

Steve Reeves – One of a Kind



Compiled for Ivor Milburn

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Steve Reeves – One of a Kind

Having a handsome visage and an outstanding physique, Mr America and Mr Universe Steve Reeves became best known to non bodybuilders through the medium of the Hercules muscle movies/videos and yet ironically, the film star Reeves was but a shell of his pre movie days, being ordered to slim down for the wide screen epics to “appeal” to a larger audience.



Early Life

Born January 21st 1926 in Glasgow Montana U.S.A. of parents Lester Dell and Golden Reeves, Steve’s father was killed when he was just 1 and a half years old. His first award in a lifetime of honours, and he probably received more awards in later years, than during his whole active bodybuilding career, was ‘The Healthiest Baby in Valley County Montana’. Even with today’s vast choice of physiques, Steve Reeves, because of a combination of facial as well as physical beauty and symmetry, had, the most universally envied development in modern times.

World famous *Muscle Magazine* photographer Russ Warner is quoted in Milton T. Moore’s superb book *Steve Reeves ‘One Of A Kind’* as saying “I don’t think there is one chance in 50 trillion, that the particular mix of hereditary genes that formed the product we see in Steve Reeves will ever occur in combination again. Steve was a very unusual bodybuilder. He had the overall beauty that no other bodybuilder has ever been able to achieve. I have had the occasion work with, photographically, most of the top bodybuilders in world, but when the good Lord made Steve Reeves, he threw the mould away.”

In spite of the passage of time - now some 50 years since he recorded his Mr America victory and despite all the changes that have taken place in bodybuilding's 'fashions', Reeves has remained the pinnacle of perfection to millions of fans, with an aesthetic physique many still attempt to emulate. Real beauty is as timeless as is good taste.

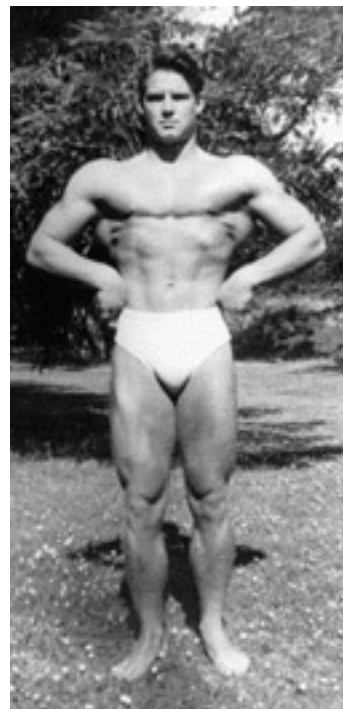
Steve commenced bodybuilding at about 15 years of age, being the first to admit he had a good foundation and was an 'easy gainer'. After a year or so, he had a potentially powerful physique. His first instruction was at Ed Yarricks gym in Oakland, California where he was encouraged to enter (and won), all local contests. His handsome features, healthy flop of hair and general overall vitality were all enormous assets for any muscle star and future film idol. A balanced and harmonious development was always his aim.



Posing at 16 years old.



Steve at 17 years old



The physique at 17 years old.

Army Days

Drafted into the U.S. Army from 1944 to 1946 during which time he spent 19 months in the Far East (Philippines and Page 17 Japan) being involved in the Battle of Balete Pass, and witnessing the many horrors of warfare, later contracting malaria. Steve all the time managed to obtain some training, albeit often with Tarzan like rope climbing, general free exercises, such as push-ups or dips, and tension exercises. Later he designed his own weights and basic pulley apparatus.

Indeed there is a story that goes that he ended up with just 100 pounds of home made weights and managed almost to maintain his amazing physique with just that and hard training.

Bodybuilding and Contests

On leaving the 125th Infantry in the Philippines and the service he resumed training at Yarricks Gym, making rapid progress. His first major contest was to enter and win the Mr. Pacific Coast in 1946.

In 1947 Steve won the Mr America contest in Chicago on June 29th, at just 21years old, beating, amongst others, the popular Alan Stephen and Eric Pederson, who at just 18 won the Most Muscular division. Steve with his harmonious physique, went on to greater glories.



