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Meet the American Staffordshire/pit bull terrier

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IT IS unfortunate that this dog was originally bred for fighting. But then, that's also true of bulldogs, which were originally used for bear-baiting. In the 19th century, bulldogs were crossed with terriers by breeders intent on combining the gameness of that breed with the strength and athleticism of the bulldog.

The United Kennel Club was founded in 1898 for the express purpose of providing registration for American pit bull terriers, which were not originally recognized by the American Kennel Club. The breed became immensely popular, with one a World War I hero and another featured in the "Our Gang" movies.

The AKC began recognizing pit bulls in 1936, but insisted on calling them "Staffordshire" terriers, after the place where the breed supposedly originated. Later, the club recognized an "American Staffordshire terrier" separate from the lighter version preferred by English breeders. UKC recognizes AKC-registered American Staffordshire terriers, registering them as American pit bull terriers, but the AKC recognizes only descendants of dogs already on their books as American Staffordshire terriers.

Today's dogs -- whatever name they go by - can be gentle pets and loyal companions. They do retain some aggressiveness, particularly toward other dogs, and need to be carefully socialized with children. Any trace of viciousness is considered a serious fault for which responsible breeders will neuter an animal. Beware of unregistered dogs of this breed.

Sources: *American Kennel Club* (www.akc.org), *United Kennel Club* (www.ukc.org), *Bulldogbreeds.com* (www.bulldogbreeds.com)

- By J. Stephen Bolhafner

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