

# Hit&Run...



## That team talk in full

**W**e may never learn what was discussed when the England team was allegedly bugged at a Hertfordshire hotel last week. The Football Association's solicitors are frantically trying to lock down tapes that are said to contain recordings of conversations between England manager Fabio Capello and key members of his squad. Not to worry; here we imagine what was said at the meeting, during which players reportedly discussed, among other things, the bonuses they are rumoured to receive if they win the World Cup.

*Wayne Rooney wears a cream, organic silk waffle-weave bathrobe as he waits for a hot-stone massage. He and some of the England camp's top players are kicking back on rattan chaise longues at the Grove Hotel's Sequoia Spa.*

**Rooney:** All right, lads, I can't wait to go to South America like – it'll be brill – but the boss says he'll give us 400 grand if we win. Taking the piss, eh? The missus spends that much a week getting her nails nice like.

**David Beckham:** We ain't going to Saaf America, Wayne, it's Saaf Africa, innit. It ain't much, but you can still get a lot with half a mill even in this day and age.

**Rooney:** Nah, s'only 400 grand, like – I told ya. **Beckham:** All right, Einstein, you can still do a lot with 400 grand. I could buy Victoria, like [counts his fingers] three pairs of proper nice shoes for that. What 'bout you, Ash?

**Ashley Cole:** Dunno, man, How much do you think singing lessons are these days? For Chez-za, ya know. Gotta win 'er back somehow.

**Jermain Defoe:** Leave it, Ash, she's a lost cause. All I know is I'm getting some well good new solid platinum rims for my Escalade, ya get me. **Gareth Barry:** Lads, this is crazy talk. How about we do something nice for once – have a whip-round for Bridgety.

**John Terry:** Leave it out! I ain't giving nuffink to that muppet. He's shot himself in the foot – end of. Besides, I need all the wonga I can put me paws on. Flowers every day, that boat in Dubai and all them bikinis don't come cheap.

**Beckham:** Tell me about it, Tel. Don't forget, an'all, we're gonna need fancy whistles and top tans when the Queen has us round at Beckingham ... erm, Buckingham Palace for the knighthoods. **Fabio Capello** (walks in wearing tracksuit and trainers): Buon giorno! Good to see you all getting together to talk the tactics. Okay, lads, time for the training of the penalties. Who's the first?

**SIMON USBORNE**

## Ker-ching whenever Chung wears something

When Anne Boleyn first wore the French hood on the front row of the Tudor court, ye fash pack ditched their gabled headgear and copied her Parisian chic. When she engineered fuller sleeves to cover her congenital sixth finger, the *Grazia* editors of the day took note and disseminated advice about ermine trim.

Back to the future though, and Alexa Chung boosted eBay sales of any style-oriented item connected to her by 241 per cent last month. She's no Boleyn, but it's semi-comforting to know that our propensity to behave like fashion-forward sheep at least has a historical basis, and isn't solely thanks to *Heat* magazine.

Since the middle-class It-girl appeared on the March cover of *Vogue* sporting this season's dogs, sales of the orthopaedic heels have gone up by 195 per cent. And a pair of

faded dungarees, no doubt donned in uncalculated nonchalance by the TV presenter-cum-style icon, precipitated a 75 per cent rise in popularity of the style. Of course, it just could be that lots of people are going to barn dances.

In this culture of celebrity endorsement, we're used to being exhorted by footballers to buy crisps or being writhed at by a pixellated Kate Moss selling perfume. But all it takes is Alexa going shopping in a pair of Levi's 501s for sales to go up 277 per cent on the website. Interestingly, since Kerry Katona was papped toting her tasselled handbag to the local carvery and back, sales on Ebay have fallen 100 per cent.

If only Anne Boleyn had been able to measure her popularity in the same way; it might have saved her a sticky end.

**HARRIET WALKER**

# A lethal weapon on a lead?

The pit bull is the most notorious of the 'dangerous dogs'. But is there more to these status symbols than meets the eye?

