

Pit bull

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The term **pit bull** is a generic term used to describe dogs with similar physical characteristics. Usually a "pit bull" is considered one of several breeds including the Staffordshire Bull Terrier, American Pit Bull Terrier the American Staffordshire Terrier, and the Bull Terrier or any mix thereof. In some parts of the world, the American Bulldog and Dogo Argentino are also classified as a "Pit Bull-type" dog, despite major genetic differences. Any dog that is mixed with a "bully breed" may also be called a "pit bull" including those that are descended from the English Bulldog, French Bulldog, Boston Terrier and Cane Corso.^[2] The pit bull is not a distinct breed which may make it difficult for experts to identify,^{[3][4][5]} and while mixed breed dogs are often labelled a "pit bull" if they have certain physical characteristics such as a square shaped head or bulky body type,^[2] visual identification of mixed breed dogs is not recommended by the scholarly community.^[3]

Several jurisdictions have enacted breed-specific legislation against pit bulls, ranging from outright bans on the possession of pit bull-type dogs, to restrictions and conditions on pit bull ownership. Research indicates that breed specific legislation is ineffective because it is not the breed of dog that is dangerous; rather, it is unfavorable situations that create dangerous dogs.^{[2][6][7]}

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↑
key point

Pit Bull



American Pit Bull Terrier

Country of origin	England Scotland Ireland United States
Traits	
Coat	Smooth ^[1]
Classification and standards	
Dog (<i>Canis lupus familiaris</i>)	

History

All pit bulls were created with similar cross-breeding between bulldogs and terriers, but each individual pit bull breed has a distinct history.

Pit Bull Terrier

The Pit Bull Terrier was created by breeding Old English Terriers and Old English Bulldogs together to produce a dog that combined the gameness of the terrier with the strength and athleticism of the bulldog.^[8] These dogs were bred in England, and arrived in the United States where they became the direct ancestors of the American Pitbull Terrier. In the United Kingdom pit bulls were used in bloodsports such as bull baiting, bear baiting and cock fighting. These bloodsports were officially eliminated in 1835 as Britain began to introduce animal welfare laws. Since dogfights were cheaper to organise and far easier to conceal from the law than bull or bear baits, bloodsport proponents turned to pitting their dogs against each other instead. Dog fighting was used as both a bloodsport (often involving gambling) and a way to continue to test the quality of their stock. For decades afterwards, dog fighting clandestinely took place in small areas of Britain and America. In the early 20th century pitbulls were used as catch dogs in America for semi-wild cattle and hogs, to hunt, and drive livestock, and as family companions.^[8] Some have been selectively bred for their fighting prowess.^{[9][10]}

Pit Bull Terriers successfully fill the role of companion dogs, and police dogs,^{[1][12]} and therapy dog.^[13] Pit Bull Terriers also constitute the majority of dogs used for illegal dog fighting in the America^[14] In addition, law enforcement organisations report these dogs are used for other nefarious purposes, such as guarding illegal narcotics operations,^{[15][16]} use against police,^[17] and as attack dogs.^[14]

In an effort to counter the fighting reputation of pit bull-type dogs, in 1996 the San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals renamed pit bull terriers to "St. Francis Terriers", so that people might be more likely to adopt them.^[18] 60 temperament-screened dogs were adopted until the program was halted, after several of the newly adopted pit bulls killed cats.^[19] The New York City Center for Animal Care and Control tried a similar approach in 2004, relabeling their pit bulls as "New Yorkies", but dropped the idea in the face of overwhelming public opposition.^{[20][21]}

Elizabethan era

Staffordshire Bull Terrier

Main article: Staffordshire Bull Terrier

The Staffordshire Bull Terrier had its beginnings in the early 19th century by breeding bulldogs, mastiffs, and terriers together. The resulting offspring were originally known as the "bull and terrier dog", the "Pit Dog" and the "Pit Bull Terrier". The early bull terriers of the Elizabethan era were often used for bull baiting and with a weight of between 100 lbs (45 kg) and 120 lbs (54 kg) were significantly larger than the modern bull terrier.^[22] These dogs imported to America from England as early as 1870, where they were known as the Pit Dog, Pit Bull Terrier, and later American Bull Terrier or Yankee terrier.^[23] They were imported primarily, but not exclusively, for pit fighting.^[23]

The dog was officially recognised by the The Kennel Club of the United Kingdom as the "Staffordshire bull terrier" in 1935.^[24] Not long after, in 1936, they were recognised by the American Kennel Club (AKC) as "Staffordshire Terriers."^[24] Breeders started creating exemplars heavier in weight. Since January 1, 1972, the breed was renamed "American Staffordshire Terrier" to describe it as a separate breed from the lighter Staffordshire Bull Terrier of England.^[25]

