

Versatile Ladder by Mark Clement

Little Giant Select Step Ladder
Little Giant Ladder
800/453-1192
littlegiantladder.com
Street price: \$220

I'm not a big fan of gadgets. Or of expensive tools not worth the money. And I'm leery of tools from infomercials. So I can understand if your reaction to the infomercial blitz from Little Giant is to think its Type 1, extra-heavy-duty-rated Select Step "adaptive" ladder is just some DIY product. I can honestly tell you, though, it's not. My 6-foot stepladder hasn't left the shop since I got a Select Step.

I spend lots of time finagling ways to get up to some work areas — especially those above walk-out basements — without killing myself. To start with, the geometry of a standard 6-foot stepladder means that climbing up puts me farther away (horizontally) from the work. Other challenges vary with the site conditions: anything from sloping ground to a ledger location that's just begging me to stand on the "This Is Not A Step" step or drag out an extension ladder. The Select Step is designed to solve these problems, and it's so versatile, I don't need two or three ladders on my truck anymore.

The ladder is a telescoping A-frame; you can raise both legs of the A together to create either a 5-, 6-, 7-, or 8-foot ladder. I've never owned an 8-foot stepladder (I'm a cheapskate), but now I have one in the Select Step. I can easily get my shoulders 11 feet off the ground standing on the proper top rung (not the rung above that).

You can also raise the rung side higher than the non-rung side, tilting the ladder into the work. The infomercial-version of this feature

will surely be of painting a stairwell, but it works for decks too. If you have a light fixture to install, for instance, you — and your tools — can work right next to the house rather than at arm's length away as with most stepladders. Another time you can use this feature is when the grade pitches away from the house — shortened legs uphill, extended legs downhill. The flat-top rungs tilt with the ladder, making them a little uncomfortable to stand on if you've got to be up in that position all day, but for quick jobs, no worries.

The Select Step has a 28-inch-wide base — much wider than my 6-foot stepladder — making it very stable at its 8-foot height. It collapses to a 5-foot height, which makes it easier to store in the shop or truck. And it has an on-board accessory, called an Air Deck, for storing tools and other stuff on the top of the ladder. It actually works, though it doesn't stay very securely in the on-board cradle.

The ladder's high-quality rubber wheels allow me to use it as a hand truck — I load tool boxes on the ladder body and roll them all at once. The wheels are small and work only on smooth surfaces, but they work.

Yes, you'll see the Select Step on TV. Even so, I believe it is a professional-grade ladder. It costs more than a regular stepladder, but it enables me to work faster and safer and spend less time figuring out how to make a standard ladder work with nonstandard conditions — you know, the kind we encounter every day.

Mark Clement is a contributing editor and a deck builder in Ambler, Penn.



Joist-Hanger Nailer Saves Time

**Paslode PF150S-PP
Positive Placement Nailer**
Illinois Tool Works
800/222-6990
paslode.com
Street price: \$300

by Robert Shaw

Most deck builders drive a lot of metal connector nails, which can be pretty time consuming. If you're still nailing off hangers by hand, the Paslode 150S will save you time, for sure, and pay for itself quickly.

The tool has a metal nosepiece that you just place in the hardware hole. Pull the trigger, and the 150S sets

the nail nicely without overdriving and distorting the hardware. It's well balanced and comes with a skyhook that can be put on either side. It also features a low-nail lockout to prevent damage to the driver when you run out of nails.

The ease of use and reliability of the 150S make it ideal to hand off to a laborer or less-experienced employee, so your carpenters can move on to other tasks. You'll need only a few minutes to teach someone how to use it.

The only downsides are small. Although this is not usually a problem for deck builders, when I used the nailer to install truss clips, the nails

were left a little proud when piercing the gusset plate. And it only shoots 1½-inch nails, while some framing hardware requires 2½-inch nails. On the plus side, Paslode does sell the 1½-inch nails in a mechanically galvanized version. ❖

Robert Shaw owns Colorado Deck and Framing in Colorado Springs.

