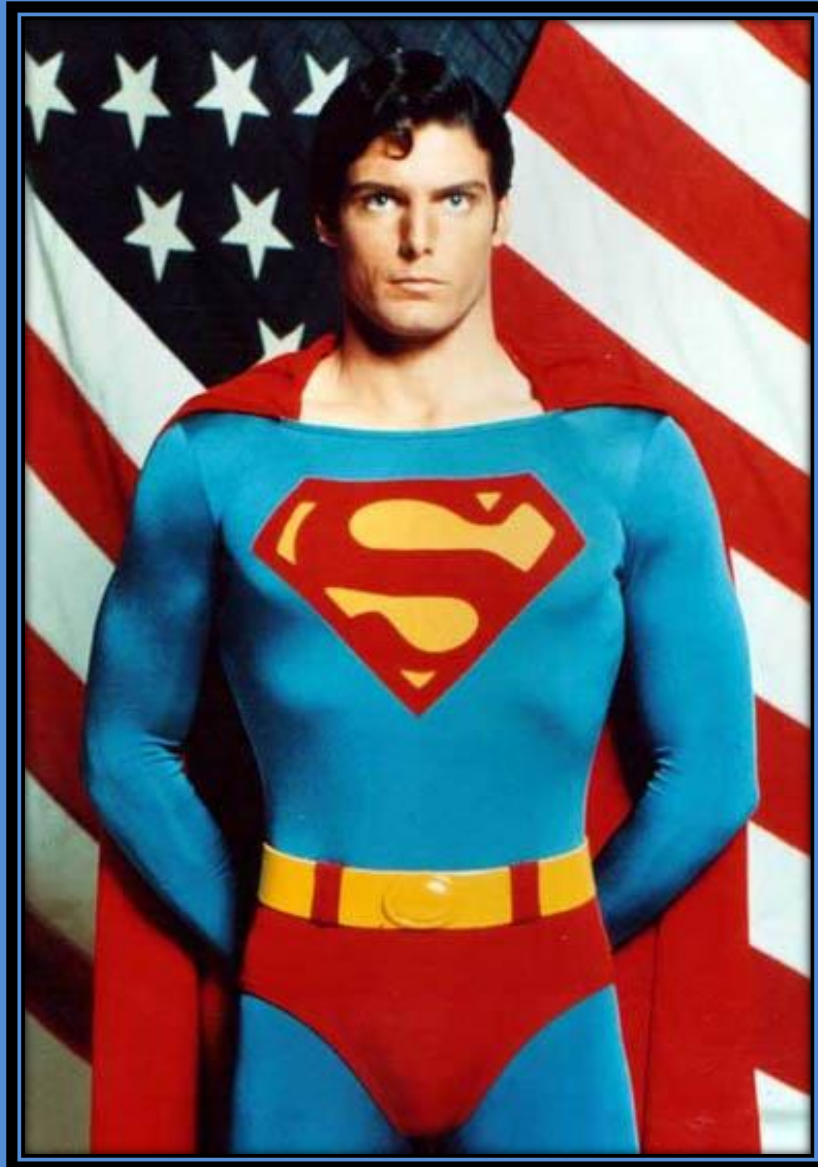


# SUPERMAN – ABOVE & BEYOND



An in-depth look at the stunts and action sequences featured in the first 4 Superman films.

Filming had already commenced on the first of what would become the Superman Quadrilogy and it was shaping up to be something very special indeed. The biggest stumbling block was always going to be the flying sequences and these pictures had plenty, but this guy from Krypton actually had to fly...for real to make the audience believe. And the following year he did.



The film opens with the destruction of the planet Krypton and Alf Joint and Vic Armstrong working with production designer John Barry worked the best possible angles for this explosive sequence. Filmed extensively at Shepperton studios stunt performers wore the fluorescent capes of the Krypton elders.



Stuntmen Stuart Fell, Alf Joint, Vic Armstrong and Mark McBride all took falls on that set constructed at Shepperton. Besides doubling for Superman and co-ordinating the action Vic was also doing general stunt work. After falling past the camera on two or three occasions the cameraman said "Vic, any chance you can fall a bit slower"? John Barry was the man who designed *Star Wars* and the feel of space was evident from this awesome set. Performers leaping from one level to another, hidden box rigs and mattresses and wire work all played a part in the opening sequence...and they haven't even got to the flying yet!.

**"You will bow down before me Jar-El"**

Christopher Reeve had three flying doubles on this project. Vic Armstrong was his main studio double. He was flying, landing or taking off all of the time hiding the harness under his costume. Another neat trick was the way fishing wire was placed through the end of the cape allowing it to flutter. Paul Weston doubled him for certain studio shots and Kiran Shah who is just 4ft tall was the scale double during the flying sequences.



So on with the film. Clark Kent has arrived at the Palace in the snowy north, he has listened to his father's wise words and is now ready to make the change into Superman. He stands at the far end of the palace. John Williams sweeping theme is heard as he lifts into the air. He flies the length of the Palace and over the camera. Vic Armstrong doubles Christopher Reeve for this sequence. This wasn't because of insurance requirements after all Chris did most of the flying on the picture, but the flight had to be graceful and balanced. Christopher Reeve hadn't done much big budget film work up until Superman and was really keen to do as much of the action as possible, but he was also aware that Vic was a very experienced performer who was able, through his previous countless stunt work, to adapt his position during the flight. Reeve knew that he wasn't going to be able to get the flight right on take one, so after 3 takes Vic took over and his was the shot used in the final film.



Christopher Reeve, Wendy Leech & Vic Armstrong. Pinewood Studios 1977

Chris got on very well with Vic and his then girlfriend stuntwoman Wendy Leech who was doubling for Lois Lane on the picture. Vic and Alf had taken Chris aside during the

preparation period for the film and worked out a fitness regime that would put him in tip-top condition for the extraordinary requirements of a motion picture of this size. The put him together with David Prowse who was already known around the world as the man inside the Darth Vader costume in Star Wars. David was a prolific bodybuilder and fitness guru who turned Christopher Reeve the actor into Superman.

On the subject of Lois Lane it would be appropriate to look at the most talked about sequence on the film.

Lois climbs aboard the Daily Planet helicopter on the roof of the building. Its pilot is stuntman Colin Skeaping who, to the best of my knowledge, has never held a pilot's licence and if Lois had of known this she wouldn't have had to go through the following ordeal. Lois climbs in and Colin attempts to lift off, but due to cross winds at the top of the building and the added element of a cable getting looped over the skid of the helicopter he loses control and the chopper goes into a spin, crashing through a make shift waiting area where stunt performers dive for cover to avoid the falling glass.



The chopper then crashes through the barrier/guard rail on the edge of the building and comes to rest perched hundreds of feet above the bustling Metropolis streets below. Colin is knocked out during the impact and Lois tries to free herself and escape. Where she thought she was going is anyone's guess as the slightest movement causes the helicopter to roll back and forth. This sequence was filmed on the back lot of Pinewood Studios and an 80ft building was constructed with a real helicopter on the top. Admittedly the engine had been removed and it was been flown by attaching it to a crane, but real none the less.



Actress Margot Kidder was doubled by stuntwoman Wendy Leech who dangles from the stricken helicopter with only the seat belt to hand onto. No wires, no CGI here. Wendy Leech is actually holding on to that belt strap, but she was aware that she was going to have to let go and drop 80ft into a box rig below.

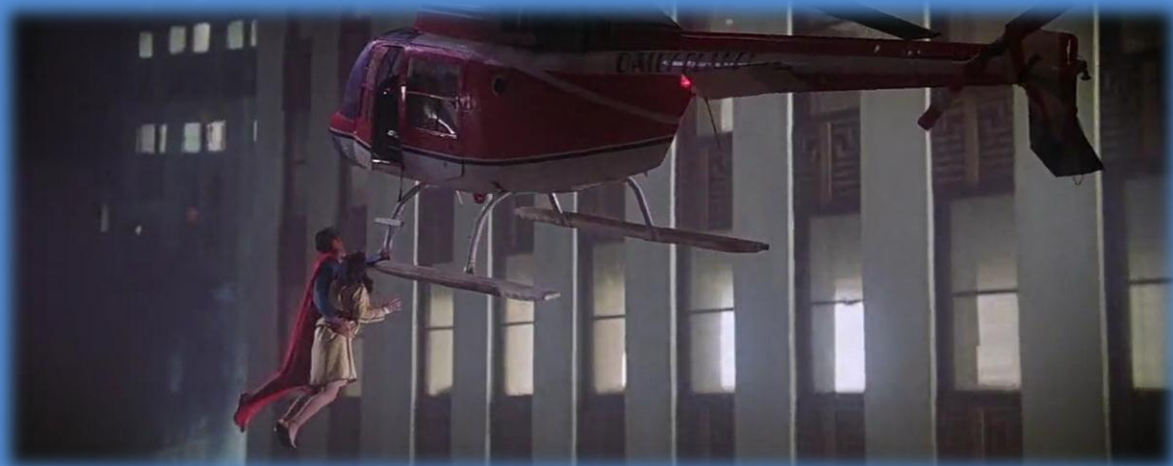
It passes so quickly on the screen, but as Wendy lets go of the seat belt she brings her knees up giving her a better balanced position for the fall, she makes sure she doesn't over rotate by waving her arms in a forward rolling motion and just as she leaves the shot she straightens her legs to assume the correct landing position.



The fall was perfect and Wendy was safe and sound which must have been great news to her father George Leech who also worked on the picture and her boyfriend Vic who realised that if she had have been injured he'd have had to take someone else to the pub that night....only joking Vic!

