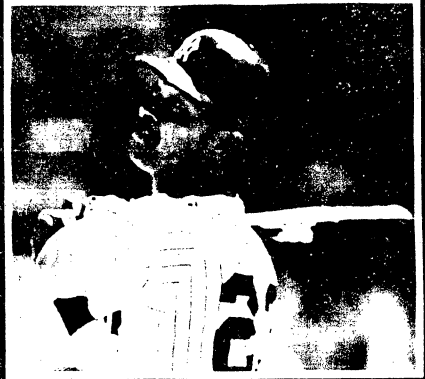


# Sports Illustrated

HOMER HERO DON MATTINGLY



# BEWARE OF THIS DOG



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# THE PIT BULL FRIEND AND KILLER

IS THE PIT BULL A FINE ANIMAL, AS  
ITS ADMIRERS CLAIM, OR IS IT A  
VICIOUS DOG, UNFIT FOR SOCIETY?

B Y E . M . S W I F T





MIKE MAPLEWOODEN CAMP

# PIT BULLS



*One theory advanced to account for the breed's unusually stable and congenial-to-people disposition is that he is far too formidable a beast for it to be prudent to allow vicious individuals to survive (and thus to propagate). . . . This selective process tended to weed out the mean dogs and has left us with a dog with an almost ridiculously amiable disposition.*

—RICHARD F. STRATTON

*This Is the American Pit Bull Terrier* (1976)

*The mean ones are the aberrations still. But the aberrations are more numerous.*

—RICHARD F. STRATTON

July 8, 1987

**A**MERICA HAS A FOUR-LEGGED problem called the American pit bull terrier. And the pit bull, its "ridiculously amiable disposition" notwithstanding, has a two-legged problem called Man, to whom Stratton's second quote could also be applied. These two species are not new to each other. They have intermingled for some 200 years, and some say their common history goes back as far as the Romans. But something has happened to the pit bull in the last decade that says as much about the nature of American society as it does about the nature of this aggressive animal. Far from being an aberration, the American pit bull terrier has become a reflection of ourselves that no one cares very much to see.

"They're athletes. They're wrestlers. They're dead game," says Captain Arthur Haggerty, a dog breeder and trainer in New York City who owns five pit bull terriers and has trained hundreds of

others. "They will literally fight till they're dead. If you found that quality in a boxer or a football player, you'd say it was admirable. Will to win. That's what a pit bull has."

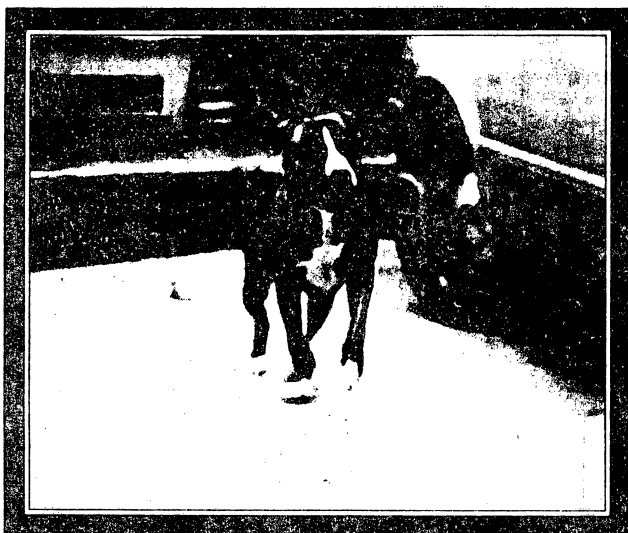
Others call it a "will to kill." At least 35 communities nationwide have considered banning the breed from within their city limits, and while such ordinances have run into constitutional problems stemming from the difficulty in defining exactly what a pit bull terrier is, their number is growing weekly. The horror stories involving pit bulls are voluminous. Recent tragedies include the death of two-year-old James Soto, who was mauled in Morgan Hill, Calif., on June 13 by a neighbor's pit bull. The attack rendered the child "unrecognizable as a human being," according to paramedics. Nine days later a national television audience watching the evening news was treated to the terrifying spectacle of a pit bull terrier attacking Los Angeles animal control officer Florence Crowell. The 33-year-old woman survived but spent five days in the hospital.

On April 6, a retired surgeon, 67-year-old William Eckman, was killed by two pit bulls on a street in Dayton, Ohio. On that same day, 16-month-old Melissa Larabee of Jones, Okla., was killed by the family's pet pit bull, who bit her in the throat. In June 1986, 20-month-old Kyle Corullo was attacked by a pit bull in Ramsay, Mich., while playing in his grandmother's backyard. The dog, fighting off the child's mother, dragged the boy into a nearby lot and shook him to death "like a stuffed animal."

