



ATC SCM7 £810

Here's a loudspeaker company with its heart and soul in the professional audio market, but how does it sound?

DETAILS

PRODUCT
ATC SCM7

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
7.5kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
174 x 300 x 215mm

FEATURES

- Two-way, infinite baffle loudspeaker
- 25mm tweeter, 125mm mid/bass unit
- Claimed sensitivity: 84dB/1W/1m

DISTRIBUTOR
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It's only since the eighties that ATC has made domestic loudspeakers, and even now it doesn't change its range very often. This is the company's most affordable speaker, as it's far smaller than most of its products, but still fairly big by the standards of this group. The two-way design sports a new ATC designed and built 25mm soft dome tweeter with neodymium magnet and precision alloy wave guide, working with a 125mm ATC designed and built mid/bass unit with an inhouse, hand-wound precision flat wire coil and 3kg optimised motor assembly.

Compared to many speakers here, the ATC seems rather old fashioned – but that is because it doesn't have any of the features that some regard as gimmicks, such as elaborately shaped cabinets or fancy-sounding cone materials. You might say it is conservative with a small 'c', and none the worse for it; certainly the construction quality is excellent. One trait it shares with all ATCs is that it needs a lot of power to drive; the company claims 84dB/1W/1m sensitivity and this is very poor for a modern loudspeaker, but understandable considering its size and infinite baffle design. ATC says it is an easy load, but it still needs a serious amount of watts; I'd advise that at least 40W RMS per channel is needed to make the SCM7 go loud in

even a medium-sized room – so do take care to match carefully.

Sound quality

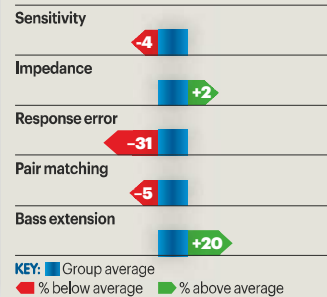
This little speaker sounds nothing like the others here. What it doesn't do is throw a massive sound into the room, hanging holographic images all around – that's the KEF Nor does it thump out large amounts of bass (the Monitor Audio), or indeed go loud in an easy and lazy way (Focal, take a bow). Rather, the ATC brings its own unique skill set to the party, and does things none of the others here can. It is tight, taut, rhythmic, propulsive, expressive and unerringly musical. More than any other speaker here it gives you the sense that music is foremost an emotional experience.

Bass fans will love its tunefulness, but miss hearing the bottom octave of their favourite songs. Its midband is very good in its way, but doesn't sound sumptuous or especially sophisticated, and the treble is solid but doesn't have any special, ethereal quality. But cue up Isaac Hayes' *Life's Mood* and suddenly you're engrossed, absolutely captivated and pulled right in. It's the high quality, small and sealed cabinet that does it; it doesn't store any energy and has no bass port to huff and puff, and the result is that bass transients are lightning-fast with no overhang. At the same time, the ATC really showcases dynamic accents, and together this makes for a

ON TEST

As the SCM7 is the smallest speaker in the group and has closed box bass loading, it is no surprise that it has the lowest sensitivity at 82.1dB – almost 2dB lower than ATC claims. Lower impedance could help, but ATC has chosen to keep the SCM7 relatively easy to drive. Its minimum modulus of 5.0ohms was highest in the group, but large phase angles reduced the minimum EPDR to 2.4ohms at 118Hz, near the group average. On-axis frequency response trend is essentially flat, leading to the second-lowest response errors, 200Hz-20kHz, of ± 2.7 dB and ± 3.1 dB. Pair matching wasn't as good at ± 1.7 dB, but mostly the matching was tighter. Given the small cabinet, bass extension of 58Hz is fair, but most of the larger speakers here achieve better. Fast initial energy decay and well-controlled resonances make for a mostly clean cumulative spectral decay waterfall. **KH**

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



seat-of-the-pants listen. The Smiths' *Girl Afraid* is an enthralling three minutes, wonderfully fast and fluid.