By this time Clark has changed into Superman and is flying up the side of the building to catch the falling Lois and the helicopter which has now toppled right over the edge and is on route to bury itself into the sidewalk.

Back projection allows Christopher Reeve to collect Lois and deliver his “Don’t worry I got you” line. Causing Lois to reply with my favourite line in the movie. “You’ve got me? Who’s got you”? This for me was the scene that sold the whole Superman idea to be and I swallowed it hook, line and sinker. Here we see a man in a red cape with a woman under one arm and a helicopter in the other hand flying up the side of a building so he can return them both safely to the roof top. Remember none of these effects were computer generated as they would be today. That is actually Vic Armstrong and Wendy Leech with a helicopter flying up the outside of a real building. After this nobody could tell me Superman wasn’t real and couldn’t fly after all I’d seen it with my own two eyes. The magic of cinema eh?



**“You’ve got me? Who’s  
got you”?**



Now after delivering Lois safely back to the Daily Planet rooftop Superman goes off to explore the city of Metropolis - looking for wrongs to right. Saving stranded cats from tree's before the fire department turn up to hose the kitty out once and for all. We next see a cat burglar played by actor David Baxt scaling the outside of a glass fronted building using suction cups to cling to the smooth surface. He gets part way up and is placing his suction device onto the next window when he is confronted by a pair of red boots. The shock of seeing someone standing on the very window he's trying to climb into causes him to fall back and plummet towards the ground. Superman simply flies down and is waiting for him 20 storeys below. The catching of the burglar takes place on the window of an office where a man is working at his desk. This man is stuntman George Leech. The reason George was used for the sequence was due to the extraordinary office set that had been built. It had to have the correct perspective for the shot to work. So Superman is standing on the flat window, but in reality the set is built so that window is the roof of the set and if the side is the roof then the floor has to be the side...do you see? This picture should make it clearer.



**“Hi there, something wrong with the elevator”?**



Director Richard Donner explains to George what needs to happen during the filming of this shot. As we can see George and his desk are mounted on the wall allowing the roof above to be used as the window for this cat burglar sequence.

The lengths the production crew had to go to in order to create this illusion included stuntman George Leech being strapped to his chair and mounted like a trophy on the wall. The desk and all its contents and fittings are fixed to the wall so they won't fall off during the shot.

The scene ends with George doing a massive 'double take'. Did he really see a man with red boots standing outside his window? He decides he didn't and goes back to his paperwork.

The next action scene is a very impressive cannon roll. It would have been even more impressive if someone was driving it, but the plot calls for a car to crash being driven by remote control. A full size remote control car? Indeed so. Just to point out that the 'cannon roll' had only been introduced in 1974 and this really is a belter. So good in fact that some might say a stuntman wouldn't be needed for these types of action scenes in future. Luckily this train of thought didn't catch on.



Vic Armstrong also performs a shot where Superman lands in the streets of Metropolis and spins through the pavement into Lex Luthor's lair. As Vic explained one of the effects boffins had this brainwave where he was suspended on piano wires on a mechanism that would wind up like a clock and then release. The theory being that it would start spinning him down through the false roof to land 15ft below. Well it looked a bit 'Heath Robinson', but he gave it a go. Everything unravelled and Vic was dropped like a stone through the floor where he was convinced he'd broken his ankles when he landed. Those thin red boots offer little protection. In the end they tried another approach involving a crane arm and a motor. Vic stood on a plinth at the bottom of a pole, painted out afterwards to conceal it on film, which was motorised and spun him down through the ground to the set below. The final shot is sped up giving the impression he is revolving at super-speed. Still would have giving you a very dizzy sensation for a good while afterwards I guess.

Once Superman has been freed from his kryptonite necklace he is free to fly through the roof of the building and away to save the day, but how was this done.

Vic doubled Christopher Reeve, but it couldn't be done in the normal way because the wires that were needed to pull him up through the fake ceiling built at the top of the studio would've cut a hole in the roof (these days that problem could be easily fixed in post with CGi). Alf Joint's idea was to have an upside down set with the ceiling at the bottom over a pit in the floor of the studio, which was eight feet deep. Inside the pit would be boxes to cushion Vic's fall from the gantry high above. The whole set was made of wood, except for the small area he was going to burst through.

**Lex Luthor: "Look at the overgrown boy scout, Miss Teschmacher. Tell me what you see"?**

## Miss Teschmacher: “Cuteness, dimples”?



So there he was 40ft above the studio floor which was itself a false ceiling. He wouldn't be able to fall from a standing position either just in case he over rotated to early. He wouldn't be able to tuck up and attempt to position himself for a landing until after he'd broken through the false ceiling. So Alf Joint was joined in the roof space by stuntman Doug Robinson who held a leg each and dangled Vic over his point of impact. He heard assistant director David Tomblin's voice, 'Roll Cameras', and then he heard the cameras winding up to speed. 'Ok in your own time Vic'. Tomblin's instruction caused his heart to pound in his chest, knowing that he had to tell Alf and Doug to let go. In a high pitched squeak he said "Now"! The boys let go and a split second later he woke up in the boxes. Also worth mentioning is that for that fall Vic was Superman and had to assume the traditional flying position. Arms outstretched, toes pointed. He was only able to become the stuntman again in the 8ft space below the floor. Quite remarkable.

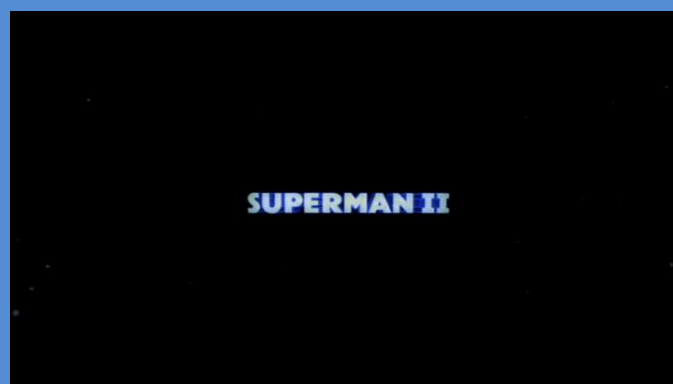
The earthquake sequence was mostly created with special effects, but a few points should be looked at. The flying underground sequence was mostly Christopher Reeve, but Vic did take over for several shots as you can see here.



The Golden Gate Bridge takes a battering during the earthquake sequence and as you would imagine cars crash into each other as the bridge wobbles and breaks apart. I always remember this sequence being much longer, but having re-watched it again it seems that the special effects shot outnumber the stunt performances and in certain circumstances some of the best work ended up on the cutting room floor. Like this moment for instance. A bus full of children swerves to avoid oncoming traffic, a VW Beetle is crashed into pushing it onto the opposite carriageway and into the path of an oncoming motorcycle which is ridden by stuntman Roy Alon who hits the car and flips up over the car eventually falling from its roof. I remember this like I saw it yesterday and no footage of this stunt remains apart from one still which is now used as my own logo.



Superman saved the day and the blockbuster was back on English soil once again. Not only this but *Superman - The Motion Picture* and *Superman II* were filmed back to back. Vic and his team were involved over an eleven month period. So let's find out how the second instalment took shape.



Number 2 starts with a group of terrorists having taken over the Eiffel Tower. They have hostages and are planning to set off an atom bomb. So naturally Lois Lane is on hand to follow the story and get as close to the action as she possibly can...some would say she

gets a bit too close, climbing the stairs and then climbing under the very elevator carriage containing the bomb. Superman is flying across the world to save her.

The French have a tactical response team who deal with hostage situations and the like and as this is a film shot mostly in the UK all the members of this crack French assault team are played by British stuntmen.



Stuntman Marc Boyle takes the role of team leader and is in radio contact with a spotter team on the ground.



Stuntman Terry Walsh is the plastic explosive guy. He places enough plastic onto the motor of the lift to stop it between floors.



Stuntman Rocky Taylor is the detonation expert. All the cables run to his box of tricks allowing him to flick a switch and set off the explosives.



And finally Stunt Co-ordinator Paul Weston gets in on the action by cutting the power to that part of the tower.

Superman arrives in the nick of time - catches the falling elevator carriage which contains a bomb inside and Lois Lane underneath. She gets off and he flies it into space where it explodes injuring nobody, but the shock wave does release General Zod, Non and Ursa from their rectangular floating jail cell. Now if I'd been stuck in a small confined space for a very long time with two others I'd want to get out have a wee, obviously, a bite to eat and perhaps a walk about. Zod, Non and Ursa decide that death and destruction is called for so they stop off at the Moon instead of the nearest Little Chef.



On the moon a Russian cosmonaut is going about his business of collecting rock samples when his oxygen cable gets snagged, he pulls it, then it is pulled much harder causing him to fly off the ground only to land at General Zod's feet.



The cosmonaut is played by stuntman Jim Dowdall who gets pulled, quite literally by the forces of evil until he is disposed of.



Stunt Co-ordinator Paul Weston also takes a go at 'Walking On The Moon' and just like the Police hit of the same name, he hoped his legs didn't break as he was bouncing along on wires suspended from the ceiling.



Now at this point Lois and Clark are covering a honeymoon scandal in Niagara Falls for the Daily Planet. They must pose as husband and wife and Lois is starting to have her suspicions about Clark. Could he be Superman, after all the two are never in the same place at the same time and up until this point Lois is the only one who hasn't worked out Clark's clever disguise. Wearing a pair of glasses and parting your hair on the other side doesn't, as a rule, fool anyone, but this is the movies and Lois has been had. Slowly, but surely the penny starts to drop and she decides to test her theory with a little rescue operation.



