



Dead Dog Walking Pit Bull Rescue

A 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization
The Dalles, OR

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The Pit Bull Terriers ... The Truths and Myths

Q: Is it true that Pit Bulls can lock their jaw?

A: The infamous locking jaw is a myth. The American Pit Bull Terrier and related breeds are physiologically no different from any other breed of dog. All dogs are from the same species and none have locking jaws. Dr. I Lehr 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." Furthermore, Dr. Brisbin states, "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 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."

Q: Are Pit Bulls naturally aggressive towards humans?

A: While many Pit Bulls do tend to be aggressive towards other DOGS (as are most terriers), the normal, well raised Pit Bull has NO human-aggressive tendencies! In fact, human-aggression was actually bred out of the breed. The majority of Pit Bulls are affectionate, intelligent, trainable dogs. In fact, the highest obedience trial record of all time is held by an American Pit Bull Terrier named Maddy!

Q: Can Pit Bulls "turn" on people?

A: In fact, no breed of dog does. Dog aggression is nearly always preceded by some kind of warning, and there is always a reason behind the attack. However, many inexperienced owners do not recognize the dog's behavior as aggression, or refuse to acknowledge it as a warning sign. The only exception I can think of is Springer Rage, a rare and controversial neurological condition that manifests itself as a spontaneous attack, followed by confusion, and then a return to normal behavior. Pit Bulls are NOT prone to this condition. There are individual dogs of any breed that may be more aggressive to others.

Q: Do Pit Bulls make good guard dogs?

Now this one is a whopper! Pit Bulls actually make completely useless guard dogs - because of their love of all things human, they will consider strangers as friends as much as they consider family as friends.

The only way in which the Pit Bull makes a good guard dog is through its appearance and its much maligned reputation, which is not a good reason to get one. Though, in the past, they have been linked with disreputable people, such as drug dealers, this should not reflect on the dog. If a Pit Bull has a natural love of people, consider what these grotesques of human beings had to do to these dogs to make them aggressive.



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Q: Don't Pit Bulls bite more than any other breed?

No, this is untrue. Bite statistics are notoriously unreliable, firstly because most dog bites go unreported. Secondly, because there are over 10 other breeds of dog that the general public confuse with Pit Bulls. There have been stories on the news about Pit Bull attacks where the picture on the screen is definitely not a Pit Bull.

Thanks to the media and general sensationalism, the Pit Bull is a newsworthy dog. In this country, bad news makes the national papers and sells more than good news, which just tends to make the local papers. The media has transformed the Pit Bull from what it used to be - America's favorite dog - into the devil dog that it is today. No-one wants to see a story with the title 'Man bitten by Labrador' or 'Man bitten by Jack Russell'. Stories involving Pit Bulls are much more newsworthy, and unfortunately their popularity does not seem to be waning.

Q: What is the true nature of the Pit Bull Terrier?

The following is excerpts taken from The Pit Bull Rescue Center (PBRC.net):

Following is basic breed information for anyone interested in acquiring a pit bull, for those who already have one or more and would like to learn more about the breed, or for anyone who would simply like to understand these great dogs a little better.

Basic Breed Overview

Pit bulls are wonderful animals that deserve a chance to have a good life like any other dog. However, it's important to remember that pit bulls are not just any other dog - They are a little more of everything a dog can be.

Pit bulls have superior physical and mental characteristics that make them excellent partners for responsible, active, and caring owners. On the other hand, these same outstanding qualities can make them a little difficult to handle for people who don't have a lot of experience with dog ownership, or for those who don't understand the breed very well. Luckily, pit bulls are very responsive to training and eager to please. It is therefore strongly recommended to take them to obedience classes as soon as they are up to date with their shots. (Pit bulls are prone to parvovirus, so it is important that they receive all their vaccinations before coming into contact with other dogs or going places that other dogs frequent.) A well behaved and obedient pit bull will be a great ambassador for the breed and help fight prejudice and misconception.

Pit bulls are very adaptable and will even do well in urban living provided they have enough exercise or other positive outlets for their energy. Many pit bulls are easygoing couch-potatoes but can also be somewhat rambunctious until they mature. Maturity can come pretty late with this breed (2 to 3 years old in some cases). Pit bulls remain playful all their life and have a great sense of humor. Real clowns at heart, these dogs will make you laugh like no other.

