

Myths or Urban Legends are a common part of every day life. We've all received the email about the businessman that had his kidneys removed. Most people are quick to realize that such stories are without merit. I've never much thought about the subject beyond how annoying they can be after they've appeared in my inbox for the tenth time. Recently I've discovered that some urban myths are destructive and can actually affect real people. Enter Madeline, 7-week-old puppy and the newest addition to my family. I've wanted a dog since I was 17. And as I hurtle towards my 30th birthday this year, I decided it was the right time in my life to make that leap. You've never heard any urban myths about a puppy? I can't think of any either but it's seriously depressing how many urban myths there are about Pit Bulls. What follows is a list of the common untruths that everyone has heard about this breed. To the best of my ability, every fact I use here is from an independent, non-biased source and is noted in an appendix at the end. So if you don't believe it, look it up yourself.

Pit Bulls have locking Jaws.

No. I've heard this myth more than any other one. The fact that most people don't seem to think this statement sounds a bit fishy is disturbing. *"The few studies which have been conducted of the structure of the skulls, mandibles and teeth of Pit Bulls show that, in proportion to their size, their jaw structure and thus its inferred functional morphology, is no different than that of any [other] breed of dog. There is absolutely no evidence for the existence of any kind of 'locking mechanism' unique to the structure of the jaw and/or teeth of the American Pit Bull Terrier,"* (*1) Along these same lines come the myth that American Pit Bull Terriers have 1600 P.S.I. in jaw pressure *"To the best of our knowledge, there are no published scientific studies that would allow any meaningful comparison to be made of the biting power of various breeds of dogs. There are, moreover, compelling technical reasons why such data describing biting power in terms of "pounds per square inch" can never be collected in a meaningful way. All figures describing biting power in such terms can be traced to either unfounded rumor or, in some cases, to newspaper articles with no foundation in factual data."* (*1) I for one have to back up this fact. After a lengthy internet search for any jaw pressure information, the best I can come up with is that *"rats can exert a biting pressure up to 7000 psi, pounds per square inch. Human biting pressure is around 150 psi; a deepwater shark's full bite strength is estimated to be 44,000.)"* (*2) Suddenly true or not, 1600 psi doesn't seem out of reach for any dog breed.

Pit Bulls are naturally dangerous dogs.

No. However every dog has the potential to be dangerous. The United Kennel Club of America recognizes 308 breeds of dogs, this is what they have to say about the characteristics of the Pit Bull. *"The essential characteristics of the American Pit Bull Terrier are strength, confidence, and zest for life. This breed is eager to please and brimming over with enthusiasm. APBTs make excellent family companions and have always been noted for their love of children. Because most APBTs exhibit some level of dog aggression and because of its powerful physique, the APBT requires an owner who will carefully socialize and*

*obedience train the dog. The breed's natural agility makes it one of the most capable canine climbers so good fencing is a must for this breed. The APBT is not the best choice for a guard dog since they are extremely friendly, even with strangers. Aggressive behavior toward humans is uncharacteristic of the breed and highly undesirable. This breed does very well in performance events because of its high level of intelligence and its willingness to work.” (*3) “excellent family companions” “love of children” those are two things I bet you never thought that you’d hear about Pit Bulls. The American Kennel club(*4) also recognizes the Pit Bull. They call the Pit Bull the American Staffordshire terrier. The AKC doesn’t make any mention of the temperament of any of the dog breeds that they recognize. The Mini-Atlas of Dog Breeds (*7) has this to say about the Pit “That sly smile, those determined eyes, that unwaning pleasure to please, the mere quality and characteristics of the APBT have evoked more human emotional, rational, and irrational response than any breed that exists today. By no means are these dogs people-haters or people-eaters: their natural aggressive tendencies are towards other dogs and animals, not people.”*

Pit Bulls are unpredictable and will turn on their owner in the blink of an eye.