In the last 18 months, 12 of the 18 confirmed dog-related fatalities in the

**AFTER THIS AND ANOTHER PIT BULL ATTACKED A 56-YEAR-OLD MAN IN DETROIT, ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICERS REMOVED THE DOGS WITH CAUTION**

**A LOCAL TV NEWS CREW TAPED THE HORRIFYING MOMENT AS L.A. ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICER CROWELL WAS ATTACKED BY BENJAMIN, A PIT BULL OWNED BY HAUSER (AT FAR RIGHT)**



KCBS-TV NEWS

U.S.—or 67%—have been caused by the pit bull terrier, a breed that accounts for only 1% of the U.S. dog population. And the maimings are far more numerous. Often it is small children who are the victims of unprovoked attacks. There is no definitive source for animal attack statistics, but pit bull fanciers claim that statistics show other breeds of dog bite more frequently—German shepherds lead the list—and accuse the media of publicizing only pit bull maulings. **DOG BITES MAN** isn't news, they say, but **PIT BULL BITES MAN** is.

Unfortunately the pit bull, when it attacks, doesn't merely bite man—or, most horribly, child—it clamps its powerful jaws down and literally tears its victim apart. “The injuries these dogs inflict are more serious than other breeds because they go for the deep musculature and don't release; they hold and shake,” says Sheryl Blair of the Tufts Veterinary School, in North Grafton, Mass., which last year held a symposium entitled. *Animal Agression: Dog Bites and the Pit Bull Terrier*.

“Most breeds do not multiple-bite,” says Kurt Lapham, a field investigator for the West Coast Regional office of the Humane Society. “A pit bull attack is like a shark attack: He keeps coming back.”

“A pit bull,” says Judge Victor E. Bianchini of San Diego, “is the closest thing to a wild animal there is in a domesticated dog.”

A fair assessment of a growing problem? Or a bad rap against an animal which has suffered far more at the hands of man than it can possibly repay? It has been estimated that there are half a mil-

lion pit bull terriers alive in the United States today. What about the 99% who have never bitten a human being? Are these dogs “loaded handguns,” as many have called them? “There's something a little scary about wondering, Is there a time bomb ticking in my dog?” says Dr. Franklin Loew, dean of Tufts Veterinary School, who opposes efforts to legislate against pit bull terriers and believes the breed is the victim of “canine racism.” Loew adds, “The pit bull does seem to respond more than other dogs to people trying to bring out aggressiveness. But everything I know professionally tells me that this is not a dog problem, but a problem of dog ownership.”

What exactly is a pit bull? Defining it has proved to be a formidable legal hurdle because the pit bull is not a specific breed. Rather, it is a *kind* of dog, a generic catchall like hound or retriever. The breeds most commonly referred to as pit bulls are the American Staffordshire terrier, which is the term used by the American Kennel Club, and the American pit bull terrier, the term used by the United Kennel Club. The men who match pit bulls in fights today do not bother with such formalities; they refer to their animals as bulldogs—a nickname which should not confuse pit bulls with the pug-faced and bowlegged English bulldog, a distant relative, or the bullterrier, another relation whose bloodline was softened long ago by crossbreeding with the English Terrier. Pit bulls come in almost any color; their ears may be cropped or uncropped; their noses either red or black; and their height and weight merely proportionate—with the weight parameters rang-



MELANIE BELL/THE MIAMI HERALD

**TODDLERS ARE OFTEN VICTIMS OF PIT BULL ATTACKS; LANCE SALTZMAN OF GREENACRES CITY, FLA., WAS BITTEN BADLY WHEN HE WAS 17 MONTHS OLD**

ing from under 20 pounds to upwards of 100. Their muzzles are wedgelike, their jaws powerful and their heads blocky. A pit bull's coat will be short and glossy, shimmering over a compact frame tightly bound in muscle.

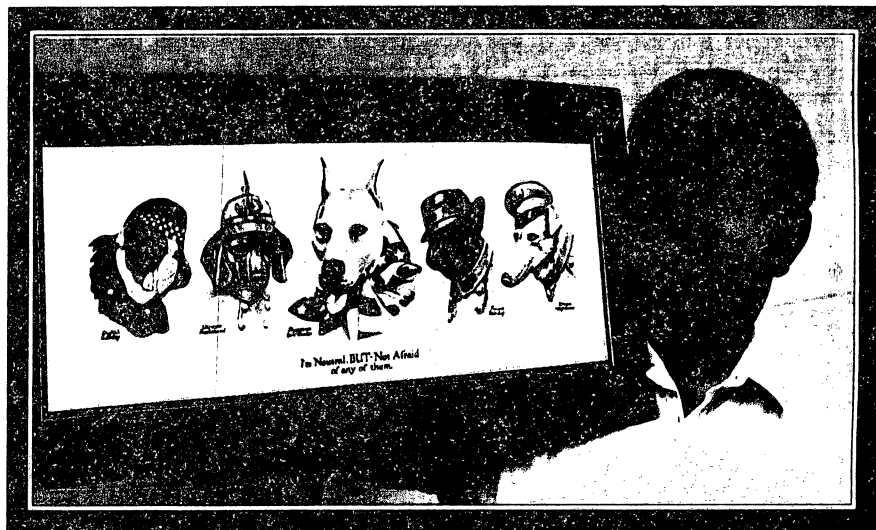
All the dogs referred to as pit bulls are



