

Activities for You and Your American Pit Bull Terrier

Whether a dog is trained in the structured environment of a class or alone with his owner at home, there are many activities that can bring fun and rewards to both owner and dog once they have mastered basic control.

Teaching the dog to help out around the home, in the garden or on the farm provides great satisfaction to both dog and owner. In addition, the dog's help makes life a little easier for his owner and raises his stature as a valued companion to his family. It helps give the dog a purpose; it helps to keep his mind occupied and provides an outlet for his energy.

If you are interested in participating in organized competition with your Pit Bull, there are other activities other than obedience in

BACKPACKING

Backpacking is an exciting and healthful activity that the dog can be taught without assistance from more than his owner. The exercise of walking and climbing is good for man and dog alike, and the bond that they develop together is priceless. Don't allow the dog to carry more than one-sixth of his body weight.



which you and your dog can become involved. Agility is a popular and fun sport in which dogs run through an obstacle course that includes various jumps, tunnels and other exercises to test the dog's speed and coordination. The owners often run through the course beside their dogs to give commands and to guide them through the course. Although competitive, the focus is on fun—it's fun to do and fun to watch, as well as great exercise.

WALKING

The first form of exercise that the average Pit Bull owner should consider is simply walking the dog on a very regular basis. What constitutes a walk? Well, the ideal

Children and dogs make natural friends. One of the best ways to develop the bond is by participating in activities that both the child and the dog can enjoy.

The Pit Bull is a fine companion dog who will welcome participating in activities and spending time with all members of the family.



dog-walking scenario is one in which both owner and dog take a brisk walk on a hard surface. The ideal surface is simple concrete such as that of the average sidewalk. Concrete is good for the dog because in addition to taking a healthy walk, the dog is also being groomed. As the dog walks, his nails are being worn down as if

they were being filed. In fact, a good rule of thumb is that if you ever need to file or clip your dog's nails, you know the dog is not being walked enough.

A good healthy walk for an adult Pit Bull would be a brisk three-mile walk. A longer walk would be even better for both the dog and the walker. Such walks

should occur at least four times a week and, if possible, daily (weather permitting). The best time of the day for such a walk is early evening, after the sun has gone down. Walks on very hot days should either be avoided or the person walking with the dog should be ever aware of the effect of the heat on the dog. If the weather is warm and the dog begins to appear uncomfortable, the walk should be called off. If the weather is cold and dry, a brisk walk should be fine for the dog. While the Pit Bull is not the kind of dog that you should

STAYING IN SHAPE

Through the generations, the activity for which Pit Bulls were produced demanded that these dogs be kept very physically fit. Just as any human fighter needs months of intense training before facing an opponent in the ring, the fighting Pit Bull also needed plenty of conditioning before being matched against an opponent. While the fighting aspect of Pit Bull history is not to be encouraged today, keeping the pet Pit Bull physically fit certainly is. Consider a few innovative ways to keep your Pit Bull in top physical condition.



Your Pit Bull must be exercised and should behave well on his leash no matter who takes him for walks.

WALKING FOR HEALTH

Dogs need to walk for fitness purposes. Unfortunately, sometimes dogs are owned by people who refuse to walk for any distance, in spite of the health benefits of walking for both dog and man. In such instances, the use of the dog treadmill is commonly employed when exercising Pit Bulls. Of course, the treadmill requires professional supervision and should not be utilized by novices.

maintain outdoors all year in colder climates, short-term exposure to the cold, especially during a brisk walk, will not adversely affect the dog. Also, if you feel comfortably cool during a long walk with your dog but the dog begins to look uncomfortably warm, stop walking and allow the dog to rest. Bear firmly in mind that the dog's natural pace is much faster than a human's, and such abnormally slow walks can lead to a dog's exhaustion more quickly than you might expect. Remember, the Pit Bull is not a breed that should be allowed to roam free! During all walks with the dog, the dog should be leashed.

When we see a Pit Bull harnessed to a treadmill, the underground activity of dog fighting generally leaps to mind. It is true that dog fighters often employ the treadmill to keep their fighting dogs fit, but it is

also true that many Pit Bulls love to use treadmills for exercise purposes, just as a pet hamster enjoys running in its exercise wheel for no apparent reason. Dog treadmills come in two forms. The first is the lesser seen circular treadmill. Such treadmills are not generally practical for the average pet dog owner because they take up a great deal of space. In order to envision this type of treadmill, imagine a large record-player-type circular plate on rollers with a pole jutting through the center of the plate. The dog is leashed to the pole and it runs on the wheel for pure enjoyment. It will amaze you just how much a dog will enjoy this activity, in fact.

