

## **Bull Terrieritis – It’s Catching**

by ANN BALL, (Reprinted from the Bull Terrier Club Bulletin, Winter 1982).

***I’m sure that a huge proportion of our readers will recognize and sympathize with Ann Ball’s reminiscences of her early days with Bull Terriers.***

In the three years that I have been owned by a Bull Terrier it has slowly become apparent that I have been infected with a deadly virus, one that offers no cure and no hope of recovery. I find it incredible that a lady of mature years and of previously sound mind should be smitten with that dreadful disease known as ‘Bull Terrieritis in extremis’.

I was adopted by Jasper on 6 September 1978, and upon our arrival at my home, we were greeted by my fond Mama and the immortal words “What in the name of God is that?” When informed that this was that fearless and fabled beast, a Bull Terrier, she was not at all impressed, and her parting shot was “God, isn’t he ugly”.

I was somewhat hurt by her remarks, but Jasper took it all in his stride and remained calm. After all, he’d heard it all before, and not only that, he had recognized what I had only heard about, namely that there is no-one like a dog for recognizing a sucker for a dog. Within three days the cry from Mama had changed to “Where’s my lovely boy then? Where’s my Jasper Carrot?”

Not at all bad for three days, but after all, one had to train these humans to heel gently, didn’t one? Of course, as I had been a push-over from the start, and therefore much easier to train, he decided he’d stay, as long as I behaved myself, that is! And naturally, things got better and better.

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### **Ignorance is bliss**

It was decided between Jasper’s other ‘Mum’ and myself that we would try showing him and see what transpired. I am exonerated on the grounds of complete ignorance, but Phyl knew better, she’d been doing it for some time. I was initiated into the heady joys of leaving my warm, snug bed at some unearthly hour of the morning, and being speedily driven down motorways in pitch darkness, thus proving that there was no-one in the whole world awake at that time in the morning, never mind being mobile.

As time went on it became clear that others were touched in the head also, and they would pass us, grinning and waving, obviously delighted that other idiots were abroad. I should confess here and now that I enjoyed it all immensely, and when Jasper did us proud and won a class or even two, Phyl and I were the happiest people in the world.

What was even nicer was that luckily for us, we remained happy even when he didn't win, because we'd had a lovely day out. I was introduced to some marvelous people, and made some very good friends, and once they'd got over the shock, most of them were just as pleased to see me . . . I think! Jasper didn't mind all this junketing about, as long as the supply of chocolate mice held out.

By this time, it had been discovered that Jasper had some very odd tastes. He adored curry, didn't mind a portion of rice before it was all gone, was crazy about Guinness, would tolerate a slurp of beer if you didn't remove temptation, because, after all, a chap from a broken home just had to keep his health and strength up, didn't he?

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### **Crazy appetite**

He had also developed a leaning towards raw onions, which in turn had developed in me a tendency to lean away from him especially at close quarters. He adored pickled onions, anything containing garlic, apples, bananas, grapes, oranges, nuts in any shape or form, wholewheat toast with lashings of dripping, icing from the Christmas cake, in fact anything that he could con the gullible or the unwary into parting with. To satisfy Jasper's ever open maw one would have needed an overdraft the size of the National Debt.

As we went along it became clear that I had a character on my hands. In my innocence, or as my Mama puts it, my stupidity, I had assumed that Jasper was a dog like any other. I am reasonably (questionably?) intelligent, but had never in my wildest dreams thought that I would ever have a Bull Terrier to share my life with. As far as I knew a dog was a dog.

Amazing how wrong you can be isn't it? I had to be slowly convinced of what Jasper already knew, he wasn't a dog, he was a Bull Terrier.

I also know, that as much as Jasper loves me, he also pities my stupidity. He was bright enough to elect to stay with me, but he makes it very clear that he is doing me the greatest favor of my life by allowing me to share his home with him. I am by far his intellectual inferior, and he makes no bones about it. I don't think I have ever been so lovingly patronized in my entire life. He puts me in my place by ignoring me, but by dint of long-suffering sighs and drawn-out yawns draws my attention to the fact that he *is* ignoring me, and that I had better watch my step.

When forgiven for my sins, he leans long and comfortingly against me and very tenderly gurks in my ear. Very forgiving people, Bull Terriers, and kind to the simple minded! Lucky that, isn't it?

### **Which one of us is mad?**

Jasper is as deaf as a post to my bellowing his name at point blank range, but can hear the rustle of a sweet wrapper at a quarter of a mile. He hates exercise, but will chase in mad pursuit of his beloved red rubber ball for as long as my throwing arm and my patience hold out. He cocks a very beady black eye at my more insane antics to amuse him, and has a look that says quite plainly "Oh God, here we go again".

He will lie in positions of excruciating discomfort and go into a deep and tranquil slumber, from which he emerges as fresh as a daisy, having spent hours looking like a screwed-up paper bag. When he wishes to come into a room and finds the door closed against him, he snuffles along the bottom of the door groaning heartrendingly until someone relents and lets him in (no prizes for guessing who!)

I have never, in all the years that my family have kept dogs, met a dog with so much character, love, humor, loyalty and strength of will. Of course we had never had a Bull Terrier, so we just didn't know what we were missing.

When Jasper and I first started to live together he possessed a charming nature but very few manners as such. I decided that we should both go to obedience training classes, and we would both learn a thing or two. The trainers told me that there was no such thing as an untrainable dog, only an untrainable owner . . . and then they met Jasper, the White Cavalier.

He wasn't naughty, nor even disobedient, he was just very hard of hearing. He was also quite a heavy dog, and the trainers and I sweated blood and tears and Jasper developed a specialty act, known reverently as "Thursday night lameness at 7.30". It was quite spectacular, and only got to chronic stages as it became nearer to 7.30. I didn't even know that he could tell the time!

He was also stubborn, as only a Bull Terrier can be. I could have a refund, or, as I was thinking of having a puppy, perhaps I'd like to try again later, and with a puppy, well, it would be so much easier, wouldn't it?

### **Showing really is fun**

I became the proud possessor of a black brindle bitch Bull Terrier known as Jenna. I was a glutton for punishment, and at the appointed date and hour, fully vaccinated etc, Jenna and I sallied forth. My baby and I did very well the first time, Jenna loved being told how adorable she was, and how clever she was, and there were all those lovely new people to play with, and it was all such **fun**.

What did I mean, we were there to work? She'd socialize, yes, but she most certainly would not work, she wasn't that sort of a girl. The trainers think that Bull Terriers are lovely to look at, but that's all they want to do . . . just look! And I never did get my refund!

So, to date, I have two Bullies, and puppies are planned. I've been granted an affix by the Kennel Club, and the wheels of fate roll merrily on. My Mama is now a totally committed fan of Bull Terriers, and Jasper in particular, my sons are also bitten by the bug. Ian, the elder, thinks that this showing lark is great fun, Martin, the younger one, is a member of the BTC Juniors Committee, and they both love Bull Terriers almost as much as eating and pop music.

Strange to think that only three and a half years ago I didn't even own a Bull Terrier. I have only one thing left to say. I do believe I'm going under for the last time!

*Since writing this article dear Jasper has died and although we now have some home-bred youngsters that we look forward to showing, we still miss him and always will!*