Mr. Pacific Coast, 1946.



Mr. America – Chicago, 1947.

Already highly popular, after giving many exhibitions throughout the U.S.A Steve again competed in the Mr. America in 1948, this time being closely beaten by the great Clancy Ross, another man with a great balanced body. Steve came second and Alan Stephen made third place.



Steve in 1947, after winning the Mr. America contest.

With his fame preceding him Reeves came over to London in 1948 (complete with 'Zoot suit' and purple wide shoulder style jacket.) On the 23rd August he competed for the first time in Europe, in the now classic battle between Reeves and the late John C. Grimek. The battle of giants, now physical culture history, saw Grimek nearly 40 years old,

winning the first NABBA Mr. Universe title (there had been an earlier AAU Universe) and with Steve still on his way up in the world of bodybuilding.

Encouraged by Oscar Heidenstam, who recognised the potential Steve Reeves' classic lines, they travelled across the Channel to France. Just three days later, on 26th August in

Cannes Steve won the titles of *Le Plus Bel Athlete Du Monde* and Mr World from the *Federation Francaise De Culture*.

1949 saw Steve, along with a who's who of American bodybuilders, trying again for the Mr. USA crown. Grimek, the winner and Clancy Ross who took second place beat



Le Plus Bel Athlete du Monde, Cannes, 1948.

him. Reeves came third and genial George Eiferman, of huge pectoral fame, came forth. This was the age of huge bulk. Physiques are as ever influenced greatly by judging requirements and of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

To the delight of his European fans, in 1950, Steve decided on an all out attempt at the NABBA Mr. Universe title, competing against a host of top stars, including Britain's own Reg Park. Reg later himself a triple winner, said, it all when he remarked on Reeves "The man had everything, the physique of the century".

On 24th June at the Scala Theatre, Steve Reeves won the Mr. Universe title, and the unique Sandow statuette, later copied and muscled up for the Olympia winners. Reg Park came second, and Muscle Mob third place went to the late Juan Ferrero, another aesthetic physique.



Mr. Universe, 1950.

Steve Reeves' Physique

Steve's measurements, officially recorded at the event, something no longer followed, were, weight 214 lbs, neck 18 inches, chest expanded 52 inches, arm 18", forearm 14", wrist 7 and quarter inches, calf 18", thigh 26 inches and height 6 ft 1 inch.

Steve was the first to admit that he had a good foundation, and right from the start was an easy gainer. Even early photos of him at fifteen display a good physique, with obvious potential.

Always impressive, Reeves shoulders, measured with callipers, reached 23 and half inches. (The only man I have seen with wider shoulders was the late Rueben Martin).

At times Reeves gained or lost muscle tissue almost at will, yet always retaining a harmonious and balanced physique. Never did one feature lag behind or out shine another. In his book (Steve Reeves, Building the Classic Physique the Natural Way) Steve set out his ideas of ideal physical proportions.

Having had the pleasure of his company, in recent years at the Oscar Foundation Awards and the NABBA 50th Muscle Mob anniversary. I can vouch

he had lost none of his charm or physical charisma.

History records Steve Reeves won the Mr America, and all of five decades later, still remained one, if not the, most admired of all physique stars to grace the posing dais. Reeves was guest of honour at the 1997 Mr America contest, sponsored by Disney.



Steve Reeves and Reg Parks lift a showgirl at 1950 Mr. Universe contest.

Early Movies

In his day Reeves was one of the most popular stars in the world. He was one of the few athletes to successfully cross over into a career in the movies ... yet Steve Reeves is all but forgotten by most moviegoers today. He and his movies are rarely mentioned even as footnotes in movie reference works.

Yet Steve is still legendary in the world of bodybuilding and to a dedicated band of aficionados to whom he will always be the one and only Hercules of the screen.

