

# Despite reputations, some experts say pit bulls can be great pets

## A Bad Rap

BY By Joseph Sergio

Pit bulls are some of the most popular dogs in America, but they have a bad reputation.

Jane Brewer, a vet tech at Acres North Veterinarian Hospital, said pit bulls aren't right for everyone, but the reason isn't because they aren't good dogs.

"The biggest mistake people make when getting any breed of dog is that they don't do their research," Brewer said while petting her pit bull. "People get a dog like a pit bull and they expect it to be something it's not."

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She said pit bulls are intelligent and need more interaction than other breeds.

Diana Dowd, the chief executive officer of Pampered Paws, a pet health spa and nutrition center, said pit bulls cannot be left in the back yard for days on end. Because pit bulls do not like cold weather, they should be more indoor dogs than outdoor dogs. She said her pit bull will jump up in her bed and lie with her while she is watching television.

have one of the best temperaments of any breed. The American Temperament Test Society, which was founded by Alfons Ertel in 1977, measures personality aspects such as stability, shyness, aggressiveness and friendliness, as well as the dog's instincts toward its handlers and self-preservation in the face of a threat. The society said that of 1,124 pit bulls tested, 84.4 percent passed. Of all 27,162 dogs tested, 81.5 percent passed.

Sandy Reed, the owner of Lollipop Farm, a boarding kennel in Lubbock that also adopts out unwanted dogs, said the term pit bull doesn't refer to one breed of dog. It refers to three: the American Staffordshire terrier, the American pit bull terrier and the European pit bull terrier. She said because pit bulls are a mixed breed, there are thousands of them across America.

Reed, whose family has owned pit bulls, said she takes in pit bulls at Lollipop Farms, but it can be difficult to adopt them out.

Dowd said that the owners' treatment of pit bulls is important, but a dog's temperament is the most important thing to know when it comes to owning one. She said any type of dog that is aggressive to humans should be euthanized, because no animal should act violently. She said owners used to test pit bull puppies to see if they were people-aggressive. If so, the animals were put to sleep.

"People found that they are a wonderful pet, which is why they became so popular," Dowd said. "But there are all these bleeding hearts that aren't paying attention to temperament and think that love will win it all. That is not the case."

Dowd said temperament is something that a dog is born with and something that will not change over time.

A 2006 dog temperament test showed that pit bulls

The book "Fatal Dog Attacks" by Karen Delise covers 431 documented human fatalities from dog attacks between 1965 and 2001. Delise says in her book that 21 percent of the fatalities were from pit bulls and pit-bull-type dogs, which is the highest percentage of all dogs listed. She also mentions the statistics can be misleading because a number of the cases were a direct result of human negligence or criminal intent.

Brewer said the biggest problem right now is overpopulation of pit bulls. She said another thing that is hurting this breed's reputation is there are so many different mixes that look like pit bulls that the pits are getting blamed for a lot of things they don't do.

And Reed believes the pit bull is the all-American dog.

"They are very special dogs," she said. "Some of the best rescue dogs in the world are pit bulls. Just think of the pit bull in 'The Little Rascals.' That is what a pit bull means to us, and one day, that is what a pit bull will be again."

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