

# US

DECEMBER 12, 1978/60¢

# SUPERMAN

**A sexy new  
star takes off  
in the most  
expensive  
movie ever—  
this time he  
gets the girl**

**Jackie, Farrah,  
Kate and Cheryl:  
How TV's Angels  
live with their men**

**Where Ann Landers  
goes for advice**

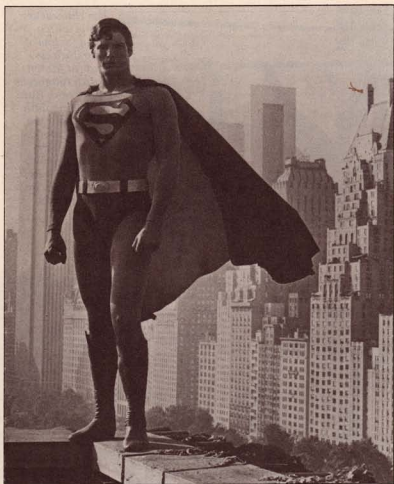
**'Taxi's' lady cabbie  
hails a real-life  
romance with Travolta**

**Roy Clark  
is country music's  
big-bucks winner**

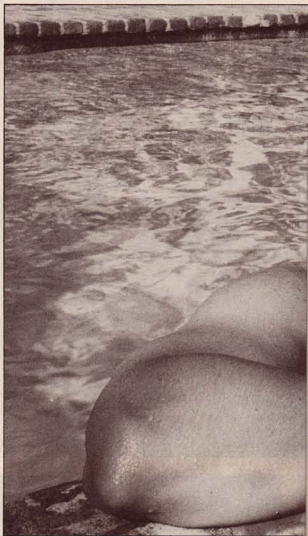
**Caroline turns 21, John, 18  
THE KENNEDY KIDS'  
MILESTONE BIRTHDAYS  
A moving family album**



**CAPED WONDER**  
SUPERMAN IMAGE



As the Man of Steel (left), Chris Reeve struts against the mythical Metropolis skyline (Manhattan). Below, Reeve, 26, tries to keep his new muscles firm in his Hollywood pool.



## THE NEW SUPERMAN: AN UNKNOWN STAR, A SEXY PLOT, AND VERY EXPENSIVE

By Eirik Knutzen  
and Peter Rubinstein

Yes, Christopher Reeve as the new Superman. And why not? As Ilya Salkind and Pierre Spengler, the producers of the upcoming \$45 million *Superman* epic, explain it, the logic was simple. Paul Newman was "too old" and Steve McQueen was "too fat." As for Robert Redford, he turned them down. During their three-year international talent search, the filmmakers momentarily toyed with using Olympic medalist Bruce Jenner. When things got really desperate, Salkind actually jettied his wife's Hollywood dentist to London for a screen test. "He wasn't so bad," Salkind says loyally of the dentist.

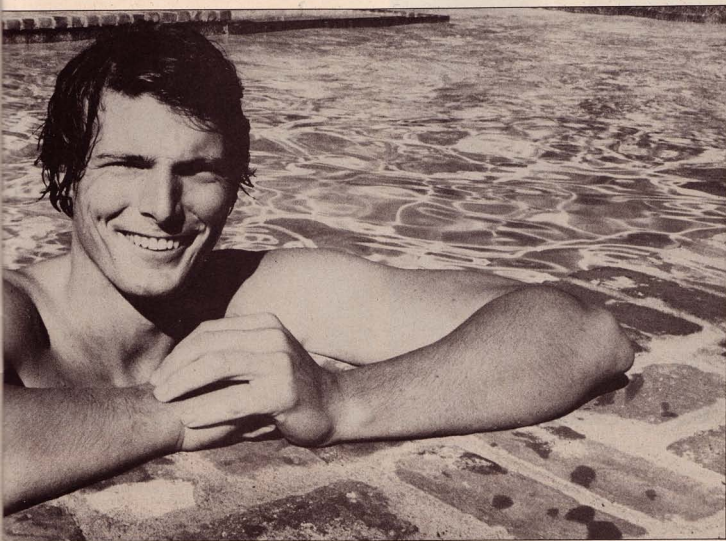
Finally, they saw Chris Reeve and

sent the dentist back to his drill. Reeve, a relatively unknown, New Jersey-born actor whose major claim to fame was a role on Broadway with Katharine Hepburn and two years as the bigamist stud Ben Harper on the soap opera "Love of Life," was more surprised than anyone that he landed the part. An upper-middle-class product of intellectual parents (Dad is a Russian translator, Mother a journalist), Reeve wasn't even allowed to read comics or watch TV as a kid. He didn't know Superman from a block of kryptonite. "It was 90 percent look," says the 26-year-old Reeve of his good fortune. "If I didn't look like the guy in the comic book, I wouldn't be Superman, and I wouldn't be so nervous now waiting for the movie to open."

