

# The Gamekeeper's Night Dog

"Faithful and fearless, but not ferocious" was the description of the breed given by Samuel Mosley of Staffordshire, England, the originator of the modern Bullmastiff.

Prior to his systematic breeding program to produce a pure-bred Bullmastiff, English gamekeepers had developed Bulldog-Mastiff crossbreds. These crossbred progenitors of what we know today as the Bullmastiff were not a particularly friendly type, having no need to accept anyone other than their masters in the essentially solitary lifestyle they shared with the gamekeepers.

Game poachers often worked in gangs. Being a nasty lot, they had no reservation in regard to doing real harm to any gamekeeper unfortunate enough to catch up with them. The gamekeepers, being no fools, decide to even the odds. They developed dogs perfectly capable of protecting themselves and all of the game, and of making any poachers they came upon in the course of their rounds think they had run into the devil on four legs. These original Gamekeeper's Night Dogs not only contained the blood of the Bulldog for tenacity and that of the Mastiff for power, but many times that of the Bloodhound for scenting ability, as well as occasionally a cross to other large, ferocious dogs who would serve the working purpose wanted by these gamekeepers.

## Mosely's Method

Mr. Mosely decided to essentially standardize the Bulldog-Mastiff cross into a manageable, civilized working dog. His description of how he did this (in his own words) is: "Taking a Mastiff bitch and a Bulldog, I produce a 50-50. A bitch of these I mate to a Mastiff dog, and this gave me a 75% mastiff, 25% Bullbitch which I mate to a 50/50 dog. A bitch from this litter, 62<sup>1/2%</sup> Mastiff, 37<sup>1/2%</sup> Bulldog I mate a 50-50 dog which gave me approximately my ideal 60 % Mastiff, 40% Bull. I repeat this from other blood lines as an outcross and thus I established my "Farcroft" strain, and the Bull-Mastiff as standard breed of set type, which breed true-like produces like. This is a fixing of type, not merely breeding a crossbred."

In December, 1924 the Kennel Club in England recognized the Bullmastiff as a pure-bred (provided the dog had both parents and the three preceding generations all Bull-Mastiffs without the introduction of Bulldog or Mastiff.)

Mr. Moseley's civilized version of the Bull-Mastiff was an ideal family guard and companion. For his family duties, the Bullmastiff needs no special training. His love and devotion to his family plus naturally possessive nature make up a dog who takes care of his own. He can be ridiculously tolerant and gentle with a baby one moment and a terrifying protector of property and person the next. He does what needs to be done.

Today's Bullmastiff should be alert yet relaxed when not actually involved in the act of protecting his property and family. This is not a nervous breed. The Bullmastiff of proper temperament should be no threat to anyone the family accepts willingly into its home. His ability to distinguish between friend and foe is uncanny. He knows the difference between someone entering the house with your permission and someone entering, even by the front door, without permission or when you are not home.

## Guard/Companion

Our first Bullmastiff, Sarah, stopped an intruder when we were away overnight. He actually had our bedroom window opened, but the detective who investigated the case found fingerprints only outside the window and a big dent in the top of our chain link fence alongside the house. Three months later when I returned in the wee hours from a horse show and was trying to change into my nightgown, I was presented with another

example of Sarah's abilities.

My husband, who is not a big horse show fan, had stayed home. As I bumbled around the bedroom in the dark, he woke and asked what I was doing getting up again. "What do you mean, again?" I asked. He informed me he had heard me moving about at the other end of the house several hours earlier. I tried to explain how difficult that would have been since I was 90 miles from home several hours before.

I suddenly got a sinking feeling. Sarah was sleeping on the service porch that week because she was in season. I ran down the hall to check on her. We have a half-bath next to our service porch, and a window in that bath opens onto our breezeway. There sat Sarah smiling at the open door to the bathroom. (Bullmastiffs do smile!) The window over the laundry sink was wide open. Someone had broken the catch and stepped into the sink, then opened the door. I only wish I had been home to see his face about the time he met up with Sarah. Being a typical Bullmastiff, Sarah does not bark unnecessarily. She didn't bark at all that night. She just waited quietly until the fool got to where she could reach him and, from all indications, assisted him back out the window. When I got to her she was her usual sunny self.

