

ATC SCM40 – Giant killers.

BY JAMES PALMER ON 29/09/2014



I wasn't excited about the arrival of these speakers. Although I personally sought a pair out for review, and they had been something I wanted to hear in my room for a while, I wasn't all that "bovered". I could wait to get home from work. I could wait to unpack them.

I suppose I thought I knew them already, having heard their predecessors at so many shows, there was no excitement about having something new.. In my mind I already had them sussed, and really just wanted to try them in my room, while hopefully providing a bit of decent copy for the forum. Equally, I was starting to feel a little jaded by the constant stream of kit. The problem is that most HiFi these days is pretty good, and even if it isn't to my personal taste, an ounce of objectivity ultimately leads one to be kind, safe in the knowledge it will appeal to many. Bruce Springsteen for example, I don't get it. His music leaves me cold, and simply doesn't move me. Yet it would be patently unfair for me to say his music was bad, many millions of people are clearly deeply moved by his dreadful middle of the road yank rock. Anyway I digress.. I wasn't that excited, until I heard them.

The SCM40's I'd heard previously had always been somewhat analytical, a very revealing speaker which measures well and is very honest in it's presentation. All admirable qualities as a tool for a reviewer. And just what I needed, an enjoyable listen, yes, as long as my electronics are pleasing, but otherwise pretty neutral. Great for trying to spot the almost imperceptible differences between sub £1k DACS for example. And of course, the ideal characteristics for a recording studio; where their parents grew up. And indeed where ATC's pedigree was really earned.



This new version is something rather more than that. They do all of those things, for sure, but have a musicality about them which is engaging and revealing but also slightly euphoric. These new boat shaped cabinets are softer, not just on the eye, but also on the ear, they are less fatiguing and all the more lifelike for it. Perhaps my amps are just a good match for these transducers, maybe I stumbled into a sweet spot with them, either way they bring a lifelike quality to even digital recordings of Electronica. Everything feels more alive than I was expecting, and that is a good thing. That's a very good thing indeed.

This of course is no accident, ATC have put a lot of work into the design of this speaker and I should probably describe at least a little of that to you before going any further into the sound quality.

The build quality is superb. Nicely matched veneers cover some damn heavy boxes. So heavy that installation is a bit of a faff. In the end I plonked them down sans spikes, slid them about to get the most out of the sound-stage. Marked off the position and then removed the bases (an alan key job, you will need one to fit the out-riggers anyway), set the spikes so the bases were level, (my floor isn't) then fitted the bases back and moved them back into place. This is no small job, a large son or sturdy wife is invaluable here. Thankfully I have a large son.



The three way drivers are mounted to the front plinth of the speaker, the big black frontispiece of their predecessors is long gone, which makes them far more domestically acceptable. To the rear there are 3 sets of terminals. Tri-amping? I really can't see the need myself. I suspect this is pandering to the cable market, or perhaps ATC hope to sell you three matching power amps.. My 100Watts of Class A Advantage (Bladelius) managed to drive them as hard and as loud as I (or my neighbours) could stand, without any difficulties. in any case, You get three sets of terminals, one for each driver.



You also get a rather fugly metal cover for the drivers. They are magnetized, so removing them leaves a nice smooth surface devoid of ugly plugs or sockets. While the grills are about as attractive an addition as spinach in your wife's teeth, they are a very practical solution, with small children in the house, the metal grill and the outriggers inspire confidence that they won't tip over and small fingers won't stray into the soft domes.

Back to the sound. Actually back to the beginning. I am new to this reviewing game, and I now fear I may have been too excited about previous review items. As I haven't left myself enough headroom to explain just how good these are compared to anything else I've had through here. They have the speed and neutrality of the Mulladine Allegrettos, but your extra £1000.00 (over the Mulladines) also buys you an insight into your recordings that is truly astonishing. Now this won't be for everyone, but it really is for me. It's what I want from HiFi. I want an insight, I want to feel like the Guitar amp is in front of me, the kick drums are not far behind and to feel involved in the music at a very live and connected level. Nothing else I have heard in a small living room has managed this feat. These do it with ease, they don't shout at you, and don't need to be played loud to sound their best, they deliver whether you are listening to Steely Dan, or Metallica, JS Bach or Phillip Glass.