Jailbait

Steve Reeves appeared in Ed Wood's *Jailbait* for his first film outing. *Jailbait* (1954) finds Steve Reeves playing cops and robbers with Dolores Fuller and Lyle Talbot. In fact, since so many of Reeves' movies are dubbed, *Jailbait* is one of the few opportunities to actually hear the voice of the future *Hercules* star. Incidentally, Reeves had only good things to say about his first film director, Ed Wood: "It was a pleasure to work with a director like Ed Wood. He was patient and understood how to make new and inexperienced actors feel at ease and get the best performance out of them." (from *Nightmare of Ecstasy* by Rudolph Grey, 1992, p. 50)

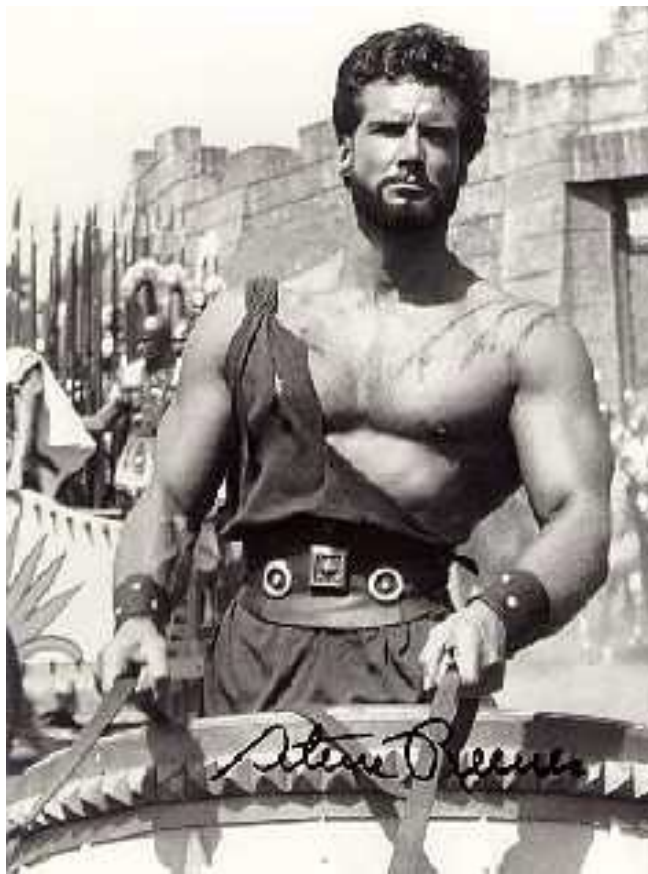


Athena

Reeves' second film, the 1954 MGM musical *Athena*, was a box-office disappointment, and today the film is mostly forgotten. Starring in *Athena* were Debbie Reynolds, Linda Christian, and Jane Powell. Also look for Mr. America 1954 Dick DuBois in the film, billed as Richard Sabre.

Hercules

Some time after this, the daughter of Italian director Pietro Francisci saw *Athena* and suggested to her father that Steve might be a good choice for the title role in his Franco-Italian production of *Hercules*, which Francisci had had trouble casting. Then, Francisci saw Steve. His spectacular, beautifully proportioned physique and strong, classically handsome facial features (enhanced by a beard) perfectly suited the mythic qualities of Hercules. *Hercules*, released in 1959, was an enormous worldwide success, and Steve was speedily cast into several other "sword and sandal"



Hercules

epics. Producers who couldn't get the real thing scoured gyms and bodybuilding contests for other musclemen to do the films that Steve turned down, but none of them achieved anything like his popularity.

Hercules Unchained

Given the wild success of the original *Hercules*, Levine decided to cash in again with the sequel, *Hercules Unchained*. In a feat which is rare in films, the sequel is actually more entertaining than the original.



Hercules Unchained

Later Movies

After almost ten years, the sword and sandal movies vanished almost overnight when an Italian-made western starring Clint Eastwood (in a role that Steve had turned down) called *A Fistful of Dollars* became a hit, and the same producers who had been grinding out costume epics now switched to "spaghetti westerns." Steve made just one of these, and then retired from the screen.

