

ATC SCM12

A high-quality stand-mount monitor from ATC for under £1000

PRICE	£1000
SUPPLIER	Loudspeaker Technology
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A no-nonsense approach to design and manufacture is one way the Acoustic Transducer Company distinguishes itself from the myriad speaker brands on the market. The other is in making seriously bomb-proof, pro monitors that routinely withstand the abuses of high-level rock'n' roll, yet preserve the finesse to satisfy the classical engineer in the neighbouring studio.

Clever photography might add some glamour to the look of the SCM12, but it's impossible to disguise the fact that this is an old-school four-square rectangular cabinet, 390 x 220 x 225mm (hwd), with all the design impact of a veneered shoebox. It has exactly the same form, in fact, as the SCM7 (*HFN* Jan 02), complete with cherry veneered cabinet, steel front baffle plate, and dark blue speaker grilles — but expanded to a larger box with a nominal 12 litre internal volume. The tweeter is the same soft-dome unit as the SCM7, but the main mid/bass driver is now a 150mm (6in) unit, with a larger convex dustcover in the centre, which ATC describes as a mechanically-coupled mid-range soft-dome.

Build quality is first class as ever, with a clean real wood finish over a high-density Medite cabinet. And a heavy cabinet it is too, weighing in

at 15kg (34lb) a piece, lending the requisite air of solidity. The grille, a fibreboard panel with cut-outs for the drivers, is a tight push-fit into the recessed front baffle. At the back is a set of terminals to bi-wire or bi-amp the speaker, fitted with removable links for single-cable connection.

Fresh out of the box, the SCM12 was not a terribly impressive performer, sounding tight, constricted and grainy; but experience has shown that sealed-box designs, such as those from ATC, usually benefit more than others from extended running-in. With some playing time under its belt, the SCM12 transformed into a smooth and confident loudspeaker, able to take just about anything in its stride.

It needs a capable amplifier to show what it can do. ATC cites a reasonable sensitivity of 85dB/1W (impedance 8 ohms), though I found that the more muscular and disciplined the amplifier, the better. Contenders such as the Chord Electronics SPM1200C, Linn Klout, Naim NAP 300 and ECS EA-2 had little trouble; ATC recommends at least 100W, which would rule out the 90W Linn and Naim amps, but in practice these two worked more than satisfactorily.

Set up on concrete-filled Target stands with Nordost Pulsar Points, the ATC SCM12 could sing out clearly given just half a chance. Integration across the whole audio band was excellent with no troublesome blooms, dips or peaks. Bass was very extended in-room, sounding more profound than the company's -6dB figure of 62Hz suggests.

TECHNOLOGY

ATC has been using its self-made large dome mid-range units for some time in its larger three-way domestic and pro audio speakers, citing the drivers' better dispersion and improved impulse response. The SCM12 doesn't quite get its own discrete driver but instead uses a 75mm dome glued into the centre of the heavily doped, polyester-weave main cone. Behind the scenes sits a massive 177mm (7in) 'Super Linear' magnet, which ATC gives as a factor in raising linearity and lowering distortion. The Vifa HF unit has a 25mm soft dome and uses a neodymium high-flux magnet.

KEY FEATURES

- Pro-audio heritage monitor loudspeaker
- Excellent bass control and response
- Main driver adds mid-range soft-dome

As an infinite baffle design, there was no port resonance or air noise to worry about — in fact the secure, damped but weighty bass contributed to the SCM12's even-handed approach across the board. Midband was smooth, if a little dark, and there were certainly no 'shouty' surprises there any more; more welcome was the sweet and refined treble. The Vifa unit that ATC has selected allows monitoring of fairly rough and unsophisticated material without adding more tweeter-borne fuel to the flames, and I found that even AC-3 soundtracks on DVD benefited from the natural, metal-free sound of the SCM12's HF unit. Unlike the smaller SCM7, which had a similar sense of robustness but lower maximum SPL, the SCM12 will also take high volume levels in its stride without the same dynamic restriction or limiting.

Soundstaging was another strength, as even though the speaker's rounded character meant the last hint of room acoustic wasn't thrust in your face, there were clearly positioned images in space behind and around the speakers when fed a high resolution signal from a quality CD player, turntable or DVD-A/SACD source. Given such a feed, the low coloration, impartial treble reproduction and overall wide dynamics of the SCM12 made it a joy to listen to. The fact that ATC has kept this high-performing loudspeaker a speck below £1000 should be immediately celebrated with a visit to the nearest ATC dealer.

WORDS ANDREW HARRISON

