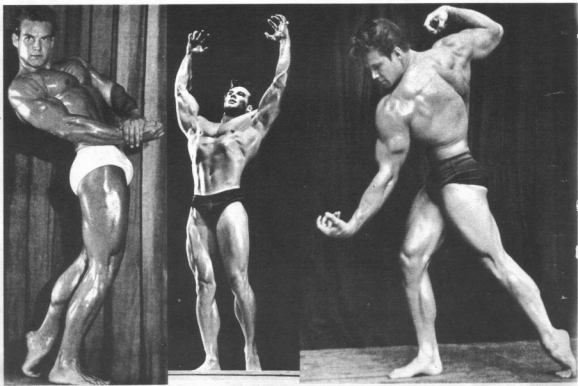


STEVE REEVES

He Knew
What He Wanted
...And Got It!

By Robert Kennedy

(Courtesy Robert Kennedy)



MTI

WAS there ever any bodybuilder like Steve Reeves?

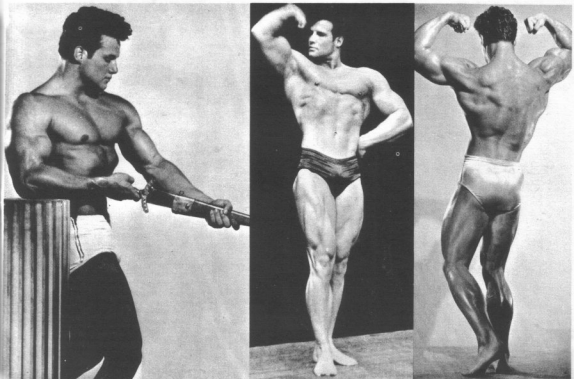
Not only did the boy have a positively handsome physique, which virtually everyone liked and admired on sight, but he had a face of such perfect features that some of his photos seemed almost statuesque because of his combined physical and facial perfection. If anyone was ahead of his time in the musclebuilding world it was Steve. In the mid 1940's the bodybuilding fraternity was awakening to the fact that weight training plus a highly nutritious diet would build huge muscles on almost anyone. This caused the first 'bulk craze' which lasted for some ten years and still hasn't been entirely forgotten. However, in the midst of it all Reeves trained along in his own way, refusing to develop any one muscle group, just because it was now possible. Reeves always thought in terms of proportion and this is the main reason for his popularity today.

Some bodybuilders scorned him when he refused to perform the full squat, for example. He sought an exercise that worked the lower part of his thighs as opposed to the upper area near the hips and buttocks. By trial and error he arrived first at a version of the front squat and then the hack lift done on a special machine. He alternated these two and consequently kept his hips and buttocks narrow, and his thighs were widely acclaimed by

experts as being amongst the most shapely and proportionate in the bodybuilding world.

Many of today's bodybuilding followers will tell you: "Sure, Reeves had everything going for him right from the start. Wide clavicles, square pecs, handsome face." Well, it's true, Steve did have a lot of natural advantages, but his genius lay in the fact that he didn't succumb to performing the run-of-the-mill exercises that were being widely practiced in his day, and which could have made him into just another 'also ran'. He did not perform the full squat because he didn't want to build a big rump. He did not do the flat bench press excessively because he didn't want to build huge low pecs. He preferred lat exercises that pulled out his latissimus so that they flared to a greater V-shape as opposed to bulking up in thickness only, which would tend to happen if he just performed rowing motions. Too, he worked his forearms fiercely to keep them in line with the rest of his body. And his calves, although naturally big, were not particularly shapely, so Steve exercised them utilizing thousands of repetitions each training session.

He took the same trouble over the development of his neck. He insisted on only performing the neck exercises that contributed to neck symmetry. He aimed at a balanced column-like neck; exercised accordingly and succeeded in building a neck of perfect all around



STEVE REEVES

proportion. This was the way Reeves tackled any problem. He worked out just what he wanted, how it could best be acquired and then went all out to achieve his desires.