Tonally it's a little dry, but it does still give a decent sense of what's going on in the recording. Not having a big cabinet thrumming away unlocks a whole world of detail, making Herbie Hancock's *Speak Like A Child* a pleasure. Piano has a solidity of tone that you can't not love, and flutes and flugelhorn has a simple purity that's only available when there's no cabinet joining in the party. Even with a relatively light bass, jazz sounds gloriously propulsive, the listener getting their rhythm cues elsewhere. Bliss ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Wonderfully propulsive; taut bass; clean midband; build

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Poor bass extension; needs lots of power

BUILD QUALITY



WE SAY: Fantastic, characterful speaker that won't appeal to all

EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



Group test verdict

As the dust settles on this month's loudspeaker face off, **David Price** provides us with the final verdict on how the six models really stack up

I AM SURPRISED by how diverse this group turns out to be. That's why it's important to try them if at all possible with the rest of your system before buying.

Mission's SX2 sounds very good in isolation, but in this company it is overshadowed. It's nicely built and has an affable, engaging and upfront sound, but by the standards of the group it is a tad muddled.

The Dali Ikon 2 is a good speaker with especially fine treble, but it doesn't give the sort of scale or bass power that many others managed here, and the overall finish and


styling is frankly sub-par in this very impressive company.

Focal's Aria 906 proves to be an excellent all rounder, the sort of thing most listeners will enjoy and few will take a dislike to. On the end of a decent system it's capable of truly impressive results and has the bonus of being very efficient for those running smaller amps in larger rooms, but is beaten here at the price.

Things get trickier now, as we have three superb but very different speakers, and the ranking really depends more on the buyer than the product itself – but here goes! Placed

third is the Monitor Audio Silver, only because it spreads its abilities a little more thinly and doesn't excel in one specific area. It gives a powerful and expansive sound that's very enjoyable and highly detailed. The standard of finish is better even than the KEF, which is saying something, and the Silver 2 is a remarkable value loudspeaker.

The KEF is another superb speaker with the best imaging here, plus excellent detailing and fine tonality. With most systems it would likely win the group, but it's just beaten here by the ATC.



WINNER

With a powerful amplifier, a smooth source and properly positioned, ATC's SCM7 is capable of a wonderful flowing musicality that gets into the groove like no other here. In a well-matched system, you will be amazed at its rhythmic and dynamic alacrity.



Make/model	ATC SCM7	Dali Ikon 2 Mk2	Focal Aria 906	KEF LS50	Mission SX2	Monitor Audio Silver 2
Price	£810	£639	£798	£800	£700	£650
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Ease of drive	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	The most musically convincing here, but you'll need a serious system to drive it. A worthy winner	A pleasant, engaging speaker with a lovely, sparkling treble – but a little on the bright side of life	A great all rounder with a smooth, easy, open sound; also great for lower-power amplifiers	Outstanding design with a wonderful, room-filling sound – plus loads of detail. Looks great, too	Very exciting listen, with an upfront and engaging sound; nice styling rounds off the package	Extremely high achiever right across the board; superlative finish, powerful sound

Key features

Feature	ATC	Dali	Focal	KEF	Mission	Monitor Audio
Dual concentric	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Three-way	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Bi-wire	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Reflex port	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Infinite baffle	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

TRY WITH THESE

CD PLAYER:
Audiolab 8200CD **£700**

Still one of our favourite mid-priced silver disc spinners, it gives nothing away in performance terms to any rival and provides a powerful, detailed source for them to work with. Its digital inputs give it added DAC functionality, and very good it sounds too!



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:
Creek Evolution 50A **£700**

A little less lush in tonality than the Arcam, this is more suited to the likes of the even-handed Monitor Audio and the warmer Focal, and also makes the Mission sing. It's an excellent, open sounding amplifier with lots of power at the price and fine dynamics; one of Creek's best value amps.



INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER:
Exposure 3010S2 **£1,350**

All the speakers here will respond well to a really good premium-priced integrated amplifier, and the Exposure is just this. Compared to the cheaper Creek it is a good deal more transparent and controlled, yet is also more musical. Its powerful sound will make any speaker here sing.