The Bullmastiff of today should have the size, substance, alertness, agility and tenacity to protect its family while having the common sense, tractability and sweetness of temperament to be a trustworthy member of the household. That is a lot to ask of a dog. But, that is a Bullmastiff.

## Strong-Minded Individuals

Living with a young Bullmastiff is much like living with a bright, strong-minded two year old child. Not only does the Bullmastiff have an uncanny ability to figure out how to get what it wants, it has the toddler's never-ending tenacity to stick with a particular idea until, with the same never ending consistency, the owner convinces the dog to do it his way. Be warned! Bullmastiffs only do things your way to humor you because they love you, not because they think your way is better than theirs. Consistency is absolutely necessary in dealing with the breed because of their intelligence and independence of nature. Just like the small child, the Bullmastiff puppy will coax, wheedle, beg, tease, be devious, defiant, in some cases actually shed real tears in order to win his way. Discussions with these bright youngsters need to be short and sweet. Get the point across, see that whatever you desire is done, and then don't look. Silent film stars can't emote like a Bullmastiff trying to get his way.

Bullmastiffs thrive on affection. The more they receive, the better dogs they are. Discipline and affection go together quite well. A Bullmastiff who is well disciplined and secure in its owner's affection is the most delightful of creatures. A spoiled brat of a Bullmastiff puppy is a time bomb. A Bullmastiff cannot be allowed to rule a household; when he reaches 100 pounds the brattiness ceases to be cute. You can't suddenly change ground rules with a strong-minded breed and expect success after you've allowed them to run the home to their heart's content.

Once a Bullmastiff understands its proper place in a household, basic obedience training is a good idea. It fosters a closer relationship between owner and dog. It also gives an owner better control over a large, powerful breed. Bullmastiffs do well in obedience work, once who is running the show has been decided. Enthusiasm and praise from the owner of the Bullmastiff during training sessions are of extreme importance. A little bribe now and then doesn't hurt the relationship either. Bullmastiffs respond much better to positive reinforcement than force. Ever

try to wrestle an unwilling Bullmastiff into submission?

I took my first champion male to obedience training class when he was six years old. When we reached the time for the “down” lesson, the instructor was going to demonstrate using a Shetland Sheepdog. I suggested he use my 150 lb., 26<sup>1/2</sup>” tall baby instead? Not being one to shy from a challenge, the trainer took on the job of demonstrating with my dog. First came the sit position with the usual downward tug on the lead. Right at that moment a dreamy, faraway look came into the dog’s black eyes. His elbows and neck locked like the door of a bank vault, and he went stone deaf. In his mind he simply was no longer with us. Several more very strong pulls on the lead with the command produced nothing. So the trainer, now perspiring a bit, decided to demonstrate another method, pulling the dog’s front legs out from under him and lowering him to the ground. Well, the idea sounded good but someone had forgotten to tell the dog how good the method was. He went back to being a concrete dog with immovable joints.

By now all 12 people attending the class were trying to hide their amusement. The dog showed not the slightest animosity; he just wasn’t going to be forced to do anything without good reason (a primary trait of the breed). Finally, the trainer said there was one more way; grabbing the dog’s front and rear legs, on the side opposite of where he was, he flipped him onto the ground while commanding him to “down.” That worked. The dog lay there benignly. No hard feelings, but no cooperation.

Knowing the breed rather well by then, I decided to try another method. It took me two minutes to convince this dog he wanted to down. I just put a cookie on the ground in front of him, just forward of his reach. As he lowered his front end to get it, I encouraged him to lower all the way to the ground. After three “cookie sessions” he decided the command wasn’t so bad and doing it seemed to please me no end so he just kept on doing it when asked. In fact, long downs were to become his best and favorite exercises. He actually napped through them. Since “down” is a submissive position, he just needed a bit of extra encouragement for placing himself there.

His great-granddaughter, who has her CD, is working toward higher degrees and is practicing retrieving the proper dumbbell from a group of dumbbells. Each time she brings back the proper one she gets a cookie. After combining several successful and unsuccessful attempts she hit upon a brilliant way to assure herself of a cookie (or so she thought). In order to be sure of having the right dumbbell she simply picked up all of them and returned them at the same time. Obviously, one had to be the right one.

