

Why XL Bully dogs should be banned everywhere

Big, strong and bred to kill, they are too dangerous to live with people



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For millennia people have selected dogs with useful or appealing traits and bred them. That is why pointers point, retrievers retrieve and most pet dogs are friendly. Though their jaws may be mighty enough to crush bones, they are far more likely to give you a slobbery kiss than a bite. However, some dogs have been bred for aggression, and it shows.

In America in 2022 two children were killed and their mother was mauled while trying to save them from the family's pair of Extra Large (or "XL") Pit Bull Terriers. Last September in England two XL American Bully dogs (which are closely related) killed 52-year-old Ian Price in his mother's garden, after leaping from a nearby house's window to get to him. In January an XL Bully in Germany fatally mauled its owner and had to be shot as it rushed at police trying to help the man.

In Britain the number of fatal attacks by dogs has quadrupled since the XL Bully was introduced to the country, from four in 2014 to 16 in the first nine months of 2023. Overall, XL Bullies were responsible for 44% of dog attacks in 2023, according to Bully Watch UK, a pressure group. They

killed other dogs, chewed children's faces and caused injuries so bad that arms needed amputating. In America Pit Bull attacks are growing more common and were responsible for nearly 70% of dog-attack deaths in 2019, according to DogsBite.org, a watchdog.

Pit Bulls were bred to excel at dog-fighting, a sport that is banned in many countries but thrives in the shadows. The rules are simple and harsh. Two dogs are placed in a pit. Only one comes out. Over generations of breeding from the dogs that survive, the animals have developed a tendency to go for the throat, attack without warning, and ignore pain. XL Bullies were bred from Pit Bull stock, for greater size. Thus, they are huge (45-70kg), aggressive and hard to stop once they have started to attack. In "White Fang" Jack London called similar dogs "the clinging death".

Pit Bulls were banned in Britain in 1991. Similar bans or restrictions exist in Denmark, Germany, more than 1,000 American cities and some Canadian provinces. However, in Britain importers of XL Bullies argued that the ban did not cover the new breed, though it is essentially a bigger Pit Bull. That loophole was closed in England in December. Other countries should follow suit and outlaw the breed.

There will be resistance, as there has been in Britain. A group of animal charities and associations known as the Dog Control Coalition argues that the law should focus on "deed, not breed". Any kind of dog can be trained to be aggressive, they point out. They cite data from Britain's National Health Service showing that the number of dog bites has increased since the original Pit Bull ban. They call for laws that hold individual dogs and their irresponsible owners to account for bad behaviour.

This is wrong-headed. It is true that any dog can be trained to fight. But those whose ancestors have been selectively bred to be good at it are much likelier to be deadly. Aggregate data on dog bites are misleading, since they give equal weight to a nip from a chihuahua and a mauling from an XL Bully. This breed is so dangerous that it sometimes kills professional dog handlers.

Sharing a home with a dog is one of life's greatest pleasures. But dog lovers have no right to endanger other people's lives by owning the most dangerous breeds. There are plenty of others to choose from. ■

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