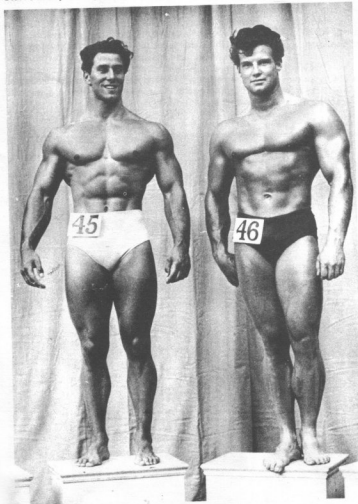
One of the most interesting things about Steve Reeves was his ability to whip himself into top condition in a matter of weeks. He proved that he could do this any time he wished. This ability is of course shared by many top men in bodybuilding today, but in Reeves' time it was quite astounding to the bodybuilding public at that time. It is an art which one acquires from knowing one's body and the way it reacts to food and exercise, in all sorts of situations. One such instance of Steve's ability to shape up in a matter

of weeks is related by John Grimek who himself could gain or lose twenty pounds in as many days. "Yes, we saw Steve Reeves change from a skinny bodybuilder to a Mr. Universe winner in just seven weeks. It was in 1950 when we invited him to come and train with us. When he stripped for his first workout it seemed that he had lost everything but his legs. The accepted opinion of the fellows in the gym was that he didn't even have a chance of placing in the Mr. Universe contest, let alone win it. His arms, shoulders, chest and back lacked any semblance of previous muscularity, however we had underestimated Steve's ambition and drive. Each workout he took, he put everything into it, and continued to do a little more each week, so that after a few weeks he showed amazing improvement. He seldom sat around talking and killing time, but worked

continuously while on the gym floor. He would repeat each exercise until he couldn't do another rep, and on several occasions while he was doing his incline curls I saw him kick up the dumbbell with his knees and then strongly resist as he lowered the weight. By the end of his sixth week he had recovered his large sinewy arms, a fuller rounder chest. His back looked wider and more massive. Even his shoulders looked thicker and his abdomen showed more detail and muscularity. There was no more whispering in the gym about whether he could win the title. Soon the time was up. Steve took one final workout and then asked us to appraise his posing. As we watched him shift from one pose to another it was evident that here was the winner of the Universe contest, and indeed he was!"

Many people want to know more about the way Steve Reeves trained. In general, he used high reps and certainly believed in training hard during each training session. He tried to forget all about barbell training when not in the gym, but once changed—ready for a workout—he would change all the fire and zest of the habitual fanatic. Another point raised by those who trained with him was that he had little regard for time during his workouts. He trained according to how he felt, and for as long as he chose, having no preconceived idea about how long he was going to train at any one session. When in serious training before a contest he would work out for anything from 2-4 hours at a time. He would aim at congesting each muscle area and in order to do this he would use a variety of exercises. He usually started with a weight near his maximum, and gradually using less weight as his muscles congested and grew tired. In spite of having a liking for a large variety of weight training movements he did nevertheless have his favorite exercises. These included the long arm rowing on lat machine, the hack lift with heels close together and toes pointed out and of course his favorite biceps exercise (and Reg Park's) the incline dumbbell curl.

Steve looked good not only because he trained hard, but also because he took the trouble to make himself look good in other ways. He took pride in his posture, he studied his appearance from all angles, he saw that his hair was cut to complement his basic face structure. He took incredible care of his teeth, skin, etc. He made a point of always maintaining a deep tan so that his body always looked its best. In short, he was a perfectionist. I firmly believe that not one in a thousand bodybuilders given the same potential, bone structure, etc., would have made such a good job of producing the perfect physique that Reeves built. While others stated that all bodybuilders should be strong in the basic lifts; almost to the extent of being able to break world records, Steve proclaimed: "I can be as strong as I want." It was absolutely true. He



Steve Reeves vs. Reg Park . . . details in text.