These anecdotes should give you a bit of a clue toward the Bullmastiff’s attitude toward obedience training. They’ll do it. They’ll even do it well. But, they want a reason to do it.

### **Just a Lapdog**

Bullmastiffs derive a lot of satisfaction from touching those they love. If one is willing to sit on the floor or the lawn with them it isn’t long before the dog is sitting on you and not next to you. This is fun with puppies, but not so amusing as the little darlings pop over the 100 pound mark. When banished from lap sitting, the Bullmastiff will park as close as possible to his human friend and find contentment in just barely touching the person with his nose, or even just one toenail. The smallest contact seems to satisfy the dog.

Having dealt somewhat with the personality of the Bullmastiff, I’d like to discuss its structure and the functional reasons for such structure. The Bullmastiff is essentially the working quarter horse of dogdom. The standard for the breed, where it applies to body, quarters and neck, can be very easily used to describe the quarter horse. The Bullmastiff standard when describing the general appearance of the dog defines it as a sym-

metrical animal, showing great strength, powerfully built but active. The Bullmastiff stalking poachers or, at present, intruders, and the working stock horse dealing with cattle both combine slow, stealthy movements with sudden bursts of speed with quick stops and turns. Both animals use their agility to stop the progress of man or steer as their particular work demands. Both need endurance and therefore are required to have deep chests for plenty of lung space. Both need to be alert yet with reliable temperaments. Both were bred to be reliable working animals.

Everything about a Bullmastiff, while showing the aforementioned traits, should give a compact appearance. Herding dogs meant to trot long distances may be properly built with longer bodies and more extreme angulation to facilitate their function. The Bullmastiff was originally developed to work in forested areas and so was not expected, or required, to travel at the herding dogs gait. The Bullmastiff accompanied his master at a slower pace until an intruder was found. The dog slowly and quietly positioned himself to leap on the intruder or raced at him from cover with great speed, pouncing on him and pinning him. A dog required to do this type of work needed a short coupled body with strong rear quarters, an excellent center of gravity, and the agility to stop and change direction in a split second.

### **Functional Aesthetics**

The skull of the Bullmastiff, as described in the English standard is required to be large and square, viewed from every angle. The US standard calls for it to be large and broad with well developed cheeks, broad deep muzzle, which is to be one third the length of the entire head. This type of skull is an aesthetic match for the type of body described in the standard. It also has an excellent functional purpose.

The English standard says the circumference of the skull may equal the height of the dog at the shoulder. It is obvious that a head of this type was useful to the dog in his work. A broad head with a broad, strong underjaw has exceptional holding power. It also makes a very efficient battering ram. I have seen many a Bullmastiff use its head to constantly push a person to the ground while playing, never harming the person but simply overpowering them.

I got an object lesson from my first Bullmastiff when she was just eight months old. I pulled her down onto the lawn to wrestle a bit. When I’d had enough I decided to sit up. The only problem was that she had not decided to call it quits. So, every time I sat up she used her lovely standard-type head to shove me back down. Luckily my husband was nearby to pull her back until I gained my feet. She wasn’t the slightest bit aggressive or upset; merely matter-of-factly doing what all good Bullmastiffs should do when they had someone down. I decided there had to be other avenues of expressing togetherness for us and ceased picking a game that only a Bullmastiff could win.

The original desired color for the Bullmastiff was brindle since it was the perfect camouflage for its line of work. As the dog became more popular as a family guard and companion, fawn, red-fawn and red outdistanced the original color in favor. In fact, the brindle color almost became extinct. In the last 10 years, brindles have had a revival and now share quite a decent percentage in the breed. All Bullmastiffs should have black masks. These are more visible on the solid color dogs but should be a part of all colors’ markings. Many people prefer the solid color dog because of the definite contrast between mask and body color. I have no personal color favorite in the breed. A beautifully built Bullmastiff with the intelligence, devotion, sweet temperament and indomitable spirit that epitomize this breed of “faithful and fearless, but not ferocious” can be any of the above, and he or she more than welcome to share my home.

*by Carol Beans, reprinted from the August 1983 AKC Gazette.*