She decides to throw herself into the water near the hotel and with a bit of luck Superman will come and save her. Margot Kidder does the first part of the fall and stunt woman Cyd Child does the rest.

**“Bye bye baby”**



Lois plunges into the surf expecting our caped crusader to swoop down and pluck her from the icy waters and yet all that Clark can get away with is to break the branch of a tree with his super-vision and assist Lois to shallow water, before getting soaked himself.

Meanwhile back in upstate 'hick-town' the population has grown by three. Zod, Non and Ursa arrive to rule planet Houston....are you confused or is it just me?



Ursa sends Paul Weston crashing through a table after she beats him at arm wrestling.

**“Tell me if this tickles”**

Standing to the left of shot is Dinny Powell who is about to get his big break in this movie by exiting through the wall and out into the street, but it isn't done in the conventional fashion.



Dinny squares up to Ursa. Zod will step in and throw him through the wall behind him. These days a device called a 'jerk harness' would be used to propel the stuntman backwards, but building the set at an angle or vertically was so successful in the last film that they went ahead with it again here.



General Zod pushes Dinny away. The next few shots are captured using false perspective. The wall that Dinny crashes through is actually on the floor of the set and has been built to look like the interior of the set used in the previous shots. Dinny falls from above the set some 20ft into the box rig buried below the false floor he is falling through.



If you thought that was clever the next few shots are just extraordinary. Dinny falls again from the roof of the set, backwards, through the wall of the café and through the side of the truck parked outside! All filmed on a set built upside down. Specially designed for this stunt.

To make it a bit clearer I've turned these next few frames to represent the actual shot captured in the studio before they were turned to give the impression that Dinny was falling horizontally instead of vertically. Incidentally the man in the chair asleep was filmed afterwards.



The truck parked outside the café appears to be filled with chickens on route to market. Dinny falls through a balsa wood frame with a big gap in the middle of it allowing him to fall freely through shot without hitting anything he shouldn't. Outside it's a very different situation. Dinny must crash through the side of the truck and land at the feet of the actors. How was this done? The old fashioned way...he was thrown out through the side of the truck. What a way to earn a living eh?



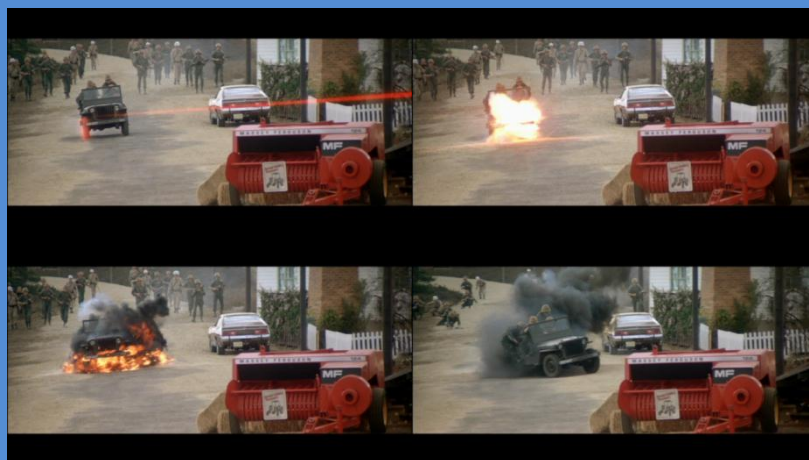
**“General Zod does not take orders. He gives them”**

Now keeping up with legendary British stunt performers Jack Cooper gets in on the action by making the mistake of waving a shotgun at Zod.

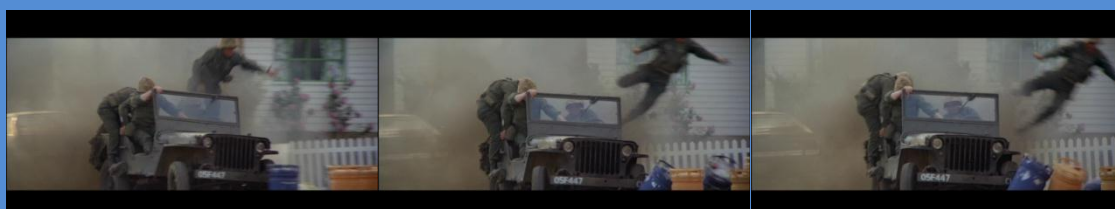


Instead of intimidating Zod it just annoys him and he picks Jack up with one wave of his finger, dropping him like a stone when he's done.

Just when you think the destruction is over the army turn up to add some firepower to this attack. A jeep is seen driving down the road and Non decides to join the fight by blowing out the passenger tyre with his newly mastered heat ray. The jeep skids and loses control. The soldiers are all stuntmen and the rest of the scene goes to show why they are such an important part of any action sequence.



Terry Plummer drives the jeep, next to him in the passenger seat is Doug Robinson, behind him is Stuart St Paul and next to him is Jim Dowdall. As you can see from the final shot above the jeep is screeching across the road out of control and we are about to lose our first passenger. Jim Dowdall is thrown from the jeep and lands safely in a concealed number of crash mats.



The jeep then turns violently the other way and is hit by another direct hit from Non. This causes the jeep to turn again and un-balance our next victim Stuart St Paul who is thrown onto the road.



This leaves Doug Robinson and Terry Plummer in the jeep to once again turn the vehicle and drive up the back of a car transporter through a hotel and out the other side. Well not entirely. The jeep driving up and into the building was one shot, then a dummy was substituted for the driver and fired out of the building using an air-ram. Doug Robinson is seen falling from a bedroom window during all of this chaos and yet still manages to turn up underneath the jeep when it lands...yep I'm still confused too.



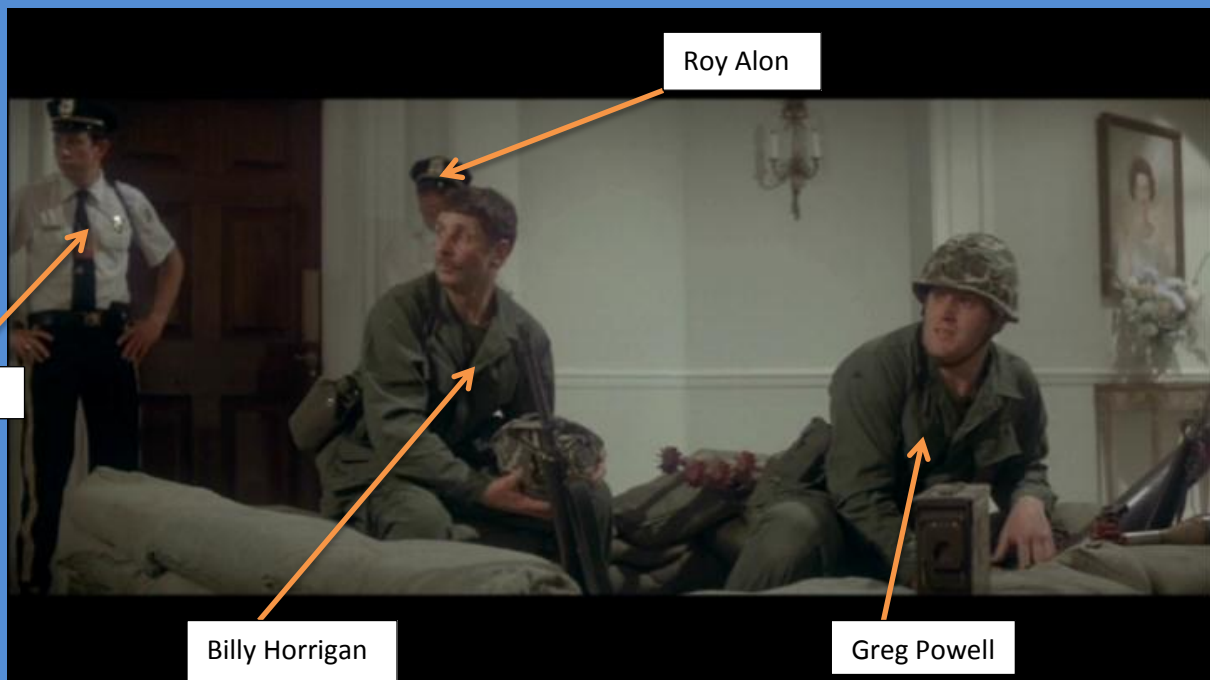
That's not the last you'll see of Doug so keep your eyes peeled, he'll be back later.

Next to make an appearance is Jim Dowdall. Feeling better after he departed the jeep so suddenly. He now finds himself on top of a building about to fire a bazooka at the gruesome threesome.

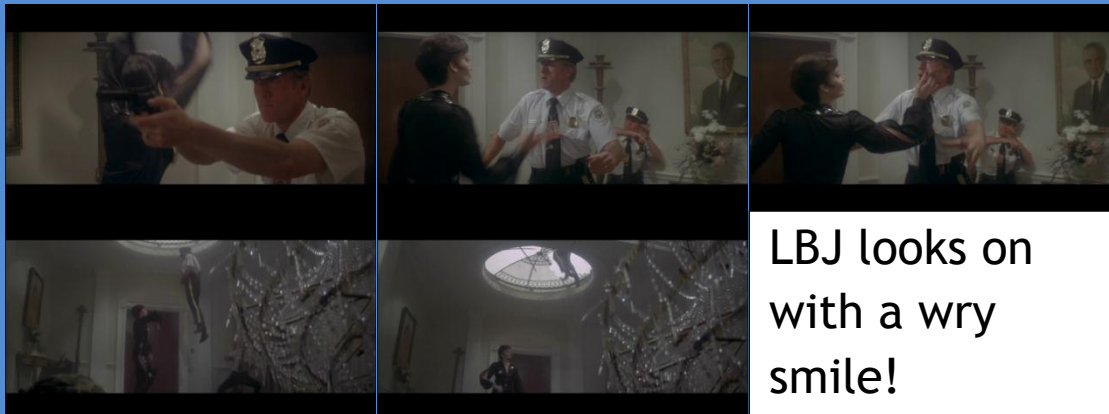


His confused expression is due to the fact that a bazooka packs quite a punch and yet the round of ammunition fired from this particular weapon was caught by Non and snapped in two as though it was made of paper!

