

Pit Bulls--Fighters and Fierce Fighters

TOM GREELEY

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Pit Bulls — Family Pets and Fierce Fighters

In Wrong Hands They Can Become a Deadly Weapon

By TOM GREELEY,
Times Staff Writer

They are unfailingly loyal.

Gentle and uncommonly patient with children.

And less likely than a Pekinese to attack a human, unless provoked.

Trained and cared for properly, the American Staffordshire terrier, commonly known as the pit bull, can be a perfect family pet and home security system rolled into one.

But it's a different story when a pit bull — unwittingly or with devious, sadistic intentions — is raised outside what owners of the breed refer to as the "perfect human environment."

Strongest Bite

Pit bulls have by far the strongest bite of any dogs. They exert an estimated 1,200 pounds of pressure per square inch when they bite (a German shepherd ranks second at 800 pounds). So the potential for severe injury when they attack is great.

In addition, they rarely bark, often catching their victims off guard. Because they have been bred as fighters they are unusually tenacious, and in many cases cannot be deterred except by a shotgun blast.

"It takes a special person to raise these dogs properly," says Capt. Bill Virden of the San Diego Humane Society. "In the wrong hands, they are a time bomb waiting to explode. An animal, or a human, is bound to get hurt."

Virden and other animal control officers agree that more pit bulls are winding up in the wrong hands as the breed's popularity grows. If the pit bull has been bred as a fighter, the situation becomes even more lethal.

Bad Reputation

Recent attacks, and publicity about the centuries-old practice of gambling on fighting pit bulls have given the dogs and their owners a grisly reputation, one that troubles the legitimate aficionados of the breed.

Officials here encourage new laws that would make owners of pit bulls liable for stiffer penalties if their dogs attack, and bans on the breed have been discussed in San Francisco and in Alameda County.

Please see **DOGS**, Page 2



VINCE COMPAGNONE Los Angeles Times

Pit bulls, known as fighters, have the strongest bite of any dog—1,200 pounds per square inch.

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DOGS: 'Killer' Reputation Called Unfair; DOGS: Fighting Is Underground Sport

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