

Media Distortion of Pit Bulls

Pit Bulls have been a part of American families since early colonists brought them over to America. They were so beloved for their courageous spirit, tenacious loyalty and die-hard devotion to their owners that they were used in early advertisements, posters and magazines as the All American Dog. Buster Brown's companion was an American Pit Bull Terrier. World War I posters displayed them as mascots of bravery. The most decorated war dog of the time was a pit bull named Stubby. Friendly, brave and hardworking, they were the dog of choice among politicians, scholars and celebrities. Helen Keller and Theodore Roosevelt were both proud pit bull owners. The Little Rascals also had Petey, their American Pit Bull Terrier. Many of our grandparents and great grandparents had them as pets. Today, tens of thousands of Americans consider pit bulls a cherished family member.

American Pit Bull Terriers are known for their gushing affection for humans. This makes them great therapy dogs and many work in hospitals and nursing homes. Parents seek them out as their dog of choice because of their steady temperament with children. Human friendliness is a hallmark of this breed. Their outgoing personalities, even with strangers, do not make them good guard dogs. American Pit Bull Terriers put their heart and soul into everything they do. For this reason they make great Search and Rescue dogs and excel at Obedience Trials, Agility Trials, Weight Pulling and Frisbee Competitions. Pit Bulls are natural clowns. Their fun loving nature is just another trait that people have come to love about this breed. They have an incredible sense of humor and know how to make people laugh. Most owners will tell you that to know this breed is to love them.

So how has this fabulous breed known for its steady temperament, outgoing personality and love of people ended up so feared? Irresponsible owners and the media have helped to malign the American Pit Bull Terrier in the last twenty years. The media has grossly misrepresented dogs involved in attacks in an effort to sensationalize their stories. This can be seen most frequently in the use of the term "family dog." It is imperative to note that **no neutered family pit bull has ever been involved in a fatal attack.** For this reason, it is important to distinguish between the two terms, "family dog" and "resident dog." A "family dog" lives inside the house as a loved member of the family. The "resident dog" lives outside, in the basement or on a chain. They have not interacted with people or been properly socialized by their irresponsible owners. "Resident dogs" are usually acquired for guarding, fighting or breeding for financial gain. These dogs cannot be expected to react the same way a family pet would under similar circumstances. Unfortunately, the media does not distinguish between "family pet" and "resident dog". Headlines are far more shocking if they exclude the facts of the attack. It sounds far more exciting to hear that the family pit bull raised from birth has attacked a member of the family than the true case of the chained, intact male only used for breeding attacking the 15 month old cousin who was allowed to wander into the backyard without parental supervision. Human aggression, shyness and fearfulness are not characteristic of American Pit Bull Terriers. They are undesirable traits in any dog. Pit bulls are people-loving dogs. Their favorite place is in a lap or by the side of their human. They make excellent family pets in a committed and loving home. For more information about this fabulous breed, visit www.badrap.org, www.animalfarmfoundation.org or read "The Pitbull Placebo" by Karen Delise.