

## Paws for Thought...

Recent coverage in the mainstream media about dog attacks, particularly by Pit Bull Terriers has highlighted the fact that there are some serious considerations to be made when we decide to introduce a dog into our home. A few weeks ago in the UK, 5 year-old Ellie Lawrenson died, while her grandmother sustained serious injuries after being attacked at their Merseyside home by a relative's pit bull terrier.



As a result of the recent attacks, all dog owners are being asked to ensure that they are aware of their legal responsibilities. The Control of Dogs Act was introduced in 1986, and amended in 1992. All dogs over the age of 4 months must, by law, have a dog licence. These can be purchased from your local Post Office for a small cost of €12.70, and must be renewed annually. There are also regulations which were introduced in 1998. Under this piece of legislation no breed was specifically defined as a dangerous dog, however certain conditions for dog ownership are specified, with special reference to certain breeds that require 'strict control'. These breeds include:

- German Shepherd
- Rottweiler
- Doberman Pinchers
- Rhodesian Ridgeback
- Japanese Akita
- Pit Bull Terrier
- Bull Mastiff
- Japanese Tosas
- English Bull Terrier
- Staffordshire Bull Terrier



When in public all of the above breeds must be walked on a chain or leash not more than 2 metres in length, be muzzled, have on it's collar a disc identifying the name of the owner and contact details, and must be under the supervision of someone over the age of 16 years who is capable of controlling the dog. Crosses of these breeds must also be controlled in the same way. Not complying with these requirements may lead to a fine and/or prosecution, with the potential for a judge to give an order for the dog to be destroyed, especially if it has been involved in an attack of some nature.



If you are considering making that canine addition to the household it is important to take into account the characteristics inherent in the breed you may be considering. Certain breeds, such as the German Shepherd, require a lot of mental stimulation and can become bored and destructive if left to their own devices for long periods of time, while others like the Springer Spaniel will require large quantities of exercise.

Certain breeds may need careful handling in early life to eliminate potential anti-social behavioural problems in later life, examples of this being the Dalmatian and the Rottweiler. And then there are some breeds, like the handsome and eternally popular Labrador retriever, whose mission in life is to chew, chew, chew, and chew. Not the dog of choice for the house-proud. If there are children or young adults in the house who are involved in sports then an athletic and active breed such as the Boxer may be a good option, having the added advantage, in most cases, of a good character.

When purchasing your puppy ensure you go to a reputable breeder. Many problems with adult dog behaviour can be the result of the lines of breeding being too close. The Irish Kennel Club can provide details of recognised breeders in your location. Breeders registered with the IKC are only permitted to breed under a very strict set of rules and guidelines. Beware of



breeders that appear to breed several different types of dogs, ones that have puppies too readily available or ones that appear to be vague or evasive when asked questions about the pup. Reputable breeders are genuinely interested in their dogs and plan each litter of pups carefully, so be prepared for a bit of a wait. They should also be able to provide you with a family history of both parent dogs.

Remember this friend will hopefully be with you for the next 10 – 12 years, so it is worth taking the time now to carefully think about your decision and consider all options before reaching a final conclusion. And remember, as the famous dog trainer Barbara Woodhouse once said *"A watchdog is a dog kept to guard your home, usually by sleeping where a burglar would awaken the household by falling over him."*