# PIT BULLS

thought to trace their ancestry back to the bull-and-terrier, which was developed in England in the early 19th century. The bull-and-terrier was a cross between the early bull-dog—the name comes from the fact that it was used in bull-baiting—and a game terrier of some kind, either English, or fox, or black-and-tan. The bull-and-terrier dog was also used for bull-baiting, and was sometimes referred to as a butcher's dog. When a butcher wanted to slaughter one of his cattle, he would sic his bull-and-terrier on the unlucky bovine, and the game little dog would latch onto the bigger animal's nose, and the butcher, hammer in hand, would move in swiftly and bludgeon the cow on the head.

At some point, no one is sure exactly when, gentlemen sportsmen began matching bull-and-terrier dogs against each other. One of the more popular establishments in London used for such purposes was the Westminster Pit, an enclosure that could hold about 300 spectators. Admission was charged at the door (two shillings in 1816), odds would be established, wagers were made and purses put up. It was all very civilized. Sometimes, after the dogs had finished chewing up one another, a fight between bears would follow.



## TO FORTENBERRY, A PIT BULL TERRIER IS THE ULTIMATE PATRIOTIC MASCOT

In 1835, the English parliament outlawed the whole bloody business—bear-baiting, bull-baiting and dogfighting. All the law served to do was to drive dogfighting underground. The coal miners in Staffordshire were said to be particularly avid followers of the clandestine "sport." Now, more than 150 years later, in an age of computers and biogenetics, the blood of those miners courses through the veins of citizens in these 50 states, and the blood of the bull-and-ter-

rier dog's descendants continues to be splattered against the sides of pits.

According to *The Complete Dog Book*, the official AKC publication, the pit bull first came to America around 1870. Some pit bull breeders date their arrival much earlier. Byron Fortenberry of Akron, Ohio, a breeder and author on canine subjects, claims that of the two dogs that came over on the *Mayflower*, one was a spaniel and one was "a small mastiff." Says Fortenberry, "A bulldog was called a small mastiff in 1620. No way, you can prove it was or it wasn't a pit bull, but more than likely that's what became our breed."

Fortenberry does not explain how this particular small mastiff was able to reproduce itself—perish the thought that it was bred to the lowly spaniel—but one of the traits one discovers in talking with breeders of American pit bull terriers is that they consider the dog capable of almost anything, including virgin birth. At any rate, the breed was well established in America by the 20th century. In 1898 the United Kennel Club began registering American pit bull terriers under the auspices of C.Z. Bennett, who drew up breed standards and wrote a set of rules governing dogfighting. In 1909 the American Dog Breeders Association, which at that time was determined to distance itself from dogfighting, set up its own registry.

**IRONICALLY, A PIT BULL AND KIDS ONCE SEEMED PERFECT TOGETHER: OUR GANG (LEFT) WITH PETE; AND FRED ASTAIRE, AGE 10, WITH A PAL**



These were the salad days of the pit bull terrier. The dog was the envy of the canine world. Buster Brown's floppy-eared pal in the popular comic strip of that era was his pit bull, Tige. Theodore Roosevelt had a pit bull in the White House. And a pit bull named Stubby, used in World War I to deliver messages between battalions, assisted in the capture of a German spy and was decorated for bravery by General John (Black Jack) Pershing.

The pit bull was America's dog and was depicted as such in 1914 by artist Wallace Robinson, who created a poster in which an English bulldog, a German dachshund, an American bull terrier, a French bulldog and a Russian wolfhound were dressed in the military uniforms of each dog's country. The caption on the poster was a remark by the pit bull, who appeared in the middle, slightly larger than the rest: "I'm neutral, BUT—Not Afraid of any of them."

Later, the most famous pit bull of them all burst on the American scene, a star who was, ironically it now seems, surrounded by a cast of children. That was the Our Gang canine pal, Pete, a predominately white pit bull with a distinctive black circle—almost certainly the work of a make-up artist—around its left eye. Pete is celluloid proof



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Can You Name This Star?

THIS ten-year-old boy with the Hunter House collar was only five when he and his sister, in Glendale, began taking the income which later led to his fame. After five years in Woodville with his sister, he arrived on Broadway. His first movie screen was Dancing Lady. He costarred with Greta Garbo in a series of RKO musicals. Married to his two-time ex-wife, can you name him?

