



WHAT IS A PIT BULL?

The term “Pit Bull” refers not to a single breed but a group of breeds, including the American Pit Bull Terrier, American Staffordshire Terrier, the Stafford-shire Bull Terrier, among others. Most originated from pairings of the ancestors we now call the Olde English Bulldogge and Terriers. Their breeders wanted to merge the muscular body and tenacity of the bulldog with the agility and “gameness” of terriers.

Originally bred for blood sports like bull- and bear-baiting in Europe and North America, these dogs were trained to attack and immobilize the agitated animal and so were favored for their large, strong jaws and muscular necks and shoulders.

When these sports were outlawed in the early 1800s, people began fighting the dogs, a sport more easily concealed from the authorities. Since then, Pit Bulls have undeservedly inherited a bad reputation, much inflated by the media, making them the target of unfair discrimination and breed specific legislation (breed banning).



The truth is that this highly intelligent, energetic, affectionate group *loves* people, even strangers, and thrives on attention and affection. Pit Bulls were prized as wonderful family dogs in years past. In fact, they once had the moniker of “nanny dog” because of their wonderful demeanor with children.

In general, Terriers were bred with a high prey drive for the use of eradicating small rodents. Therefore they have a tendency for animal-intolerance, making their early socialization with other animals, including dogs, especially important.

Pit Bulls are strong and athletic. With their impressive stamina and staunch work ethic, they enjoy a variety of sports – agility, disc dog competitions, flyball, freestyle, competitive obedience and weight-pulling contests. Especially when adolescent, these dogs have a tendency to get easily excited, so adequate exercise, training, and mental stimulation are a must for these dogs.

While most experts agree that today’s Pit Bull is a short-coated dog characterized by a wide skull, powerful jaws and a muscular, stocky body, there is great variation in this group’s appearance. Typically 35 to 65 pounds, some weigh as little as 25 pounds, others tip the scales at 80 pounds or more. While some have bulkier frames and colossal skulls, others have leaner, more muscular bodies.

Because of their unfortunate reputation, owning a Pit Bull can be a greater responsibility than owning other breeds. It is important that they are well-trained and socialized so they can be good ambassadors for their group. Yet, those dog guardians ready for the effort of Pit Bull ownership will find them to be one of the most loyal, loving, and wonderful companions on four legs.



Did you know... that Helen Keller, the famous blind and deaf author, activist, and lecturer of the early 1900s, owned a Pit Bull? Or that Petey from *The Little Rascals*, the popular series of the 1920s and '30s, was also a Pit Bull? Moreover, during World War I and World War II, Pit Bulls were frequently used to carry messages on the battlefield. Neat, huh?