Attacks on humans

Main articles: Dog attack and List of fatal dog attacks in the United States

Studies

A 9-year (1979–88) review of fatal dog attacks in the United States determined that, of the 101 attacks in which breed was recorded, pit bulls were implicated in 42 of those attacks (42%).^[26] A 1991 study found that 94% of attacks on children by pit bulls were unprovoked, compared to 43% for other breeds.^[27] A 5-year (1989–94) review of fatal dog attacks in the U.S. determined that pit bulls and pit bull mixed breeds were implicated in 24 (29%) of the 84 deaths in which breed was recorded.^[28]

A 15-year (1991–2005) review of dog attack fatalities investigated by the Kentucky Medical Examiner determined that pit bulls were implicated in 5 of the 11 fatal attacks (45%).^[29] Another 15-year (1994–2009) review of patients admitted to a Level I Trauma Center with dog bites determined that pit bulls were most often involved in these attacks: of the 228 patients treated, the breed of dog was recorded in 82 attacks, and of these, 29 (35%) of the attacks were by pit bulls.^[30] In 45% of the attacks, the dog belonged to the victim's family.^[30]

However, concerns about the reliability of the study's data, its conclusions, its methodology, and its use of citations were raised in a later letter to the editor of *Annals of Surgery*, by Karen Delise, founder of the National Canine Research Council, a pit bull advocacy organization.^[31]

A 5-year (2001–05) review of dog attack victims admitted to the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia determined that pit bull terriers were implicated in more than half of the bites where breed was identified. Of the 269 patients where breed was identified, 137 (51%) were attacked by pit bulls.^[32] The authors wrote:



American Pit Bull Terrier puppy



Staffordshire Bull Terrier



Pit bull, muzzled

KEY POINTS

KEY POINT

42% 1979-1988

Year El Dorado Blamed them

1/3 out of 826

note

the overwhelming number of bites involving pit bull terriers in this study and others certainly has some degree of validity when it comes to identifying bite-prone breeds. Pit bull terriers, German shepherds, and Rottweilers were the offending breeds implicated in our study, and have accounted for the majority of dog bites according to other investigators.^[12]

A review of the medical literature found that pit bulls and pit bull cross-breeds were involved in 42–45% of dog attacks.^[13] Fatalities were most often reported when children were attacked, with 70% of victims being under the age of 10.^[13]

Some other studies on the number of human deaths caused by dog bite trauma have surveyed news media stories for reports of dog-bite-related fatalities. This methodology is subject to potential errors, as some fatal attacks may not have been reported, a study might not find all relevant news reports, and the dog breed might be misidentified.^[14]

Courts in the United States^{[33][36]} and Canada^{[37][38]} have ruled that expert identification, when using published breed standards, is sufficient for the enforcement of breed-specific legislation.

Other studies

A study questioned the bull dog reputation as a dangerous breed. An electronic search of newspaper articles by Raghavan found that pit bull terriers were responsible for 1 (4%) of 28 dog-bite-related fatalities reported in Canada from 1994–2007.^[39] The study also noted that:

A higher proportion of sled dogs and, possibly, mixed-breed dogs in Canada than in the United States caused fatalities, as did multiple dogs rather than single dogs. Free-roaming dog packs, reported only from rural communities, caused most on-reserve fatalities.

The total number of fatal dog attacks from the 17-year period is equal to about 1 fatal attack per year, while the Clifton Report, a study that includes the 1990–2007 period in the Canadian Veterinary Journal Study, shows an average of 6 fatalities attributed to pit bulls alone annually in the U.S. and Canada.^[40] The Clifton Report notes that one limitation is that even experts may disagree as to the breed of a particular dog.^[41]

In a project called the "Calgary Model," legislation addressing bad owners instead of breeds has been the focus. After implementation, which included fining the owner \$350–\$1,500 in dog bite cases, there was a 25-year low in the incidence of such cases.^[citer-needed]

Several studies determined that pit bull owners, and owners of other "vicious" or "high risk" breeds (most commonly identified as Akita, Chow Chow, Doberman Pinscher, Rottweiler, and Wolf-mix), are more likely to have criminal convictions and are more likely to display antisocial behaviors. A 2006 study compared owners of "high risk" dogs to owners of "low risk" dogs. "High risk" dogs included "vicious" dogs by breed (e.g., pit bulls) or "vicious" actions (e.g., any dog that had bitten, attacked, or killed a person or other animal). The study determined that "high risk" dog owners had nearly 10 times as many criminal convictions than did "low risk" dog owners.^[42] A 2009 study^[43] and a followup 2012 study generally supported these findings.^[44]

