

HISTORY

The Gamekeeper's Night Dog

"Mr. Burton of Thorneywood Kennels brought to the show one night a dog (not for competition) and offered one pound to any person who could escape from the securely muzzled dog. One of the spectators who had experience with dogs volunteered and amused a large assembly of sportsmen and keepers who had gathered there. The man was given a long start, and the muzzled dog slipped after him. The animal caught him immediately and knocked him down with the first spring."

"The latter tried bravely to hold his own, but was floored every time he got to his feet, ultimately being kept to the ground until the owner of the dog released him. The man had three rounds with the powerful canine, but was beaten each time and was unable to escape."

This fascinating cameo of a man vs. dog contest appeared in *The Field* on August 20, 1901. With poaching (especially deer poaching) on the increase again, with human staff costing so much nowadays, and the law of the land almost favoring trespassers - especially those apprehended as poachers who plead "trespass" as their only offense - it is surprising that the "gamekeeper's night dog" isn't more widely used.

The "night dog" referred to is, of course, the Bullmastiff, the only British breed ever specifically produced for guard duties and from the two oldest, purest and bravest breeds. Technically created in modern times, it existed for centuries in the form of the lighter Mastiff when used as a hunting dog, and the bigger, faster Bulldog when used for bull-baiting. It can be argued that the Bullmastiff is a truer descendant of the original Bulldog than the modern breed of that very name.

Not recognized by the Kennel Club as a breed until 1924 - but used previously by gamekeepers - these dogs have the mastiff instinct to pin their quarry rather than to bite, and to attack a man and throw him to the ground every time he tries to get to his feet - without ever using their teeth to savage him.

Mr. S. S. Moseley, from his Faircroft kennels, stabilized the modern breed after many previous trial crosses of Bulldog and Mastiff. There are similarities with the French equivalent, the Dogue de Bordeaux and the Neapolitan Mastiff, indicating a breed-type in history, perhaps together with the Brazilian Guard Dog, the Tosa - the Japanese Fighting Dog - and the now extinct German Bullenbeisser.

What was being sought was a "gamekeeper's dog". Just as the poacher needed his "Lurcher" to locate, chase, kill and retrieve game silently and slickly, so the gamekeeper required a powerful, well-disciplined dog to find, seize and detain the poacher. This was not a task for a light, nervous, noisy, fidgety, ill-disciplined dog, but the strong, silent type, able on command to knock down a young, healthy country-man, possibly after tracking him or quietly observing his acting illegally.

The requirement decided, the end-product was then designed for the purpose in mind. Undoubtedly, more than two components were involved: the Great Dane and the yellow Labrador type of gundog, which was beginning to emerge about that time, being likely ingredients. But in essence, it was the cross between the Bulldog - tough, tenacious, fussless, brave and with silent self-reliance: and the Mastiff - immensely powerful, trustworthy, fearsome in appearance but stable by nature, loyal and brave, which produced the Bullmastiff - 27 inches at the withers, some ten stones (Ed. note: a stone = 14 pounds) of muscular guard dog.

From these carefully selected ancestors - specifically purpose-bred - came a strapping, fearless, superbly proportioned, imposing looking animal, combining the massiveness and sheer pugnacity of appearance of the age-old beautifully natured Mastiff breed, with the famed courage and proven endurance of the renowned Bulldog.

These two famous breeds gave the modern Bullmastiff three priceless qualities, ideal in combination for a guard dog: superb temperament - even tempered, level-headed, magnanimous and never excitable: a silent, steadfast, almost arrogant bearing: and most importantly, the instinct to pin the quarry rather than to bite.

The powerful Bullmastiff doesn't savage its target or "worry" the arm of a standing "wanted" man. He has all the necessary strength to use his inherited impulse to pin his victim to the floor or a wall. But before the action ever begins, there is the considerable deterrent value of the Bullmastiff's sheer physical size, pugnacious, black-masked face, and his impressive, almost regally impassive composure. He really looks the part.

Capable of quite astounding speed off the mark, immensely strong and - although large and heavy - an essentially active dog, the Bullmastiff has superb self-reliance. He stands as if he owns the ground he stands on, looks you in the eye as an equal and yields to no one. Don't expect subservience from this breed. However, gain the confidence on one, together with his respect, and you have one of the best guard-companion of all dogs.

Not to be chained up in a backyard or confined in a small run, the Bullmastiff must be made a member of the household and ideally taken to a training class to get used to other dogs. Well-trained from young puppy-hood, they are most trustworthy. With his keen, hard expression and well-arched neck, a young Bullmastiff is very proud and full of himself. This admirable self-assurance has to be utilized to good effect by firm, consistent training so that he becomes equally proud of his self-restraint.

Yet this formidable dog is well-behaved with children, never loses its temper and tolerates endless teasing. He is responsive to training, intelligent and faithful by nature. Used as a guard dog in such widely separated situations as the Mau-Mau emergency in Kenya, in the Kimberley diamond mines in South Africa, and on John D. Rockefeller's huge country estate in New York State, the Bullmastiff is now used mainly by discerning private owners as a companion/guard.