Pit bulls are strong, energetic, agile, and powerful dogs. They are also very resourceful and driven. Determination is one of their most notable traits. Whatever they set out to do, they put their heart and soul into it...Whether it is escaping an inadequately fenced yard to go explore the neighborhood, destroying your new couch when left home alone, or climbing into your lap to shower you with kisses! They just don't give up easily.



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Stahlkuppe (1995) writes, "The American Pit Bull Terrier (APBT), or the AmStaff, is certainly not the right pet for everyone. Being a powerful dog, it will require sufficient and adequate control. Some prospective elderly owners or children, will not be able to supply that control... A first-time dog owner, in the minds of many experienced dog breeders, should not buy an APBT or an AmStaff! An insecure person who wants only an aggressive dog to bolster some personal human inadequacy should never become an owner of one of these dogs. An uncaring or negligent person should not buy an AmStaff or an APBT (or any other dog for that matter)."

Another very important characteristic of pit bull dogs is their amazing love of people. Many people are surprised by the loving personality of these dogs the first time they meet one. Pit bull dogs are indeed remarkably affectionate and truly enjoy human attention. They are wonderful cuddlers, and nothing beats a belly rub. In fact, most pit bulls think they are lap dogs!

Dunbar (1999) writes: "Today, a properly bred pit bull is so exuberantly happy upon meeting her owner's friends (or even friendly strangers) that new owners sometimes worry that their dog is too sweet and fun-loving to protect their home and family... A multi-talented companion, the well-trained pit bull is suited for a variety of exciting activities. He excels at obedience, agility and weight-pulling competitions, events which showcase intelligence, trainability and strength. In addition, the pit bull's pleasant nature makes him an ideal candidate for therapy work with people."

Human aggression, severe shyness, and instability are not traits typically found and accepted in the APBT breed. Dogs with these traits are not good representatives of the breed and should not be placed into adoptive homes.

Like any other breed, pit bulls can develop behavior problems if poorly bred, mishandled, abused, unsocialized, etc., that could result in inappropriate aggression. Any large, strong, and powerful dog that attacks can do a lot of damage. This is why temperament evaluation is important when dealing with dogs of certain size and potential.

Unlike the myth propagated by the media however, human aggression is NOT a problem specific to pit bulls. In fact, pit bulls tend to do better than average in temperament tests.

The American Temperament Test Society provides temperament testing around the country for dog breeds, and gives a passing score for the entire breed based on the percentage of passed over failed within total number of the particular breed tested. As of December 2003, the American Pit Bull Terrier has a current passing rate of 83.9%, and the American Staffordshire Terrier passes at 83.2%. In comparison, The Golden Retriever passing rate is 83.2%.

Pit bull type dogs are wonderful, loving, and very loyal companions. It is important however, to understand the breed's nature, to provide a structured environment, and to establish a positive leadership role. In order to do so, pit bull owners must understand the original purpose of the breed, and respect its limits and potential.



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The Breed's Original Purpose

Humans have created specialized dogs through emphasizing desired traits and eliminating unwanted ones. It is no different with the pit bull type dogs. The American Pit Bull Terrier has been "selectively" bred for hundreds of years to fight other dogs. This is the sad "work" these dogs were created for. In the same way that Labradors were bred to retrieve birds, APBTs were bred to face other dogs in mortal combat. Even in dogs that are not recently bred from fighting lines, the urge to fight can arise at any time. Not to strongly emphasize this fact would be negligent.

That said, we can't blame specialized breeds for behaving as they were bred to. Specific traits were bred into the dogs and are now part of the breed's character. It's like the digging instinct of many Terriers, the herding behavior in Shelties, the compulsion to run in Greyhounds, etc. Your Pointer may have never spent a day on a real hunt, but he may still point and flush birds as his ancestors did.

It's a mistake to think that the fighting gene can be trained or loved out of a dog, or that early socialization will guarantee your pit bull will always get along with other animals. There are precautions to take when owning pit bulls, especially in a multiple-dog environment. Unfortunately these precautions are often viewed as acceptance for the sport of pit-fighting when nothing could be further from the truth. Knowing how to avoid a fight, as well as how to break it up if, despite all efforts one strikes, is proof of smart and responsible pit bull ownership.