Locking jaws myth

A popular myth is that pit bulls have "locking jaws".^[45] There is no physiological "locking mechanism" in the jaw muscle and bone structure of pit bulls.^{[46][47]} Pit bull-type dogs, like other terriers, hunting and bull-baiting breeds,^[48] can exhibit a bite, hold, and shake behavior and at times refuse to release when bitten.^{[49][50][51]} Pit bulls also have wide skulls, well-developed muscles, and strong jaws.^[49]

Methods to force pit bull-type dogs to release their grip include breaking an ammonia ampule and holding it up to the dog's nose,^[52] or using a "break stick" to lever the dog's jaws open if it is biting a person or animal.^{[50][51]}

Legislation

Main article: Breed-specific legislation

Widely reported pit bull attacks have resulted in the enactment of breed-specific legislation in several jurisdictions. The attacks have also led to increased premiums for liability insurance.

Many of the jurisdictions that restrict pit bulls apply their restriction to: (a) the modern American Pit Bull Terrier, (b) American Staffordshire Terrier, (c) Staffordshire Bull Terrier, and (d) any other dog that has the substantial physical characteristics and appearance of those breeds. Such jurisdictions include Ontario (Canada),^[53] Miami (Florida, U.S.),^[53] Denver (Colorado, U.S.),^[54] and Malden (Massachusetts, U.S.)^[55] However a few jurisdictions, such as Singapore^[56] and Franklin County, Ohio (U.S.),^[57] also classify the modern American Bulldog as a "pit bull-type dog". In the United Kingdom, a pit bull is an American Pit Bull Terrier.^[58]

↑ not even half

in 17 years only 1 fatality out of 28 from pits

↓ HUGE

as can any dog

All of the breeds share a similar history, with origins rooted from the bulldog and a variety of terriers, except for the Johnson line of American Bulldog (as opposed to the more pure Scott line), which come from the bulldog and a variety of mastiffs. The dogs called bull terriers before the development of the modern bull terrier in the early 20th century may also be called pit bulls.

Approximately 550 jurisdictions have enacted breed-specific legislation (BSL) in response to a number of well-publicized incidents involving pit bull-type dogs, and some government organizations such as the U.S. Army^[69] and Marine Corps^[68] have taken administrative action as well. These actions range from outright bans on the possession of pit bull-type dogs, to restrictions and conditions on pit bull ownership. They often establish a legal presumption that a pit bull-type dog is *prima facie* a legally "dangerous" or "vicious" dog.^[61] In response, 16 states in the U.S. prohibited or restricted the ability of municipal governments within those states to enact BSL, though these restrictions do not affect military installations located within the states.^[62]



Blue nose pit bull puppy

It is now generally settled in caselaw that jurisdictions in the U.S. and Canada have the right to enact breed-specific legislation.^[63] Despite these holdings by the courts, there is some public skepticism over whether the laws are effective.^[64] One point of view is that pit bulls are a public safety issue that merits actions such as banning ownership, mandatory spay/neuter for all pit bulls, mandatory microchip implants and liability insurance, or prohibiting people convicted of a felony from owning pit bulls.^[65] Another point of view is that comprehensive "dog bite" legislation, coupled with better consumer education and legally mandating responsible pet-keeping practices, is a better solution to the problem of dangerous pit bulls than BSL.^{[66][67]}

A third point of view is that breed-specific legislation should not ban breeds entirely, but should instead strictly regulate the conditions under which specific breeds could be owned. For example, forbidding certain classes of individuals from owning them, specifying public areas from which they would be prohibited, and establishing conditions, such as requiring a dog to wear a muzzle, for taking specific breeds of dogs into public places.^[68] Finally, some governments, such as in Australia, have forbidden the import of specific breeds, and are requiring the spay/neuter of all existing dogs of these breeds in an attempt to eliminate the breed's population slowly through natural attrition.^{[69][70]}

The ASPCA said that along with putative over-reporting, false reporting was a major contributor to public perceptions about the breed.^[71]

In a 2012 ruling involving the mauling of a child, Maryland's highest court held that pit bulls are "inherently dangerous". It made pit bull owners, and landlords renting to tenants who own a pit bull, strictly liable for any injuries caused during an attack by a pit bull.^{[72][73]}

In England and Wales the Dangerous Dogs Act prohibits the ownership of pit bull terrier along with 3 other breeds. The Act also bans the breeding, sale and exchange of these dogs.