—RAYMOND S. STUART.

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THE SATURDAY EVENING POST November 21, 1933

# PIT BULLS

that there was a time when the pit bull terrier had "a ridiculously amiable disposition."

In 1935 the American Kennel Club finally decided to recognize the American pit bull terrier as a breed. The club, however, could not bring itself to call the animal by that name. The AKC wanted its own name for this courageous, personable dog, and it wanted a name that did not include the word *pit*. The AKC settled upon the Staffordshire terrier because so many of the dogs had come from that area of England. In the summer of 1936 the first Staffordshire terrier was registered by the AKC. Pit bull lore has it that Pete was the first Staffordshire. It's a swell story, but not true. Pete was among the first, but the honor actually goes to a dog named Wheeler's Black Dinah.

"It was exactly the same dog as our American pit bull terrier," says Andy Johnson of the rival UKC, which currently registers between 25,000 and 30,000 American pit bull terriers annually. "They even opened their registry to our dogs. The AKC just didn't want anything in their name that would remind people of the fighting history of the pit bull. It was like a family denying that it had horse thieves in its past."

Perhaps. But most pit bull fanciers believe that in the 52 years since the Staffordshire terrier—renamed the American Staffordshire terrier in 1972—was recognized by the AKC, it has become a dog significantly different from the UKC's American pit bull terrier. Not in looks—which are nearly identical—but in temperament. Why? Because over the years the Staffordshire has been bred to show, rather than to fight. In one of his books, pit bull expert and breeder Richard Stratton addressed this subject in his glossary of pit bull terms: "American Staffordshire terrier. . . . The show counterpart of the APBT. Except for some game strains that are dual-registered, these dogs could not be expected to be as game as the APBT or to have the same ability."

The ability Stratton is talking about is the ability to fight. The gameness he describes is the willingness of the animal to

fight to its own death. American Staffordshire terriers have not been valued as fighting dogs for at least half a century. "A true Staffordshire terrier is not a fighting dog, even though it came from a fighting dog," says the Humane Society's Lapham.

Is it just coincidence, then, that none of the killings of people in the past two years have been attributed to registered American Staffordshire terriers? Probably not.

"The American Staffordshire terri-



THIS FENCE CAN'T KEEP IN STRATTON'S HOOVER

er's chief requisites should be strength unusual for its size, soundness, balance, a strong, powerful head, a well-muscled body, and courage that is proverbial," reads *The Complete Dog Book*. "As to character, they exceed being dead game; nevertheless, they should not be held in ill repute merely because man has been taking advantage of this rare courage to use them in the pit as gambling tools. These dogs are docile, and with a little training are even tractable around other dogs."

Ginny Bazalak of Chepachet, R.I.,

president of the American Pit Bull Terrier Club of New England, feels the same way about the dogs that she has bred. "They say pit bulls have natural aggressiveness," she says. "I don't believe it. People who are breeding for aggressiveness will get it. For the last 12 years I haven't been, and these dogs aren't. My dogs are babies. They'll lick you to death. The people who fight dogs tell me I'm ruining the breed. They say my dogs are wimps."

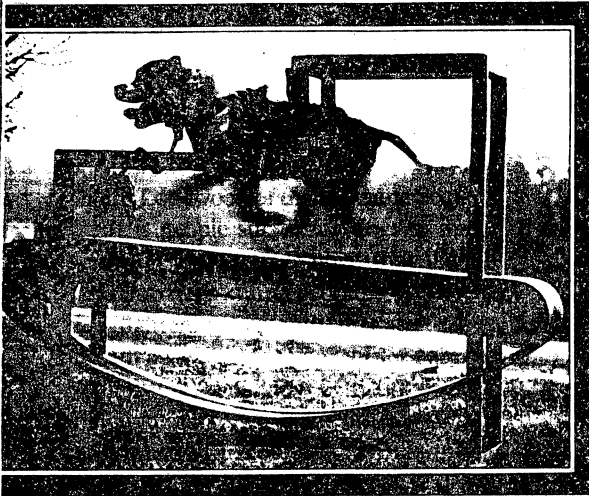
Sadly it is the responsible owners and breeders who are suffering the most from the recent wave of pit bull hysteria. "You feel like a criminal walking your dog," says Bazalak. "You're constantly approached by someone who says, 'That's a vicious dog,' as if it's a wild animal. I've stopped breeding mine. I don't want to add to the population right now. I'm disgusted with the American people who believe the problem's with the dog and not with the people raising the dog."

But the hysteria, or concern, is understandable. To the untrained eye—or even to the trained one, in many instances—it is virtually impossible to tell a docile pit bull from a mean one. None of them looks like a wimp, and a friendly pit bull jumping up to lick you to death has an eerie resemblance to a pit bull jumping up to rip out your throat. Your best bet is to pass a fast judgment on its owner.

