

Acoustic Energy AE1 Classic



£845

IMAGINE PITTING A 1980s Ford Escort up against 2006 versions of a VW Golf. Could it compete? No chance! Twenty years is a long time in any industry, and hi-fi is no different. Yet the original AE1 was no ordinary speaker, so don't expect the outcome to be so negative.

The AE1s first surfaced in the mid-1980s, stunning the market with their exceptional sound, high price and cutting-edge engineering, single-handedly establishing Acoustic Energy as a serious speaker brand. Even today, the originals are highly sought after on the secondhand market, which is why Acoustic Energy has chosen to reissue the speaker after all this time.

Impressive colours and control

It's a measure of just how far ahead of the competition the AE1 was that it's not embarrassed in this test. More than that, in many sonic areas these speakers are right up with the class-leaders. It's an astonishing achievement for such an elderly design. Those twin metal drivers still blend seamlessly, projecting the sound with immense authority. They go loud, too. Play Radiohead's *Paranoid*

FOR

An authoritative, punchy sound; go loud; powerful bass for their size

AGAINST

Don't capture subtleties as well as newer rivals

VERDICT

The AE1s are true classics, still good enough to compete with the best almost two decades on

Android at neighbour-rattling levels, and the AE1s stay calm and composed. There's no sign of edginess or compression. In fact, we submit before they do.

Bass is strong, too; the speakers giving surprising weight. You'll need solid, heavy stands and a muscular amp, but get it right and the scale and punch are impressive. Stereo-imaging is expansive and focused also, provided the speakers are at least 30cm out in the room. Finally, the tonal balance is commendably even.

Weaknesses? Compared to newer rivals, the AE1s don't quite capture subtle nuances in a performance, be it Jill Scott's immaculate vocals on *Beautifully Human* or the LSO's passionate rendering of *Tragic* from Mahler's *Symphony*

"The AE1s are classics, still good enough to compete with the best decades on"

No.6. The result is the emotion in the music isn't communicated as clearly as it should be. Detail and low-level dynamics fall short of the best at this price level.

The blunt conclusion is that you can buy a better performance for the money. Even so, it's a measure of the original AE1s' design that it can still compete so well with newer rivals. Turns out it was less of an Escort, more of a Porsche 911.



Punchy and authoritative, these AE1s conceal the fact that their design is almost 20 years old

ATC SCM 11



£850

SOMETIMES HI-FI FORCES you to make a choice: between accuracy and entertainment. This *Group Test* demands you make such a decision. There are speakers here that'll do a better job with flawed recordings than these – those that'll round off the rough edges and make the sound more

"No other speaker renders Mahler's Symphony No.6 with such utter precision"

palatable – but the ATCs don't do that: they give the music to you straight. These SCM 11s remain faithful to the recording: warts and all. You'll hear the flaws all right, but they won't be exaggerated, either.

A neutral tonal balance is just one part of the equation. Class-leading resolution is another. No other speaker in this test renders the instruments in Mahler's *Symphony No.6* with such precision, or can unravel the intricacies of Radiohead's *Electioneering* with such ease. Think of all the hi-fi qualities we normally talk about: timing, dynamics,

FOR

Brilliant all-round sound; transparent; unfussy about positioning; rugged build

AGAINST

Not at their best at low volume levels; need a powerful amp

VERDICT

These ATCs set a sky-high standard for the rest of this group to try and match

scale... the list goes on. In each area the ATC is either the best, or positioned just behind the champ in that discipline.

The result of such all-round musical talent is speakers that'll play all types of music with equal ease. They're not particularly fussy about positioning, either. A sealed cabinet – the only one in this test – helps the low-end stay controlled close to a wall, and gives the SCM 11s the kind of tuneful, articulate bass most ported speakers can only dream of. Yes, some rivals have more bass – and we're not just talking about floorstanders – but better-quality bass? No.

ATCs take you away to ecstasy

Build quality is as rugged as you might expect from a manufacturer so closely linked to the pro-audio market (where equipment is used and abused, yet still expected to work year after year).

Flaws? These speakers shine brightest at medium volumes and above. At low settings they lose too much life for our liking. They're also insensitive, so need at least 100 watts per channel to motor.

That's all we can moan about. Don't buy anything else near this price without trying the SCM 11s out first. We love 'em!

The ATCs reproduce sound more clearly and faithfully than any other speakers in this test



TEST RESULT

Look no further: this stunning pair of stereo speakers from **ATC** provides realism and detail like few others

NO PRIZES FOR guessing that the Wharfedales finish bottom of the pile. They're not bad, just uninspiring, and in this group that isn't good enough.

Miles ahead come Acoustic Energy's AEs. These are terrific little speakers that perform astonishingly well considering the age of the design. Want a piece of hi-fi history while getting modern standards of performance? Here you are.

Next comes a trio of closely matched performers. The Dynaudios, ProAcs and Triangles are all excellent, and any preference for one over

the other is purely down to taste rather than outright ability. Try them out and see if any in particular float your boat.

However, first audition must go to ATC's excellent SCM 11s. These monitors raise the bar when it comes to transparency, dynamics and resolution at this price. We go so far as to say most speakers at double the money would struggle to better the ATC's performance. That's why they win this test. Just make sure the rest of your system is good enough.

"The SCM 11s raise the bar when it comes to dynamics, transparency and detail..."



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WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION
GROUP TEST WINNER

ATC SCM 11



£850



NOW ADD THESE



CD PLAYER
ROKSAN M-SERIES



£ 1100

This CD player is sometimes overlooked for the sonically flashier Cyrus CD8x, but in this case this Roksan is exactly what the ATCs need. It's detailed, full-bodied and delivers dynamics in an organic and unforced manner.



AMPLIFIER
ROKSAN KANDY L.III



£ 650

The uprated Kandy is more than up to the job of powering the ATCs. Its 120 watts per channel works with the speaker's low sensitivity, and its class-leading resolution is good enough to show off the ATC's talents.

STANDS
PARTINGTON SUPER DREADNOUGHT



£ 180

These are the minimum we'd recommend for the SCM 11s, with the mighty £400 Heavis from the same brand sounding even better, if budget permits.

TOTAL SYSTEM £2780

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE RANGE	ACOUSTIC ENERGY	ATC	DYNAUDIO	PROAC	TRIANGLE	WHARFEDEALE
£650 - £850	AE1	SCM 11	FOCUS 110	STUDIO 110	ALTEA ESW	EV02-30
SPECIFICATION						
PRICE	£ 845	£ 850	£ 850	£ 750	£ 795	£ 650
TYPE	Standmount	Standmount	Standmount	Standmount	Floorstander	Floorstander
SENSITIVITY	88dB/w/m	85dB/w/m	85dB/w/m	88dB/w/m	91dB/w/m	89dB/w/m
IMPEDENCE	8 ohms	8 ohms	8 ohms	8 ohms	8 ohms	6 ohms
POWER-HANDLING	200w	200w	150w	150w	100w	125w
BIWIRABLE	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
DIMENSIONS	30x18x26cm	38x21x25cm	31x17x29cm	38x20x24cm	107x31x37cm	92x23x40cm
FINISHES	Black	Cherry	Maple, rose	Ash, black, cherry, maple, mahogany	Bordeaux, champagne, cognac	Black ash, maple cherry, rosewood
HOW THEY RATED						
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★