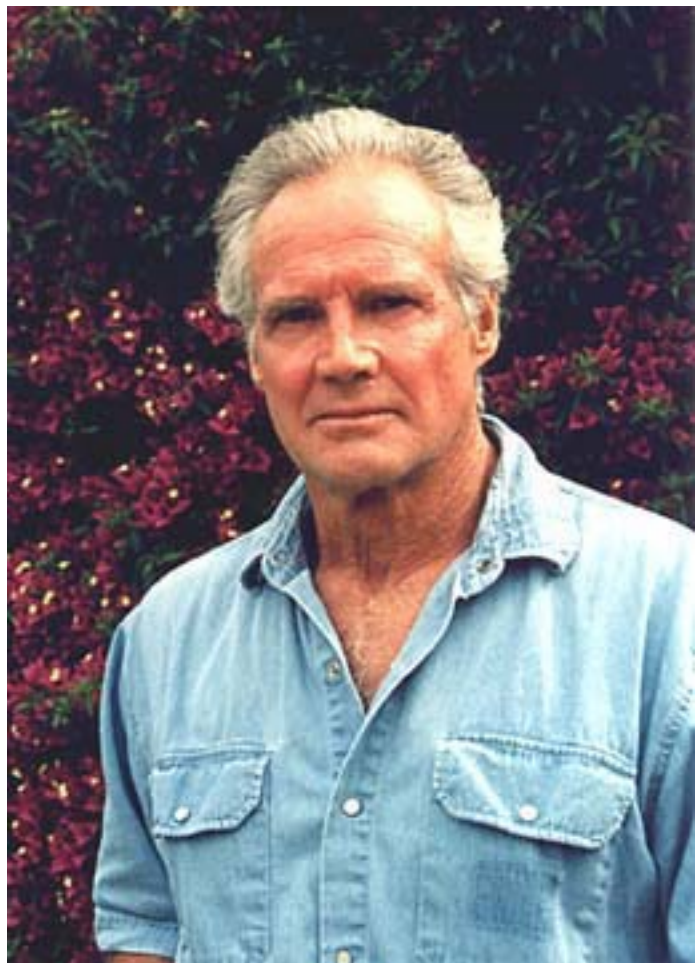
Today, the simplistic plots, dubbed dialogue, and crudely contrived effects of many of Steve's movies seem hokey, but they can also great fun compared to the current crop of overblown, multimillion dollar "spectaculars," with their nonstop explosions, crashemup car chases, and overpriced stars. Many famous actors and bodybuilders, among them Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, credit Steve as being an inspiration to them. Both Steve Reeves and his films deserve to be better remembered for their unique contributions to the screen and sports worlds.

Later Life

Steve Reeves moved to southern California where he raised horses. He was an outspoken critic of the use of drugs in bodybuilding.

On 1st May 2000, the legendary Steve Reeves died in hospital in California. He was 74 years of age and most believed he would live forever; such is the stuff of heroes.

Taken from short biography written by David Gentle, May 2000.



Steve in 1996

Vital Statistics

Born - January 21, 1926
Birthplace - Glasgow, Montana
Height - 6'1"
Weight - 215
Hair - Brown
Eyes - Blue
Neck - 18 1/4"
Chest - 52"
Waist - 29"
Hips - 38"
Biceps - 18 1/4"
Forearm - 14 3/4"
Wrist - 7 1/4"
Thighs - 26"
Calf - 18 1/4"
Died - May 1, 2000, California

Bodybuilding Awards

1946 - Mr. Pacific Coast
1947 - Mr. Western America
1947 - Mr. America (AAU)
1948 - Mr. World
1950 - Mr. Universe (NABBA)



Mr. World, 1948

Movies

A Long Ride From Hell (1970)
Sandokan the Great (1965)
The Slave (1963)
Duel of the Titans (1963)
The Last Glory of Troy (1962)
The Avenger (1962)
The Trojan Horse (1962)
Morgan the Pirate (1961)
The Avenger (1961)
Thief of Baghdad (1961)
The White Warrior (1961)
Goliath and The Barbarians (1960)
Hercules Unchained (1960)
The Giant of Marathon (1960)
The Last Days of Pompeii (1960)
Hercules (1959)
Athena (1954)
Jail Bait (1954)
Pirates of the Seven Seas
Tee Vee Treasures - V. 3