Never trust a pit bull not to fight...

It is not a hate of other dogs that causes pit bulls to fight, but rather an "urge" to do so that has been bred into the dogs for many generations. Pit bulls may fight over hierarchic status, but external stimulus or excitement can also trigger a fight. Remember that any canine can fight, but pit bulls were bred specifically for their drive, intensity, and determination to win.

Pit bull owners must be aware of the remarkable fighting abilities these dogs possess and always keep in mind that pit bulls have the potential to inflict serious injury to other animals. A pit bull may not even be the one starting a conflict, but he has the genetics to finish it. Remember that pit bulls are almost always blamed no matter who initiated the hostilities, and often end up paying the price...as does the owner!

That said, some pit bulls get along great with other pets and may live happily with other dogs without incident. We just can't assume that this is true for all of them, or take for granted that pit bulls getting along with other pets today will do so tomorrow. Pit bull owners must have common sense and make sure they don't set their dogs up for failure by putting them in inappropriate situations.

Every negative incident involving a pit bull adds to their reputation and jeopardizes our right to own these great dogs. Keep your pit bull out of trouble!

Please remember that animal-aggression and people-aggression are two distinct traits and should never be confused. Unless they have been very poorly bred and/or specifically "trained" to attack humans (often by undesirable individuals through abusive methods), pit bulls are, by nature, very good with people. They are, in fact, one of the most loving, loyal, friendly and dedicated companions one can have.

PBRC hopes this article will help people understand why so many of us are deeply dedicated to these wonderful dogs. Pit bull dogs need more help, compassion and understanding than many other breeds, but they will pay you back with more love and loyalty than you ever thought possible.



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Q: What is Breed Specific Legislation (BSL)

The following is excerpts taken from The Pit Bull Rescue Center (PBRC.net):

Breed specific legislation is exactly what sounds like...regulation of your right to own or, in many cases, not own a dog based solely on the breed or "type" of dog, not your responsibility as an owner.

Breed specific ordinances are quick fixes and not a sufficient long term solution for the following reasons:

1. Dog problems are generally problems with owner responsibility and are not limited to breeds. When breeds are singled out as dangerous or vicious, responsibility is removed from the dog owner which is where it belongs. Irresponsible people are also less likely to follow the law - and as a result, everyone has to suffer.
2. By limiting the ability of citizens to own certain breeds, responsible law abiding citizens will shy away from those breeds. These are the types of owners that communities need to encourage, not drive away.
3. Communities that have instituted such bans often find that the irresponsible owners and the criminals who use dogs for illegal purposes simply switch to another breed.
4. Breeds and mixes are hard to identify and often dogs are mis-labeled and destroyed based on paranoia and prejudice and also punishes those that are good canine citizens. Many breeds function as assistance dogs for handicapped owners, search and rescue dogs, drug-sniffing dogs, police dogs, etc. and drives them out of the community.

The American Veterinary Medical Association and several state veterinary medical associations oppose breed-specific legislation for just this reason.

5. The dog most restricted is the "pit bull." A pit bull is a type of dog, not a recognized breed. See the [breed information](#) for more detail.
6. Passage of laws that are only enforced through complaints cause two problems: 1) they create disrespect for the law if authorities require compliance only upon complaint, and 2) they provide ammunition for neighborhood feuds.

Suggested alternatives to breed bans include:

1. Stronger enforcement of existing dangerous dog laws. If they are not already in place, lobby for protection from untrained and unsupervised dogs of any breed or mix. This is a broad-based effort that protects all citizens as any dog can bite and be a nuisance when owned by an irresponsible owner. Those who would deliberately train a dog to act aggressively towards people or other animals, or to use dogs in the commission of a felony or misdemeanor should face additional penalties.
2. Encourage local animal rescue and welfare agencies to provide responsible dog ownership seminars and canine safety education. The American Kennel Club has a free education program created for elementary school children.
3. Protect the rights of all citizens with nuisance ordinances such as anti-barking, pooper scooper regulations and leash laws.