



Reality bites

Looking for a sound that's crisp, clear and utterly honest? Try ATC's new entry-level range for size

PRODUCT ATC SCM19

TYPE Standmount loudspeaker

PRICE £1,499 per pair

KEY FEATURES Size (WxHxD): 22.3x44x31.5cm
 • Weight: 16kg • 25mm soft dome tweeter • 150mm bass/mid driver • Sensitivity: 85dB • Impedance: 8 ohms (nom) • Frequency Response (-6dB): 54Hz-22kHz

CONTACT ☎ 01285 760561 @ www.atc.gb.net

It's not often that ATC launches a whole range in one go, but that is precisely what it has done with its new Entry Series speakers. Gone are the SCM12, 20 and 35, and in come the SCM11, 19 and 40; only one original model number remains, although the new SCM7 bears little similarity to its predecessor. These are the Stroud-based company's most affordable products and are

passive designs with, for the most part, standmountable dimensions. The new SCM7 kicks things off at £499 per pair and the price rises slowly to £1,999 for the SCM40. The SCM19 tested here is the biggest standmount of the bunch, with its 19-litre volume.

In fact, the 19 is same size as the SCM20 it replaces, but had a name change to avoid confusion. But never mind the nomenclature... feel the girth. This back-breaker weighs in at 16kg, thanks to a motor assembly on the main driver that itself tips the scales at 9kg.

The key to ATC's impressive reputation in the 'pro' audio industry lies with its mid and bass drivers. These are built in-house and without compromise, and are designed to be played long and hard. The company's finest drivers are dubbed Super Linear (SL) and the SCM19 is the least expensive speaker that incorporates an SL

unit, in this case a 150mm design with a large 75mm soft dome. This large diameter also represents the size of the voice coil, which gives you some idea why the speaker is so heavy.

The main change to this speaker's predecessor is in the new high-frequency unit, which has a neodymium magnet and a faceplate that ATC machines in-house. This carefully curved aluminium plate has been designed to give greater and smoother high frequency dispersion. The tweeter itself is a 25mm soft dome with a second-order Butterworth crossover, incorporating metallised polypropylene capacitors, large air-core inductors and ceramic wire-wound resistors. These are all high-quality ingredients that give the speaker superior power handling and inspire the sort of confidence that ATC underpins with its six year guarantee.



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The hefty infinite baffle cabinet is constructed out of 18mm MDF, damped with 5mm bitumen pads; an extra 18mm is added to the front and painted in a ‘grey’ that’s so dark, it’s virtually black. This top baffle is profiled to make for smoother high-frequency dispersion and has the additional benefit of adding some curves to an otherwise very rectangular box.

Unusually for ATC, the speaker is balanced for use without a grille in place; one is supplied but for best results, leave it off. We suspect that ATC is, or was, the last bastion of grille-on ‘voicing’ and it’s a little sad, if entirely logical, for them to give up this classic tradition.

A lot of hi-fi companies claim to go for absolute neutrality, but as speakers never have a ruler-flat response, there’s always a degree of tonal tailoring. ATC eschews any sweetening of the mid or boosting of the bass, but aims to deliver as flat a response as possible. This spells success in the ‘pro’ audio world, but can lead to a result that is not as flattering as it might be.

SOUND QUALITY

The SCM19 is an analytical, revealing loudspeaker and it’s not hard to imagine it sounding abrasive in the wrong company. As such, what you put in is what you get out in terms of sound, with nothing in the way of smoothing in between.

Given the low 85dB sensitivity,

high power is essential. ATC suggests anything between 50 and 300 watts, but you’d need a pretty stiff power supply in an amp at the bottom end of that scale.

With this speaker, any description of its ‘sound’ is intrinsically reliant on discussing the nature of the rest of the system. This is a particularly analytical and precise speaker with a ‘warts ‘n’ all’ sound that can reveal the shortcomings of many recordings. But this is a price well worth paying for the ability to hear so far into the good recordings. It’s a variation on transparency that can take a bit of getting used to, however, and anyone considering this speaker should hear it with a few of their favourite albums first.

In the imaging department, the SCM19 is a slave to the signal and while only the best recordings create a sound that totally escapes the cabinets, the vast majority come across in open and honest fashion. So, Brendel’s piano playing is holographic and entirely beguiling, while early stereo recordings are patently crude in the way the engineers placed certain instruments exclusively in one channel.

As with previous ATCs, this model does a phenomenal job of differentiating between recordings. Because it has a genuinely wide dynamic range, you can hear the effects of compression all too easily... and on some occasions, this can come as a

bit of a shock. Take the first two tracks on *Led Zeppelin III*, for example. The opener, *Immigrant Song*, is squeezed severely, which gives it a sense of power and allows all the different instruments to be heard, but it could be distinctly more expansive. The next track, *Friends*, is far more open, with the acoustic guitar strings clattering and the soundstage opening out in rather more convincing fashion.

This transparency to the signal extends to timing, which is never other than on the money. In the bottom end, the specs suggest a 54Hz bass roll-off, but that is a misleading figure. In room, the speaker can shift remarkable amounts of air for its size thanks to the natural reinforcement of room boundaries. Then there’s power handling – the choice of a second rather than ATC’s preferred fourth-order crossover limits things only by ‘pro’ standards, and you won’t find many other domestic speakers that will go this loud without distortion.

This is a speaker for the purist who wants to hear what the band *really* put on tape, rather than a smoother, sweeter version of events. It offers uncanny transparency for the money but takes no prisoners. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy



VERDICT	
SOUND >> 90% [Progress bar]	PRO Very revealing of recordings and associated hardware; lovely real wood veneer; consummate power handling and wide dynamic range.
EASE OF DRIVE >> 62% [Progress bar]	CON Warts ‘n’ all presentation can be a shock. It’s also deceptively power hungry, and you’re best served using 200-watt amps (or more) to get the best from the speaker.
BUILD >> 92% [Progress bar]	
VALUE >> 89% [Progress bar]	
CONCLUSION With heavyweight construction and fabulous veneer, this is a classic, studio-friendly ATC design for the home. If you want to hear the nuts and bolts of favourite discs and are prepared to cope with their shortcomings, it’s nigh on unbeatable.	
HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE >> 90%	