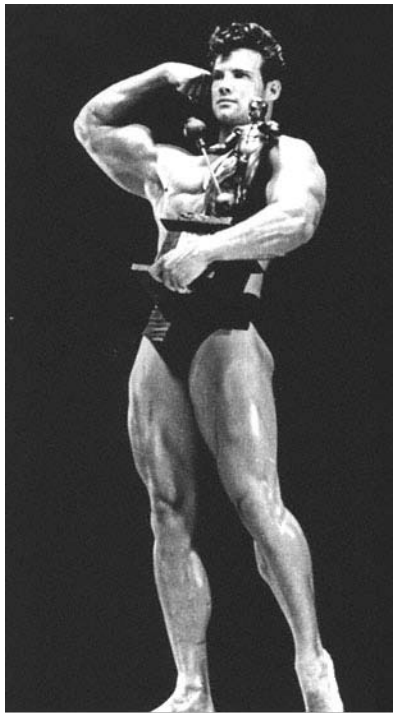


Special Thanks to Dennis Weis who granted permission to post this article. More excellent material can be found on his website, www.dennisbweis.com

Steve Reeves Secrets of a Mr. America Physique

By

Dennis B. Weis “The Yukon Hercules”



Yes... all bodybuilding enthusiasts younger than fifty years of age... there was a bodybuilding superstar before Arnold. The immortal Steve Reeves. Reeves' had the rugged handsome good looks, golden tan and magnificent incomparable physique of classic lines and proportions that were and continue to be appreciated not only by bodybuilders but the average man or women, and that is a rarity, too! Reeves impact muscle aesthetics, of impressive shape and symmetry, set a standard that still exists today. Broad champion shoulders, colossal wide back, tidy etched waist, trim hips, formidable thighs and diamond shaped calves.

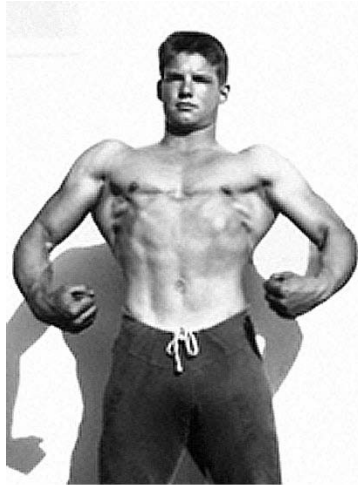
It is interesting to note that many Bodybuilding historians point to the mid 20th Century emergence of Steve Reeves on to our sport scene as the beginning evolution of the modern pure Bodybuilding period. This being due to his training methods and innovative techniques which conflicted with the hardcore strongman period that preceded Reeves. At the Reeves neo-classical physique schism crossroads, old world weightlifting and modern specialized Bodybuilding took off on different directional functional paths.

Although Reeves did have good genetics, genes alone did not get him to the top. Reeves was defeated a number of times in physique contests and whatever success he achieved he did so through persistence and hard work. As a matter of fact hard work is synonymous with Steve Reeves whether his business life, movie career, personal life, or bodybuilding, Steve Reeves committed himself completely and totally giving 100% effort.

Reeves worked hard his entire life, even as a youngster. As a young boy growing up in Oakland, California Steve had a newspaper route. In his later years Steve credited his superb leg development, especially his calves, to peddling a bicycle (with only his toes on the pedals and his buttocks firmly on the seat) daily up and down hills. No one can dispute the fact Reeves had some of the best calves in bodybuilding and even by today's standards they are impressive.

Steve's early bodybuilding workouts were at Ed Yarick's, Gym in Oakland California. Ed took a real liking to the young Reeves and put him on a routine and worked with him for a couple of years. During that time Reeves made steady progress. He experimented with various angles and methods during his career. Many articles have been written concerning his workouts and some seem to contradict one another when in reality they are in fact accurate. They were however, written at different times during Reeves training.

It has been said by many who knew and worked out with Reeves that he could change his physique dramatically in only a few short weeks time. Most credit this to the fact Steve put forth all the effort he had in each and every workout. His workouts lasted from two to four hours and he took very little rest during his sessions. Steve's workout pace consisted of moving from one movement to another and he didn't waste anytime between sets or exercises.



Steve at age 16
Photo taken at Yarick's Gym

Each exercise would be repeated until he couldn't do another rep. Each workout he would increase the poundage, reps, sets or exercises he did. He knew and used the progressive system and one way or another forced progress each workout. This is one reason his workouts would take up to four hours in length. As the body becomes accustomed to a particular load, you must increase the resistance placed on the muscles in order to make them grow. Steve knew this and each workout was an all out attack on forcing his muscles to do more than the previous workout.

