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Photo Credit: Soldiers and Sailors Hall

PITBULL HANDOUT © COMPILED BY ANNA MACNEIL-ALLOCK
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Pitbulls

Pit Bulls

For those of you who have fallen in love with a Pitbull or Pitbull-mix dog this handout contains information about their history and behaviour. It also discusses common 'Pitbull' myths, and explains why these dogs have been considered good family pets for centuries.



Photo credit: Anna MacNeil-Allocock

Rugby, a rescued Bull-and-Terrier



Photo credit: www.bulldog.org

A Bull-and-Terrier adopted from an Animal Shelter

What is a 'Pitbull'?

According to Merriam-Webster a 'Pitbull' is *a powerful compact short-haired dog developed for fighting*. The term 'Pitbull' is often used loosely to describe four breeds of dog: the American Pit Bull Terrier, the American Staffordshire Terrier, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier and the Bull Terrier. All four breeds have a common ancestor, the *Bull-and-Terrier*, so to make things simple, this term will be used throughout the rest of the handout when referring to the four breeds as a group.

History of the Bull-and-Terrier

Bulldogs and Terriers were developed in the British Isles. Both breeds became increasingly popular around the start of the 16th century when hunting was a major form of entertainment. Tall, athletic Bulldogs were used to hunt large animals like bulls, stags, and boars, while the short and tenacious Terriers were sent down the burrows of rats, badgers, foxes and weasels. The Bull-and-terrier combination was created when 'Blood sports', such as bull-baiting and dog fighting became popular means of gambling and entertainment. Bull-baiting involved setting dogs upon a tethered bull destined for market. Partly because the practice was



thought to tenderize the meat, but mostly for entertainment purposes. Dog-fighting took place in an enclosed arena called a 'pit'- hence the name, 'pit-fighter', 'pit-dog' or 'Pitbull'. In 1835 these 'Blood sports' were made illegal in England yet organised dog-fighting continued behind closed doors.



American Pit Bull Terrier breeds were created in America. By the 1900's, it was becoming obvious that the American breeds were superior in their fighting abilities. So, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier and Bull Terriers were re-tired to the show ring to win dog shows instead of dog fights.



About Breed Differences

Chronologically, the Staffordshire Bull Terrier and Bull Terrier breeds were developed first, in the British Isles. The American Staffordshire Terrier and



Hailed for 200 years

Until recently, Bull-and-Terriers were celebrated tokens of pop culture. *Buster Brown Shoes* used the Bull-and-Terrier to represent the tough dependability of its product.



Petey from the popular television show 'Our Gang' (also known as 'Little Rascals')

was one of the first American Staffordshire Terriers to be registered with the American Kennel Club.



The Bull-and-Terrier image was used to represent the American presence in a World War I poster with a British Bulldog, a German Dachshund, a French Bulldog and a Russian Wolfhound. The caption states, 'I'm Neutral, BUT-Not afraid of any of them.'

The Staffordshire Bull Terrier is nicknamed the 'Nanny dog' in Britain to reflect their good nature with children.

A Staffordshire Terrier named 'Sergeant Stubby' was a decorated World War II hero. He warned troops of incoming gas, sought out wounded soldiers and caught enemy snipers.



The 'Pitbull' Debate

Are Bull-and-Terriers Inherently Dangerous to People?

It is well understood that Bull-and-Terriers are generally aggressive towards other dogs. Unfortunately, it is often assumed that Bull-and-Terriers are inherently dangerous to people because they have been bred to fight other dogs. This logic is flawed for a number of reasons. First, if it were true that a history of dog-fighting makes a breed dangerous to people, then it also stands to reason that being bred to kill wolves and

coyotes should make a breed dangerous to humans. Yet the Anatolian Shepherd, Kuvasz, Great Pyrenees, Tibetan Mastiff and Irish Wolfhound have never been considered inherently dangerous to people. In fact, of the breeds most commonly assumed to be dangerous to people, the Bull-and-Terrier is the only one with a dog-fighting history. The Rottweiler was used to drive cattle, and the Doberman was developed to guard the tax collections of their creator, Louis Doberman. In the 1970s the Saint Bernard breed was fingered as the instigator of a number of attacks, even though this breed had been developed to rescue humans in avalanches. Finally, Bull-and-Terriers had been bred to fight dogs for more than two-hundred years yet have only been labeled 'dangerous' in the last twenty years. Clearly, a history of 'dog-fighting' does not ensure that



Photo credit: Blockhead Bulldogs

Bull-and-Terriers were sometimes the breadwinners of poor coal-miners

not ensure that

all individuals of a breed are inherently dangerous to humans.