Athena, 1954

Motion Picture Awards

- 1959 Most Popular Foreign Actor Award, Riccione, Italy
- 1959 Top Box Office Star by Box Office, (for *Hercule*, undisputed box-office champion of the year)
- 1960 Golden Wing Award, by Italian Cinema for being the number one box office champion in the world, Chianciano Terme
- 1963 Best Actor in Action Films by the Italian Cinema
- 1964 Most Popular Actor in Historic, Biblical and Mythological Films
- 1994 Silver Boot Award, by The Knoxville Western Film Caravan
- 1994 Golden Halo Eagle Award, for Contributions to the Entertainment Industry and the Performing Arts, Hollywood, CA

Fitness Awards

- 1973 Dan Lurie Award, for World's Greatest Bodybuilder, New York, N.Y.
- 1977 World's Greatest Bodybuilder of All Time, for Induction into the Physical Fitness Hall of Fame, New York
- 1977 Gold Sandow Trophy, for The World's Classic Physique, Paris, France
- 1977 World's Most Popular Bodybuilder, Madrid, Spain
- 1978 Outstanding Contributions to Physical Fitness and Sports, by the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports, New York, N.Y.
- 1981 Hall of Fame, by Bodybuilder's Guild-Grand Prix, Long Beach, CA
- 1981 Annual Steve Reeves Award by The Downtown Athletic Club of N.Y.C., New York, N.Y.
- 1984 Bodybuilding Award of Excellence, by Hall of Fame, Long Beach, CA
- 1988 Greatest and Most Popular Physique Champion of All Time, by the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen, New York, N.Y.
- 1989 Pioneer of Fitness, by the Association of Physical Fitness Centers