The second type is the rectangular treadmill. These mills are much like the treadmills that are commonly used by people. The dog is leashed to the top of the mill. The mill is often slanted slightly upward. The dog runs for pleasure. If the mill is inclined, the leash should be sufficiently long for the dog to get off the mill should he desire to do so. Again, just as we are often surprised at how much time our pet hamster will spend running in its exercise wheel, you may be surprised at how enjoyable your Pit Bull will find using his treadmill. Such treadmills can often be found in dog-supply shops that cater to Pit Bull owners.

BICYCLE RIDING WITH YOUR PIT BULL

Bicycle riding with your Pit Bull is an activity I suggest with great reservation. While a dog's natural pace is closer to a person's casual bike-riding speed than it is to a person's natural walking pace, the dog must always remain leashed. It's fairly easy to take an embarrassing spill while trying to ride a bicycle while leashed to a dog, and such spills can be more than just embarrassing, they can be dangerous. And don't underestimate the strength of a Pit Bull—if you're concentrating on riding and the dog suddenly decides that he doesn't want to go in that direction or that he doesn't want to go anywhere at all, you're going to have a problem. Bike riding with a dog must be undertaken with the utmost caution, so it's not an activity that comes highly recommended.

PLAYTIME WITH OTHER DOGS

Another good form of occasional exercise for the Pit Bull is a little friendly play with another dog. It cannot be emphasized enough that the other dog chosen to participate in playtime with your Pit Bull must be one that is well known to your dog, one that is not too small, one that is always friendly to your dog and one to which your dog is always friendly. Even under these conditions, play between the Pit Bull

and another dog should always be carefully supervised and the owners of both dogs should always be present. Play between the Pit Bull and more than one other dog at a time is discouraged.

WEIGHT PULLING

A form of exercise that can be recommended for the Pit Bull is really something that only a small segment of the Pit-Bull-owning

PLAYMATES

It seems that the most strenuous play between two dogs is that of two dogs who know each other well but do not live together. Dogs living together tend to take each other for granted. Dogs that see each other only occasionally tend to seize the opportunity to play hard when they can. While organizing this type of structured play may not be convenient every day, the occasional hard play session is good for exercising your dog as well as for socializing your dog. Let the dogs enjoy themselves when possible.



population will be interested in, but perhaps the reader is part of that small segment. This form of exercise is weight pulling. Just as many people lift weights to keep themselves not just in good condition, but in *peak* condition, many Pit Bull owners like to keep their dogs in peak condition. Such owners may be interested in involving their dogs in regular weight-pulling exercises.

Before discussing weight-pulling exercises for your dog, you should understand a few things. The first is that the Pit Bull breed is not and has never been a weight-pulling dog. This is to say that weight pulling was never an activity for which this breed was selectively bred. Other breeds were and continue to be selectively bred for their ability to pull weights, the sled dogs being the best example of such breeds.

Nonetheless, there is nothing fundamentally wrong with involving your Pit Bull in weight pulls for fun, sport and exercise. The reader should be aware that

due to the association of the Pit Bull breed with the activity of dog fighting, other dog fanciers may misinterpret or resent your interest in this activity. This can lead to an awkward situation such as the one that occurred in the following anecdote.

To make a long story short, there was a man who owned a very large, blocky and powerful Pit Bull. A weightlifter himself, he began to involve his dog in weight pulling. The dog loved it so much that, one evening, the man decided to show a friend just how much the dog enjoyed pulling. In order to do this, he harnessed the dog to a small car, let up the car's emergency brake, stood about 20 feet in front of the dog and began to yell words of encouragement to the dog, who had never pulled a car and was, at first, not sure what to do. Shortly after the man began yelling to the dog and the dog began to pull, a woman began screaming out of the window of a nearby apartment building that she was going to call the police to report cruelty to the dog! Within minutes, the police arrived, and they watched in amazement as the dog pulled the car. After watching for a while, one of the police officers declared that he was going to buy himself a Pit Bull and they drove away. Still, it is best to avoid making the negative

A Pit Bull in fit condition is all muscle. He loves to run, jump and play. Pit Bulls are fun and versatile companions.





