

Response Requested

(Responses and/or excerpts to go to The Stafford magazine)

THE GAMENESS ISSUE
(The Nature of the Breed)

By Steve Stone

An article by Editor Lillian Rant in the December, 1970, quarterly issue of the California SET magazine made a number of questionable statements in a very authoritative tone concerning the modern Stafford's lack of gamesness and fighting ability. It drew response from Joe Orday, printed in the March, 1971, quarterly issue and this received a sharp counter-response from the Editor. Reid Randall also responded but another part of his letter was printed. In a letter to Joe Orday, the Editor said that she merely wanted to stir up comment while simultaneously telling Reid Randall that she was tired of hearing that Staffords are not really game because (she says) they are not really supposed to be.

This question comes up in Stafford circles rather often as it indeed deserves to, being so important and involving as it does the essential nature of the Breed. Now, however, I believe that the particular conditions existing in the USA would make this issue once again worthy of world-wide dissemination and discussion, and I would particularly like to solicit the opinions of experienced persons in the Breed and particularly those of the "old stagers" , the men who founded the modern Breed, men like Joe Mallen, Reuben Timmons, Bill Boylan, and others---men who know something of gamesness and something of the show ring.

Editor Rant in the September, 1970, quarterly issue of the same magazine set the stage for her appearance as an authority on the Breed (p. 10) by stating that she had been in the Breed for 29 years. Surely a person with nearly as much time in the Breed as John Gordon must know it well. In actual fact, however, Editor Rant simply owned an all-white un-registered Stafford bitch in England from about 1941 to about 1951. The bitch was never bred from, never shown. It was left in England when the Rants emigrated to Canada, and it eventually died from heart break. From roughly 1951 to August, 1967, a period of sixteen years, the Rants owned no Staffords whatever, either in Canada or, later, the USA. In August, 1967, they bought Bearcats Bellamour from my third litter, and thus "Charlegirl" became their foundation bitch and their first registered Staffordshire Bull Terrier. In brief, this means that Editor Rant at the time of writing had been in the organized SBT movement three years and one month. During this time, by her own statement, she had never attended or participated in a dog fight and had shown in two unbenched, unsanctioned, unpointed show. (Further, to the best of my knowledge, she has never attended a Stafford show of any kind in her native country, England.) This, then, is the basis for her authoritative statements regarding the abilities and character of the Staffordshire Bull Terrier.

In her article on the Stafford's lack of fighting ability and gamesness, Editor Rant says: "...if I see an American Pit Bull within two miles of me, I gather up my brood (of four Staffords) and beat a very hasty retreat - this is not being yellow - just smart since I know there isn't another canine in the world as magnificent and as well trained and capable in the art of dog fighting as the American Pit Bull and I believe one fighting APB is more than a match for my four Staffords even with all of them working together...we do not have a game breed to match the one that already exists in this country - The American Pit Bull. No self-respecting Pit Bull man would consider the Stafford to be in any way in the same class, or remotely near the same class..." There is a great deal more in this same vein, but the essential message seems to be on p. 6 where she states flatly: "... you cannot have both a fighting dog and a show dog." This means that the two areas are mutually incompatible. In other words, a fighting dog is a brutal, savage, unreliable beast which should be locked up and

not allowed near man or animal.

All this, and more, Editor Rant pontificated on the basis of her three years and a month in the organized Staffordshire Bull Terrier movement, admitting at the same time that she had never seen a fair fight from scratch or anything resembling one. Nevertheless, there were and are a number of Stafford owners in the USA having genuinely extensive experience with fighting dogs, Pit Bulls and Staffords alike, over a number of years, men whose word carries weight. Pete Sparks, for example, edits a Pit magazine and raises both breeds although nowadays he fights neither. Al Brown has had both breeds since 1907, prefers the smaller Stafford to the larger Pit Bull, and is very probably the only living person in the USA who has actually pitted a Stafford for money. (He won.) Joe Orday owns a bitch which was BIS at a Stafford speciality show in another country where she also won three pit matches. Jim Wesley owns a game Stafford and a couple of Pit Bulls. Frank McNolty once owned Pit Bulls and edited a magazine about that breed, and he now owns an imported Stafford. And there are others with similar backgrounds.

Yet with all this wealth of genuine, broad experience to rely upon, Editor Rant chose not to consult any of these persons, giving simply her own rather restricted observations.

Why?

The answer, an amalgam of previously uncorrelated facts, was revealed to me inadvertently during the recent visit at my home by Stan and Irma Rosenfield when they told me about "Sherri", their brindle foundation bitch which they had bought as an adult from a man who had "tested" her. On a visit to the Rosenfields' Boston home in August, 1970, Editor Rant told them that they should never have had Sherri because she had been tested and because they had four children! Not surprisingly, the Rosenfields never quite digested that particular remark, Sherri being a singularly sweet-tempered bitch. But that remark, coupled with the line about you cannot have both a fighting dog and a show dog put a lot of things in focus for me.

You see, while Editor Rant does not have anything like 29 years in Staffords she must have very nearly that amount in another breed of dog, a breed that her father kept and showed, a breed she has known since early childhood: GERMAN SHEPHERDS. It is her acquaintanceship with German Shepherds, I believe, that has led Editor Rant astray, for she has simply made a psychological transposition of German Shepherd character onto Staffordshire Bull Terrier character, coming up with what I honestly believe to be profoundly incorrect results.

The German Shepherd is a fine breed, extremely useful in many ways, but it is not a Staffordshire Bull Terrier. A Shepherd, once trained to attack or kill, is a dangerous animal forever after and must be treated as such, for it will often fail thereafter to distinguish between friend and foe, hearth and arena. This is what Editor Rant knows, and knows well, and this is how she expects our Staffords to be.

I claim this is not so. I have only been in the Breed seven years, since April, 1964, but my own limited experience and that of the "old stagers" I know indicates quite the opposite. A true fighting dog is not savage or ferocious, but cool, calm, and collected, and he does not carry his "work" home with him. A real Stafford will fare equally well in the pit, in the show ring, and at home with the baby. If I am incorrect, may all the acknowledged experts rise in a chorus and tell both me and the Stafford world about it, for I am no expert, acknowledged or otherwise. Let the experts, both American and English, give us the benefit of their years and knowledge. I call on all Stafford folk of insight and experience to make their own views public so that we may obtain an unimpassioned, enlightened, and experienced consensus on the nature of gameness in the Stafford so that the bulk of eager but new Stafford owners in this and other countries may know the truth.

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