



Potter's Angels Rescue

Pit Bull FAQs and Myths

What defines a pit bull?

A pit bull is not actually a breed but rather a grouping of at least three different breeds, sometimes more depending on who you are talking to. The three main breeds included in the pit bull group are the American Pit Bull Terrier, the American Staffordshire Terrier, and the Staffordshire Bull Terrier. Some expand this group to include the Bull Terrier, the American Bulldog, and even Boxers and Mastiffs which are not even historically connected to the pit bull group. This is another reason why pit bull attack statistics are fatally flawed. You cannot fairly compare that many breeds grouped under one label to the rest of the dog population.

What is the History of Pit Bulls?

Since the late 1800s, pit bulls have been popular family pets. Famous historical figures like Helen Keller (her service dog), Theodore Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and John Steinbeck all owned them. The dog featured in "The Little Rascals" was a pit bull; pit bulls were the only dogs to grace the cover of Time Magazine three times. Popular advertisements of the early 1900s also featured pit bull type dogs, including Buster Brown Shoes, Wells Fargo, and Eveready (now Energizer) Batteries. A pit bull was even the original mascot for the University of Texas Longhorns!

Pit bulls also served our country during World War I; at least one, Sergeant Stubby, gained fame for saving lives, lifting morale, and warning U.S. soldiers about an enemy attack. He served in 17 battles and was awarded nearly a dozen medals, including the Purple Heart. Stubby was the first dog to be given a rank in the U.S. Army (Sergeant). The American Pit Bull Terrier represented the U.S. on war posters of the time—"neutral, but not afraid."

As the century progressed, however, new efforts by animal advocates put an increased focus on the cruel and illegal activity of dog fighting. The inadvertent and unfortunate side effect of this new movement was that some people began to seek out pit bulls for illicit purposes. This began a cyclical process whereby the media began to cover only negative stories about the dog, ignoring the over 99% of pit bulls living in happy, fulfilling homes. The dogs themselves had not changed, but public perception of them had.

Today, advocates, rescuers, and pit bull owners work extremely hard to restore the image of the pit bull as an All-American family dog, like the hero Stubby. Hundreds of thousands of Americans' families are made whole by a beloved pet pit bull.

Are Pit Bulls naturally aggressive towards people?

No dog breed is human aggressive by nature. In fact, the American Pit Bull Terrier passes the American Temperament Testing at a rate of 86.8% comparable to that of a Standard Poodle (86.6%) and other popular family breeds such as Golden Retrievers (85.2%), German short haired Pointers (76.9%). The point is not that pit bulls have a better disposition than golden retrievers and other dogs but that most breeds fall within an acceptable range of temperamental soundness. At the same time, no dog breed is inherently non-human-aggressive and all dogs are capable of biting humans under the right circumstances.

Don't Pit Bulls eventually TURN ON THEIR OWNERS?

No. Healthy pit bulls with stable temperaments are succeeding in countless homes across the continent. Dogs that bite people are typically troubled individuals, set up to fail by irresponsible and/or reckless owners who've ignored or disregarded the classic warning signs that come with nearly any dog bite. In general, biting dogs have been set up to fail by improper handling, abuse and/or damaged genetics. Profiling dog breeds works against the goal of reducing dog bites. Bite prevention education resources such as these offered by the American Veterinary Medical Association can help build safe, humane communities without resorting to the kind of ineffective paranoia that comes from targeting select breeds. For a well-researched source of information on canine aggression, visit The National Canine Research Council on the web.

Why do I hear so much about pit bull attacks?

Simply put, media sensationalism. The media is more interested in putting out stories that sell than giving the whole truth. For example, between 1990-1998 the nation's murder rate declined by 20%, however, the number of murder stories on news networks increased by 600%. As a result of this public opinion was that murder was on the rise and the reason that they believed this was not through their own experience but rather what they saw in the news.

Pit bull attacks are no different. The media has painted this image of the pit bull as a vicious blood thirsty monster and the public has eaten it up. Plain and simple the amped up perception sells. When you take into account a study that was performed by the National Canine Research Council where four serious dog attacks were tracked (including one fatality) by four different breeds, one of which was a pit bull, the biased behavior of our media reporters is obvious. The attacks which caused two hospitalizations and a fatality were reported only by local newspapers either one or two times. In contrast, the pit bull attack, which was not fatal, was reported over 230 times, not only in national and international newspapers, but also on major television networks. Clearly this one sided reporting has a devastating effect on the public's perception of the breed.

The reality is that the factors that affect a dog's tendency to be aggressive have nothing to do with what breed they are, but instead involve their living environment, their reproductive status, their sex, and their socialization or lack thereof. More than 70% of all dog bite cases involve unneutered male dogs. An unneutered male dog is 2.6 times more likely to bite than a neutered male dog. A chained or tethered dog is 2.8 times more likely to bite than a dog not chained or tethered. In 2006, 97% of dogs involved in fatal attacks on humans were not spayed or neutered.

Can Pit Bulls do more damage than other breeds?