Pit bulls do not usually growl before attacking; they seldom bark. The hair on their backs does not stand on end when they are enraged. These are not dogs given to threatening displays. The pit bull, when so trained, is all business, which has made it the dog of choice for drug dealers and street punks around the country. "People whose insecurities are such that they need macho reinforcement feel a need for this type of animal," says Loew of Tufts, "and they are available because of the overflow from illegal dogfights."

"I just saw a surprising statistic from a Los Angeles study," Steve Blackwood, a sergeant in the San Diego Sheriff's Department, said recently. "In two out of three narcotics raids, pit bulls were used as the guard dogs."

# PIT BULLS



WILLIAM STRODE/WOODFIN CAMP



WILLIAM STRODE/WOODFIN CAMP



WILLIAM STRODE/WOODFIN CAMP



THE HUMANE SOCIETY OF THE UNITED STATES

San Diego investigators also were told that local members of motorcycle gangs were stashing their drugs beneath the doghouses of their pit bulls. "Street dope dealers and street gangs have gone to pit bulls," says Budd Johnson, an inspector for the U.S. Marshals Service who is based in San Diego. Law enforcement officials are seeing the same thing all over the country, and the pit bull populations in urban areas have mushroomed as a result. There have also been instances when pit bulls were used in armed robberies, in effect taking the place of a weapon, and one case in which a 16-year-old girl was raped by a man who allegedly threatened her with his two pit bulls.

"You've got a bunch of kooks out there who are getting these dogs and making them mean and registering them," says Andy Johnson of the UKC. "Every time somebody writes how mean these dogs are, the demand for them jumps up. You can make any dog mean if you work at it."

Now, and historically, at the core of the breed's problems is dogfighting. This loathsome "sport" is, by most accounts, more widespread than ever in the U.S. At the same time it is even less humane, having passed from the hands of the old-time "gentlemen" breeders into the mitts of the borderline sadists. Once primarily a rural dementia, dogfighting has become a city problem as well, the outgrowth of the popularity of pit bulls. It matters little that dogfighting is illegal in every state, and a felony-level crime in 36 states. "You can virtually find a convention [as dogfights are called in the jargon of the sport] on any weekend in any of the 50 states," says Eric Sakach of the West Coast Regional office of the Humane Society in Sacramento.

"There are probably more matches taking place today than ever before because of the popularity of the breed," says Stratton, whose books on pit bull terriers include such chapters of general interest as: "Dimensions of the Dog Pit"

**SCENES FROM THE BRUTAL 'SPORT' OF DOGFIGHTING: A PIT BULL TRAINS ON A TREADMILL (TOP); A HANDLER HOLDS HIS DOG BEFORE THE START OF A FIGHT; BETS CAN BE BIG; BUSTS OF ILLEGAL 'DOG CONVENTIONS' ARE BECOMING MORE AND MORE FREQUENT**

and "Fluid Therapy for Treating Hypovolemic Shock."

"Dogfighting is the greatest perversion of the special relationship that exists between people and dogs," says Randall Lockwood of the Humane Society. "It is people subjecting dogs to incredible cruelty. And now that has turned into dogs killing people."

Dogfighters vehemently dispute this, and with a straight face one writer compared pitting a bulldog with taking a greyhound out on a run. When, as a youth, Stratton asked Mrs. William J. Lightner, the wife of a legendary pit bull breeder, if dogfighting was cruel, he re-



WILLIAM STRODE/WOODFIN CAMP

calls that she responded, "It was cruel all right, but not to the dogs, for fighting was the very breath of life to them because of their breeding. But it was cruel to the people because it was hard not to get especially attached to your best dog, the very one likely to be matched, and sometimes they were lost."

The dog, in the warped perspective of the dogfighting zealot, dies happy, fulfilled, like an Iranian soldier. Next stop, puppy heaven. As one pitman bragged to Benno Kroll, who wrote a superb account of dogfighting in the November 1979 issue of *Geo*: "My dogs die with their tails up and wagging."

Perhaps. They also die with their legs broken, their ears mangled and their flesh torn. "We've seen them, with both front legs broken, push themselves across the ring to fight," says Blackwood, the San Diego sheriff.

Many times the dogs die hours after the fight of hypovolemic shock—dehydration—since the prevailing wisdom says to dehydrate your animal before fighting him to cut down on his potential loss of blood. And sometimes a dog dies minutes after the fight from a bullet to the brain, if the dog happens to "cur out"—refuse to engage in battle.