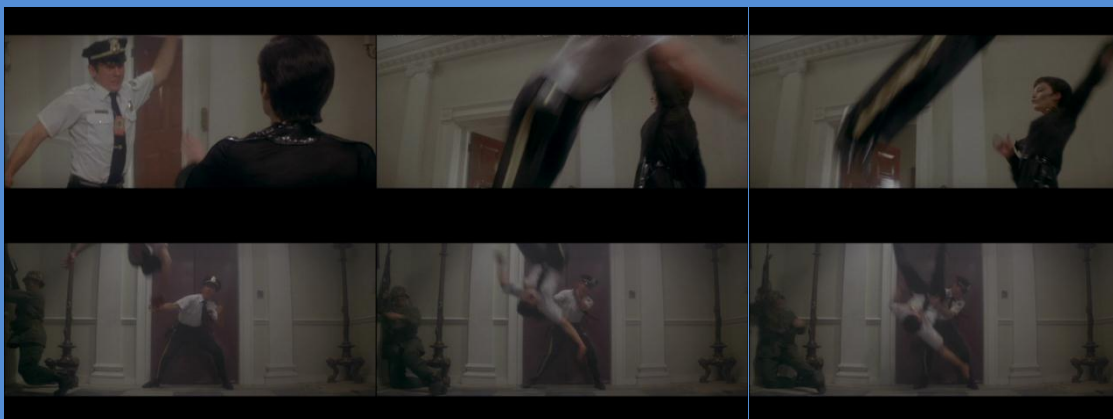
The three villains now fly onto the White House to take over the planet and rule. A bit like the democrats only without all the razzmatazz! As they drop down through the ceiling they are confronted with 4 top British stunt performers.



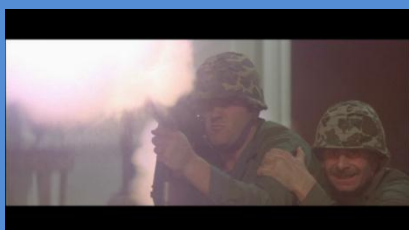
Ursa crashes through the roof and is confronted by stuntman Terry Forrestal who she assists to leave the building by the nearest exit with a swift shove!



Jim Dowdall appears once again, this time as a security officer in the White House sequence. He runs at Ursa with what appears to be a truncheon raised above his head about to teach her a lesson in breaking and entering when she catches hold of him and throws him over her head and into a door on the other side of the room landing on stuntman Roy Alon.



Greg Powell now joins the fight with his bazooka. Firing at the fast approaching Non.



While this is all going on Doug Robinson has presumably rushed across the US after hearing a commotion was going on at the White House and decides to take a look through the window. Unfortunately General Zod is waiting for him...

# Lucky Zod!



Doug crashes through the window and hurtles across the room, tumbling and flipping as he goes. What's interesting is that when this shot was filmed it was done in silence on set. Footage appears in the making of documentary that was released at the time.



Non didn't like the way that Greg Powell tried to kill him with a bazooka so he throws a marble column at him, knocking him off balance and causing him to shoot the chandelier right down on top of his position. The two stuntmen in the foreground are Jim Dowdall on the left and Roy Alon on the right.

Finally in this sequence a new stuntman pops up as a plain clothes secret service agent. Val Musetti gets a swift backhand from Ursa when he tries to prevent her from going into the Oval office. You ever get the feeling that Ursa is not ideal first date material?



The next set piece is the major action point in the film. The three villains make their way to the offices of the Daily Planet in search of Superman. As Lex Luthor later points out with all this knowledge and intellect you'd think they'd be able to open a door or two, but alas no. They crash through the office space like three bulls in a very fine china shop. Several members of staff or 'have a go heroes' as they'd be known these days, do decide to wade in a try to prevent them getting to Editor Perry Whites office. The first is non-other than stuntman and co-ordinator Vic Armstrong in one of his days off from doubling Christopher Reeve in the flying sequences. Remember Superman 1 & 2 was shot back to back so Vic would have been available to assist Paul Weston with arranging the upcoming action.



**Superman! Thank  
God!**

Then Non is accosted by guess who? Yep Doug Robinson who rushes him between the broadsheets and gets knocked out of the way for his trouble. Alf Joint has a go from the front and gets thrown to one side as well.



Superman comes to the rescue and hovers outside the window where this chaos is taking place. The three crash through the window and go after him. On the street below people look up wondering what will happen.



Stuntman Alan Stuart plays a cab driver who shares the excitement of the viewer when he says *“This is gonna be good”*



Stuntman Roy Alon gets in on the action as a construction worker. Roy was a member of Vic Armstrong’s organisation *‘Stunts Incorporated’* and started his big screen work on a previous Vic Armstrong / Alf Joint collaboration *A Bridge Too Far*.

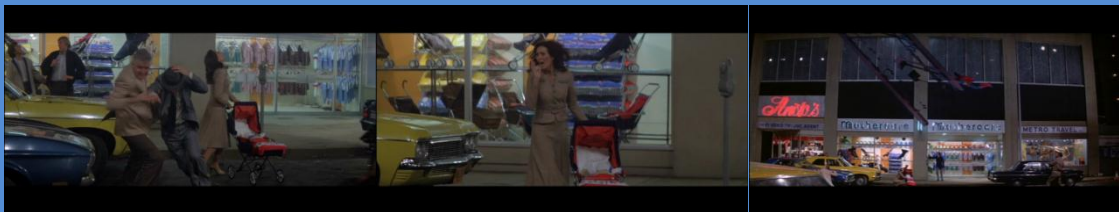
By this time Vic has jumped back into the flying suit and has taken to the sky. Non throws Superman against an air vent high on the side of an adjacent building. Vic once again doubles Christopher Reeve.



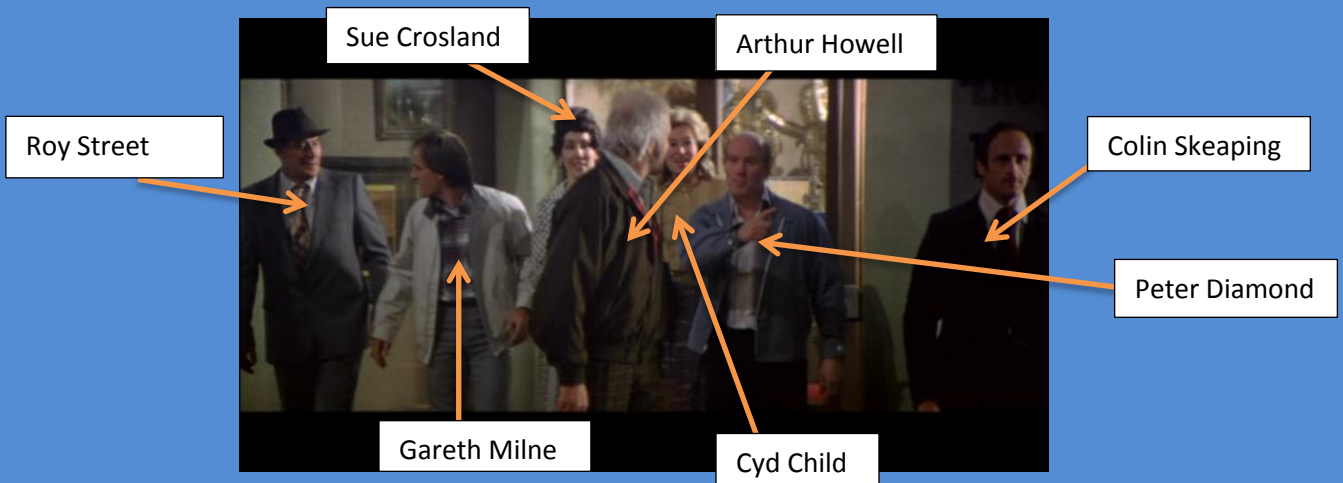
Meanwhile down on the street below the population of Metropolis appear to all be in the stunt business. Outside a branch of Mothercare a woman pushes a pram across the road. The woman is Wendy Leech and the baby is....I'm joking there's no baby in the pram! Standing left of shot, two men look up at the on-going commotion. On the left is Roy Street and on the right is Billy Dean.



The script calls for a huge telecommunication aerial to be dropped from the very top of a skyscraper. It falls towards the ground about to crush the pram Wendy is pushing. Roy and Billy take a very public spirited approach to the whole event by running for cover...who said chivalry was dead eh?



Superman swoops down and save the day once more. Is there no end to this man's daring do?



Another collection of Britain's finest stunt performers in the streets of Metropolis.

The fight goes underground. Superman and Non exchange punches and the vibrations are felt on the street above. All of a sudden the ground shakes violently once more as Non is sent spinning out of the ground and high into the sky.



This is a model shot used in the final cut of the film. Toy cars and toy figures on the pavements and behind the police car. Non is also a toy figure shot through the floor by compressed air. The shot is slowed down dramatically and you see the figure spinning around as it leaves the ground. The spinning Non crashes through a building, through the window and up through the roof. The trajectory of Non meant that the body must continue its upward path. So how was it done?



