and dogs with incorrect temperament have succeeded in making their way into the headlines, tarnishing the Pit Bull's once-proud image. It seems nowadays that one cannot turn on the nightly news without having to sit through a report on a "pit bull attack". Pit Bulls are not, by any stretch of the imagination, the only breed committing attacks, nor even the single breed that bites the most (remember, the term "pit bull", when used in bite statistics, includes several breeds and mixes of those breeds, plus misidentified dogs). But they are the current hot topic, and the words "pit bull" are likely to sell more papers than the words "Cocker Spaniel". Recently, a report on a dog attack appeared in a New Jersey paper, the headline reading, "Pit bull attack". This same story included information about a Dalmatian attack. Of course the Pit Bull nabbed the heading, being the more controversial breed.

Even if the situation is blown out of proportion, there really is no denying the fact that irresponsibly kept Pit Bulls ARE biting people and that there is a perceived "pit bull problem". The Pit Bull, a once obscure and highly regarded breed known for its gentleness towards humans, is now viewed as a devil dog. What happened, and why?

Since the mid 80's, the Pit Bull has seen an enormous increase in numbers. The reason for the popularity explosion is not the focus here; concern lies with the fact that with that popularity came huge problems. Popularity has shown in the past to cause serious problems for specific breeds. German Shepherd Dogs, Doberman Pinschers, Rottweilers and Golden Retrievers have felt the disastrous effects of popularity and over-breeding. Unscrupulous breeding (which leads to both health and temperament problems), people who buy a dog because of its fad and/or macho status, and irresponsible/uneducated people combine to create a hazardous situation. No where has this been demonstrated more true than with the Pit Bull. Consider the breed's current status in society: it is an immensely popular breed—by some estimates the most widespread breed in the nation (appealing to a wide demographic, most often for benign enough reasons, too often for the wrong reasons). Pit Bulls are being bred at an alarming rate,

and the excess animals of puppy millers and backyard breeders end up lining the walls of shelters across the nation. Irresponsible keepers flourish, many meaning well but really having no idea what it means to be a “good” dog guardian. Is it any wonder then that the Pit Bull breed is in such dire straights?

Dog bites are a huge public safety concern. A few recent highly publicized maulings committed by Pit Bulls or similar breeds have stirred an outcry, and communities are demanding now more than ever that something be done. The average person does not understand dog nature, let alone the idiosyncrasies of the Pit Bull breed, or its current situation. The circumstances surrounding a specific attack are even less of a concern. Misinformation and distorted facts have paved the way and gathered support for what is termed, “Breed Specific Legislation”, or “BSL”, a supposed answer to the question of how to deal with vicious dogs. These laws target individual breeds based on the misguided view that some breeds are “inherently vicious”. BSL is prejudicial in nature; guardians of such “inherently vicious” dogs, according to BSL, are obligated to muzzle their dogs, keep them confined in special pens, pay extra licensing fees, as well as carry insurance (usually a \$100,000+ policy), and are subjected to other unjustified rules and restrictions. This is all regardless of a dog’s history of aggression, or lack thereof. In some areas, BSL bans specific breeds altogether, no matter what a guardian may do by way of restraint, housing, and liability insurance. Pit Bulls are always the main targets of such legislation, however breeds like Rottweilers, American Bulldogs, Dobermans, and others are also sometimes subject to BSL. Dangerous Breed Mania has reached a fever pitch, and no breed is truly safe. One highly publicized attack may be all it takes for another breed to be lumped into the “inherently vicious” category and outlawed out of existence.

Enacted in the name of public safety, these anti-dog laws fail to truly eliminate the problem of dangerous dogs. BSL does not address the underlying causes. It attempts to fix a problem by addressing only the symptoms. It is nothing more than a Band-Aid placed over a gaping wound. Of real concern are irresponsible people, not specific breeds. These are people that allow their dogs to run loose, keep dogs with multiple bites on their records, are involved in illegal activity, etc. If the problems we are seeing, not just with Pit Bull keepers, but irresponsible people in general, are to be reversed, legislators must focus on laws that punish the actions of people and individual dogs. Generic dangerous dog laws judge by action, not by misguided assumptions about the genetic proclivities of certain breeds. If legislators succeed in passing BSL to the point that the Pit Bull is faced with extinction, there will be another breed standing by, just waiting to be exploited. What, then, would be the answer? More breed bans? We would eventually end up living in a society in which all dogs would be considered outlaws. Indeed, we are approaching such a society now.

Responsible Pit Bull guardians and advocates must recognize the fact that

there are serious problems surrounding our breed. Attacks are taking place, irresponsible people are destroying the future of this breed. Whether the dogs involved in attacks are purebred, Pit Bull crosses, or dogs misidentified as Pit Bulls is of no concern to the public at large: all the public knows is that "pit bulls" are attacking people, and they want something done about it. Breed guardians must step up to the plate, stop making excuses, and start presenting solutions. Pit Bull supporters need to show unified outrage when it comes to attacks and other Pit Bull related problems. An effort needs to be made to move forward and present viable solutions to these problems. Guardians need to make it known that they do not support BSL because it does nothing to help remedy the dog attack problem in the long run. Generic dangerous dog laws will help, and the public, who in its naiveté continues to support BSL, needs to have its focus shifted to supporting generic dog laws. Only in this fashion will we have any hope of reclaiming the future for our breed.