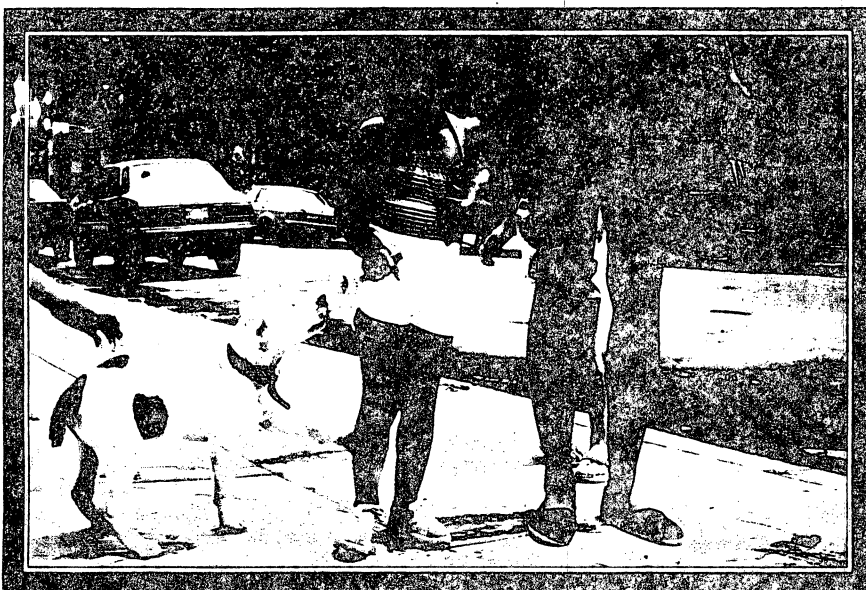
Of course they don't all die. Pit bulls

are incredibly hardy animals that, some folks would have you believe, are impervious to pain. The majority of the pit bulls recover from their fights, which routinely last more than an hour and sometimes as long as three hours, and live to fight again.

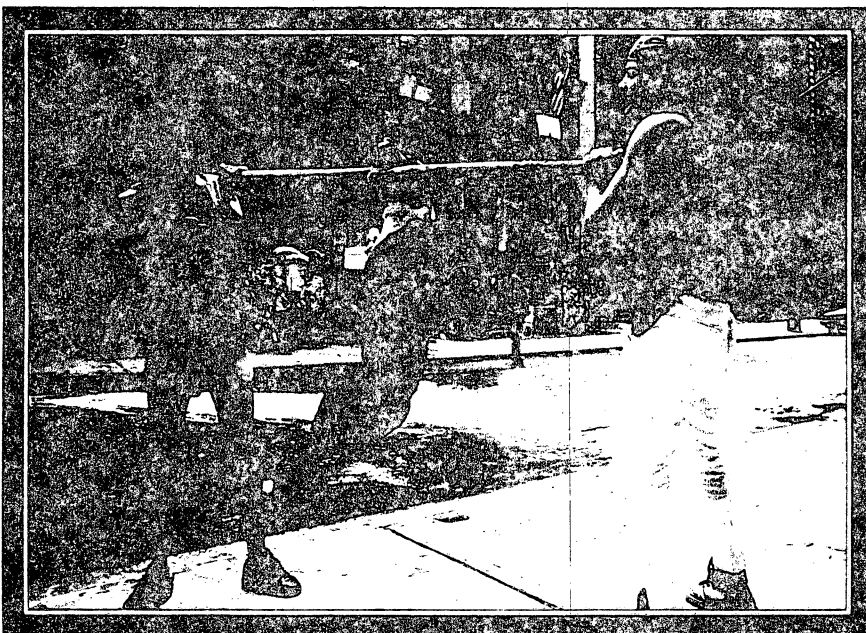
Before each match, the handlers wash their opponent's pit bull, a tradition which started after some "gentleman sportsman" discovered that by putting poison on his own dog's coat, he could paralyze his adversary's animal. When the fight begins, the two dogs share the 16-foot-square pit with two handlers and a referee. It's close quarters in there.



# PIT BULLS



DONNA FERRATO/VISIONS



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DONNA FERRATO/VISIONS

no place for a man-eating dog. And the bloodthirsty spectators, with fistfuls of cash, are separated from the participants by only a 30-inch-high wall.

"In the old days the fighting dogs were people-gentle," says Lockwood. "But that's not true any longer. It's not unheard of now for dogs to come out of the pit and attack spectators. Some of our investigators have seen it."

It has become a new game. It's commonplace these days for a dogfighting raid to turn up a veritable storeroom of illegal weapons and illegal drugs. "People who think they are dogfighters are into it now, but they have no concept what it's about," says one pit bull breeder from Ohio. "True dogfighters had a lot of money tied up in their dogs, and they didn't want to lose them. Today these clowns steal somebody's pet and put him in the pit without training him. Then they watch while the dog gets torn up. At best, they're sadistic."

