

STEREO SPEAKERS
ATC
SCM 40
★★★★★
£ 2000

ATCs will give it to you straight

FOR

As honest a sonic presentation as you'll come across for the money; rugged build

AGAINST

Some people like their sound sugar-coated; functional looks

VERDICT

These ATCs are easily among the best speakers at this price level: is your system good enough?

THESE ATCS ARE fussy. Feed them a below-par recording – Erinnert's

Encore springs to mind – and they'll highlight any sonic shortcomings with the subtlety of an angry man with a megaphone. Don't stop reading just yet, though, because that's way less than half the story.

What you need to know is that the SCM 40s' biggest problem is also their main strength. Matched with a neutral system of suitable quality, and at least 100 watts of clean power, these ATCs are among

“Interestingly, the ATCs' biggest problem is also its strength – honesty”

the most truthful speakers we've come across. True, if a disc is poorly recorded, they won't fudge, blur or smooth. The upside is that when you listen to something better – say, Kate Bush's *Aerial* – the SCM 40s uncover a mountain of detail, and present it all in a cohesive and neatly structured manner. Tonally, these towers are spot on, having the kind of taut, controlled

low-frequency performance most floorstanders can only dream about.

These ATCs manage the rare trick of sounding like a small, agile standmount – until the music demands it, of course. It's only when you ask them to reproduce something with powerful lows, like Massive Attack's *Angel*, or with immense scale, such as Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, that these speakers sound big. That's a true mark of quality. Timing is crisp, too, which is something of a rarity in three-way designs: integrating three drivers can be a tricky task.

Great sound, functional looks

Positioning is easy: put the ATCs at least 60cm out into the room, and angle them in a touch. This way, you'll get balanced results, and a pleasingly expansive stereo image.

Flaws? The SCM 40s don't look as luxurious as some price rivals. Functional is probably the best description of their appearance.

Nevertheless, if you really want to hear exactly what the rest of your system is doing, we can't think of a better option for the money.



ALSO CONSIDER

B&W
703

★★★★★

£2000
October 2004

This large floorstander is excellent in parts, but it lacks coherence

SPENDOR
58e

★★★★★

£1995
October 2006
The 58es impress with their natural, unforced sound