WAS a natural, but was not prepared to practice heavy strength lifts to the extent of spoiling his athletic appearance and natural grace. But even so, most of the moves he practiced could not be beaten or even duplicated by many of the strength exponents who ridiculed his lifting ability. Some of the feats were never duplicated. While lying on a flat bench, for example, he could leg curl a 200 lb. man sitting on his feet. He was able to lift the same man with his teeth and he could incline curl two 85 lb. dumbbells for reps. He could perform the one arm chin and was especially adept at the hack movement.

Steve Reeves was seen in a different light by almost all who knew him. Here are a few select random quotes from leading iron game figures to help you build a more complete picture of the man. Opinions vary but none can argue with the fact that he built an 'instant appeal' physique of flawless perfection and unparalleled athletic appearance and proportion.

Earl Liederman, who recently passed away in his 84th year, a former close associate of Eugen Sandow and one time the world's biggest mail-order musclebuilder: "Steve Reeves was only in his teens when I first saw and met him. It was in a large dressing room during the preliminaries of a California physique contest, wending my way around, looking over the contestants, who were warming up. I saw a small gathering around a tall good-looking fellow. By chance I heard his name which meant nothing to me. Steve Reeves. He looked quite impressive standing there amongst those youngsters, and almost a head taller than any of them. Here, I mused to myself, was a real physique standout, not only among the novice group but also among those who were competing in the major physique contest. Yet, when I heard that he was still in his teens I could not help but ponder over and over how any kid his age could develop such a good build. Yet here he stood and seeing is believing . . ."

Oscar Heidenstam, former Mr. Europe and organizer of the annual NABBA Universe contest in London: ". . . others in their way have been equally sensational of course, and the PC world has stood in awe of them; men such as Grimek, Park, etc., stand supreme, but there is a special place for Steve Reeves in the archives of PC. Perhaps it was because he was before his time. People can look at pictures of Steve taken twenty years ago and they do not age. They could have been taken last week. I remember Reeves telling me that right from the age when he first became muscle conscious at 14, that he was a big lad. He told me that he could never remember his arms under 14½" and by the time he was 16 his arm was also 16".

"My very first glimpse of Steve was at the Olympic Games lifting in London in 1948. He arrived in the middle December, 1970

of the lifting and almost stopped the show. His dress by the standards of the day was 'way out'. He wore a lavender silk suit with no lapels and a

silk flowered shirt. He was incredibly handsome with his flawless skin burnt to a deep tan by the California sun, flashing white teeth and a head of



Steve Reeves at an early age . . . a born giant.

incredibly beautiful hair. Later he, George Greenwood and I traveled to Cannes in the South of France where we entered the Mr. World contest. Steve won comfortably (at 39 I came 5th and was content) and was presented with a valuable Sevres vase; "What shall I do with this goddamn vase?" asked the smiling Reeves to me after the contest. I had to explain to him that it was probably worth around \$300.00."

For the untold thousands of body-builders who have not seen the Reeves body in person, he has of course made numerous films, both in America and on the European continent. None of these showed him at his best except perhaps "Athena," a film built around the Universe spectacular starring Debbie Reynolds and Ed Pardon. In his first epic film, "Hercules," he had a certain amount of size but was nowhere near his competition standard. With each successive film he lost more and more weight. This was probably because he had no rest between films and was working long hours every day and all day. Don't judge Reeves on his "Hercules" films. He was barely a shadow of his former self. There is a film on the market, sold at a fair price, by one or two companies, so if you have a home movie projector and really want to see what the Reeves body looked like in action, then I suggest you get hold of one of these (No, I don't get a cut!).

Reeves will undoubtedly play an important part in the history of bodybuilding as will Sandow, Grimek, etc. Like these men, Steve was an innovator. I well remember the stir Steve caused when some 25 years ago he suddenly sprang upon the scene. His first pictures caused a mild sensation. "Your Physique" captioned a picture of a young 18-year old Steve: "You could have knocked us down with a feather when we saw this picture."

