

Telescopic Ladder Shootout

Ladders and flashlights are near and dear to the home inspector, as these are tools we use on a daily basis. This summer I evaluated telescoping ladders from Telesteps® and Xtend & Climb®. As with our flashlight evaluation I decided to use each ladder for 45 days and then compare my experiences.

What inspector's love about these types of ladders are their small 2.5 ft. size when collapsed and one story working length when extended. The 12.5 ft. models are the most popular and come in heavy- 300lb ratings and lighter-225lb ratings. Each ladder extends in 1ft. increments. Lets look at the two contenders:

Telesteps® 12.5 ft. Telescopic Extension Ladder

Telesteps® originated in Swedish but today is built in China. Telesteps® ladders are fashioned from 100% anodized aluminum. Slide bushings and molded dampers on the sections give the ladders a smooth, sliding action when open and close it. The feet are made of ribbed rubber.

The locking mechanism is unique to Telesteps®. To raise the ladder you will need to determine the overall working height, then determine the number of sections to raise. So if you are going into a standard attic hatch you would count down to the ninth section and start raising from there. The collapsed section will be at the top of the ladder. To lower the ladder, raise the ladder to vertical and pull the locking rings. The rings release the sections and the ladder collapses.

Xtend & Climb Ladder - Telescopic Ladder

The Xtend & Climb® is similar to the Telesteps® in constructions with a couple of key differences. It is manufactured of 6061 Alloy, weighs the same as the Telesteps® and but has a Velcro closure strap. The method to raise the ladder is the same as Telesteps®: determine your climbing height and start to raise the sections. To collapse the ladder you release each section individually with thumb latches.

The evaluation:

I know several inspectors who swear by the Telesteps® so I was pretty excited to incorporate it into my inspections. I read the directions and put the ladder up several times at my own house before going on my first inspection with it. Initially, I was not impressed with the ladder. I found myself either extending it too far or not enough. With



Xtend & Climb on left, Telesteps on right

the Telesteps®, the only way to change to climbing height is to collapse it and try again. I also found that if you put the ladder too far into the attic that the hatch lid will pinch the ladder preventing it from coming down. If you've released the locks in the process, you have to make sure that you relock them before climbing the ladder to fix the hatch. This isn't a reflection on the ladder but perfecting the attic hatch techniques takes practice. The Telesteps® also needs to be nearly vertical to collapse. If it's on an angle the sections will bind and will fight you trying to get them telescope. On a number of occasions I released the locks and nothing would happen.

My initial impression of the Telesteps® wasn't positive and I took a while to warm up to it. After about two weeks, I got the techniques down and was feeling pretty good about it. This ladder really impressed the clients and worked well on interiors and one story roofs with one caveat. The round tubes of the telescoping ladders wanted to slide along the gutter. This was common to both ladders. I found out the hard way you need to check each lock mechanism. This was true for both ladders especially if the tubes had any dirt on them. For some reason the Telestep engineers designed the locking mechanism so on the upper sections the indicators are "in" when locked but at the base the indicators are "out" when locked. The indicators should be consistent for safety. I also found that there was only one carrying position. If you tried to grab a beam and carry it sideways, the ladder would want to extend. I ended up wrapping it with a bungee cord, but really wanted a nice nylon strap with a carrying handle on it.

When I switched to the Xtend & Climb® I had already mastered the telescoping ladder techniques so I concentrated on the more subtle differences such as the locking mechanisms and construction. The ladder comes with an attached carrying strap that ensures the ladder stays collapsed when you are carrying it. Although I thought collapsing each section might be a hindrance, it never was. I did find that you could put it up incorrectly given locking mechanism. Normally you would want the strongest part of the ladder extended which is the bottom but with the Xtend & Climb® you could raise the top sections. While this won't compromise the integrity of the ladder, it does leave all the sections at the bottom and there is large gap as you step down which could cause a fall. The benefit of this type of locking system is that you can raise or lower just an individual section, so if you misjudge your distances you don't have to lower the ladder all the way.



The Xtend & Climb® ladder is designed to avoid pinching your fingers. The latches are designed to keep your hands to the sides. Each section closes easily and stops before it comes in contact with the section below it. The last section has a pneumatic piston in it to slowly lower it.

In September, Consumers Reports gave the "kiss of death" rating to the Little Giant,

Telesteps®, and Xtend & Climb® ladders. Consumers Report's focused on finger pinching and the ladder feet slipping to justify the rating but I didn't experience any of the issues during my testing. The Telesteps® and Xtend & Climb® representatives felt the ratings are unjustified and are refuting the information. One key point is that with any tool, whether it is a power saw or ladder, we must understand its intended use and limitations.

Summary

The differences between the ladders are small and both serve their intended purpose well. However given a choice between ladders I preferred the Xtend & Climb® even though the locking system took longer to close. I like the flexibility it offered and I had more confidence when using it. I also like the nylon strap that was attached to the ladder. Telesteps® has straps for other models and should strongly consider adding it to their 12.5 model. Both companies offered carry bags, but in our line of work, a bag just gets in the way.

A telescoping ladder is a great asset for those who are constrained on vehicle space but if you already have a ladder that works, my advice is to stick with it. I would also advise you to try one before buying. I also don't see this as your only ladder unless you never plan to climb to a second story.