On the contrary, it has been argued that a history of dog-fighting is partly responsible for the breed's friendliness to people because for centuries Bull-and-Terrier breeders culled dogs that showed aggression towards humans. This was done for a number of reasons. First, Bull-and-Terriers were the breadwinners of poor coal-mining families that could not afford many dogs. When not winning dogfights, these dogs lived inside the home as a family pet. Second, dogs that showed aggres-

sion towards humans were usually fearful animals that performed poorly in dog-fights. Third, the nature of the sport required a great deal of contact between dogs and people. For example, to ensure that no foul tasting or poisonous substances had been placed on the fur, each dog was checked over by the opposition before, during and after a fight. Also, the rules of the fight required the dogs to be separated a number of times throughout the round to determine if both were still willing to continue. This involved pulling the dogs to a corner of the ring and releasing them to see if they were still willing to cross over the scratch line and fight. Any aggression towards strangers, even in the middle of a dog-fight, would not have been tolerated.

Some Bull-and-Terriers, by reason of poor genetics and/or poor ownership, do show aggression to people and are extremely dangerous to society. All signs of aggression should

be taken seriously. Keep a muzzle on your dog and ask your Veterinarian for advice about the most responsible course of action and/or to help you find a professional trainer right away.

'Pitbull' Attacks in the Media

The frequency of 'Pitbull attacks', as portrayed by the media, could be inaccurate for a number of reasons. First, the media may tend to over-report stories about Bull-and-Terriers by giving them a level of press attention that other breeds do not receive. Second, Bull-and-Terriers are difficult to identify. It may be that any short-haired, medium sized dog involved in an aggressive incident is likely to be reported as a 'Pitbull'. It is not uncommon for newspaper stories about ag-

gressive 'Pitbulls' to be accompanied with photos of Boxers, Bull Mastiffs, and even Boston Terriers. Third, attacks may appear disproportionately common for this breed because the number of Bull-and-Terriers is under-reported in official records. Reportedly, Bull-and-Terrier owners are reluctant to register their dogs as 'pitbulls' to avoid

scrutiny and/or to avoid paying the increased license fees often enforced by cities with breed-specific legislation.



Photo Credit: Our Gang Kennels

These dogs were considered good with children



Photo credit: www.bulldog.org

...and still are today.

The Reality of Owning a Bull-and-Terrier



Aggression toward other dogs

It is not true that Bull-and-Terriers are just like any other breed. Most breeds are different from one another, and have very different capabilities. Bull-and-Terriers have been selectively bred, by humans, to fight with other dogs. It is irresponsible to ignore this fact. Bull-and-Terrier owners need to accept the fact that they do not have the same freedoms as the owners of other breeds. They should not expect their dog to play with other dogs. They should not expect to visit off-leash parks. In fact they should not expect to ever let their dogs off a leash unless confined safely on their own property.

Of course there are always exceptions to these rules. Those Bull-and-Terriers adopted at a young age, and well socialised may have one or two 'friends' that they can still play with (only opposite sex). However, remember never to let them interact unsupervised. If they begin to fight, do not 'let them work it out on their own'. Separate them and do not let them interact in the future. See www.pbrc.net for information on how to stop a fight, should it occur.



Public Response to Bull-and-Terriers

Bull-and-Terrier owners should be prepared for occasional adverse reactions from people. You cannot blame them if they have not had the good fortune of meeting a well-behaved individual. Your actions will represent all Bull-and-Terrier owners so it is important to ignore negative comments and let your well-behaved dog speak for itself. Get out there and show him/her off.

Separation Anxiety

When adopting a dog you must allow them time to adjust to their new life. They have been separated from their owners in the past and a common problem with such dogs is separation anxiety. This can lead to destructive behaviour when left alone. Bull-and-Terriers are particularly susceptible to this condition because of their strong need for companionship. A few precautionary measures can be taken to smooth the transition into the home. Do not make a big fuss when entering or leaving your home. Ignore your dog five minutes before leaving and five minutes after returning. To convince your dog that you will always return to him/her, frequently pick up your keys, put on your shoes, and leave the house for very short periods of time throughout the day. Start by leaving for five minutes at a time and work your way up to a few hours. Never discipline your dog upon returning, even if s/he has destroyed something in your absence. This creates an association of punishment with your arrival and will make separation anxiety worse. If you find that your dog is chewing things when you are gone, one option is to get a large dog kennel and keep your dog crated when you are out. Ask your Veterinarian to help guide you through this procedure.

Bull-and-Terriers and other Pets

Great care should be taken during inter-pet introductions. All interactions should be controlled and consistently monitored. When you leave your pets at home, separate them into different rooms, or keep them in their own kennel.

Multi-dog household

It is best if a Bull-and-Terrier is the only pet. The next best thing is a male/female mix. Never leave food, bones, toys, or anything laying around that could trigger a fight. Don't throw the ball for both dogs at the same time and never let them play tug-o-war with each other. If your dogs do get into a fight it may be necessary to separate the dogs at all times. It is possible to keep two dogs that don't get along with each other, but it requires a great deal of commitment and discipline.