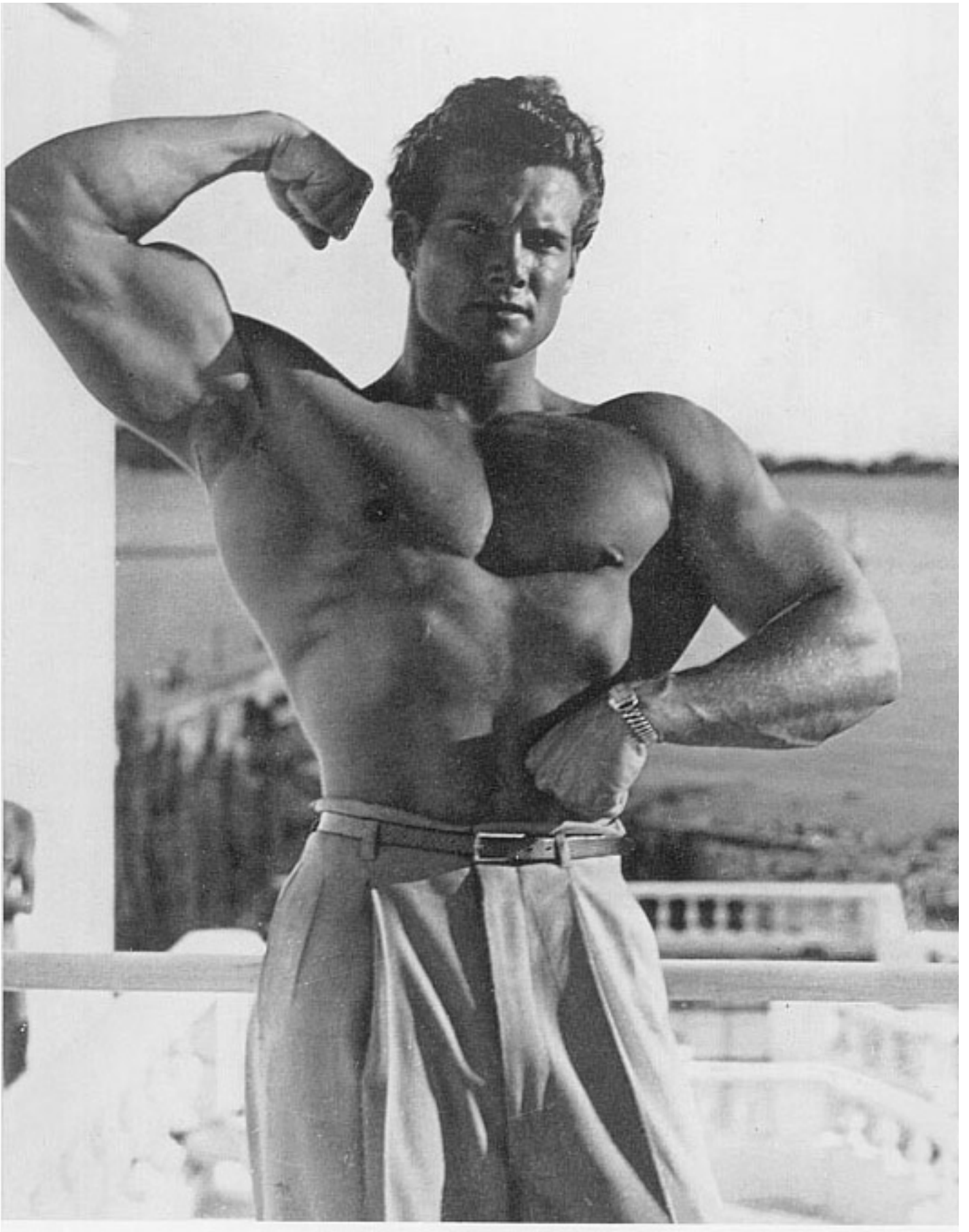
- 1991 Outstanding Lifetime Achievement and Contributions to the Sport of Bodybuilding, by the Los Angeles Club
- 1992 Pioneer of Bodybuilding, by The Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness Awards, Redondo Beach, CA
- 1993 Honorary President of Les Papy's der Muscle, for leadership in Bodybuilding and Fitness, France
- 1993 Movie Legend of the Past, by the Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness Awards, Redondo Beach, CA
- 1994 Oscar Heidenstam Award, for achievements, sportsmanship, integrity and ambassadorship, by NABBA, London, England
- 1994 Pioneer of Bodybuilding and Fitness Award, by Gold's Gym, Oakland, CA
- 1994 Movie Action Hero Award, by The Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness, Redondo Beach, CA
- 1994 Lifetime Achievement Award, by The Academy of Bodybuilding and Fitness, Redondo Beach, CA
- 1996 Mr. America Lifetime Award, by AAU, Falls Church, VA