**Not only was the set built upside down, but also at an angle so stuntman Paul Weston could fall through the set and out into his landing area.**



After the success of attaching George Leech to the wall in the first film and building an upside down set for Dinny Powell's exit earlier, this again is used very successfully here. Stunt artists are put in place to create this office environment. In the doorway Chris Webb and Roy Alon are fixed to the spot. Behind them Mark McBride leans of his office desk. In the foreground and working at her desk is Sue Crosland and finally opposite her on the phone is 'Noshier' Powell.



On the street the stunt community look up in disbelief. On the left, holding the newspaper is stuntman Frank Henson arm in arm with Cyd Child. Behind them is Tex Fuller a one-time double for Norman Wisdom.

Now onto one of the most famous scenes. Ursa picks up a man-hole cover and throws it like a Frisbee at Superman who is hit right in the stomach throwing him backwards into a car windscreen. Easy enough to create you'd think, but as Vic Armstrong remembers it the shot was nearly never completed.



The arrow shows a raised area underneath Vic's cape. This was a nail attached to his back protector allowing him to smash the windscreen of the car he's about to land on. It had been a long night's shooting for Vic who had already been thrown over the vehicle and almost trapped under it in previous takes. The cable system that was being used needed constant adjustment so the trajectory would be just right allowing Vic to land squarely on the windscreen and stay there.



Superman now struggles with General Zod on top of the car. It was thought appropriate to use stuntman Paul Weston to double Terence Stamp during this sequence.



The big black 'M' of the Marlboro truck sits to the right of shot as Christopher Reeve is thrown from the top of the car. Paul Weston doubles Terence Stamp and can be seen clearly in these shots. Vic Armstrong won't take over until the audience is ready to see

Superman crash through the side of the truck. Christopher Reeve was always very capable of performing much of the action and here is no exception. He has to hit his mark exactly and sells the fall very well indeed.



Now down the street a bus full of stunt people is about to get thrown down the street by Non and Ursa.



Left to Right: Colin Skeaping and Mark McBride, Alan Chuntz and Steve Emerson



More stunt people gather in the streets. Picture Left: Gareth Milne, Terry Richards and Roy Alon. Picture Right: Graeme Crowther in a sailor's uniform, Terry Plummer and Cliff Diggins.

# Let's Go get Em!



Stuntman Frank Maher stands in a shop doorway while Roy Alon decides enough is enough. George Leech stands behind him in the hat.



Just goes to prove that when a big budget picture is in production the stunt community comes out in force. Here we see another collection of Britain's finest performers. Even during all this mayhem a moment of slapstick is required and as a fierce breeze is blown through the Metropolis streets Joe Dunne feels compelled to eat an ice cream. Nick Hobbs is just in the wrong place at the wrong time and ends up wearing Joe's dessert.



Good job there was no flake in that ice cream. Could've had Nicks eye out!



Terry Walsh and Cyd Child decide to end their evening out with a trip to the Colonel's very own eatery. The result is 'finger lickin good'. Well not for Terry and Cyd who've probably spent the best part of £20 on yesterday's chicken and a few cold chips. Anyway if the food was hot it wasn't by the time they left the restaurant and they are blown away by the wind...must have been something they ate!



Stuntman Peter Brace is on the phone trying to order takeout food from KFC. The lengths you had to go to in the early eighties for home delivery.



Here we see stuntman Tex Fuller who was, Norman Wisdom's double in his more outlandish knockabout moments, having a spot of trouble on a first date. His lady friend is very tall and his 'syrup' won't stay on!

Finally the fight is taken to Superman's palace of crystal in the frozen north. Doug Robinson doubles Gene Hackman and is unceremoniously bundled off Ursa onto the floor of the palace.

Paul Weston takes over the doubling of General Zod and is disposed of by Superman with a slide down an icy crevice to his certain doom.



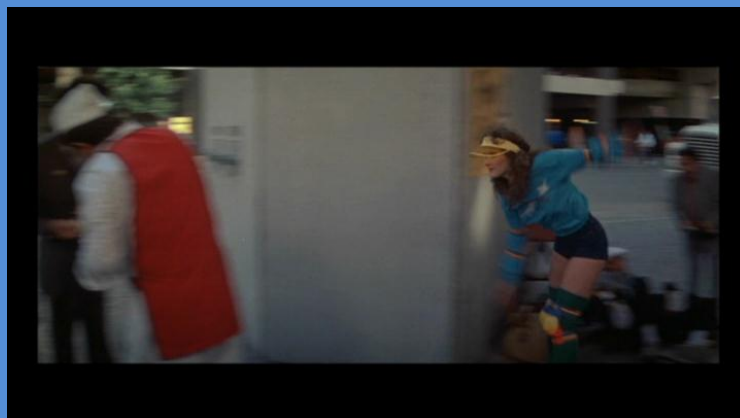
**SUPERMAN WILL RETURN**



Return he did in 1983 for what could have been another sure fire hit at the box office. Unfortunately a considerable amount of politics and backbiting meant that Superman 3 was way below par.

Christopher Reeve was always the driving force behind the pictures and was very keen to give the audience something new. Upon reading the first draft of what would become the shooting script in 1981 he was quietly pleased that many of the ideas he had put forward were being taken seriously enough to add to the final movie. The idea that even Superman had a bad side was something that Chris wanted to develop. He's a superhero from another galaxy, but has feelings and a darker side to his nature like the rest of us.

Shooting began in Canada in 1982 and for me one of the highlights was the terrific slap stick opening. Wonderful use of stunt talent provided a welcoming introduction to the story that lay ahead.

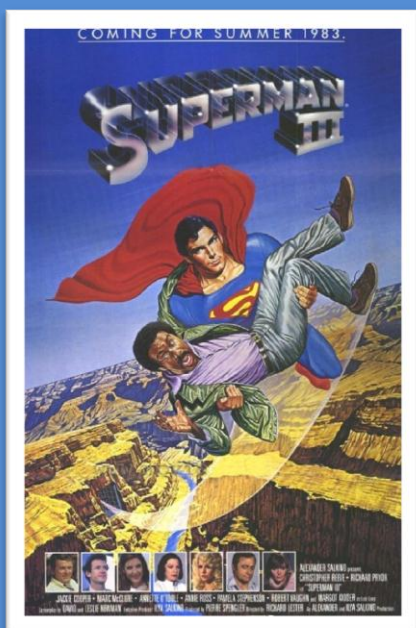


The sequence opens with a roller skating girl, Tracey Eddon, out of control and heading towards a hot dog vendor. She grabs the hot dog trolley and crashes into the first of three phone boxes standing next to each other in the street. The first topples causing a domino

effect and it floors the second which in turn makes the last one fall to the ground. Stunt performers in each.



The first phone booth contains stuntman Billy Horrigan. He crashes into the middle one containing Clive Curtis and finally the middle one crashes into the one on our left containing stunt woman Wendy Leech.



So with a cast like this the movie had to be a sure fire winner right? Wrong! As with any movie the actors can only deliver the 'goods' if the script is worth its weight in gold and this script had many issues. Richard Lester had had experience with Superman 2 and had come in ready to fight another day with a new script brimming with new ideas. He was presented with the original draft of Superman the Movie which was to be 'adjusted' for a further movie option. Richard Pryor was brought in not only to play the character of Gus Gorman but to lend a few fresh ideas to what was a very limp script. They had assumed, incorrectly that the bigger the name on the poster the better the performance....oh well that's Hollywood for you.

Meanwhile across town the Century Savings Bank is being robbed. Police on the scene open fire, missing the robber as he runs away with the loot, but shooting the tyre of a passing vehicle in the street driven by stuntman Roy Alon.



He swerves across the street after losing control of the vehicle and crashes into a fire hydrant. Now the idea here is simple enough. A hole in the floor of the car has been created by the impact, the fire hydrant now starts to gush thousands of gallons of water into the car causing poor Roy to have nowhere to go as the water level rises around him.



Stunt Co-ordinator Paul Weston dives in as a passing pedestrian and tries to open the car door, but everything is jammed. Roy told me that this sequence took all day to do. The car had to keep filling up and then the director required another shot or close up. The car was equipped with breathing apparatus should Roy need it, but he had huge lungs and was able to hold his breath throughout.



**“Way to go Superman”!**



Here we see Roy Alon, drying off after his soaking, with Christopher Reeve and Paul Weston as they discuss the sequence and how they can adjust it for the edit.

Incidentally I asked Roy about the yellow jumper, which wasn't something anyone should be seen out in. He said "If it was any other colour you wouldn't see me in the water right"? And he was too. Any other darker colour and he'd have blended into the background. With his brightly coloured sweater you could see him from the other side of the street.

There was a photograph on the television set in Roy's house of him being saved by Superman. It meant a great deal to him and it deserved pride of place.

The story then moves on to Clark and photographer Jimmy Olsen going off to Smallville to check out Clark's high school reunion. Whilst on the bus journey they come across a road block and a policeman informs them that the chemical plant has a fire and the road could be closed for some time.

Clark wastes no time deciding what he's going to do and Jimmy is off to get a few great pictures.



Plant workers are trapped on a walkway between two buildings and must be saved. Superman arrives, as usual, in the nick of time to bail them out. Christopher Reeve is doubled on many of the flying sequences by stuntman Mark Stewart as seen here.

As with the previous Superman outings people in danger are played by stunt professionals and these are some of the best around.



**L-R Alex Green, Tracey Eddon, Wendy Leech, Marc Boyle, Wayne Michaels, Dickey Beer and Colin Skeaping**



Superman grabs hold of a metal chimney and places on the ground. He then tells each one to slide down to safety. Which they do.