**Public Perception:** Every Pit Bull guardian has experienced it while out with his or her dog: the "evil eye" of a passer-by; the panicked parent gathering up the child who, up to that point, had been having his or her face cleaned by your "vicious" Pit Bull's tongue; the self-proclaimed Pit Bull expert that lives next door and knows "for a fact" that Pit Bulls have locking jaws and a desire for human blood. Such encounters can be saddening and downright frustrating to the dedicated guardian who knows that the Pit Bull on the end of its leash would no sooner hurt a human than sprout wings and fly away. Still, as our chosen breed, we Pit Bull fanciers need to accept the fact that the public has a certain perception of the breed. And to the public, the ideas and fears that go along with that perception are very real.

The public has been highly misled when it comes to the Pit Bull. Bombarded from all angles with only negatives about the breed, and having very little, if any, contact with "real" Pit Bulls and responsible guardians, it is no wonder that parents fear for their children's' lives when a Pit Bull enters a neighborhood. The public believes it has a cause to fear the breed and their belief alone should be enough to warrant our consideration. Being understanding of a person's fears is the first step towards helping them overcome those fears. The most important thing Pit Bull guardians can do to help change the public's attitude towards the breed is to simply show responsibility. An on lead, controlled, obedient dog can have more of an impact than any words. Also important are polite, patient dealings with the public and their glances, questions, and accusations. No need to reinforce the negative stereotypes about Pit Bull guardians, either! Always be aware of the image your dog *and* you present.

Even if an encounter with a stranger does not change that person's mind completely about the breed, at least it will give that person a reason to question what they already think they know about Pit Bulls. Sometimes such encounters

can have a domino effect, setting off a series of events that eventually lead to a former "anti" being transformed into a "pro".

Pit Bull guardians must accept their roles as ambassadors for the breed, and remain constantly aware of the fact that their actions and the actions of their dogs are having an impact on the breed's future. Let's make sure that the impact we all have is always a positive one.

## Resources

### *Breed information:*

The REAL Pit Bull Website: [www.realpitbull.com](http://www.realpitbull.com)

### *Online Forum:*

The REAL Pit Bull Forum: [www.realpitbullforum.com](http://www.realpitbullforum.com)

### *Breed registries:*

United Kennel Club: [www.ukcdogs.com](http://www.ukcdogs.com);  
100 E Kilgore Rd, Kalamazoo, MI 49002-5584

American Dog Breeders Association: [www.adba.cc](http://www.adba.cc);  
P.O. Box 1771, S.L.C., UT. 84110

American Kennel Club: [www.akc.org](http://www.akc.org);  
260 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

### *Rescue & Advocacy Groups:*

Pit Bull Rescue Alliance: [www.realpitbull.com/pbra.html](http://www.realpitbull.com/pbra.html)

## Photo Index

**Cover:** **clockwise from top right:** ADBA Jones' Be My Valentine, ptd., 34lbs Red & white red nose, owned by Elise Gonzalez; UKC/ADBA Ren's Krash, owned by Mary Harwelik; Boldog Dirk, FR Brevet, SchH B, owned by Diane Jessup; Boldog Dirk, FR Brevet, SchH B, owned by Diane Jessup; UCK CH/ ARBA Master CH O.W.'s Kap-Patcheeno Qake, CGC, Therapy Dog, DNA-P, Penn Hip, owned by Patch O' Pits; UKC Ch. Cedarbar's Bad As I Wanna Be, NKC WPI, CGC, owned by Bryan and Kienan Hahn; AKC Royal Court Close Encounter, owned by Mary Harwelik; **center:** UKC Arkay's Pink Cadillac owned by Manette & Karen Frenette.

**Page 3:** Dozer, owned by Rachel D.

**Page 6:** ADBA/AADR Gonzalez' Juelz Santana Best Of Show winner  
32lbs brindle & white, owned by Elise Gonzalez

**Page 7:** UCK CH/ ARBA Master CH O.W.'s Kap-Patcheeno Qake, CGC,  
Therapy Dog, DNA-P, Penn Hip, owned by Patch O' Pits

**Page 9:** AKC Galaxy's Kisme On A Rampage, owned by Bryan and Kienan Hahn

**Page 10:** UKC Arkay's Pink Cadillac, owned by Manette & Karen Frenette.

**Page 21:** ADBA Harrington's "CH" Loki, Owned by Oklahoma Outlaw Kennels

**Page 25, top:** Boldog Dirk, FR Brevet, SchH B, owned by Diane Jessup

**Page 25, bottom:** Brandi, CGC, TDI owned by Barbara Wright