

BULL TERRIER

by Deborah Gill



History

The Bull Terrier was developed in England during the early 1800s for the purpose of fighting other dogs. By crossing bull baiters such as the bulldog with various terriers, a dog of substantial strength and substance, combined with speed and agility emerged. Blood sports such as dog fighting, were banned around 1935, but this type of 'entertainment' continued illegally for many years.

The breed was first standardised in the 1850s by James Hinks of Birmingham who made a living as a dog dealer. Due to a newly affluent middle class society, and a burgeoning interest in dog shows (often staged before pit events) he began crossing his Bull Terriers to the (now extinct) white English terrier, the Manchester terrier and the Dalmatian. Hink's desire was to produce a white dog with clean lines, elegance and a longer face than contemporary bull-and-terriers. His white version of the Bull Terrier became a sensational fighter, superior ratter, and one of 19th century London's dogs of fashion.

The Bull Terrier was introduced to Australia in around 1885 and the Bull Terrier Club of Victoria Inc (BTCV) formed in 1975. Breed popularity during the 1980's saw club membership surge to around 500 members. It is unfortunate that Bull Terriers also attracted owners who were after a macho type accessory and due

to the lack of responsibility shown by some owners of that time, Bull Terriers are still trying to shake off an undeserved reputation for aggression today. Today, as much as it was then, the Bull Terrier just wants to be everyone's friend.

The number of puppies bred today is lower than in the '80s and '90s but this enables breeders to find the best owners for their pups. Due to demand outstripping supply, prospective buyers will often have to pass a temperament test themselves before being placed on a waiting list for their desired pup!

The BTCV and other state Bull Terrier clubs have actively campaigned against the breed specific legislation laws that have seen breeds such as the Bull Terrier banned in some European countries. Condemning an entire breed for the actions of a few dogs in the hands of idiots will never reduce the incidence of dog attacks on people. When that breed is banned, the 'idiots' move onto another 'in-fashion' dog and leave the hard, responsible bull breed lovers, empty handed.

Character and temperament

Although it has a distinctive appearance it is ultimately the personality that sets the Bull Terrier apart from other breeds. They are loveable, affectionate, clownish, and extremely witty.

They can also be stubborn, willful, and conniving, often showing all of these characteristics in a ten-minute span. Above all, they absolutely ooze charm. They are at their best when included as a family member and do not do well where they are expected to remain alone for extended periods of time. They are intelligent and if left to amuse themselves, may become destructive and develop unpleasant habits such as barking, tail chasing or chewing if they are bored.

Properly socialised Bull Terriers should not pick a fight with another dog, they will however, defend themselves if provoked. As a rule, a male Bull Terrier should not be kept with another male dog. Bully pups should be introduced to other dogs and animals from puppyhood, and should never be encouraged to be aggressive.

Bullies love to wrestle with one another however some breeds of dog do not appreciate this and therefore Bull Terriers should be on a leash around strange dogs and supervised at all other times to prevent any altercations.

Bull Terriers are people dogs and truly believe that they are one of the pack. They may challenge you for the dominant position and so require firm discipline and must know their place in the household. Obedience training is useful but will require lots of patience, and overall, must be fun. No other dog enjoys life quite as much as the Bull Terrier and it is their independent mind and charisma that attract so many devotees to the breed. If a bully cannot see any fun or purpose in the activity he is being asked to do, he may simply choose not to do it!

All Bull Terriers secretly believe that they are lap dogs, and weighing over 30kgs is not a deterrent to them trying to crawl up on your knee! Many people who are not familiar with Bull Terriers are often surprised at just how affectionate they are. Bullies do not ask for attention, they demand it!

Health and feeding

Bull Terriers are sturdy robust dogs and it is not uncommon to hear of them living for 12 to 14 years. Whilst there are no officially recognised diseases the following hereditary health problems have been known to affect a small number of Bull Terriers:

- Deafness (unilateral & bilateral)
- Heart disease
- Nephritis or polycystic kidney disease (PKD)
- Luxating patella
- Primary lens luxation (PLL) – affects Bull Terrier Miniatures only

A prospective buyer should enquire as to what health screening has been done on the parents and pups before purchase.

Bull Terriers can also suffer from skin problems triggered sometimes by seasonal pollen or food allergies. Dry eye and ear infections can also accompany this. Allergies can often be controlled by a change in diet. Always seek advice from your vet or a Bull Terrier breeder for helpful tips on how to control skin problems.

Bull Terriers are notorious chewers, and due to powerful jaws and teeth, care should be taken when raising puppies that all chewable items are removed from access including small items of clothing (socks and underwear) garbage, rubber, plastic, soft toys, garden/laundry hoses and foam. If you love your garden, you might also want to fence it off as any plants are fair game during puppyhood.

Always supervise your Bull Terrier if feeding bones, because if swallowed, they can lodge in the esophagus or throat. Remove bones from the yard after a few hours.

If you suspect your bully has eaten anything it shouldn't have, rush it straight to the vet, do not delay. Symptoms of a blockage may not be noticed for several days and by this time, it is often too late to save the dog without major surgery.



Grooming and maintenance

Bull Terriers have short coats that continually lose hair so a weekly brush to remove loose hair is beneficial. Excessive bathing can dry out the skin so always use a proper dog shampoo, especially for dogs with sensitive skin. If showing your dog, white dogs will come out nicely if a purple tinted shampoo is used as it will remove any yellow stains in the coat. When showing, chalk in their natural coat colour will mask any pink skin or bare patches.



General appearance

The Bull Terrier should be strongly built, muscular, well balanced and active with a keen determined expression. Their unique features are their egg shaped head and small triangular eyes.

They should have erect ears, firm tight skin, short back and broad chest. The body should be well-rounded showing maximum substance for the size of the dog. There are no height or weight limits but the average female is 25-30 kgs and males between 30-40 kgs. Limbs should be strong and straight.

White animals should be pure white, with head markings and skin pigmentation allowable. Coloured animals, where colour predominates are acceptable in brindle, black brindle, red, fawn, and tri-colour. Liver or blue are highly undesirable.

The Bull Terrier Miniature is subject to the same breed standard but a height rule of 14 inches applies.

Further information:

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