Reeves was the lynch pin for the evolution of pure isolated bodybuilding functionality and had several movements he preferred and liked such as Incline Dumbbell Curls, Hack Squats off a platform table, Incline Dumbbell Presses,

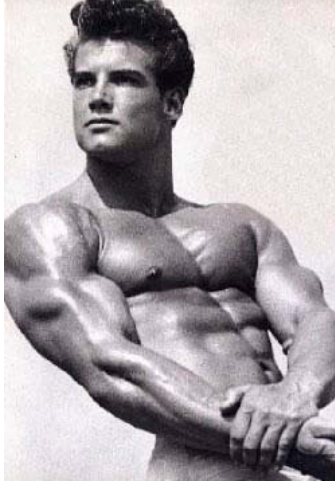
Donkey Calf Raises, Bent- Over Low Pulley Long Cable Lat Pulls. Although Steve used a great amount of variety in his workouts, these movements are well known as being his favorites and he incorporated most of them in each workout.



Joe Weider and Steve Reeves

Reeves usually started a movement with a weight that was near his maximum and with each set he would reduce the weight but continued to perform as many repetitions as possible. He would sometimes perform straight sets while at other times he would perform what we now call tension super-sets (using two movements one immediately following another), barbell curls followed immediately by incline dumbbell curls for example. Other times he would rotate movements, one for his back then one for his chest.

Steve knew the principle behind muscular growth and he also knew how quickly the body and muscles adapt to a workload. Steve was constantly changing, modifying, and adding to his workouts. Here's some examples.



While working out at the old York Barbell Club in York, Pennsylvania, in preparation for the 1950 Mr. Universe in London, England, Steve used a special “yoke” apparatus for his calves that he favored. The unique “yoke” or harness rested on top of an old parallel bar set-up. Steve then loaded plates on either end and then draped the “yoke” harness webbing straps over his shoulders and then assumed the position for Standing Heel Raises.

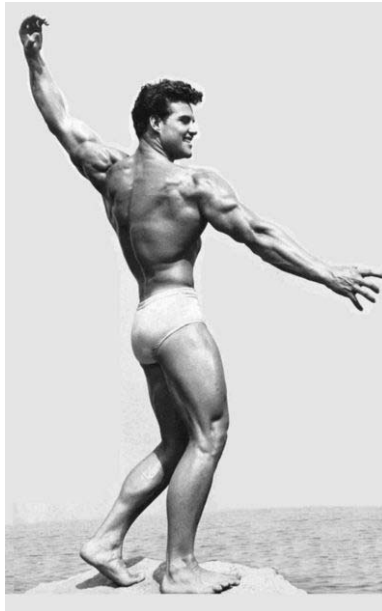
He would also perform Donkey Heel Raises and it would not be unusual to see two people on his back as he did them. Steve would rise as high on his tip toes as he could and would stretch all the way down on each rep. There were no half reps or jerking and bouncing just full contraction and extension each rep.

But more than that, Steve punctuated his calf training by pointing out that you only get a full contraction of the calf muscle if you roll forward, putting your weight right onto your big toe---which feels as if you're turning the movement inward rather than going straight forward. The natural tendency doing calf raises is to roll outward onto the other four toes, turning your ankle as you do the movement. But when you do calf raises like this you can't totally peak the calf muscle, which means you end up losing training intensity.

You can compare peaking the calf muscle to getting a full peak contraction of the biceps. You can contract your upper arm as hard as you want, but unless

you supinate your hand (twist your wrist, bringing your little finger around toward the centerline of your body) you won't feel a full peak contraction of the biceps.

Having superior calf development was not something Steve had due to genetics alone; he worked them hard and heavy. Admittedly calf training was one of Steve's favorites. The diamond shape calves he had may have been a genetic gift but the size they obtained was brought about by pure hard work and sweat. I have been told that he used backward running as a further means to stimulate development on his calf muscles.



Reeves' was also known for his arm development. His favorite biceps movement was the Incline Dumbbell Curl. He would use a bench set at approximately a 45 degree angle and would extend his body straight out. From this position he would let his arms drop to his sides. As he curled his arms up, he would keep the upper arm stationary and would not allow it to move during the movement. He also lowered the dumbbells almost twice as slow as he would raise them. Reeves believed in and utilized the negative part of a movement in almost all of his exercises.