Steve Reeves trained with Ed Yarrick and made tremendous progress during the next three years. He entered the 1947 Mr. America and had a very close battle with another young fellow, Eric Pedersen. Reeves came out the winner on the second ballot. At 21 he was the youngest winner of the national title and as a result received tremendous publicity. His pictures were circulated around the world. Curiously, on the strength of comparatively few pictures being published of Steve, he has remained as popular as ever since that day. From time to time he has dropped out of the bodybuilding limelight, and has periodically returned from the past. However, since beginning the film, "Hercules" (his first epic) he has not been in any kind of competition shape, although reports indicate that he is currently keeping very fit. His main exercise now seems to come from his regular horse riding, a love which he has had since early childhood. He is in fact an expert horseman in his own right and has an extensive knowledge about horsebreed-

ing. He has a ranch in Oregon and is currently retired from physique competition. From his films he has amassed a small fortune and although not as busy with his acting career as he was during the rush of "Hercules" films he is still in the profession and even turns his hand to scriptwriting at times.

At the moment Steve's bodyweight is down from his contest best of 228 pounds to somewhere in the region of 170 lbs. He is happily married to a charming woman, Countess Lina Czartarwicz. During the early part of their marriage they lived in Switzerland, but I believe Steve really prefers his Oregon ranch where he can ride all day under the big American sky. Will Steve Reeves ever return to heavy training for a guest appearance at one of the big annual shows? Who knows? If you asked most people this question they would answer "No," but I am not so sure. He is certainly not too old to do so. Nor is it beyond his ability. Remember Steve has special know-how of being able to whip himself into top condition. You can be sure that if a juicy film part were offered him which dictated that he should weigh in at a muscular 230 lbs., he would be on the studio floor on the first day of shooting weighing just that!

Although the 'Baron of the Biceps' (as he is known to many enthusiasts) has won every important international physique competition he has had his share of disappointments. On August, Friday 13th (yes, unlucky Friday 13) Steve entered the first Mr. Universe contest ever. It was held in London, England, and was held in conjunction with the Olympic games in 1948. It WAS an unlucky day for Steve. He was placed second to John Grimek after both were called out on stage for a second showing. The decision was so close that even today when people are asked who possessed the greatest physique ever, physical culturists will name one of these two men. It is no exaggeration to say that these two men rocked London town that memorable summer. Well, just imagine... Britain was just regaining her breath after the Second World War. Clothing and social habits were reserved. So picture the impression big Steve made when he arrived flashing white teeth, sporting a deep California tan and wearing a broad-shouldered lavender silk suit! After losing to Grimek, Reeves crossed the English Channel to Cannes, France. Here he won the Mr. World contest placing first. Remember, he won a 'goddamn vase'.

A couple of years later Steve again journeyed to London. This time he had been groomed by Grimek and others in every conceivable way. His posing and overall presence was faultless, but even so he was tied at first with another competitor. This time none other than the young muscular sensation Reg Park. The judges called out both men for a second ballot and Steve must have been wondering wheth-

er the 'Grimek-thing' was about to happen over again. But his 'luck' had changed. The judges had awarded him the title by virtue of the fact that Steve was the better proportioned of the two. Steve's measurements at that time were: height, 6'2"; weight, 223; waist, 31"; chest, 51"; thighs, 26½"; calves, 18"; upper arms, 18½". From London Steve flew back to America, where a victory banquet was thrown in his honor. After this he worked out spasmodically and gradually became restless. Then one day he simply purchased an old Ford convertible and drove back to California to seek his fortune as an actor. As a physique threat he didn't exist but even though he wasn't directly in the limelight his name was still magic. Nor did his film successes come easily. He got numerous bit parts, some lasting but a few seconds. He was for a long time in a Broadway production, standing in the background holding a spear. Yet all the time yearning to be discovered as a lead player. His perseverance paid off. One day an Italian film director approached Steve with an offer to make a series of "Hercules" films. Steve was so surprised by the offer that he refused to believe that it was genuine. In fact, it was only after some insistence on the Italian's behalf that Reeves was finally convinced that the guy was genuine. Back to training, Steve got into top condition, grew a beard and was well on the way to stardom.