Superman helping down Wendy Leech, Marc Boyle in front of him, Wayne Michaels wipes the smoke from his eyes, Dickey Beer with the white hard hat on and Colin Skeaping standing behind.

Now they say that Superman is faster than a speeding bullet. Well Wayne Michaels who can be seen above being saved by the caped one is about to appear again over the other side of the compound doubling Jimmy Olsen....honestly with all these real life superheroes about do we need the fella with his underwear on the outside?



See I told you. There he is stuck up a ladder pretending to be a photographer. Now Jimmy wanted to get some up close and personal shots of this fire for the late edition of the Daily Planet, but unfortunately he gets a great deal more than he bargained for.



The heat rises and the ladder falls with Wayne on top. It's a tethered fall, which means it's not falling for real it's a supervised decent. Nevertheless Wayne will be pitched off the end of that ladder at the end of the ride. Wayne was a wonderful high fall man when he joined the stunt register in 1981. If it was above sea-level Wayne would jump off it and make it look graceful the whole way down.

Everybody remembers Wayne's incredible leap doubling Pierce Brosnan at the start of 'Goldeneye' - he'd been working up to that height of 750 metres for 12yrs!



Luckily for Jimmy Olsen and Wayne Michaels Superman hears Jimmy's cries for help and swoops down to rescue him. Just as well really as Wayne has to be in Columbia in the next shot getting married.



See I told you - here he is on the happiest day of his life. Well it would be if the usually humid weather outside wasn't about to change dramatically for the worse because of our movies villain Robert Vaughn and his satellite that can control the weather.

As the vows continue the chapel starts to fall apart due to the battering it's receiving from the hurricane like winds - Wayne grabs his bride and runs for cover but is stopped by falling masonry. The priest also gets hit with bricks and mortar as does a man standing in the doorway. All of who are played by stuntmen.



Now then Richard Pryor had a double working on the picture. American stuntman Greg Elam who had doubled him on Silver Streak and Stir Crazy.



We are going to see Greg Elam in action first as he doubles Richard Pryor in a freak skiing accident...off a building! Not only off a building, but with a pink table cloth attached around his neck. One of the points in the script where Christopher Reeve knew it wasn't going to plan.



A remarkable fall for such a small part of the movie, but remarkable nevertheless. Paul Weston, part of the Stunts Incorporated unit brought together by Vic Armstrong for the 1977 war epic *A Bridge Too Far* are responsible for creating the decender. Allowing a stunt performer to fall great heights without the use of an airbag. Greg Elam fell several hundred feet attached to a small wire. The shot of him landing in the road was tagged on afterwards.

Vic received a technical Oscar in 2000 for his achievements in stunt work and in particular his development of the decender.

The story continues and petrol pumps are drying up due to the cost of fuel rising. Many drivers just want to fill their tanks and will stop anything to do so.



Here we see stuntman Reg Harding and his on screen wife going about their lives. They try to obtain fuel from the gas station to find stuntman Marc Boyle driving into their car because he wants his fuel before the other driver.



Marc doesn't look happy does he? In fact it turned into full blown fisty cuffs. No Marquis of Queensbury rules here you know.

Now I need to fill you in on some plot detail for this next sequence to make any sense. Gus, Richard Pryor, is a computer programmer and has been told by Ross Webster, Robert Vaughn, to create a piece of Kryptonite that will drain Superman of his powers and leave Webster to carry on doing evil for ever...pretty much. Gus does this and finds all the necessary components to create the perfect piece of Kryptonite except one which he replaces with tar. Consequently when Superman is presented with the Kryptonite which is cleverly disguised as a large green rock...nothing happens. Turns out the missing element is the reason for the delay and it gives our superhero a slow drip feed of evil.

Superman visits the home of Clark Kent's childhood sweetheart Lana Lange and instead of rushing off to save a truck which is about to fall from the very bridge it was travelling on he has a go at trying to get Miss Lange into bed...awkward I know, but that's Kryptonite for you.



So what do we know about Superman when he is under the influence of Kryptonite? Well firstly he doesn't wash his outfit. Not a bad thing as the later Superman movies proved. Dark is a good look. He doesn't shave, also not a bad thing. Five O'clock shadow on a superhero can be quite appealing. He drinks whiskey...again not the worst thing a fella can do after a hard day at the office. I'd rather he was seen drinking that than a bizarrely named cocktail with an umbrella and fruit on a stick in it. No much worse that all of this is his inability to stop using his powers out of office hours. Here he is having a drink down at the local bar, which happens to have stuntman Colin Skeaping as the bartender, and he decides to flick the peanuts at the mirror behind the bar. Any normal punter wouldn't get within ten feet of the mirror or the bottles stacked on the shelves but our caped lush not only scores a doubles figures score of direct hits and smashes everything in sight he then and for no obvious reason uses the heat rays from his eyes to bend the already broken mirror! Its alcoholism gone mad! Colin tries his best to keep our stubbly superhero from flying off with the entire building in a fit of rage and Superman walks out angrily to fight his demons head on.

What this movie lacks it makes up for in heart. Christopher Reeve was the one who put the idea of Superman having to deal with his darker side on the table. And it's a great idea. It's worked for many in the past. The *Star Wars* films and many of the later *James Bond* adventures. They had enough trouble in the early days making him fly. Now they had to put Superman and Clark Kent on the screen together...but how?

Well we need to thank a few boys from the Optical department for giving us a chance to see this battle for real. Roy Field, Peter Harman and Martin Brody almost single handedly worked out the positioning of the shots and where the other person's perspective would be.



As optical shots go this is very good for 1983. The same actor faces himself in a nearby junkyard. Certain shots would require Christopher Reeve to play both characters in a tight mid-shot incorporating the other character. For these shots stuntman Mark Stewart stepped in and played whichever character Christopher wasn't. The end result is pretty impressive.



So evil Superman (Mark Stewart) punches Clark Kent (Christopher Reeve)

During a meeting like this evil Superman would throw the weedy Clark about a bit. In fact he'd throw him a lot. Mark Stewart was involved in many a heavy landing for this movie.



The landing looks very heavy, but many of the steel sheets Mark is landing on are cardboard made to look like the real thing. The next item we are going to look at is where the evil Superman says “You always did want to fly Kent, well now’s your chance”. Clark is then picked up and thrown fifty feet across the junkyard into a car crusher. This was done using a Russian Swing which is a giant version of a swing you might see in a children’s playground which is used to propel acrobats in circus great distances often ending up in a pool or a mat or on the shoulders of another acrobat. Mark will land safely in a box rig and live to fight another day, but what a ride.



Mark Stewart in full flight

The next action is based around the Grand Canyon hideaway of our villain Ross Webster. In order to get from the top to the bottom they must use motorised balloons. The sequence was devised by Colin Prescott who had previously worked on the 1981 Ryan O'Neal movie *Green Ice*.



Colin Prescott was also used as a double, although no stills exist any longer. Presumably because he was required to double the very lovely Pamela Stephenson for the sequence. Hanging 300ft above the canyon floor underneath a helicopter. He has never lived it down.

So inside the hideaway Gus decides he's had enough of trying to harm Superman and would rather be on his side after seeing what the world's most powerful computer can do. This computer was his idea and so impressed was Webster when he heard the idea he had it built and installed in the canyon.

He must get from the top of the gantry to the floor as quickly as possible. He decides to improvise a zip line and grabs a rope to slide down. Greg Elam doubles Richard Pryor for this fall.

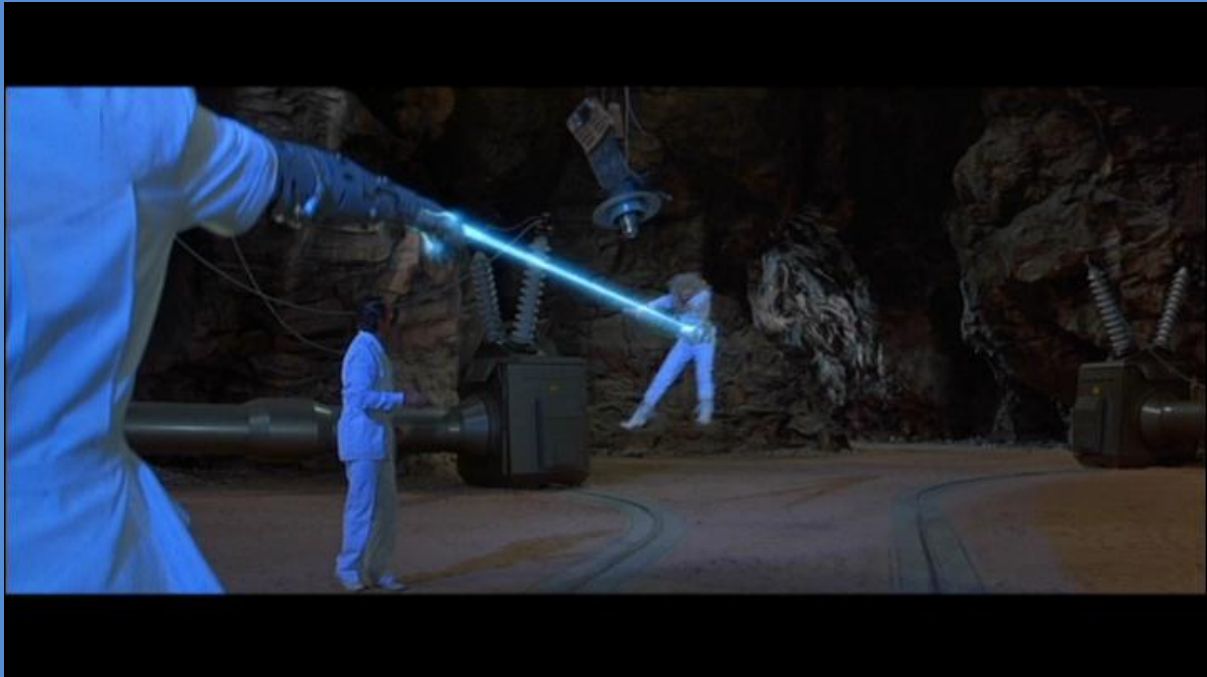


As if that wasn't bad enough Gus is now going to be attacked by the computer. A beam of light shoots out from the body of the machine, grabs hold of him and throws him against the wall of the hideout. Greg Elam again takes the fall.



