

## EXPLAINING THE CONTROVERSY ABOUT PIT BULLS

On pages 22-23 of the book I have a section with warnings and advice about Pit Bulls which does not fully explain the complex issues about this breed. Until I can remedy this deficit in the next edition of The Dog Bible, I will expand and explain further what is known about the pleasures and pitfalls of this popular – although often maligned – breed. On the one hand, there have been tragic Pit Bull attacks on humans (especially in the Bay Area of California where the breed is popular and there are thousands of Pit Bulls). These horrible maulings have left people with the incorrect belief that Pit Bulls are a vicious, dangerous breed that should be banned. On the other side are the defenders and lovers of the breed, who feel it has been unfairly singled out for discrimination because of a few “rotten apples” (and that the humans who own those few are at fault). I will attempt to get at the truth, which lies somewhere between.

Pit Bulls are not bred to be human-aggressive – in fact, this breed is actually intended to be Lab-like in its tolerance for any kind of handling by people. In fact, I have heard that even the sorry souls who use Pit Bulls for dog fighting rely on the fact that they can reach in and grab their dog without that dog turning on them (and it is said that any fighting Pit Bull is destroyed who displays aggression to a person handling him during a fight). In any case, one of the strong characteristics of the breed is their desire for human attention, especially touch. This affectionate side is one of the reasons that these dogs are so beloved by the people who have them as pets, along with their loyal and playful disposition and a reported trainability based on an eagerness to learn and please.

Therefore, there is something inherently wrong with any pit bull who would challenge a human over any object or command. In theory, a good Pit Bull would not even defend himself against a human. Professionals and knowledgeable owners have adopted a zero tolerance for any aggressive behavior – either defensive or offensive – by a Pit bull (or really any of the large strong breeds). This needs to be a firm policy to keep people safe and restore or maintain a good reputation for a breed. A shelter with a well-trained staff will carefully evaluate every Pit Bull and Pit-Mix for aggressive tendencies; a shelter fortunate enough to have the resources will then have the dog live for several weeks in a foster home situation with knowledgeable people who can complete the dog's evaluation. This means that Pit Bulls displaying any aggression must be screened from the population.

The potential for danger in a Pit Bull is higher than other types of dog because:

Pits have a strong drive to chase things

They have an intolerance towards other dogs (or smaller animals like cats)

Pits can be unable to control their excitement level, “losing” themselves if they get too wound up - even when playing

If a Pit Bull decides he is going to attack something, there is nothing that can stop him once he gets going.

These are qualities inherent to the breed, which people who chose a Pit need to know so they can choose their dog accordingly and train with these issues in mind.

The Marin County Humane Society in Northern California continues to adopt out Pits and Pit-mixes after careful evaluation, and suggests that if you want to learn more

about Pit bulls, go to [www.badrap.org](http://www.badrap.org) (for Bad Rap, or Bay Area (Doglovers Responsible About Pit Bulls)).

#### A Film about the Exploitation of Pit Bulls

American Pit Bulls once had a stellar place in our culture: Petey was the canine star of “Our Gang” on television – Victor was the RCA dog listening to the gramophone - the logo for Buster Brown shoes was a Pit bull and Stubby was the most decorated dog in American history, receiving numerous medals and the honorary rank of Sergeant for his services in WWI. President Theodore Roosevelt had a Pit and so did Helen Keller. Now there is a documentary film that explores the evolution of the breed and tries to answer how a dog once beloved is now believed to be a “public menace” and is banned in some areas.

“Off the Chain” is a new documentary film that offers a disturbing look behind the scenes at the people who participate in the gruesome world of dog fighting - while also showing the loving nature of the breed. The film is available in DVD and is being sold through the Humane Society of the United States, which will receive one third of the sale price. To order go to [www.offthechainproductions.com/store](http://www.offthechainproductions.com/store) and use the redemption code HSUSOTC so that the Humane Society will receive their donation from the filmmaker.