If Reeve is nervous, more so are the producers, who worry about how the public will react when they unleash their *Superman* movie at theaters everywhere in time for Christmas.

How did a simple comic strip turn into the world's most expensive movie? For openers, there is Marlon Brando's \$4 million salary for 12 days' work as Superman's father and Gene Hackman's hefty fee of \$2 million to act the archvillain. Newcomer Reeve settled for a relatively flimsy \$250,000 to do the title role. But the real money eaters were the innovative special effects needed to get the Man of Steel realistically off the ground.

With postproduction costs still rising faster than a speeding bullet, the movie's producers are feverishly devis-



ing methods to protect their Gargantuan investment. First of all, they've cut the existing film in half and will release a sequel, *Superman II*, next year. More immediately, they are determined that *Superman I* will not open to an unprepared, unprimed public: The producers are launching a \$6-million-plus advertising campaign prior to release.

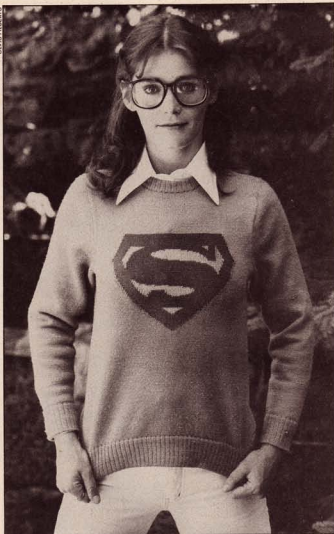
They also have a slew of merchandising spinoffs. America will soon either gag on or gobble up some 1000 "Superman" products (ranging from T-shirts to S-embazoned lunch boxes) that are being cranked out by approximately 120 licensees.

*Superman*, the cagey filmmakers are quick to point out, "is the comic (continued)



In the 1950s "Superman" TV series (far left), George Reeves and Noel Neill took a sexually hands-off stance. At left, Chris Reeve's modern movie Kent almost busts down a door to get at Margot Kidder's Lois Lane.





At home in Bel Air, Margot Kidder wears her movie friend's sweater. "Superman is a beautiful love story."

book come to life." They know the value of the cartoon hero's built-in audience (estimated at 6.5 billion in 38 countries, speaking 14 languages).

Superman has captured the public's imagination ever since 1938 when Jerry Siegel and Joe Schuster, then 19-year-olds from Cleveland, conceived it as an action comic. Since then, it has been a radio show, a movie serial, a popular 1950s TV series (still syndicated in many areas), a novel and a Broadway musical. Mario (Godfather) Puzo's screenplay wisely touches on all the familiar elements, tracing Superman's life from the planet Krypton, the journey to earth in a space vehicle, his upbringing in Smallville, U.S.A., and his mature years fighting the good fight as Clark Kent, the bespectacled, mild-mannered reporter whose secret identity as Superman goes unsuspected by all except inquisitive girl reporter Lois Lane.

The most astonishing departure from the old Superman legend, and

one likely to raise eyebrows, is the Superman-Lois Lane relationship. Gone are the shy, virginal glances of the past. *Superman* the movie emerges as much a love story as an adventure, and quite a love story at that. (Inside talk has it there's even more sex in *Superman II*.) In the words of actress Margot Kidder, who plays Lois, she and the fearless paragon actually "get it on." The film's PG rating is the result of those demythologizing sexual innuendoes.

Demonstrating the adult tone of the new *Superman* is the scene in which a skeptical Lois Lane, ace reporter, interviews the Man of Steel for the first time. "Is it true that you can see through anything?" she asks. Superman nods. "What kind of underwear am I wearing then?" she asks unabashedly. Stumped, Superman replies that the planter between them must be made of lead, one metal he cannot penetrate with his X-ray eyes. Unimpressed, Lois logs the answer in her notebook, then strolls away. Once



Young Superman (Aaron Smolinski) amazes adoptive parents (Phylliss Thaxter and Glenn Ford) lifting truck.



Superman Reeve's disguise as Clark Kent fools reporter Lois Lane (Kidder) and editor Perry White (Jackie Cooper).

away from the planter, Superman fixes his eyes on her midsection and snaps, "Pink."