**Kate Burt** anatomises the arguments

### WHAT IS A PIT BULL?

Yesterday, a Government consultation proposed reviewing the 1991 Dangerous Dogs Act, which made it illegal to own a "pit bull type" dog. With both more attacks by dogs (up by 79 per cent in the capital, according to the Greater London Authority) and dog fights (which increased 12-fold between 2004-2008, says the RSPCA), and the rising trend for intimidating "status" dogs (over 1000 seized by Police in London in the last year, up from just 43 in 2003), the law is simply not working. But what is a "pit bull type dog"? It's complicated. "A derivative of the American Pit Bull Terrier [the type photographed here], originally bred in America for dog fighting," explains Caroline Kisko of the Kennel Club. "However, in the UK it is defined in law as a type of dog sharing similar characteristics. This is at the crux of why the Act is so flawed because it is so difficult to define what a pit type dog looks like." The Metropolitan Police's Status Dogs Unit compares a suspect dog's physique to established characteristics from the American Dog Breeders Association standard to define "pit bull type", taking into account the dimensions of its head, its height and its gait. But, says Kisko, certain dogs that simply look similar can be "demonised".

### MEET STAFFIE, THE PIT BULL'S LONG-LEGGED RELATIVE

A close relative of the pit bull, the Staffordshire bull terrier is probably the UK's most highly prized legal status dog (and according to a 2007 Police report, made up 56 per cent of all stolen dogs in the UK), though is often cross-bred to incorporate more pit bull characteristics. Scan puppy adverts and you'll often see descriptions such as, "Irish Staffies", "American Staffies" or "long-legged Staffies" – all euphemisms for pit bull terrier. So the Staffordshire gets a bad name. The "Staffie" combination of strength and a tough image, its British heritage and a loyal and loving nature at home (it's regularly recommended as the ideal family pet by breed guides) has helped to make it a trophy dog for those who want to look tough. As Sharon Bolt, a expert in canines at Good-dog.co.uk says, "Chihuahuas can be vicious, I've even worked with a Labrador who hospitalised a family member – but they don't have the hard image that the Staff has, so [people looking for a status dog] don't choose them."

### FASTER, BETTER, STRONGER

The original version of the pit bull type – and common ancestor for the Staffordshire bull terrier, bull terrier, American pit bull terrier and American Staffordshire terrier – was known as the "bull and terrier" dog. It first emerged in pre-19th century England, when bull- and bear-baiting was a popular sport. Breeding produced a more active and long-legged predecessor to today's versions, which fought well against these large creatures in special pits (hence its later name). But when such bloodsports were outlawed, dog fighting gained popularity instead, and breeders honed a smaller, more agile version better suited to the purpose. It looked a lot like today's Staffordshire bull terrier.

### BRED TO BITE?

Pit bull-type breeds have long had a reputation for having excessively strong jaws capable of "locking" when they bite. This is nothing more than urban legend, suggests the American Kennel Club, citing scientific research proving that "there is nothing in the skeletal structure of the pit bull terrier jaw any different from that of any other dog in respect to locking". The problem, it is widely agreed, is with the owners – something campaigners hope the revised legislation will take into account. In fact, reports that owners train dogs to clamp onto tree branches are more likely to be behind the locked-jaw story (trees in East Barnet last year suffered over £1,000 worth of damage from this training technique). Sharon Bolt outlines other aggression-inducing training methods among many status dog owners: "Reward-based training can be reversed," she explains. "A group of lads might hype a dog up by, say, putting it in a confined space like a lift so it gets scared, and then give it treats when – inevitably – it lashes out." But this tactic would be effective with any dog, she says.

### TO NEUTER OR NOT?

Male dogs tend to be more aggressive than females – particularly with each other (and so are popular in dog fights). Which is why, along with microchipping, enforced neutering is on the list of proposals for the new legislation. There has been scepticism, however, about the idea of enforced insurance – "yeah, because dangerous drivers are always the ones with insurance, aren't they?" ranted one critic on Twitter. There has also been a suggestion that insurance companies are courting the Government for an income boost.

### IS THE NEXT STEP 'DOGBOS'?

Status dogs are becoming a political lever – with the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats both recently highlighting the rise in attacks in the last 10 years of Labour rule. With each party trying to outdo the other in ingratiating itself to Middle England, and tackling "yob culture" and bandying around suggestions such as issuing "dogbos" for offending canines, the outcome of the revised bill is likely to be back in the news very soon.