For a twist while performing Incline Dumbbell Curls, Reeves would start with heavy dumbbells resting on his knees. They would be heavy enough that he could not curl them without some assistance in getting them up. To get them up he would use his knees to get them up and then he would lower them as slow as possible resisting all the way. Once down he would repeat the movement again until he could no longer hold the weight up.

Reeves popularized the Incline Dumbbell Press (120+ pound Dumbbells were not uncommon for him to use), he didn't invent it. Back in Steve's day most bodybuilders were performing the Flat Bench Press. A few did the Incline Barbell Press and fewer if any incorporated the Incline Dumbbell Press into their workouts. Until that is, Steve Reeves came along. Steve had a very unique square pec development and the upper part was particularly thick. Everyone tried to duplicate the pec's of Steve Reeves and that meant doing incline work. Ask him what he did for his chest and he would, without hesitation say, "the Incline Dumbbell and Barbell Press."



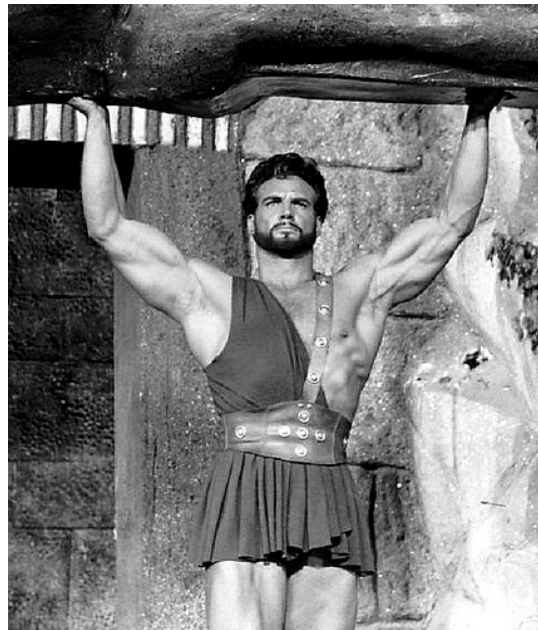
Starting with the maximum poundage he could use for ten reps he would press the dumbbells up with a forceful thrust and lower them slowly under full control. Once he completed ten reps he would pick up a slightly lighter pair of dumbbells and again force them up lowering them in a slow controlled motion. He continued to lower the poundage he used on each set while still trying to pump out ten reps in strict form. Even with heavy weight Reeves kept perfect form and constantly fought the weight on the negative part of the movement.

Hack Squats performed the Reeves way were unique compared to how others were doing them. When Steve was training at the old York Barbell Club in his bid for the 1950 Mr. Universe he used part of the old Milo hip lifting wooden platform plus a fabricated cold rolled steel T-Bar. The hip lifting platform had a hole in the middle of it and the "T" end of the bar extended through the hole. Plates were loaded or anchored on the bottom part of the "T" bar underneath the platform. While standing atop the platform Reeves would squat down with his hands behind his back and take a strong knuckles forward grip on the "T" (holding it tightly against the underside of his buttocks) and then would straighten his legs up to almost near lock-out but not quite. Once in the up position he would lower himself and repeat the movement for about fifteen reps. Doing the reps in non-lockout fashion would keep tension on his thighs the entire time.

An additional frontal thigh movement Steve relied heavily on for mass was the Barbell Front Squat...which was his answer to the buttocks building and supposed hip widening full Barbell Back Squat. With the barbell cradled in front of his neck across the shoulders (starting press position)...elbows high Steve's non-bending forward torso when squatting achieved maximum quadriceps muscle stretching and contractile force.

Another movement Reeves' made generous use of was Low Pulley Long Cable Rowing. Not performed as most people today perform it in a sitting position however. Steve performed the movement from a bent over "crouched" position.

He would bend his knees and lower his torso to about a forty-five degree angle. From this starting position he would pull the bar into his lower chest using only the lats. As he returned to the starting position he would resist with his lats until his arms were almost completely extended. Performed in this manner, the movement feels very awkward and requires practice to get it down. Once able to execute it properly, it provides a feel unlike any other lat movement.



Reeves also liked the Barbell Press and the Dumbbell Press for his shoulders. Often he would alternate one set of Barbell Press's and one set of Dumbbell Press's. Back and forth he would go thrusting the weights up with a strong forceful movement and lowering them slowly. While performing pressing movements Reeves would extend his arms all the way and lockout his elbows on each rep, something most bodybuilders don't do today.