As a personal observation I would say that Reeves got his breaks through constant effort. He never thought in terms of failure and it was a well-known fact that defeat only inspired him to greater efforts. He was always proud of his appearance and dressed neatly with well-fitting clothes. In his early years his mother used to make his shirts as he couldn't afford to have them tailor-made and off the peg shirts didn't fit his shoulders. Now of course he can have all the tailor-made shirts he wants. In clothes Steve still appears as impressive as ever and is among the best-dressed men in the world.

Not too much has been said about Steve's eating habits, yet he places tremendous importance on this especially when he was in heavy training for a contest or photo session.

Also, unlike many of today's top men in bodybuilding, Reeves was extremely interested in being in top health. He once said: "I want to be the healthiest man in the world as well as one of the best built." He took great care to keep his teeth strong and cavity-free, brushing them with baking soda and salt and also massaging the gums with the same solution to keep them hard.

His diet was largely liquid and consisted of mixtures that he would prepare in a blender of orange juice, raw eggs, bananas and honey. Additionally he would drink two quarts of goat's milk a day and a quantity of carrot juice. Figs too were a Reeves favorite.

For dinner at night he preferred steaks but for variety he would sometimes eat large quantities of fish.

The years roll by, the waves roll in from the ocean. We can't turn back the pages of the calendar to those Muscle Beach days when Steve strode the golden California sands, magnificent in his muscular glory, turning the ladies' eyes wherever he went. But we can hope that one day, perhaps when riding one of his prize-winning horses on his Oregon ranch, he makes a decision to get in tip-top shape just one more time. As one authority put it: "Steve's magic cast a twenty year spell," and I for one believe that he will continue to be tops in the minds of hundreds of thousands for a lot longer than that. I ask you: "Was there ever anyone like Steve Reeves?"

Steve Reeves was probably the most brilliant in Muscledom as far as intelligent application of weightlifting exercise was concerned. He never performed an exercise until he knew exactly not only what muscle was being worked, but what part of that specific muscle was being motivated and to what degree.

He performed high sets (5-8) and repetitions that also tended to be high (6-20) usually around 12. Above all he really "pushed" the repetitions until his muscles would contract no more.

Reeves was concerned with the development of muscular bulk, but only where he considered that muscle size was necessary for aesthetic harmony.

Although his shoulder (bi-acromial) clavicles were of normal width his rib-box, pelvic and knee structures were of average size. Perhaps varying on small. His wrists were of average size 7-1/2" at well over six feet in height.

Reeves didn't want to develop any added size on his waist or hips. He therefore performed as little heavy exercise as possible for these areas. He also believed that direct trapezius work in building that muscle would detract from the wide shoulder look he was so keen to preserve. (However he did, nevertheless, use spectacular trapezi, especially when viewed from behind.)

He hated "Tapered ends" arm so much in many modern bodybuilders. He therefore gave tremendous attention to his forearms and calves. His bodybuilder should make the excuse of not being able to build large calves until he has worked his own calves as hard as Steve did his. Many sets, nearly every day. Dumbbell wrist curls and regular calf raises.

Reeves knew that the full squat, for tall men, built too much muscle size on the upper thighs and buttocks. That he specialized on building his vastus internus and externus lower down the thigh at a point nearer the knee. He used the leg press and favoured the hack squat (and occasionally the front squat.)

Steve hated to think that he might be building a feminine chest appearance, low pectoralis, so emphasis was put on the incline presser rather than supine (flat) which built the lower pectoralis. The incline work built the upper chest nearer the neck. One of his favorites was parallel bar dips.