It's hard to describe just how revealing these speakers are, they resolve such fine details and respond to the tiniest changes in input. This seems odd given the tough load they present to amplifiers (producing just 85db per Watt at 1meter), yet this is certainly the case. To add some sugar to this very revealing medicine, the domed mid range driver works in perfect harmony with the tweeter. The mid-range driver is domed for that very reason, it's the same shape as the tweeter, and works in a similar way, with the added benefit that the mid range radiates around the room, rather than beaming into the room. This makes for a softer sound-stage, which although perfectly revealed is not overly deep or holographic, and doesn't stand out as the main feature of the sound. The main feature of the sound would probably be the raw speed of attack. Transients have curves so steep you wonder if ATC has found a way of achieving infinite bandwidth. Mohammad Ali famously said "I'm so fast, I turn my bedroom light off, and I'm in bed before the room is dark". Well that's as maybe young man, but you are still not as quick as the cones on the ATC SCM40! They've had 8 hours kip and a full English by the time your head is hitting the pillow. With the right music they actually take your breath away. The intro to [Metallica's](#) Enter Sandman has huge snare, cymbal and guitar smashes which burst into the room and leave you with a stupid look on your face. Sort of boss eyed and laughing, shaking your head in disbelief. The bass is so taught, yet thunderously deep. My room is shockingly difficult for bass bloom, yet the ATC's have everything under control. Deep and tuneful, in a way that is entirely new at WigWam towers. I know I've said similar before, about other speakers, mia culpa, these are better. Trust me, these are better.

Listening to [Stevie Ray Vaughan and Albert King](#) "in session" was quite an emotional session. My friend Ben had come over for a listen. He's a guitarist and also the man that introduced me to HiFi equipment. He sat agog, as did I at the sheer presence of the musicians. His comment "You can hear the mic working, each note is so real, it's... its.." He was lost for words, Dom was also here, he felt similarly impressed. Each note is parceled up and delivered perfectly, but not in an artificial "big American HiFi" kind of way. It's a realism, an honesty that tells you exactly what that session sounded like in the studio, but done with style. There's a wholesomeness to the sound, I hate that word, but can't find a better one. The sound is perfectly revealed, but never brash. This may well be down to my amps and Turntable more than anything else. The Valve Phono Stage, valve Pre amp, and class A power amp providing the Watts is a smooth and slightly warm sound. The ATC's certainly let you know what you've got.

The bottom line.. I'm sold. I can't live without them. I need them in my life and will have to make the change. Putting my Living Voice OBX R2's back in was pleasing and frustrating in equal measure. Yes, they are a lovely listen, but the lack of comparative clarity and speed is something that I can't live with. Many will disagree, in some systems the SCM40's will sound too revealing. If the electronics are forward, they will sound forward and with this much detail that will be too much. Audition carefully, but please, do audition. In the right system, you would have to spend £10k to get anywhere close to this sound quality. Genuinely, you could piano gloss them and change the labels, hawk them round the European shows and sell plenty at £10k a pair.... erm... anyone know a French Polisher? I'm off.

Price: £3275.00.

Available from Wigwam dealers: [Concerto Audio Musicraft Derby](#) and [Audio Emotion](#).

Details:

- New ATC designed and built 25mm soft dome HF unit with precision alloy wave guide..
- ATC 164mm bass driver.
- Massive optimised motor assembly.
- ATC [Soft Dome](#) mid-range driver.
- Flat impedance curve allowing easy load for amplifiers.

- 6 year warranty.

Drivers: HF ATC 25mm Neodymium, Mid 75mm ATC Soft Dome, LF ATC 164mm SC

Matched Response: $\pm 0.5\text{dB}$

Frequency Response (-6dB): 48Hz-22kHz

Dispersion: $\pm 80^\circ$ Coherent Horizontal, $\pm 10^\circ$ Coherent Vertical

Sensitivity: 85dB @ 1W @ 1metre

Max SPL: 112dB

Recommended Power Amplifier: 75 to 300 Watts

Nominal Impedance: 8 Ohm

Crossover Frequencies: 380Hz & 3.5kHz

Connectors: Binding Posts/4mm Plugs, tri-wire

Cabinet Dimensions (HxWxD): 980x265x300mm

Weight: 31kg

Review Equipment:

Turntable: Acoustic Solid with Audio Note Arm 1 and Benz Glider

Phono Stage: PureSound P10, T10

Digital: Leema Antila CDP, Sonos streaming FLACS to Leema Elements DAC

Amps: ModWright SWL 9.0SE Valve pre amp, Bladelius S100 (100 Watt Class A) power amp.