Gone too is the open-eyed idealism of past *Superman* epics. When Superman tells Lois to "fight for truth, justice and the American way," she sasses that he'll "end up fighting every elected official in the country."

Moviegoers will be surprised to find that this new *Superman* is not a cartoon at all. "It's a picture for adults that children can see," explains Reeve. Overriding the laughs and the special effects à la *Star Wars* is a story played straight and with genuine emotion.

The enormous burden of keeping Superman credible instead of camp falls on the powerful shoulders of Reeve. "I had to be careful not to make him goody two-shoes," says Reeve. "I wanted to portray him as a man who takes one look at Lois Lane and thinks, 'This is it.'"

Before Reeve could portray or interpret anything, however, he had to get in shape for this "role of a lifetime." By



*As Superman's real parents, Marlon Brando and Susannah York prepare to speed their son to the safety of earth before their planet, Krypton, explodes.*

his own admission, Reeve was "a 6-foot, 4-inch, 185-pound stringbean" when he tested for the role early in 1977. Out of masculine pride, Reeve rejected the idea of wearing a specially designed Styrofoam muscle suit under the Superman uniform. Instead, he was granted two months to build himself up to super proportions. To supervise his body-building program, Reeve hired David Prowse, a former Mr. Universe, who played the villain Darth Vader in *Star Wars*.

To avoid undue strain, one day would be devoted to back and neck muscles; another, to the thighs and waist. No pills or steroids—not even vitamins—were allowed in Reeve's diet. The instructions were to eat everything put on the table, which meant a huge breakfast, two lunches and a full dinner. The exercises worked off excess fat. "It was pure agony," says Reeve, but two months later Superman didn't need padding for his suit—he had a classical body able to carry 219 pounds gracefully.

Seeing the muscular Reeve in the flesh today is almost enough to make you believe he's capable of such superhuman feats as welding the Golden Gate Bridge together after an earthquake. However, he is worried about the extra 30 pounds he put on. "None of my old clothes fit," he complains. "And if I don't keep exercising, all that muscle will turn to fat." Today, Reeve divides his time among homes in London, New York and California, where he has a pool to keep in shape.

What bothers Reeve most, however, is the hoopla that comes with playing Superman. "Before, I was taking my own shirts to the cleaners," he says. "Today, they're asking me to pontificate on everything from God to Jimmy Carter. Don't they realize I'm not Superman? Not now, anyway. Check me out in a year; I may be a jerk."

One thing Reeve is sure of: "I would never play a part like Superman again. The regimen was too painful." He still winces at the crimp it put in his relationship with Gae Exton, a modeling

agency rep. She shared an apartment in London, where the film was shot.

Reeve's co-star, Margot Kidder, shares his horror of the special-effects ordeal. It took three months to film a single sequence in which Superman flies Lois around Manhattan at night. "The hardest part," says Kidder, "was acting like you're in love while you're suspended 40 feet above the ground in a harness attached to a crane. My muscles were screaming. There were nights when I'd go home and cry."

A variety of techniques was used, including harness and wire, to give the illusion of Superman in flight. In some scenes, the wires were spray-painted to match the color of the sky while the action was filmed with special lenses and filters to obscure the wire system. For other scenes, the wires had to be meticulously painted out of thousands of frames of film in the laboratory.

In addition to the special effects, a nice nostalgia bid for box-office dollars is made with the cameo appearances of Kirk Alyn and Noel Neill—the Superman and Lois Lane of the original *Superman* movie serial. Both fell victim to a typecasting syndrome that set a precedent for those who followed. George Reeves, who played Superman on TV from 1951 to 1957, became so depressed at his inability to land another role that he committed suicide.

*Superman* veterans Alyn and Neill are skeptical about the movie's emphasis on Superman's sexual exploits. Indeed, no one—especially the nail-chewing producers—yet knows how the public will react to the "hot" love scenes between Lane and the previously pure Man of Steel. In the movie, Superman even begs his father to relieve him of his superqualities so he can move in with Lois. Says actress Kidder, "It's after we make love that he gives up his superpowers, so I guess Lois is pretty good in bed." We'll have to wait for *Superman II* to find out just how good.

In case Superman's loyal comic-strip audience is worried about a sexy, savvy Superman for the 70s, Chris Reeve has a few comforting words. "Superman doesn't use the fact that he could score any time he wants to. It's not in his nature. He can see through clothes, but he doesn't use it unfairly." Suddenly, he smiles broadly. "I assure you that Superman's eyes are X-ray, not X-rated." □