Part of the stuntman's job is to be the character they are doubling for. You've probably heard the phrase 'selling the stunt' well here is a fine example of Greg Elam selling the stunt on the behalf of Richard Pryor.

Pamela Stephenson is also going to take a tumble at the hands of Ross Webster's sister who has been grabbed by the computer and has become some form of android...yes I know, but just go with it.

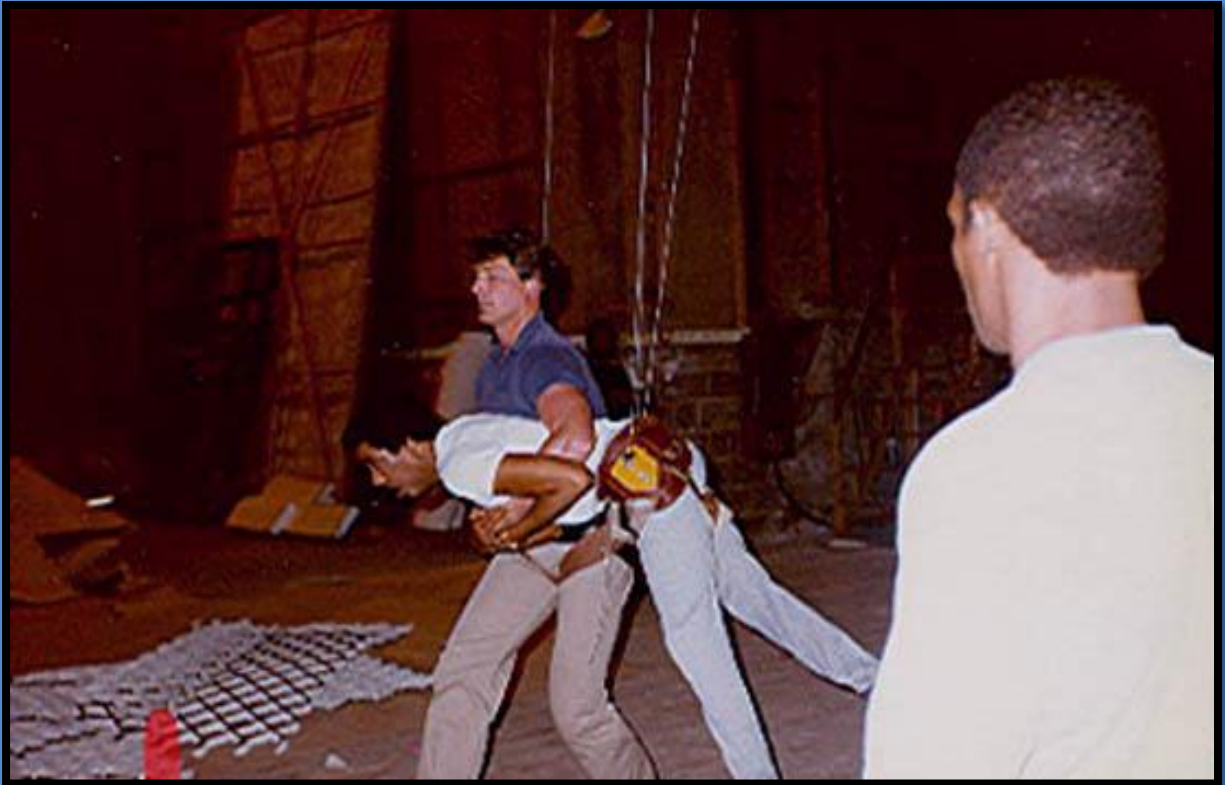


Pamela does the first part and Tracey Eddon does the rest



Finally on this picture we must talk about the flying. Flying had become second nature to Christopher Reeve and Margot Kidder in the earlier pictures, but Richard Pryor really wasn't keen on leaving the ground. Rumour has it that before travelling overseas for film or comedy shows he would sink the best part of a bottle of bourbon. Measures had to be taken to make sure that Richard got used to hanging about.

**“You don't know about me and  
Superman”?**



Here we see Christopher Reeve and Richard Pryor practising the flying sequences at Shepperton Studios under the watchful eye of Greg Elam.



The two men got on pretty well on set. Chris knew his lines and so did Richard. They both enjoyed sports and supported the same teams. They were often seen in between set ups enjoying each other's company.



And so onto our final outing with Christopher Reeve as Superman and if you thought *Superman III* was tough going then this fourth instalment must be like walking from Dover to Calais in glue.

Christopher Reeve was again at the front of the campaign for this movie and had written not only a series of ideas, but a full script based around those ideas. The concept of nuclear disarmament was at the forefront of people's minds. Chris thought that if anyone was able to do something about the nuclear problem it would be a superhero. After all governments had talked and promised for years, but nothing had been done. Chris had the idea of seeing the world through a child's eyes and so a school kid writes to Superman asking him to help with getting rid of these weapons of mass destruction.

Superman, after some soul searching, agrees and addresses the United Nations confirming his intent to rid the world of all nuclear weapons. Well that's just marvellous. What could possibly go wrong?

Well the scriptwriters decided that if Superman was going to fight the world's biggest problem head on he would also need something else to keep an eye on. This came in the form of Nuclear Man...no seriously it did. Not only that but in the original shooting script one Nuclear Man wasn't enough. There were two. One played by Mark Pillow and the other by Clive Mantle. Clive's nuclear dude was destroyed fairly early on and Mark's nuclear chap took all of the first one's power...yes I'm confused too, but let it wash over you.

Very few action sequences in this adventure. The producers relying on special effects to see them through, but one or two moments are well worth a mention. Firstly a sequence at the Great Wall of China or the back lot at Elstree Studios as it became known. Nuclear Man is enjoying his power far too much and likes nothing more than blowing stuff up. The wall that can be seen from space is such an item of stuff. He doesn't care, but the wall is full of tourists and they are in for quite an afternoon. One young lady in particular.



Stunt Co-ordinator Alf Joint mingling with the crowd for this destructive sequence.



To the right of the shot you will see a young lady in a green top, blue jeans and white trainers or sneakers if you're of the American persuasion. This is stunt performer Sarah Franzl and its one of her earliest jobs. Alf Joint was a firm believer in bringing through new talent and Sarah had a big future ahead of her. In years to come she would perform stunts on *Harry Potter*, *Mission Impossible*, *Johnny English* and numerous *James Bond* adventures. Although rather more immediately she has a 50ft fall to concentrate on. Poise, grace and determination are the three qualities that sum up Sarah rather well. Here she is in action.



The fall is completed now they must make the pick-up shots where Sarah is rescued by Superman. This requires wire work training. Sarah had many years circus experience before entering the stunt business so she is fully aware of the safety requirements.



I wonder if in years to come she will look back at these photos with her children or their children and stare open mouthed at what she has done with her life. Pretty awesome to say that you were one of a select few who was saved by and flew with Superman.



And judging by the big smile on her face she enjoyed every single minute of it too.

Now the other major set piece in this picture is the downtown Metropolis battle with Nuclear Man. Passers-by get caught up in the middle of the chaos and are thrown into danger.



The streets explode and people's lives are thrown into turmoil once again as Superman fights evil.



Here we see an everyday scene. A bunch of happy go lucky stunt folk walking down the road when they are suddenly lifted into the air by Nuclear Man. The three gentlemen at the front are L-R Simon Crane, Terry Cade and Roy Alon.

Then you get the SWAT team responding and they send out their best man.



And when I say their best man I mean ours. This is the late, great Peter Diamond. The stunt co-ordinator on *Star Wars*, *Highlander* and one of my favourite swashbucklers *The Princess Bride*. Note please that his weapon is bending a bit. This is because it is made of rubber and he's having trouble holding it up...I'm so sorry about that!



You see? Rubber.

The one thing to be said for these movies is they're great entertainment and if you wanted to go to the movies and watch some escapist fun for 2hrs they were ideal. I have a feeling that the phrase 'does exactly what it says on the box' was written about the Superman Quadrilogy.

In years to come after Superman IV the character had a revival as a successful TV show starring Dean Cain as the caped crusader and his Lois was played by Terri Hatcher who went on to become a Bond girl in *Tomorrow Never Dies* and then a *Desperate Housewife*.

New movies were always being talked about and an initial idea that had originally been suggested by Christopher Reeve was based around Clark Kent's days growing up in his home town of *Smallville*. This show really captured the nation's imagination and was a massive success here in the UK and in the US.

On May 27<sup>th</sup> 1995 Christopher Reeve was competing in an equestrian event in Virginia when his horse refused at an obstacle and threw Reeve to the ground. His injuries were life changing. He spent the rest of his life in a wheel chair as a quadriplegic and required constant care from his wife Dana and a number of nurses.