Training a fighting pit bull terrier is something the Marquis de Sade certainly would have appreciated. Treadmills are the most commonly used apparatuses, and sometimes a kitten or a chicken is hung in a mesh basket at the top of the treadmill to hold the dog's attention. At the end of the hours-long workout, guess what the reward is? To increase the dog's biting power, trainers will hang tires from tree limbs, bidding their pit bulls to leap up and latch on, sometimes making them hang there for 15 to 20 minutes.

Those are the sophisticated methods. "In Toledo we arrested a guy who was paying kids to collect cats for him," relates Lapham of the Humane Society. "He'd throw them into the basement where he kept his pit bull, to let him taste blood."

Steven Creighton, a sergeant with the San Diego police department, recounts the gruesome tale of the arrest on Dec. 4, 1986, of 18-year-old James Madison. "We got a call that a guy put a noose around a live cat's neck and threw it over a branch so that it hung about eight feet off the ground," says Creighton. "Then the guy let a pit bull loose who attacked the cat while [a group of neighborhood children] watched in horror."

**IN NEW YORK CITY, A PUPPY PAWS A TOT (TOP); AN ADULT PIT BULL WORKS ON HER GRIP; A BOY LOVES HIS DOG**

He would let the pit chomp on the cat for a while, and then he'd lift the cat up out of the pit's reach. The dog was going crazy." The cat eventually died. Madison, who has pleaded not guilty, will go on trial next month for felony cruelty to animals and raising a dog for fighting.

"It's ridiculous," says Stratton. "The taste of blood doesn't make a pit bull a better fighter. But people write that kind of stuff about people who train pit bulls, and these kids read it and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy."

And in some instances, it is literally the kids who get involved. Last year in Philadelphia five boys between the ages of 11 and 14 were arrested and charged with participation in a dogfighting ring in which the losing dogs were thrown out the window and hanged. All five were found guilty. "They call it 'gambling the dog,'" Sam McClain, a police officer with Philadelphia's 19th District, told reporters. In a follow-up article on Philadelphia street dogfighting, which appeared in the July 2 issue of *Rolling Stone*, writer Mike Sager described the training regimen of a pair of pit bull handlers, brothers aged 13 and 14: "They'll starve him to make him mean, fatten him on twenty-five-cent-a-can dog food and leftover beans and rice, run him around the block behind their bicycles, feed him chicken blood, take him on a safari around the neighborhood looking for cats and strays, shoot him up with black-market penicillin and vitamin B12 to help heal his wounds, and rub him with used motor oil to make his fur grow back over his scars."

Some feed their dogs hot sauce to make them mean, while others subscribe to a dosage of gunpowder. It is not clear whether these dogs, when they die, do so with their tails up and wagging.

Who has suffered more, then? The pit bull for his association with man? Or man for his association with the pit bull? It should be pointed out that pit bull terriers serve man in a number of legal and interesting ways. They are not just guard dogs and fighters. The stamina and courage of the pit bull make the breed unparalleled as a hunting dog for wild pigs, a popular quarry in parts of the South and Southwest. Some ranchers, particularly those who graze livestock in brushy country where it is difficult to

rope, use pit bulls as catch dogs for cattle. They can also be trained to herd sheep—pity the coyote that would bother a pit bull's flock. And, recreationally, pit bull owners have started to show enthusiasm for weight pulling. "The pit bull's the hardest-pulling dog in the world," brags Ralph Greenwood of the American Dog Breeders Association. Last year in Seguin, Texas, a 78-pound pit bull named Bighead set a record by pulling 5,650 pounds over rails for a distance of 15 feet.

Clearly, though, steps have to be taken if man and the pit bull terrier are to continue to coexist. "Dogfighting needs to be prosecuted," says Blair of Tufts, "And effective vicious-dog legislation needs to be enacted."

There are a number of reasons why "vicious dog" legislation is preferable to ordinances that specifically target the pit bull terrier. As has been noted, it is virtually impossible to define a pit bull in legal terms. There is also the nettlesome question of punishing innocent, responsible breeders of American Staffordshire terriers and American pit bull terriers for the abuses of irresponsible, often criminal, owners. And finally, the pit bull is not the only aggressive dog on the street. Rottweilers, Dobermans, German shepherds, akitas and chows are all breeds that can be aggressive and that are large enough to inflict severe damage on people and other animals. For that matter, any breed that is improperly raised or is allowed to run loose can become a menace. The population of this country is more than 240 million people, and "Ninty-seven percent of Americans now live in cities, towns or villages," says Loew of Tufts. "There are 50 million dogs in this country, more than at any time in our history. How are we going to live *with* them?"

"We suggest a procedure by which a dog can be identified as 'dangerous' or 'vicious' that does not just take into consideration bites," says the Humane Society's Lockwood. "A dog that assumes a threatening posture when unprovoked, that lunges at its fence when someone walks past, that chases kids—that is a dangerous dog, even if it hasn't actually bitten anyone. The new thrust is to make owners responsible for their dogs before there's a problem."

