



ATC's active alternative to boring boxes

ATC SCM 10A-2

Active loudspeaker £999



For Control; resolution; tonal neutrality; styling and build

Against Balanced XLR input only

Verdict The active approach isn't fashionable, but the SCM 10A-2s prove that it can work beautifully

Visually the SCM 10A-2s mark a significant departure from traditional rectangular boxes. Yet their stylish appearance is a long way down the list of what makes these speakers so different.

That classy, unusual cabinet is composed of laminated MDF panels and sleek aluminium extrusions, which lock together to produce a neatly tapered, low resonance enclosure. The shape reduces the build-up of internal standing waves and looks pretty cool into the bargain.



Packed into each compact cabinet are two power amps. One sends 200W into a heavily engineered 12.5cm polyester-weave mid/bass driver; the other outputs 50W and is dedicated to the 25mm soft-dome tweeter.

These amplifiers are designed to work in Class A for two thirds of their maximum output, and so produce a fair bit of heat. In fact the long heat-sinks around the back of the speaker get almost too hot to touch at times.

Unfortunately, connection to these standmounters is only by balanced XLRs. This type of connection is used to minimise noise interference over long cable lengths, but most preamps and AV processors aren't fitted with such outputs and will need RCA-to-XLR adaptor cables.

While ATC supplied its new £750 CA-2 preamp to drive its SCM 10A-2s, we also used our reference Krell KRC-3 preamp and Audio Research's LS 25Mk II to gauge absolute performance.

These ATCs are heavyweight speakers, so solid stands are essential. Think of something like Partington's Dreadnought or Kudos' S50 as the bare minimum to allow them to shine properly.

Positioning is easy, however, thanks to a sealed enclosure design and one of the tightest low-frequency performances you can buy. The iron grip of the built-in power amps is admirably demonstrated on Beverly Knight's 'Sista Sista', where the ultra-deep bass is replayed with



ACTIVELY BETTER

Active operation in speakers has so many advantages over passive that it's surprising it isn't more common. The internal power amps can be optimised for a particular drive unit, while the minimal distance between amp and driver means that control and detail are improved. In addition, the crossover between drive units can be managed far more precisely, and correction for phase differences between drivers made more easily. The results should be better control, dynamics and resolution than via the passive route. The disadvantages are a loss of power amp choice for the buyer, and reduced upgrading potential.

exceptional agility and definition. Given that internal cabinet volume is only 10 litres, the weight and authority of the lowest frequencies is highly impressive, and although bigger rivals may dig lower, the ATCs' presentation rarely leaves the listener looking for more.

Precision and control are the watchwords here. Subtle details are sharply focussed no matter how complex the musical production, while both low and high-level dynamics are reproduced with composure.

Tonal balance is spot-on and this neutrality, combined with bags of insight, gives a crystal clear view of the recording. Poor recordings are revealed as such, but the speakers' innate balance means that the musical message still comes over loud and clear.

These SCM 10A-2s are highly accomplished monitors that prove that active speakers have much to offer. A passive version is available for £150 less, but the quality of their power amps is such that we can't see many people going for that option.

LEADING RIVALS

No similarly priced active speaker has yet been tested.