Other breeds seem to be favored as professional guard dogs: Alsatians, Doberman Pinschers, Rottweilers and Giant Schnauzers. The last three breeds, however, have varying temperaments, require a very firm hand and by instinct "savage" their quarry. The Alsatian, when well-bred,

well-trained and kept in suitable circumstances, has many admirable qualities. I suspect that for professional guard dog duties - by security firms, in prisons, on country estates and in burglar or vandal prone premises - the Bullmastiff would be extensively employed if only his qualities were known.

Yet sadly, quite unsuitable breeds are being used by ill-advised people. but who wants to be sued because a so-called guard dog has savaged straying, adventurous children? Who wants to be taken to court over an endlessly barking "security dog"? The temperament, the instinct and the physical impression of a guard dog are the vital components for a success in the job.

The Bullmastiff doesn't snap or nip and rarely barks. he can track as well as guard, is easy to train and control, and tolerates - perhaps more than any other breed - children. On duty, he does not savage his prey but silently and effectively detains it. That great, powerful head with the ferocious, scowling, black mask and the lasting impression of physical power, make the Bullmastiff a formidable, commanding figure for any wrongdoer to confront.

A loyal, faithful, even-tempered, noble breed. Bullmastiffs make superb companion-guards and do not have the restless energy which demands vast amounts of exercise. But, when all is said and done about the various breeds available as guard dogs, the Bullmastiff is the professional. He was bred for the part. After all, who would employ a shepard as a night watchman when a security guard is available?

And which would you prefer to be guarded by, a lion or a wolf? The Bullmastiff is the lion of the dog world. He is massive, powerful and brave - a truly underrated, undervalued king among dogs.

GENERAL APPEARANCE

The Bullmastiff is a powerfully built, symmetrical dog, showing great strength, but not cumbersome.

HEAD and SKULL

The skull should be large and square when viewed from any angle, with fair wrinkle when interested, but not when in repose. The circumference of the skull may equal the height of the dog measured at the top of the shoulder; it should be broad, and deep with good cheeks. The muzzle short, the distance from the tip of the nose to the stop shall be approximately one third of the distance from the tip of nose to the centre of the occiput, broad under the eyes and nearly parallel in width to the end of the nose; blunt and cut off square, forming a right angle with the upper line of the face, and at the same time proportionate with the skull. Underjaw broad to the end. Nose broad with widely spreading nostrils when viewed from the front; flat not pointed or turned up in profile. Flews not pendulous, and not hanging below the level of the bottom of the lower jaw. Stop definite.

EYES

Dark or hazel, and of medium size, set aside the width of the muzzle with furrow between. Light. or yellow eyes a fault.

EARS

V shaped, or folded back, set on wide and high, level with the occiput, giving a square appearance to the skull, which is most important. They should be small and deeper in colour than the body, and the point of the ear should be level with the eye when alert. Rose cars to be penalised.

MOUTH

Mouth to be level, slightly undershot allowed, but not preferred. Canine teeth large and set wide apart, other teeth strong, even and well placed. Irregularity of teeth is a fault

NECK

Well arched, moderate length, very muscular and almost equal to the skull in circumference.

FOREQUARTERS

Chest wide, deep, well set down between the forelegs, with deep brisket. Shoulders muscular, sloping and powerful, but not overloaded. Forelegs powerful and straight, well boned and set wide apart, presenting a straight front. Pasterns straight and strong.

BODY

Back short and straight, giving a compact carriage, but not so short as to interfere with activity. Roach and sway backs a fault.

HINDQUARTERS

Loins wide and muscular with fair depth of flanks. Hindlegs strong and muscular with well developed second thighs, denoting power and activity, but not cumbersome. Hocks moderately bent. Cow hocks a fault.

FEET

Not large, with rounded toes, well arched (cat feet), pads hard. Splay feet a fault.

TAIL

Set high, strong at the root and tapering, reaching to the hocks, straight or curved, but not hound fashion. Crank tails a fault.

COAT

Short and hard giving weather protection, lying flat to the body. A tendency to long, silky or woolly coats to be penalised.

COLOUR

Any shade of brindle, fawn or red, but the colour to be pure and clear. A slight white marking on the chest is permissible but not desirable. Other white markings a fault. A dark muzzle is essential, toning off towards the eye, with dark markings around the eyes giving expression. Dark toenails desirable.

WEIGHTand SIZE

Dogs should be 25 to 27 inches at the shoulder and 110 to 130 pounds in weight. Bitches should be 24 to 26 inches at the shoulder, and 90 to 110 pounds in weight. It must be borne in mind that size must be proportionate with weight, and soundness and activity are most essential.

GAIT

The movement should indicate power and a sense of purpose. When moving straight, neither front nor hind legs should cross, or plait. The right front and left rear leg rising and falling at the same time. A firm backline unimpaired by the powerful thrust from the hindlegs should be maintained denoting a balanced and harmonious movement