This much we have learned from the pit bull: The so-called "one free bite"



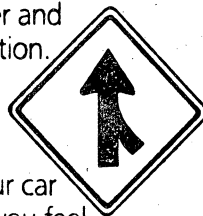
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And when your car performs better, you feel better about driving. Now that's a nice balance of power.



# PIT BULLS

concept of dog control is out to lunch. This is the policy in effect in many communities where a dog is not considered to be a problem until it has bitten on two occasions. In the case of the pit bull terrier, that is usually two occasions too many. David Sholes, a Rhode Island state senator, proposed and drafted vicious-dog legislation for his state in 1985. It is now considered a prototype for others to follow. "We had a tremendous explosion of pit bull attacks, you were reading about a new one practically every week," says Sholes. "One child lost part of a buttock, another part of her face. A pit bull managed to get on a school bus and terrorize the children. It was apparent that the current law was not working."

The new Rhode Island law provides a workable definition of a "vicious dog": One that has either committed an *unprovoked* attack on a person or animal, or that approaches a person in an apparent attitude of attack when unprovoked. That is the key word: unprovoked. Any dog that is unlicensed falls into the "vicious" category until it is licensed. Rhode Island's procedure for having a dog declared "vicious" is as follows: 1) the complainant calls the local animal control officer; 2) the officer investigates the complaint and holds a hearing to examine the circumstances; 3) he then declares whether the animal in question is "vicious" or not; 4) if the owner of the dog disagrees with his verdict, he may appeal to District Court.

Should his appeal fail, the owner of the "vicious" dog must keep it in a secure enclosure, at least six feet in height, that is both childproof from the outside and dogproof from the inside. The dog is tattooed for identification. Furthermore, the dog owner must show that he has a \$100,000 insurance policy for liability, and he is required to display a sign that can be read from the road: VIOUS DOG ON PREMISES. The dog officer has the right to inspect the enclosure at any subsequent time and without need of a war-

rant, and has the right to seize and impound the dog if any of the specifications are not met to his satisfaction. If the dog bites again, the owner is fully liable, much as if he had been keeping a wild tiger in a cage.

"Most owners would rather turn in their dog than comply," says Sholes. "So the net effect was to keep these vicious dogs off the street."

Of course the vast majority of problem pit bulls are unregistered and unlicensed. These are the animals that law enforcement officials must focus on, and



**BAZELAK RAISES CHAMPIONS FOR THE RING, NOT THE PIT**

quickly. Unlicensed dogs should be impounded. And anyone who knows of individuals who are keeping unlicensed dogs, or whose dogs are allowed to run loose, should be encouraged to report them to the proper authorities. "We've got to make bad-dog behavior impersonal," says Loew. "It should be like asking someone who is smoking in a no-smoking area to stop. No offense, but your dog is a problem."

"For a long time the judicial system has not taken dogfighting and dog-biting seriously," says Lapham. "That laissez-faire attitude cannot persist. Dog-

fighting is not just aberrant behavior in a civilized society, it has become a lethal liability within that society. The best new ordinances and leash laws in the world will be worthless unless the courts deal with these people seriously. They have to send a message that says: You want to own these dogs, fine. But you'll pay the consequences if you screw up."

It is a message that is already being sent. In February, Hayward Turnipseed of De Kalb County, Ga., was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to five years in prison after three

of his pit bulls attacked and killed four-year-old Billy Gordon as the child walked through a neighbor's yard. Michael Berry, 37, the California man who owned the dog who killed two-year-old James Soto, has pleaded not guilty to a charge of involuntary manslaughter. And Edlyn Joy Hauser, the woman whose dog, Benjamin, attacked animal control officer Crowell, has pleaded innocent to three felony counts of assault with a deadly weapon—Benjamin—and intentionally inflicting great bodily harm.

As for the American pit bull terrier, it, too, has taken its lumps. In the three weeks following those two grisly June incidents in California, more than 300 pit bulls and pit bull crosses were turned in to the Los Angeles County Animal Care and Control Department, most of them by owners who no longer wanted the responsibility of keeping them, or who had simply become frightened of their own pet by the breed's reputation. The animals were all put to sleep.

Overpopulation of the breed remains one of the chief concerns about pit bulls, especially in already crowded urban areas. Law enforcement officials, animal control officers, animal rights groups and legislators are just beginning to address that particular problem.

And the American pit bull terrier's aberrant sidekick? They're going to be dealing with the human part of the puzzle for a long, long time.

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Comm. from Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk, transmitting a copy of a portion of Sports Illustrated containing an article on pit bull terriers.

In City Council,

September 14, 1987

Referred to the Hearing  
Scheduled 9/14/87  
@ 7 P.M.