As mentioned earlier, Reeves' altered his training methods and routines quite often. Two of his favorites were full body three days a week and also a split routine consisting of movements for the Chest, Arms, Shoulders on Monday – Wednesday – Friday and Back, Abs, Legs on Tuesday – Thursday – Saturday,

as well as variations of those. Already noted were his marathon two to four hour workouts but he also would train full body workouts employing 1-2 sets per movement using mainly multi-jointed exercises to failure three times a week, training briefly, infrequently and intensely to facilitate progress in his bodybuilding endeavor. When he worked at his training he really worked at it. At other times, he just worked at it.

The magnitude of Steve Reeves way of training can be summed up by saying he trained intensely using moderate to heavy weight for relative high reps (10 -15 range). He was persistent and dedicated yet he would take extended layoffs from time to time. He knew just how far to push his muscles to make them grow. It was a very rare incident if Steve talked during his workouts. He would do all his clowning and talking after he showered but during workouts he kept completely focused. Reeves rarely trained alone, usually had a training partner with him. One of his favorites was his long time friend George Eiferman. They were not only training partners but entered various contests, traveled and socialized together. Over the years they formed a real bond.

Incidentally...many of the hardcore lifters at York considered Steve's training approach and exercises to be sissified at that time. In fact someone at the gym questioned whether Steve was really strong or not. Upon hearing that comment Steve was quoted as saying **“I can be as strong as I want to be. Follow me.”** Without another word he loaded a 7 foot Olympic bar to approximately 400 pounds. Then he reached down and with his arms fully extended to span more than six feet, gripped the lip of the 45 pound plates with only his fingers and preceded to dead-lift the enormous poundage. This demonstration of the fingertip or Snatch-grip dead-lifting quieted his doubter's big time.

Back in 1986 the late 'Monarch of Muscledom', John C. Grimek paid me a surprise visit here in Ketchikan, Alaska and during a conversation we were

having about Steve Reeves he confirmed the Snatch-grip dead-lift story as he had seen it first hand. I have a photo of Steve doing the lift on page 24 of my eReport: 'Massive Muscle Pumping' (www.dennisbweis.com). Grimek also went onto say that Steve could as an impromptu feat of strength clean a 225 pound barbell from the floor while kneeling. I know just how difficult an accomplishment it is because I have in years past, never impromptu but with lots and lots of practice, emulated Steve's feat and beyond with 250 pounds.



As all bodybuilders do, measurements go up and down depending on the season and stage of training one is in. Steve Reeves was no different; he considered himself to be in his peak shape and condition when his measurements were as follows.

- Height - 6'1"
- Weight - 215
- 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"

In his own words here is what Steve had to say with regard to building the classic physique the natural way.

Quotable Quote by Steve Reeves

“Today, everything about the top bodybuilding champions is oversized; they have lost the whole purpose of bodybuilding which is to create a harmonious whole, not to exaggerate the development of one part or parts, of the body. A body has hands, legs, feet, arms and a head. If a man’s arms appear bigger than his head, his body is thrown out of proportion.”

“Today’s bodybuilders are carrying too much muscle for their frames, which distorts and obscures the natural lines of the body. Why these men would aspire to deform themselves at such tremendous sacrifice is incomprehensible. This has been indulged in to such an extreme that I’m thinking of sanctioning a special *Steve Reeves Trophy* to be presented at shows to the man whom I think has the most classical proportionate, tastefully developed physique. The man who doesn’t actually win the contest might win my trophy, which in the long run might be more prestigious.”

“I don’t believe in bodybuilders using steroids. If a man doesn’t have enough male hormones in his system to create, a nice hard, muscular body, he should take up ping pong.”

“I’m often asked how I would compare myself with Arnold Schwarzenegger. I think Arnold Schwarzenegger is in great shape. But if there were two buttons, and I could push one button and look like Steve Reeves did in Hercules, and push another button and look like Arnold Schwarzenegger did in Conan, I’d push the Steve Reeves button.”



Steve's quote regarding anabolic steroids is interesting because they have been for decades the key to contemporary size but back in the '50s, before anabolic steroids were used, Steve evidently was into Vitamin B-12 shots as a means to up the muscle gain factor in his dynamic physique.

A true physique champion and not just a paper tiger or movie star, Steve captured innumerable bodybuilding titles.

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

Steve Reeves was one of the first, if not the first, real bodybuilders to become a world renowned movie star. His films inspired millions across the entire planet...in their many language versions... to take up some version of muscle training. Sound familiar? And you thought Arnold was the first.

The following is a list of some films and television programs Steve, appeared in.

