

PATHFINDER

DIGEST OF WORLD AFFAIRS

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LEGS

One of the oldest newspaper publicity devices is the "leg display." Resorted to chiefly by actresses whose press agents want them to break into print, it consists of nothing more than arriving in New York aboard an ocean liner and letting news photographers do the rest.

The "leg display" is usually achieved by the actress when she perches on the ship rail and crosses her pretty knees as the cameras click. Next day, her picture appears in the papers, with her well-turned ankles and shapely calves amply impressed upon the reading public.

Through just such a device many a Hollywood star has launched her career, it being, apparently, a demonstrated fact in the movie world that good-looking legs win attention long before acting ability. In the days of the silents, Phyllis Haver, Gloria Swanson, Bebe Daniels and others followed this rule consistently in the Mack Sennett "bathing beauty" series.

Then, when bathing suits became more abbreviated, the practice continued with still greater leg display. Greta Garbo, for example, frequently posed in track outfits and swim shorts before her publicity build-up centered almost exclusively around her mysterious silences and glamorous flights.

Marlene Dietrich, who still carries the nickname "Legs," once used the leg-display technique for all it was worth. Throughout "The Blue Angel," her first American movie appearance, she played a skirt-lifting part deliberately designed to make her underpinning famous.

As these and other actresses became box-office successes, however, they began to rebel against leg show and to rely more upon "art." As a result, Dietrich today professes to be annoyed by any publicity having to do with her shapeliness, and Claudette Colbert, who once displayed her legs quite readily on the stage, now is rather reluctant to do so. Others who have voiced the same reluctance include Loretta Young and Joan Crawford.