

ATC SCM7 Loudspeakers

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The ATC SCM7 is a diminutive loudspeaker of just 7 litres and costing from £810. Dan Worth takes a listen.

On different occasions over this past year Dominic and I have had the pleasure of listening to the SCM11s and the SCM19s from British loudspeaker company ATC. Each time we'd greeted their arrival with a mixture of apprehension and excitement. This is because our experience of ATC had taught us to expect great dynamics, attack, insight and truthfulness, but also the occasional jagged edge from the older style tweeter, particularly on poorer quality recordings.

However we needn't have worried. For their new 'passive' range ATC has replaced a modified third party tweeter with its own in-house design – and it's stunning. The unit on these new SCM7s, and the 11s, 19s and 40s is at once more refined, better controlled and truthful. Its secret is a dual suspension design, which is hand-built at ATC's Stroud HQ and has taken the Company years to perfect. Coupled to a more efficient and

linear underhung driver motor, the dual suspension controls the driver's movement more precisely for lower distortion, better power transfer and a smoother response. ATC has got this design just right, because both the 11s and 19s have received our highest accolades.



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AT FIRST GLANCE

The dinky SCM7s have a tiny 7-litre cabinet (hence the name), measuring 300x174x215mm and housing the tweeter and a 5" linear mid/bass driver. The review sample's curved design immediately felt solid and sturdy, with a high standard finish in real cherry wood veneer. They cost £810 a pair in the standard cherry or black ash options. However a special order piano black model comes in at a hefty £1243.

I was pleasantly surprised when I lifted the SCM7 from its box. It's much heavier than I had imagined weighing-in at around the 7.4kg mark. Nearly half of this weight is due to the bass/mid driver's massive 3.5kg underhung magnet system, which includes a 45mm flat wire voice coil, milled by ATC at Stroud on a machine designed by ATC's founder and Chief Engineer Billy Woodman. Most of remaining weight is down to the heavily-braced veneered enclosure, which also sports chunky bi-wire terminals.



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THE SOUND

Dom and I have had many conversations about the character and virtues of the SCM11s and 19s. We've decided that the 11s are about pure excitement and have a punchier sound whereas the 19s come across as richer, fuller and more refined.

I'm writing this before Dom has had a chance to listen to the SCM7s, so I'll give you my immediate impression: these 7s are really exciting and their imaging is fantastic. Due to their size, they struggle to reproduce image height if you are sitting too close to them, but when you're sat back and even at lower volumes, they get going so easily for an 84db-sensitive speaker, instantly disappearing into the background and placing instruments way beyond the expected width boundary.

I would suggest that they have some of the SCM11's zip and enthusiasm, which Dom and I loved so much. They punch rather than pound, but the bass is so representative of truthful playback (given their 60Hz limit at -6dB), that I only hankered for more on occasions.

Obviously the 7s are ideal for those who have limited listening space, but I would suggest they're also great for music lovers who enjoy vocals and acoustic guitar, as well as pop and

electronic music – I would prefer a bass reflex design in this sized cabinet for the latter. The SCM7s can't muster the wash of deep bass you'll get from larger cabinets and drivers, for example on bass guitars and oboes, but they will keep a beat. Sparkling percussion sounds terrifically accurate from these small boxes, complete with all their natural dynamics. When replacing my active desktop Focals, I was extremely impressed with the 7's overall response, especially from the bass when enhanced by the alcove they were sitting in.



What I really enjoy about the 7s and even the 11s is that they seem to allow upper frequencies to breathe so well, allowing for more perceived accuracy in the higher frequencies and mid

level notes, making for a crystal clear vocal reproduction. I suspect this is due to their tonal balance from smaller cabinet sizes and sharper bass roll off, but it got me thinking that a set of 11s or 7s with ATC's own C1 subwoofer could make for a stunning listen.

Fast forward a few days and, courtesy of ATC's PR man, I now have a C1 subwoofer and I've put together a little system comprising SCM7s, C1 sub, and a Primare I32 with MM30 multimedia board/DAC fed by my Mac.



Wow, this set-up proved to be a real treat. I suspect that ATC would frown upon the idea of passive speakers and active sub in a music application, because it wouldn't be the last word in

accuracy, but what the hell, this system rocked with everything I sent it. I love the increased definition of the midrange especially, under-pinned with tremendous weight, poise and control. Even the treble sounds beefier. Dialing the sub in to around 60Hz to integrate with the 7s was magic. Not purist, but magic – and fun!

Dance music had a more intense rhythm and a crystal clear top end. Rock had a grip and a leading-edge sharpness that may well have sounded overbearing from the 7s alone, but with the C1 it had more flesh on the bone and greater weight. Acoustic music and vocals seemed to be better defined in the soundstage with an in-filling of subtle undertones that demanded the attention of the listener. It just sounded richer.

In each scenario the 7s worked so well. Ultimately available space and music tastes will determine your speaker choice, but if you have room for a subwoofer I would wholeheartedly recommend one from ATC, as it adds another dimension to the sound.

CONCLUSION

I've not written a long review for a change. This one is short and sweet – just like the 7s. Combine the imaging of the old ProacTablettes, the surprising bass of a Totem One and the enthusiasm of an old AE1. Each of these speakers is renowned for having a special and memorable characteristic. The diminutive ATC SCM7 seems to possess a good measure of

each. It's one of those speakers that is so addictive and so unassuming that I think I'm going to have to buy a pair. They are like the cutest animal in the litter – the one you simply have to take home. Over time their musical consistency, honesty and downright practicality are simply undeniable. The thought of being without them has me reaching for a tissue.

Build Quality – 8.5/10

Sound Quality – 8.7/10

Value For Money – 8.75/10

Overall – 8.65/10

Price at time of review:

Cherry/black ash – £810

Piano black lacquer – £1243

Pros:

Emphatic, transparent, detailed presentation

Solid imaging and strong dynamics

Great build

Cons:

At this price, nothing

