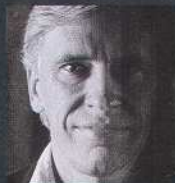


Designer's notes

"Not even the best power amp and speakers can achieve the sound of a similar active system"



• Billy Woodman
Founder and
managing director, ATC



ATC SCM 100A

These **active floorstanders** pack 350W of power – and one hell of a wallop

Profile

Price £11,615 ★★★★★

Design miracle A three-way design with a 12in bass driver. A 100-litre cabinet and 350W amp makes things really interesting

Tempted? ATC's pro heritage, combined with the promise of top-class resolution and mighty bass, equals huge appeal

Speakers like the **SCM 100A** move goal posts. In active form, with 350W of power amplification built-in, they deliver massive volume with awe-inspiring composure. Most conventional passive alternatives would crumble if asked to deliver a similar volume of sound.

How loud? ATC claims a maximum level at 115dB – pretty much watching-AC/DC-at-the-Shepherd's-Bush-Empire volume. Even at very high levels, the kind of earplug territory that numbs the ear's response in minutes, the SCM 100As simply refuse to harden-up or squash dynamic extremes.

Did you know?

1 You'll need some XLR cables

The ATCs only have an XLR input. In an ideal world this would be connected to a balanced preamplifier or source with variable output. However, they'll also work with an unbalanced source with the use of an RCA-to-XLR adaptor.

2 The grilles improve the sound

Unlike just about every speaker we review, these ATC floorstanders sound best with the grilles left on. They're designed to have the flattest tonal balance when used this way. Take the grilles off and the high frequencies get a little too vivid for our tastes.

3 Better mains leads will help

ATC won't thank us for this, but these speakers sound a lot better with high-quality mains leads. We got improved refinement and subtlety when using a set of van den Hul Mainsstream Hybrid BS.

So clean do these floorstanders sound that we found ourselves listening to far more loudly than usual. It was only when we had to shout to be heard that we realised how high the volume really was. People's perception of loudness is closely tied to levels of distortion: with speakers as clean sounding as these ATCs, that threshold is far higher.

It's fair to say that we weren't totally surprised by these speakers' hairy-chested approach to volume, nor their ability to deliver huge amounts of bass with power, weight and agility. After all, this is an active three-way design with a massive 100-litre cabinet

They have the attack to work with Nirvana, the authority to deliver the Inception OST and the ability to convey the emotion in Arvo Part's Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten

and a 31cm bass driver. The chances are it would be able to do those things – with all the gusto we could hope for.

Less expected is the seamless integration between the three drivers. We're familiar with the 25mm soft dome tweeter and 75mm dome midrange, and they sound as good here as we've ever heard. That large bass driver dovetails beautifully into the midrange, and manages to deliver lots of bass without attracting too much attention.

The SCM 100As enjoy a lovely consistency of character throughout the frequency range: it's something that's rare, even at this kind of price level.

Tonally, things are spot-on. ATC speakers tend to be neutral and these towers are no different. It makes a huge difference with well-recorded acoustic material such as Bonnie Prince Billie's

Summer in the Southeast. This is a live recording, and the speakers' convincing tonality and impressive detail resolution make it an absolute joy to listen to. These floorstanders are immensely muscular when required, but with subtler music such as this, their agility and finesse is deeply impressive.

Of course, the ATCs' range of abilities means they sound at home across a wide range of music. They have the attack to work with Nirvana, the authority to deliver the *Inception* OST and the ability to convey the emotion in Arvo Part's *Cantus in Memory of Benjamin Britten* with the utmost skill.

In some ways this is a hugely demanding speaker to own. It's transparency means that the spotlight shone on the source and preamplifier is brighter than usual. Any shortcomings in either area will be highlighted.

The SCM 100A's sheer size, bass extension and preference for a free space siting means a large room is essential. A weight of 68kg per

TECH SPECS

Type Floorstander
Drive units
Treble: 25mm soft dome
Midrange: 75mm dome
Bass: 31.4cm woofer
Amp power ratings
Woofer: 200W
Midrange 100W
Tweeter: 50W
Connections
Balanced XLR
Size (hwd)
107 x 40 x 56 cm
Weight 68kg

enclosure means moving them around is awkward and many will have an issue with their rather functional appearance.

Yet, considering the level of performance on offer – and the inclusion of dedicated power amplification for each driver – makes the SCM 100As stonking value.

If you value tonal neutrality, dynamic reach and deep bass, we haven't heard anything better at this money.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Massive dynamic reach; huge bass; great composure and integration; tonal neutrality

AGAINST Big, so they'll need a lot of space

VERDICT The SCM 100As are massively talented. Rarely if ever has deep bass sounded so good, so loud, or so nuanced



Give the ATCs room to breathe and they'll reward you handsomely

What's so clever? The active crossover advantage



It's always been something of a surprise to us that active speakers - those with power amplifiers and active crossovers built-in - aren't more popular. Technically they have plenty of advantages.

In the SCM 100As, each power amplifier is dedicated to a single driver, and connected directly

to it rather than going through many metres of speaker cable and a passive crossover network. This gives it greater grip and control.

Even the best engineered crossovers suck up power, detail and dynamics. They also need to be able to cope with hundreds of watts of power and so the

type of components used aren't particularly closely-toleranced - which means the sound quality can suffer. The components in active crossovers work at far lower power levels and so can be far more precise in operation.

The result? A more accurate sound, and more fun for you.