A common misconception about Pit Bulls is that they have a locking jaw or their bite is harder and stronger than other breeds, which is 100% untrue. One study performed by Dr. Brady Barr of National Geographic showed that the average domestic canine has a bite force of 320 pounds. In one portion of the study, three breeds were tested, the German Shepherd, a Rottweiler, and an American Pit Bull Terrier. The Rottweiler bit with 328 pounds of force, the German Shepherd bit with 238 pounds of force, and the APBT bit with 235 pounds of force.

Although scientific data has thoroughly disproven myths of locking jaws and superhuman bite strength there are still a lot of people that strongly believe these myths are true. Even news media has published some of these myths as facts thus perpetuating the deceitfulness.

Are Pit Bull attacks sudden and unprovoked?

Unfortunately, the average dog owner does not understand dog behavior and body language. Some dog's signs of fear or nervousness are more subtle than others, that does not mean they are non-existent. There is

always a reason for a dog's behavior and warning signs leading up to a display of aggression. Starting with low level warnings such as flattened ears and a tucked in tail, proceeding with widened eyes or a low growl, if these signs go unnoticed it may appear to the untrained eye that the dog is biting out of nowhere for no apparent reason. This is true for all dogs.

Another thing that the media and uneducated owners always fail to recognize is the underlying factors of a supposedly "unprovoked" attack. Dogs kept outside the home whether on chains, kenneled, or in yards and/or dogs obtained for negative functions (guarding, fighting, or breeding for financial gain) are not family pets, they are what are referred to as "resident dogs". Acknowledging their environment and background is vital to understanding their behavior. Resident dogs cannot be expected to exhibit the same behaviors and level of sociability as family pets. Due to the fact that the pit bull's reputation has attracted ignorant and criminally minded individuals who want them for all of the wrong reasons, you see more pit bulls being used as resident dogs than any other breed of dog. So it is reasonable to assume that the breed suffering the most abuse will exhibit the most behavioral problems. That does not mean that it is typical to the breed, just that this breed is being exploited more than others. During the period of time when Pit Bulls were popular family pets, their attack statistics were extremely low.

Should Pit Bulls live in a home with children?

Most pit bulls make excellent family pets and are great with children for many reasons. That being said *NO CHILD SHOULD EVER BE LEFT UNSUPERVISED WITH ANY ANIMAL*. There are many great aspects of the pit bull terrier that make them a great choice for a family pet. Their high tolerance for pain bodes well with the "abuse" that children can unintentionally dish out to their pet friends. They also have an extreme devotion and loyalty to their family when they are living in a loving household where they are well cared for.

The biggest problem that we usually have with pit bulls is their size and enthusiastic nature can easily knock over a small child when they are excited. The good news is that something like this can be trained out of them by teaching them to play gentle, to sit and wait at the door when going out, not allowing them to jump on people, and greeting visitors appropriately.

Before bringing any dog into a home with children, you should teach your kids how to properly and respectfully interact with animals. You will also have to be diligent about supervision. All dogs are capable of harming a child, in fact, there was even a case of a Pomeranian killing a child. Most importantly the dog should be treated as a family pet, not abused, neglected, or chained outside.

Is it true that 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 of the brain in which the skull became too small to accommodate a dog's grey matter. This would, according to the rumor, cause the Doberman to go crazy, or "just snap" out of nowhere and attack their owner. This rumor could never be quantified, 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.

Are Pit Bulls bred to be aggressive towards other dogs?

Most Pit Bulls are far removed from the breed's history as dog fighting dogs and owners who are committed to giving their dog a quality life will find that Pit Bulls are just as moldable as any other dog. 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 his owner asks him to complete. Pit Bulls have had experience with many sports including obedience trialing, conformation showing, weight pull, Schutzhund (a German sport which requires dogs to perform in

obedience, tracking and protection phases of a competition), agility, fly ball, disc and have 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.

It is important to make sure they are well socialized at a young age with many different dogs and other animals such as cats, horses, birds, etc. The more socialization they get (and this is true to any dog) the more well-rounded they will be when they mature. If you get your Pit Bull as an adult and they are friendly with other dogs, it is important to learn how to properly introduce two strange dogs to avoid setting them up for failure. You must remember that although you know and love your dog, not everyone will feel the same way. It is your duty to be super diligent and responsible in making sure that all dog interactions go smoothly because you now own a dog that is widely discriminated against and it is your duty to represent them well. Once you are the proud owner of a Pit Bull you graduate from being a regular dog owner to being an advocate for your breed. Please do so responsibly for the rest of the Pit Bulls in the world.... And thank you for proving to people how truly wonderful this breed is.

Don't Pit Bulls have an unusually high prey drive?

Although many terriers were initially bred for their high prey drive, this does not necessarily predispose them to be cat chasers. Throughout the years as dogs have become more and more domesticated as what they were initially bred for is no longer useful in today's society. There are many Pit Bulls that live happily amongst small animals. It is more important to assess each dog's personality individually and to socialize them well with all animals at a young age. This serves true for any breed of dog.