To see this man of steel reduced to this was heart-breaking for many and for me. Christopher Reeve was one of my favourite actors when I was growing up and not having him around as Superman was very difficult for many to come to terms with. "He's Superman, he'll bounce back", the public said but it wasn't to be and on October 10<sup>th</sup> 2004 he died having suffered a cardiac arrest brought on by his antibiotics. He was 52 years old. As if this wasn't enough for the family to cope with his wife Dana was diagnosed with cancer and died the following year. She was 44.

It goes to show how extraordinary the Superman story is when the man who played him for many years is struck down by something that wouldn't have affected his alter-ego and his wife passing away from lung cancer could have been prevented with the use of his x-ray vision.

Newspapers of the world joined in paying tribute to the man who gave the world Superman. Here are a few of the cartoons dedicated to Christopher Reeve.





Chris was a great supporter of the stunt business and he knew better than most how important the stunt team is to a production like Superman. His great friend Vic Armstrong was in Virginia when he heard of Chris's accident.

"There for the grace of God go all of us. You couldn't visit him in hospital as he was far too poorly and I never had the opportunity to see him again. But he was one of the bravest men I ever came across. He was a real fighter"

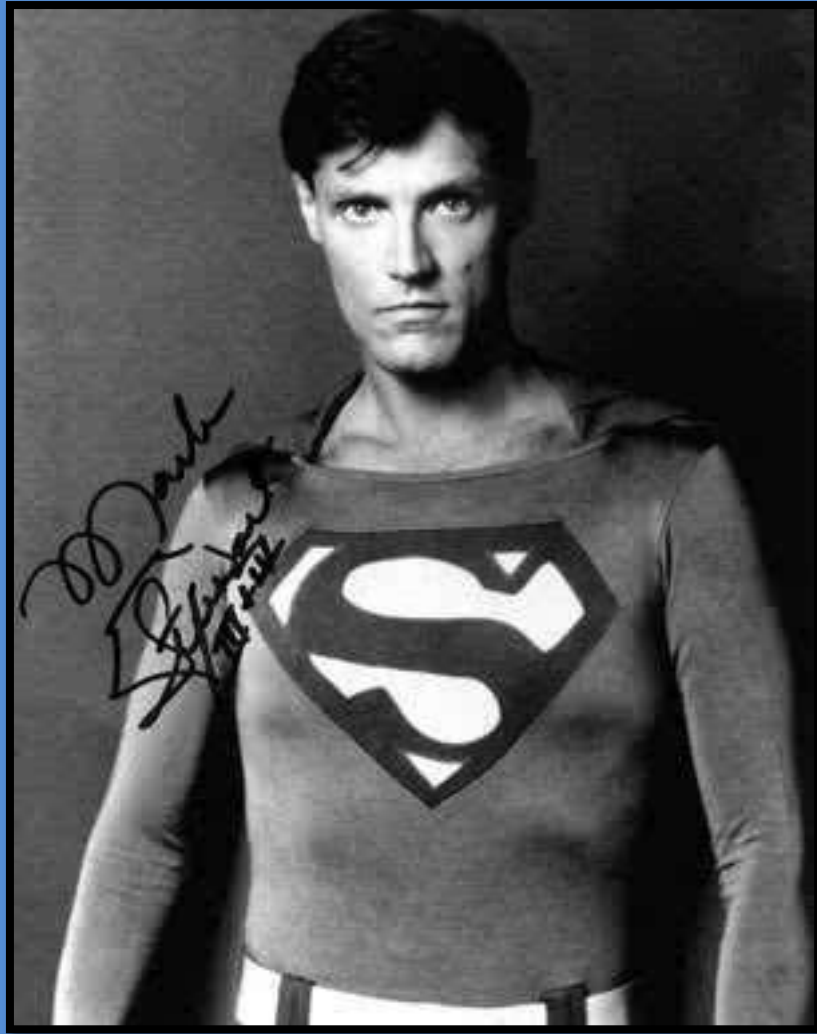
It seems appropriate after looking at all four of these movies that I should leave you with a story told to me many years ago but a stuntman, but one I just couldn't believe until I saw the photo. Christopher Reeve would have been in the final stages of promotion for Superman III in England when he was called by an agent friend who had been asked to call him for a casting while he was in the country.

Chris wanted to know what the casting was for, but wasn't told. He was given instructions to go to Pinewood Studios and wait for a phone call. Odd I know, but read on and I try and explain. He arrives at Pinewood and drives into the main car park. A man came out of a doorway and shouted "Mr Reeve, phone call for you sir". Chris walked through the doorway, into an office and picked up the phone. "Hello this is Christopher Reeve", he said in his best I've had enough of this voice. The voice on the end of the phone was Roger Moore who said "Thank God for that now come over and see us - I need a Superman around here and you're the best in town". Roger was filming *Octopussy* and the circus tent

sequence was being filmed on the back lot. Chris thought he might be asked for Bond when in fact he was asked for by Bond.



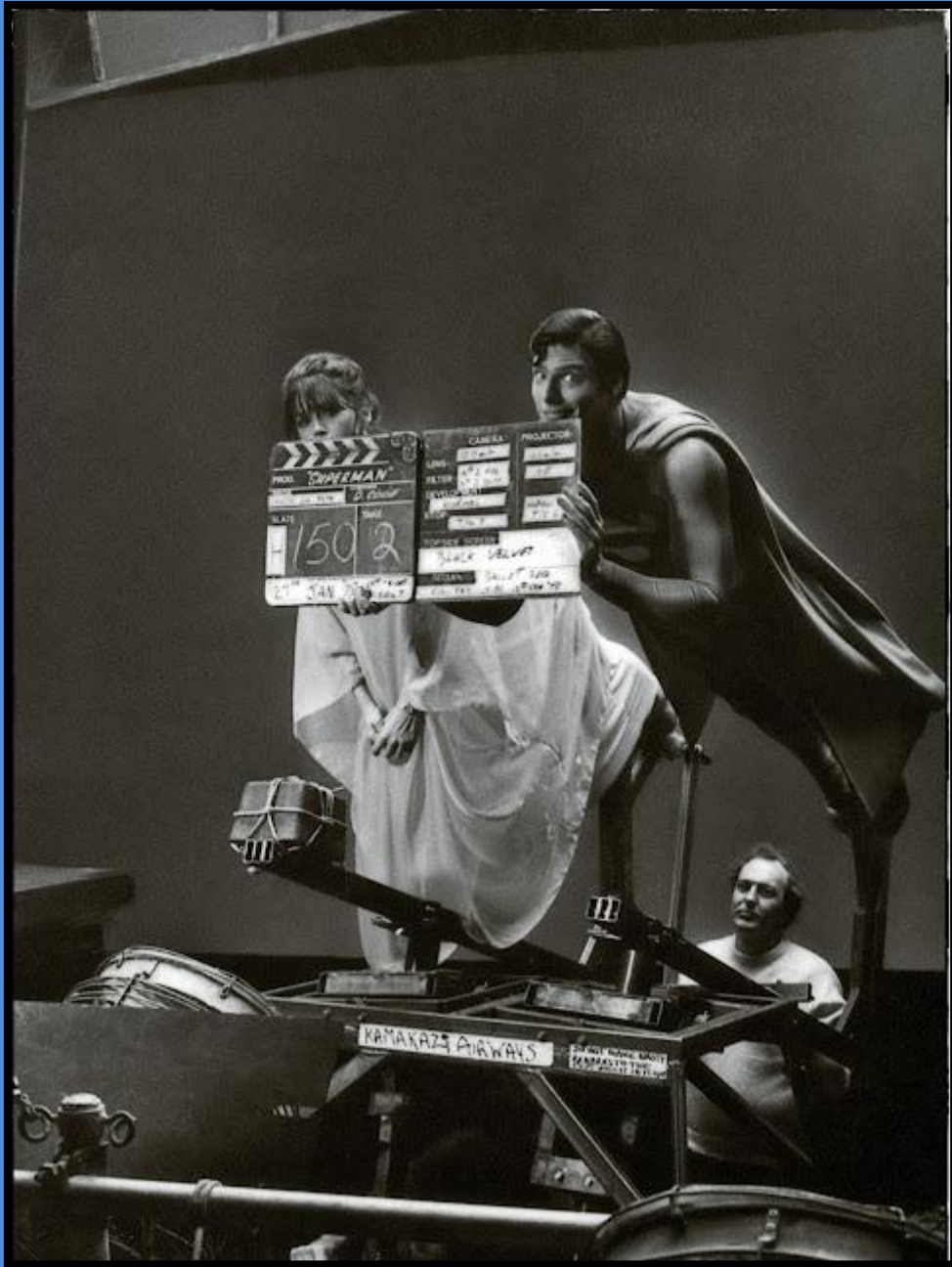
**Christopher Reeve  
takes a swing at stunt  
co-ordinator Paul  
Weston on the set of  
Superman III**



Flying stunt double Mark Stewart



Ever wondered about those  
Superman take offs?



The glamorous life of the superhero flying  
Kamikaze Airways



*A Legend Will Be Missed*  
CHRISTOPHER REEVE  
**CHRISTOPHER REEVE**

"If there is no great glorious end to all this, if nothing we do matters,  
then all that matters is what we do"

1 9 5 2 - 2 0 0 4

Superman - Above & Beyond

Written and produced by Jon Auty

With thanks to

[www.capedwonder.com](http://www.capedwonder.com)

Vic Armstrong

Roy Alon

Paul Weston

And all of the stuntmen and women who performed the action on these four Superman adventures

Superman - The Movie 1978

Superman II - 1980

Superman III - 1983

Superman IV - The Quest For Peace 1987

This publication is dedicated to the memories and families of Christopher and Dana Reeve



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