FILMS

A Long Ride from Hell (1968)
The Pirates of the Seven Seas (1964) Also known as Sandokan the Pirate, this film is a sequel to Sandokan the Great
Sandokan the Great (1964) with Rik Battaglia
The Slave (1963) (aka The Son of Spartacus)
The Shortest Day (1963)
The Trojan Horse (1962)
The Avenger (1962)
Morgan the Pirate (1961)
Duel of the Titans (1961) with Gordon Scott
The Last Days of Pompeii (1960)
The Thief of Baghdad (1960)
Giant of Marathon (1959)
Goliath and the Barbarians (1959)
The White Warrior (1959)
Hercules Unchained (1958)
Hercules (1957) with Sylva Koscina
Athena (1954) with Debbie Reynolds, Jane Powell, and Linda Christian
Jail Bait (1954) with Ed Wood regular Dolores Fuller and Lyle Talbott

TELEVISION

The George Burns and Gracie Allen Show (1952)
The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet (1953)
Love that Bob with Bob Cummings
The Ralph Edwards Show (1954) The late, great Ed Wood was watching this show when he first saw Steve Reeves
Topper (1953) with Anne Jeffreys and Leo G. Carroll. Steve Reeves' guest shot garnered the most fan mail of any Topper show, which ran from 1952-1955.

Steve appeared on Broadway, on the legitimate stage, in the 1955 comedy musical called...THE VAMP starring Carol Channing. playing the role of a comic foil 'Samson'. During this time he trained at the immortal strongman Sig Klein's Gym on Broadway...while seeking ways to further his professional acting career. And guesting on various television shows.

Cecil B. Demille considered Steve for the role of Samson in the famous movie Samson and Delilah which went to Victor Mature. He was close personal friends with Mario Lanza .

Lastly...he was the one considered for the Sergio Leone movie A Fist Full Of Dollars which started the Italian spaghetti western cycle of films and made Clint Eastward a major star. Steve turned this down...because he felt it too violent. He did seem to regret it. Additionally...George Pal considered him for the role of pulp character Doc Savage for his return to the screen out of retirement. Reeves reportedly turned down \$100,000 for the role of James Bond in "Dr. No" (1962). Reeves produced and starred in his last movie, a western called "A Long Ride from Hell" in 1967.



Steve Reeves was not only one of the worlds most popular bodybuilders but perhaps the best know and most widely accepted Hercules of the silver screen. Many famous actors and bodybuilders, among them Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone, credit Steve as being a continuous inspiration to them.

Steve Reeves was also an accomplished author. In 1982, Reeves published a best-selling book, *Powerwalking*, in which he encouraged runners to slow down and save their knees, ankles, and hip joints. Instead, he advocated a form of fast walking using ankle and wrist weights as a safer and equally effective form of aerobic exercise. He was in many ways a pioneer in the field of exercise walking, and in the years since the publication of his book *Powerwalking* millions

of people have switched from running to walking. And in 1995 he published *Building the Classic Physique--the Natural Way*.

BONUS! – A Steve Reeves Favorite Drink

Blend the following ingredients until smooth. Makes one serving.

12 oz. Fresh Squeezed Orange Juice

2 Tablespoons of Wheat Germ

2 Tablespoons Bee Pollen

2 Tablespoons Knox Gelatin Mix

2 Tablespoons Raw Honey

1 Medium Ripe Banana

Steve Reeves was born in Glasgow Montana January 21, 1926 and passed away on May 1, 2000 at the young age of 74. Even today Reeves had what can be considered as perfect and socially accepted proportions. His rugged features, brown hair and blue eyes left no doubt he was a movie star and his physique left no doubt he was Hercules.

Oh one final irony...there may not have been a MuscleMag International in existence for close to 35 years of publishing had it not been for the awesome inspiring classical physique of Steve Reeves...since the Steve Reeves persona may have been the main influence of MuscleMag publisher and executive editor Robert Kennedy in his personal training life.

Thank you Steve...the iron game has been made richer by your existence. And may your memory be honored for as long as men and women pump iron in quest of the perfectly proportioned strong attractive physical structure!"

Dennis B. Weis is a Ketchikan, Alaska based power-bodybuilder. He is the co-author of 3 critically acclaimed books; ***Mass! Raw Muscle, Anabolic Muscle Mass*** and the exclusive author of **21 Master Data E-Reports** (read about them at: www.dennisbweis.com).

He is also a frequent hard-hitting uncompromising freelance consultant to many of the mainstream bodybuilding magazines published worldwide.

Website: www.dennisbweis.com

E-mail: yukonherc@kpunet.net