

Gangsters steal terrier pets for fights to the death

Barry Hugill

DISTURBING evidence of criminal behaviour and cruelty to animals has been uncovered by an *Observer* inquiry into pit bull terriers — the 'killer dogs' responsible for vicious attacks on people.

Criminal gangs are snatching family pets as bait for pit bull terriers training for fights. Hundreds of animals are suffering horrendous deaths trapped in cages attached to treadmills on which fighter dogs exercise. The lure of live bait drives the killer dogs to exhaustion, at which point they are rewarded with the live animal.

The gangs are also stealing dogs, mainly Staffordshire bull terriers, to use in training fights. In the Bolton area of Lancashire over 20 dogs have disappeared in recent weeks. Most die in the fights but a few, horribly mutilated, are abandoned, often on motorways.

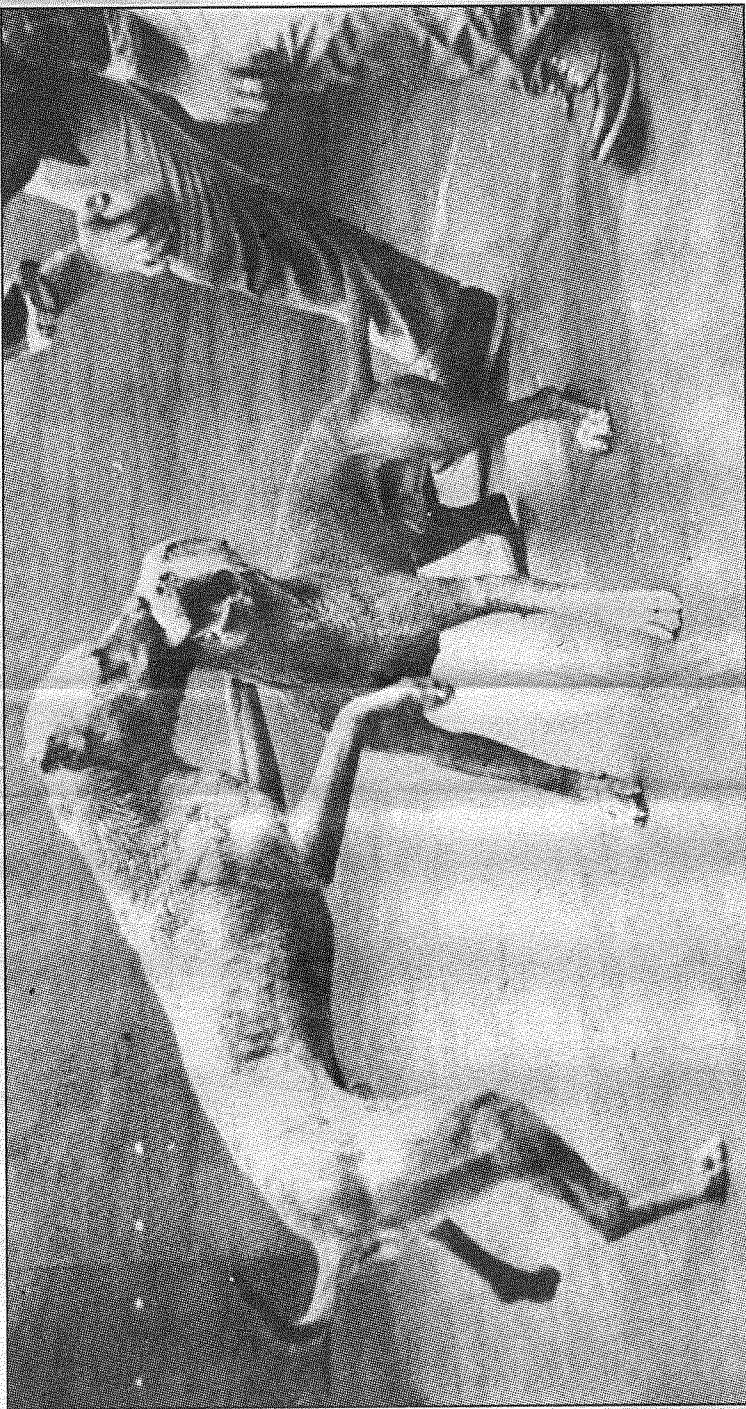
Mrs Barbara Green, who runs a dog rescue scheme in Lancashire, said the situation

was 'a nightmare' and that white dogs were particularly at risk because they 'show up the blood more'.

Animal welfare groups and Labour MPs are stepping up their campaign for tough laws to control pit bull terriers — a breed unknown in this country 10 years ago. Last week Mark Love, RSPCA legal officer, called for the humane destruction of all pit bulls in Britain.

John Bryant of the League Against Cruel Sports says a child will soon be killed. 'Pit bull terriers have no place in society. Ten years ago the Government was warned not to allow them in but ignored us. They must act before people die.'

Two weeks ago a Lincoln baker, Frank Tempest, was savaged for more than 30 minutes by two pit bull terriers. Tim Milward, consultant plastic surgeon at Leicester Royal Infirmary, who performed emergency surgery, backed the call for action: 'These dogs set about removing parts of his face



Fight night: A dog called Strider gets an 'ear-hold' on its opponent — 'ear and head' dogs are much favoured.

bit by bit. He is going through a tough time at the moment because he is beginning to realise what he looks like.

'That is hell. These dogs, whose only purpose in life is to kill other dogs, should not be classified as pets. They are wild animals.'

Dr Roger Mugford, an animal psychologist who counts the Queen's corgis among his patients, warned that any parents keeping a pit bull terrier as a pet were putting their children at risk. 'Pit bulls have been developed for one purpose and that is to give sadistic pleasure

Two 'underground' journals, *Pit Bull News* and *Sporting Dog Periodical*, print results of fights and advertise dogs for sale. A recent edition of *Pit Bull News* carried advice on first-aid for 'performance' dogs whose own-

ers might find themselves in 'circumstances' making it difficult to consult a vet. The newspaper also carries adverts for training treadmills.

The same edition of *Pit Bull News* carried a report of a fight — Fagin's Beau Belle v. Meg: Meg appeared stronger and was top dog from the start — but, by round 15, things had evened out.' By round 19 Meg was counted out — pit bull fighters' jargon for dead.

The editor Joe Graham denies any involvement in fighting. 'The vast majority of pit bulls are pets — but of

course people want something that will guard the house. These animals are gentle and sweet. Owners are always complaining to me that they 'are too soft'. I have two and they sleep in my bedroom.'

Mr Graham refused to supply *The Observer* with the latest copy of his newspaper. Ed Reid, editor of the *Sporting Dog Periodical*, did not return our telephone calls.

The largest concentration of 'sporting' dogs is in the white working class areas of east and north London. Owners are usually young men with short hair-

ture of the spine. 'The smaller

nothing else that does the same job.'