Those who adapt their lives for this situation will tell you the dogs are more than worth the effort. (www.pbrc.net)

Remember

Veronique Chesser of Pit Bull Rescue Central suggests, 'remember that Pit Bulls are very strong, energetic, agile and powerful dogs. They also are very resourceful, and *determination* is probably their most notable trait. Whatever they set out to do, they put their heart and soul into it... Whether it is escaping an inadequately fenced yard to chase the neighbor's cat, or destroying your new couch when left home alone, or climbing into your lap and shower you with kisses!' (www.pbrc.net)

Health and Care of your Bull-and-Terrier



Photo credit: www.bulldog.org

Health of your Bull-and-Terrier

As long as you keep vaccinations up-to-date, your Bull-and-Terrier should be relatively problem-free in the health department. Your Veterinarian could be pleasantly surprised that Bull-and-Terriers often take medicine willingly and needles without flinching.

You may find that your dog picks up many cuts and scrapes even on uneventful walks. Their short, single coated fur does little to protect them from sharp stick, twigs and rocks. Enthusiastic antics and a high pain tolerance often mean that deep cuts will go unnoticed until you get home. Keep a bottle of Hibitane Antibacterial Soap on hand and simply wash any superficial cuts as soon as they are noticed to keep them from becoming infected.

Weatherproofing a Bull-and-Terrier

Bull-and-Terrier breeds do not grow a 'second' or 'winter' undercoat. This is great news for those who desire a dog that doesn't shed in the Springtime. However, it also means that they lack protection against the elements. They should be monitored in anything but temperate weather. Their high muscle-to-fat ratio causes rapid heat loss, so they get cold very easily and should never be made to live outside. You will notice your dog shivering in cool weather and may even witness steam rising from your dog's body under cold and moist conditions. For this reason, many people buy sweaters for their

dogs. On the opposite side of the scale, Bull-and-Terriers are also very susceptible to heat stroke. Although they love to be warm and so actively seek out sunny spots, they need to be monitored carefully on a hot summer day. Keeping the head and neck area cool is an important measure for preventing heat stroke.

Give your shelter dog a few months to become comfortable in his/her new home. Please be patient.



Photo credit: www.bulldog.org

Bull-and-Terriers love to chew Kong toys.

Muzzling your Bull-and-Terrier

It is a legal requirement to muzzle Bull-and-Terriers in many locations. Many argue that muzzling enhances the negative image of these breeds. If you are concerned about such laws get active in the fight against them. Don't worry- your muzzled dog can defend itself long enough for you to break up a fight, if one should occur. The best muzzles for the Bull-and-Terrier are the basket-type that enclose the front of the muzzle instead of the nylon tube that simply holds the mouth closed. On



A wire basket muzzle will allow your dog to drink and breathe freely



Photo credit: www.bulldog.org

Use a ball as a reward when training your dog.

a hot day or after exercise, your dog needs to open its mouth wide to pant and cool off. The basket muzzle is most accommodating.

Exercise Requirements

Bull-and-Terriers need regular exercise but are content to play indoor games on a rainy day. Once the sun breaks out, these dogs love to work their muscles, and a good run-and-jump game is always an effective form of exercise. Bull-and-Terriers love to chase balls but many are more likely to sit down and chew them than bring them back.

Training your Bull-and-Terrier

Bull-and-Terriers require positive, firm and very consistent training. Not excessive force - just patience and a strong will. Search for a personal trainer who has some experience with Bull-and-Terriers and uses social rewards such as play, petting and verbal praise instead of relying mostly on food rewards. Teach your Bull-and-Terrier to ignore other dogs on your walks. Bounce a ball, or jog with your dog to distract him/her from looking at other dogs. Praise him/her for looking at you instead.

Feeding your Bull-and-Terrier

Bull-and-Terriers generally have high metabolism rates and may benefit from a number of small meals throughout the day instead of one or two large meals.

Enjoying your Bull-and-Terrier

Bull-and-Terriers are attention addicts. If these dogs could communicate one wish, it might be to spend more time with their owners. They will keep you company day and night. Bull-and-Terriers can adapt to any lifestyle, as long as it means they can be with you.



Photo Credit: www.bulldog.org

Bull-and-Terrier on a Sail boat

These dogs truly appreciate the good things in life. They are masters at finding the warmest, most comfortable spot in the house to settle down for a nap. If there's a pile of pillows or blankets around, they'll find it. If you have a fireplace or a heater they'll make it their home.



Photo credit: www.bulldog.org

A common resting place for Bull-and-Terriers: the couch

The Bull-and-Terrier is a good choice for people who like to pamper their animals and appreciate an adoring pet.

Bull-and-Terrier's adapt extremely well to city life and apartment dwelling. They remain surprisingly clean because of their short fur and lack of an undercoat. Many have a seemingly innate dislike of mud puddles and shine after a quick wipe down with a towel.



Photo credit: Thunder Ridge Kennels

For more information about Bull-and-Terriers visit the following:

- People for Pitbulls: www.peopleforpitbulls.com
- Pitbull Rescue Central: www.pbrc.net
- Pitbulls.com: www.pitbulls.com
- Pitbulls on the Web: www.pitbullsontheweb.com
- Therapy & Search Pitbulls: www.forpitssake.org

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