



IS IT A BIRD? CHRISTOPHER REEVE HAD TO CONTEND FOR THE PART OF SUPERMAN WITH MANY OTHER STARS, INCLUDING ROBERT REDFORD, RYAN O'NEAL AND SYLVESTER STALLONE

Guinness Choice Superman

143 mins, USA/UK, col
Dir Richard Donner
Christopher Reeve, Margot Kidder,
Gene Hackman, Ned Beatty



Superman was launched in a blaze of publicity at a time when audience expectations had been raised by super-effects-laden big-budget blockbusters such as *Star Wars* (1977). The cost of the credits sequence alone exceeded the entire budget of most movies of the day. Happily, *Superman* more than lived up to the hype.

The lengthy prologue, explaining Superman's origins, is impressive, but it is when Christopher Reeve dons the Man of Steel's cape and tights that the story really takes off. On the planet Krypton, Jor-El (Marlon Brando, in the highest-paid cameo ever) tells his fellow elders that they must evacuate in order to avoid an imminent planetary catastrophe. They fail to heed his warnings, so Jor-El sends his baby son off to the planet Earth, where he hopes his child will blend in despite his immense strength and ability to

defy gravity. On Earth the young child is adopted by the Kent family, who keep his great powers secret. After the death of Pa Kent (Glenn Ford), young Clark (Reeve) learns of his true origins and heads for the city of Metropolis. There he takes on dual identities, working as a mild-mannered reporter on the *Daily Planet*, and defending truth, justice and the American way of life as Superman. Christopher Reeve is excellent in the double role of Clark Kent and Superman, making the reporter an endearing, accident-prone bumbler and Superman effortlessly heroic, but with his tongue placed firmly in his cheek. Able support is provided by Margot Kidder as feisty *Planet* reporter Lois Lane, who treats Clark with affectionate disdain

while going gooey-eyed whenever the superhero turns up. Comedy is provided by Gene Hackman's evil genius Lex Luthor and Ned Beatty as Luthor's inept henchman Otis. Marlon Brando is on screen for less than 15 minutes, for which he earned \$3 million and a share of the film's profits, while Trevor Howard and Glenn Ford's appearances are similarly brief. However, it was not the stars of yesteryear that audiences were queuing up to see. The special effects are good (the movie's publicity blurb included the line: 'You'll believe a man can fly!') if not brilliant, but the film's real strength lies in its sense of fun, something upon which the inevitable sequels (in 1980, 1983 and 1987) would build.