- 1998 Icon Award, for Contributions to the Sport of Bodybuilding, by North Carolina Athletic Union, Burlington, NC

Career Milestones

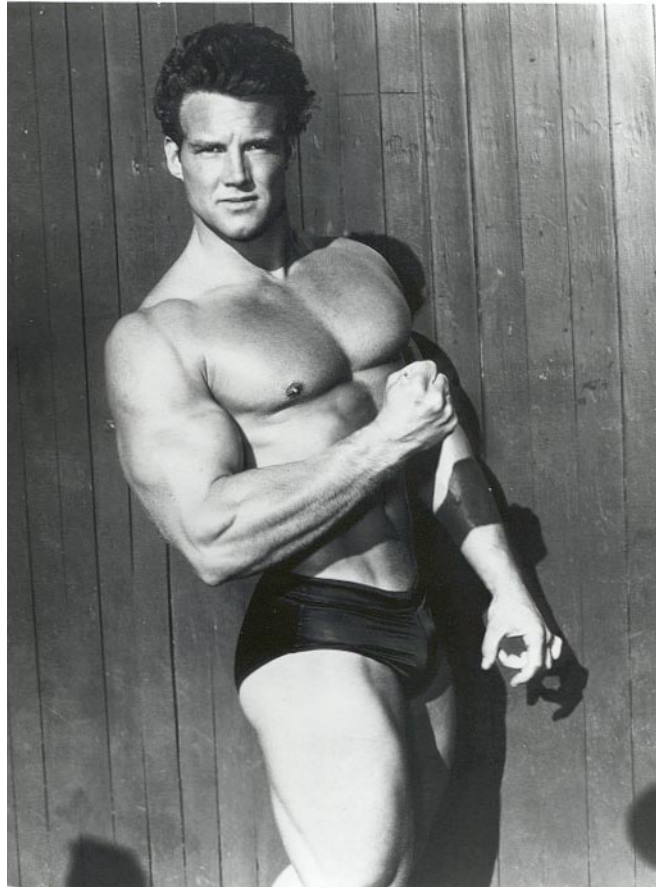
- 1942 Begins lifting weights at age 16
- 1944 Graduates from high school and enlists in the U.S. Army
- 1946 Honorably discharged from the U.S. Army
- 1947 Begins national radio broadcast, appears in nightclub acts, rodeos, and stage
- 1950 Retires from competitive bodybuilding
- 1953 Debuts on Broadway in *Kismet*
- 1954 Appears in first movie *Jail Bait*. Also appears in musical film *Athena* with Debbie Reynolds and Jane Powell.
- 1957 Stars in *Hercules* film in Europe. The first of 16 films Steve makes in Europe.
- 1959 *Hercules* first released in the U.S. Steve is voted the biggest box office star in the world.
- 1967 Becomes the highest paid actor in Europe along with Sophia Loren.
- 1968 Completes his last film, *A Long Ride from Hell*
- 1977 Inducted into the Physical Fitness Hall of Fame
- 1982 Authors book *Powerwalking*