Commercial restrictions

Liability insurance

Dog owners in the United States can be held legally liable for injuries inflicted or caused by their dogs. In general, owners are considered liable if they were unreasonably careless in handling or restraining the dog, or if they knew beforehand that the dog had a tendency to cause injury (e.g., bite); however, dog owners are automatically considered liable if local laws hold an owner strictly liable for all damage caused by their dog, regardless of carelessness or foreknowledge of a dog's tendencies. Homeowners and renters insurance policies typically provide liability coverage from US\$100,000–300,000 for injuries inflicted by dogs^[74] however, some insurance companies limit their exposure to dog bite liability claims by putting restrictions on dog owners that they insure. These restrictions include refusing to cover dog bites under the insurance policy; increasing insurance rates for homeowners with specific breeds; requiring owners of specific breeds to take special training or have their dogs pass the American Kennel Club Canine Good Citizen test^[75]; requiring owners to restrict their dogs with muzzles, chains, or enclosures; and refusing to write policies for homeowners or renters who have specific breeds of dogs.^[76]

Owners of rental properties may also be held liable if they knew an aggressive dog was living on their property and they did nothing to ensure the safety of other tenants at the property; as a result, many rental properties forbid pit bull-type dogs and any other breeds if the rental property's insurance will not cover damage inflicted by that type of dog. The dog breeds most often targeted by insurance companies include pit bull-type dogs, Rottweilers, German Shepherd Dogs, Doberman Pinschers, Akitas (Akita Inu and American Akita), and Chows.^[76]

In 2013, Farmers Insurance notified policy holders in California that "it will no longer cover bites by pit bull, rottweilers and wolf hybrids. A spokeswoman for Farmers said those breeds account for more than a quarter of the agency's dog bite claims."^[77]

Air carrier restrictions

Several air carriers embargo certain dog breeds, due to the effect of high temperature and humidity on brachycephalic animals, or concerns for the safety of airline property, personnel, and passengers. The following table has a sampling of air carrier embargoes on dogs.

Airline	Reason	Details
Air France	Safety	Dogs "similar in morphology" to Staffordshire Terriers, mastiff (boerboel), tosa, and pit bulls may not be transported or shipped by air. ^[78]
Alaska Airlines / Horizon Air	Health	Dog breeds including American Pit Bull Terriers, American Staffordshire Terriers, Staffordshire Bull Terriers, fly at their owner's risk, with no additional compensation if the dog suffers injury or dies during transit. The airline may refuse to accept the dog if it feels outside temperatures are too extreme for the animal's safety. ^[79]
American Airlines	Health	American Airlines will not accept brachycephalic or snub-nosed dogs as checked luggage. ^[80]
Delta Air Lines	Health	"Snub-nosed dogs" are embargoed when the temperature at the departure point or any stop along the travel route is expected to exceed 75 °F (24 °C). ^[81]
Southwest Airlines	Practicality	Southwest only accepts small dogs and cats in-cabin, in carriers that can be stowed under their owners' seats, a restriction that would exclude most — if not all — adult pit bulls. No dogs are accepted in cargo. ^[82]

United Airlines formerly embargoed American Pit Bull Terriers for safety reasons. However, pit bulls (along with American Staffordshires and other similar breeds) are now permitted, provided that dogs over six months old or weighing more than 20 pounds (9 kg) are transported in reinforced crates.^[83]

Notable pit bulls

Pit Bull breeds have become famous for their roles as soldiers, police dogs, search and rescue dogs, actors, television personalities, seeing eye dogs, and celebrity pets. Historically, the Bull Terrier mix Nipper and Patsy from the Little Rascals are the most well known. Lesser known, but still historically notable pit bulls include Billie Holiday's companion "Mister",^[14] Helen Keller's dog "Sir Thomas",^[15] Buster Brown's dog "Tige",^[16] Horatio Jackson's dog "Bad",^{[17][18]} President Theodore Roosevelt's Pit Bull terrier "Petey", "Jack Bratton" who served for Company K, the First Connecticut Volunteer Infantry during the civil war,^[19] and Sir Walter Scott's "Wasp".^[16]

Modernly significant pit bulls are: Weela, who helped save 32 people, 29 dogs, 3 horses, and 1 calf;^[11] Popsicle, a five-month-old puppy originally found nearly dead in a freezer, who grew to become one of the nation's most important police dogs;^[2] Norton, who was placed in the Purina Animal Hall of Fame after he rescued his owner from a severe reaction to a spider bite;^[2] Titan, who rescued his owner's wife, who would have died from an aneurysm, and D-Boy, who took three bullets to save his family from an intruder with a gun,^[19] and Lilly, who lost a leg after being struck by a freight train while pulling her unconscious owner from the train tracks.^[20]

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