The naturally muscular Pit Bull is well-suited to exercises requiring strength and stamina.

impression that was undoubtedly made upon this woman, for the sake of the breed.

Should you decide to begin training your Pit Bull for weight pulling, you will need a few things. First, you will probably want an indoor location, so as to avoid the kind of conflict just described. Second, you will need some carpeting so the dog won't hurt his paws while pulling. A carpet that is not very plush is best for this; indoor/outdoor carpeting is ideal. Third, you will need a cart with wheels and a low

flat top. Such a cart can be built easily enough. It should not be very wide and the wheels should be 6 inches in diameter or so. Larger wheels will make for an easier pull. If you want to get serious about weight-pulling competitions, find whatever local club sponsors weight-pulling events for dogs and be sure to construct a cart that meets the club's standards for competition.

Fourth, you will need weights. Bricks or cinder blocks are fine, but the kind of weightlifting plates that people use are best.

If the dog owner is a weightlifter himself, this will not require the purchase of additional weights; if not, the weights can be obtained easily enough from a sporting-goods store.

Finally, you will need a harness to attach the cart to the dog. Such harnesses are often available through magazines that cater to Pit Bull owners, but a comfortable leather harness can also be made by a leather worker who deals with horses. If you intend to have a harness made just for weight pulling, start the dog off with wearing the harness before you introduce the animal to actually pulling weights. Allow the dog time to associate the harness with positive events like a

short walk. Once the dog is comfortable with the harness, or with one like it, you can begin to use the harness for cart pulling.

It's best to have two people present during weight-pulling exercises. Begin by harnessing the dog to the cart with no weights on the cart. Have a friend (one who knows the dog and with whom the dog is familiar) hold the harnessed dog on the carpet while you, the dog's owner, take a position a few yards in front of the dog. Simultaneously release the dog and begin to encourage him to come to you. If the dog looks confused and does not move, encourage him more. If the dog refuses to come, end the session and try again another day. You might also try sitting in your position, acting casual and waiting for the dog to come to you. Often a little gentle encouragement is easier to comprehend than an overwhelming onslaught of encouragement.

When the dog finally pulls the empty cart in order to come to you, act excited and praise the dog profusely. Try the pull again and again. Use no weights on the first day of pulling unless the dog is very obviously enjoying himself, which some dogs do. As the dog becomes familiar with the routine, begin to add weight to the cart. Start off with light weights and, when the dog has learned to pull these with enthusiasm, begin

It's helpful to have a friend involved, one whom the dog knows well, when introducing your Pit Bull to new activities.



an actual training routine.

A training routine can be easily devised. An example of such a routine follows; you can adapt it according to your personal schedule and situation.

Work out a weekly schedule and stick to it. On one day, load the cart with as much weight as the dog can pull 8 or even 10 times over a distance of roughly 5 yards. Encourage the dog to pull the weight for the amount of repetitions you have decided on (we'll use 8 as an example). The dog should be allowed to rest for about a minute between each repetition. When this has been accomplished, allow the dog to rest for three minutes, increase the weight to whatever the dog can pull for six repetitions and follow the procedure above.

When this has been accomplished, increase the weight again to whatever the dog can pull for four repetitions. When this has been accomplished, allow the dog to rest for three minutes. Finally, encourage the dog to pull as much weight as he can pull twice. This should be the heaviest weight pulled that day.

On the second day, rest the dog. On the third day, follow the routine for the first day. On the fourth and fifth days, allow the dog to rest. On the sixth day, begin the dog with the weight he can pull for six repetitions and follow the schedule as you have



This Pit Bull looks like he is ready for action! Try out some different activities until you find which ones your dog likes best.

been. When the dog has made his final two pulls, increase the weight and encourage the dog to pull a maximum weight one time only. If the dog can pull that maximum weight twice, all weights should be increased. On the seventh day, rest. Each day you should give the dog a brisk one-mile walk before and after the pulling session.

That should get you and your dog started. Remember, just as with any strenuous exercise you may do yourself, after the first day or two of a new exercise, muscles will be sore. Allow for some extra rest time in the beginning. Also, should you find that your dog simply doesn't enjoy weight pulling, forget it and concentrate on one of the other forms of exercise that he does enjoy. Again, it should be reiterated that weight pulling is not what this breed was originally intended for and, as such, your Pit Bull may just not take to it.

Your Pit Bull's crate is where he belongs under unfamiliar circumstances, like a visit to the vet. Crates should be sturdy and easy to transport.

