



Reprinted from BAY WOOF August 2007

PIT BULLS: THE INSIDE SCOOP

By Donna Reynolds

The SF Bay Area is a mecca for pit bulls and their people. There are thousands (yes, thousands!) of homes here where pits are beloved members of the family. Perhaps you've heard the buzz about the breed: Maybe a co-worker has photos of hers plastered all over her cubicle, or your mechanic brags non-stop about his. But just as not every home is right for a Border Collie, not every home is a good match for a Pit Bull. Before adopting one yourself, read on to see what you can expect.

Upside Breed fans will tell you that a temperament-correct pit bull is one of the most enjoyable dogs you can share your life with. Why? They're fun! They flirt, they flatter, they clown, and they tend to stay puppyish until old age. Far from being a vicious guarding dog, a true Pit Bull from a good background is shamelessly social and even flirtatious with strangers. After all, no other breed was specifically bred to enjoy being handled.

Downside As social as Pit Bulls can be, society can be downright anti-social to them. Across the board, many Pit Bull guardians will tell you that the hardest part of owning one is warding off insensitive comments and discrimination. Apparently, well-adjusted Pit Bulls are just too boring to capture the interest of news crews, so your dog will be judged based on over-hyped examples of damaged dogs and irresponsible owners. As a result, property managers are less likely to rent to families with Pit Bulls, businesses may shut them out, strangers may sneer, and your kids may find that some of their friends aren't allowed to come over to your house to play. This unjust discrimination hurts!

Upside Pit Bulls aim to please. Training them is fairly easy to accomplish, given their love of a good challenge. Pit Bulls don't need to be trained in order to be "nice dogs" – they are born that way! But training helps to channel their play drive and over-the-top enthusiasm into the very best manners, which will impress even the nay-sayers. Pit Bulls all over the Bay Area are earning accolades as Ambassadors. Many are Canine Good Citizens (CGC) and Therapy Dogs (TD), and some are top contenders in a variety of dog sports.

Downside Not every dog owner can match the energy level of a young Pit Bull. Folks that are more laid back or who just aren't cut out for being team leaders might find this dog's brand of enthusiasm downright exhausting!

Upside Not sure what to think about the social side of Pit Bulls? It helps to remember that they are Terriers, and like all Terriers their tolerance levels with other animals vary. Some are Dog Social, some Dog Tolerant, some Dog Selective, and some Dog Aggressive. Many can enjoy a large and varied network of dog friends, while others are more choosy. Knowing your Pit's limits with other dogs will help you set him up for nothing but success.

Downside The advent of dog parks has brought some unfortunate ideas and unrealistic expectations to dog culture. Somewhere along the way, people decided that all dogs should be best friends with each other. Nature disagrees! Nose-to-nose greets don't always go well between dogs that don't know each other, and scuffles between all the breeds are commonplace in dog parks. Making sure our pets have only the best experiences with other dogs means avoiding situations where they might be pushed past their limits and made to look bad. Although dog aggression is normal and manageable, no one likes to see it. The really hard part is helping other people understand that your dog may not necessarily want to meet their pets, and that's okay!

Just like any other breed, the Pit Bull brings us unique gifts and challenges. Despite the downsides of owning a pit bull, people with good common sense and a healthy sense of humor will find that the rewards of living with Pits are enormous. And now, more than ever, these wonderful dogs need good owners who will help them regain the respect they deserve.