Lats were built with rowing exercises, on a long pulley and also by chinling. Biceps were built with his favourite, incline bench curl exercise. The incline curl was practiced most for his biceps, but he also did the barbell curl. Triceps were built with the military press and an original triceps exercise whereby a single dumbbell was held at arms length (one arm at a time) while lying face upwards on a flat bench, keeping the upper arm vertical, the elbow would be bent until the dumbbell hit but touched the opposite shoulder. He also liked the lat machine pressdowns.

Steve Reeves believed in owning a column-like neck and he gave it substantial work via human resistance. He worked it from all sides to keep it balanced. The thigh biceps were given heavy exercise with the high curl done lying face down on a bench. Steve believed that the development of this muscle reduced the size appearance of the buttocks and the added curve of the rear leg when seen from the side.

Many people thought that Steve was not strong. True he did not practice the conventional "Power lifts" but on the other hand he many people bodybuilders or weightlifters can incline curl two one hundred pound dumbbells, leg curl over one hundred pounds, lift a human adult above the head with one hand and perform a single arm chin up over 200 lbs bodyweight?

Although Reeves never specialized in strength feats he could never be termed weak. "I can be as strong as I want to be," he said.

This was true, but he knew that the balance of his body would suffer if he gave all his training to the development of strength.

Reeves trained with clockwork regularity, using the heaviest weights he could handle for moderately high reps. He would select lighter weights as his workout progressed and his muscles pumped, as he didn't like to recover fully between sets, but rather tire his muscles with constant bombardment. Steve was the first top bodybuilder to use weight training for aesthetic body shaping. He never performed any movement unless he thought it contributed to bettering his muscular symmetry.

Exercises of Steve Reeves-

1. PRESS BEHIND NECK.
2. HACK SQUAT (see pointed out at ten to two), heels closed
3. DIP ON PARALLEL BARS
4. CHIN BEHIND NECK.
5. BARBELL CURL.
6. TRICEPS Pressdown on lat machine.
7. INCLINE DUMBBELL CURL.

BARBELL CURL FOR BICEPS.



HACK SQUATS FOR LEGS.



PRESS BEHIND NECK FOR SHOULDERS.



INCLINE DUMBBELL CURL FOR ARMS.



CHIN BEHIND NECK ON BENCH.



PUSHDOWN ON LAT MACHINE FOR ARMS.



PARALLEL BARS DIPS FOR CHEST BACK AND ARMS.



PERSONAL.

BIRTHDATE - January 21, 1927.
 BIRTHPLACE - Glasgow, Montana.
 HEIGHT ----- 6 feet, 1 inch.
 WEIGHT ----- 214 pounds.
 CHEST ----- 51 1/2 inches.
 WAIST ----- 30 inches.
 ARMS ----- 18 1/2 inches.
 NECK ----- 18 inches.
 CALVES ----- 18 inches.
 THIGHS ----- 25 1/2 inches.

TITLES.

1945 - Mr. Pacific Coast.
 1946 - Mr. Pacific Coast.
 1946 - Mr. California.
 1947 - Mr. America.
 1948 - Mr. Universe (2nd).
 1948 - Mr. U.S.A. (2nd).
 1948 - Mr. World.
 1949 - Mr. U.S.A. (3rd).
 1950 - Mr. U.S.A.
 1950 - Mr. Universe.

MELESTONES.

1942 - Began lifting weights at 16
 1944 - Enlisted in the Army
 1946 - Honorably discharged
 1947 - Begins national radio broadcast - appears in nightclub act, rodeo and the stage
 1950 - Retires from physique competition
 1953 - Broadway debut in Kismet
 1954 - Wins Men West show
 1954 - Makes 1st movie "Athens"
 1955 - Physical director in gym
 1957 - Begins movie career with "Hercules"
 1963 - Wins Cosmos Lina Czarzanic becomes "Cosmos Reeves"

HERCULES II