Bodybuilding Photos





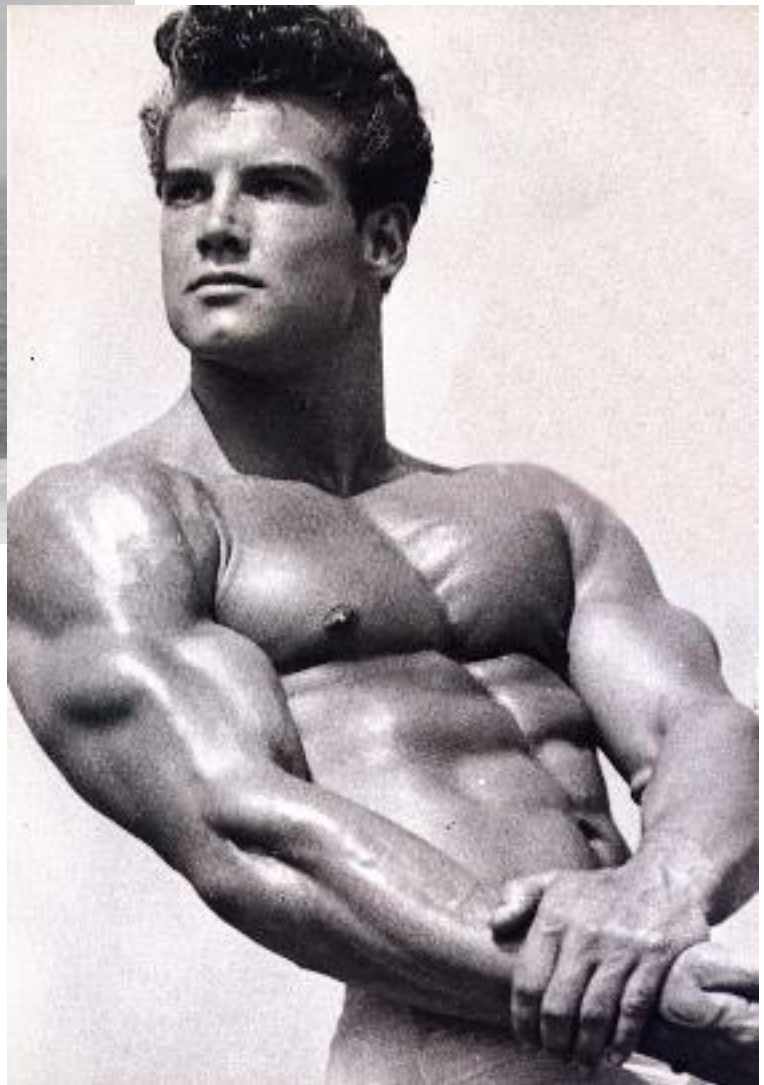
Steve Reeves – One of a Kind





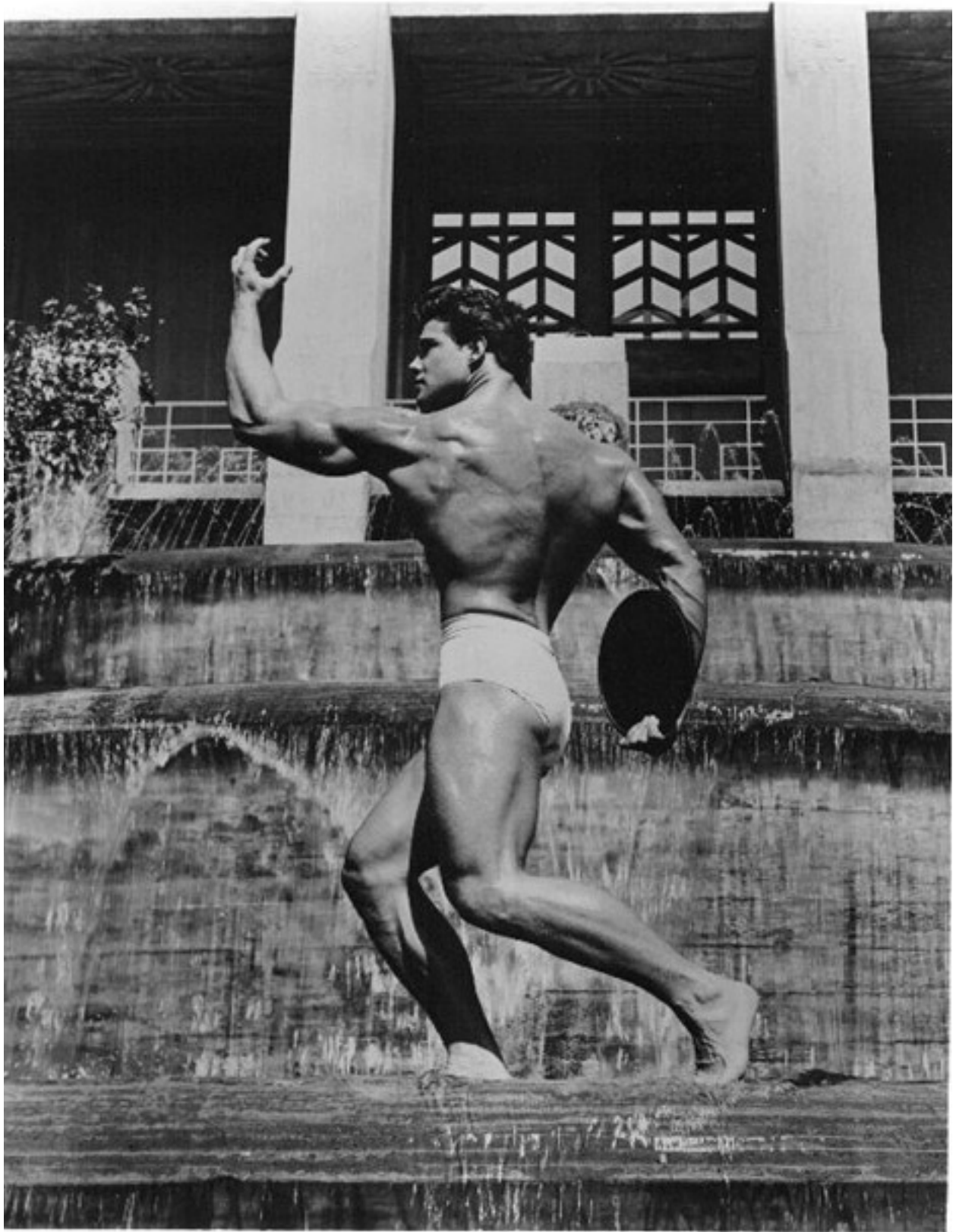


Steve Reeves – One of a Kind



Movie Photos





Steve Reeves – One of a Kind



Goliath and the Barbarians



Giants of Marathon



Steve with George Burns and Gracie Allen



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