No. It’s a sad fact that the breed was used for dog fighting. 200 years ago dog fighting was as regular as baseball and just as legal. This is the genius of the breed. *“When the fight begins, the two dogs share the 16-foot-square pit with two handlers and a referee. It’s close quarters in there, no place for a man-eating dog. And the bloodthirsty spectators, with fistfuls of cash, are separated from the participants by only a 30-inch-high wall.” (*5)* Randall Lockwood of the Humane Society puts it more directly, *“In the old days the fighting dogs were people-gentle,” (*5)* Pit bulls had to be people friendly and emotionally stable, they had to be so all the time, even while injured and in the middle of a dog fight. There was no room for anything less. The American Temperament Test Society (*6) is a group that tests all dog breeds for temperament. They test for stability, shyness, aggressiveness, and friendliness as well as the dog's instinct for protectiveness towards its handler and/or self-preservation in the face of a threat. Here are the statistics for some of the more popular breeds of dog.

Breed Name	Tested	Passed	Failed	Percent
American Pit Bull Terrier	469	391	78	83.4%
American Staffordshire Terrier	480	400	80	83.3%
Beagle	55	43	12	78.2%
Bulldog	120	82	38	68.3%
Chihuahua	34	24	10	70.6%
Collie	791	625	166	79.0%
Dachshund	42	28	14	66.7%
German Shepherd	2717	2250	467	82.8%
Labrador Retriever	644	587	57	91.1%
Miniature Poodle	63	48	15	76.2%
Pomeranian	32	24	8	75.0%
Rottweiler	4498	3702	796	82.3%

Kudos to the Labs for being the only dog on the list to test better than the Pit Bull! And if you're curious, after throwing out any breed not tested at least ten times the Tibetan Mastiff comes in the lowest at 13 dogs tested and 38.5% passing. The Toy Manchester Terrier has 10 dogs tested with 100% passing.

The Pit Bull cannot be trusted around other dogs.

This is not true either. During the 1860s, the 'sport' of dog fighting was made illegal in most states in the U.S. After the breed was accepted into the AKC and UKC the breed was no longer bred for its dog aggressiveness. Instead Pit Bulls were bred to conform to specific characteristics. There have always been men creating dogs to fight illegally but a Pit Bull that has been properly socialized with other dogs should not be dog aggressive. The tens of thousands of dogs that are brought into show rings every year can prove this. The UKC for example has this to say about dog aggressiveness "*A Judge must disqualify a dog that bites or attempts to bite a person, or that bites or attacks another dog.*"(*8).

I hope that I have managed to show you here that much of what people think they know about Pit Bulls has much substance as the stories we heard around the camp fire as kids. The stories that are passed around about this mystical dog with a locking jaw that can't be stopped by anything short of a howitzer are just not true. A pit bull terrier is a dog. In the right hands they can be loving companions. In the wrong hands they can become vicious, just like every other dog.

In the course of writing this little article I've come across so much more information that I'd like to share with you. But it doesn't quite fit in anywhere. So let me just leave it here in bullet form

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pit_bull
 - The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), which maintains the United States' database on fatal wounds inflicted by dog bites, does not advocate breed-specific legislation, instead encouraging "Dangerous Dog" laws that focus on individual dogs of any breed that have exhibited aggressive behavior.
 - In November 2002, the [Alabama Supreme Court](#) ruled that there was no genetic evidence that one individual dog is more dangerous than another, simply because of its breed.

*1. Dr. I. Lerh Brisbin of the University of Georgia (from the ADBA booklet, "Discover the American Pit Bull Terrier.")

*2. http://www.belllabs.com/images/reports/BR_Dom_01_02_01.pdf

- *3. <http://www.ukcdogs.com/breeds/terriers/americanpitbullterrier.std.shtml>
- *4. http://www.akc.org/breeds/american_staffordshire_terrier/index.cfm
- *5. 7-27-1987. Sports Illustrated. Found online at
<http://www.dogexpert.com/Popular%20Press/Pitbullfriend.html>
- *6. <http://www.atts.org/index.html>
- *7 "The mini-atlas of Dog Breeds" by Andrew De Prisco & James B. Johnson
(1990 T.F.H. publications)
- *8 <http://www.ukcdogs.com/ConformationRules.htm>