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ATC CONCEPT 4 SPEAKER SYSTEM ◆ SYSTEM PRICE £7,600 ◆ 01285 760561 ◆ www.atc.gb.net or www.softdome.co.uk



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ATC'S CONCEPT 4 SYSTEM IS FULLY ACTIVE. ADAM RAYNER IS BLOWN AWAY BY ITS SIZE AND POWER

Having a background in pro audio, I've heard a slew of the kind of studio monitors that you might find in, say, west end theatres. The Concept 4 or C4 system from ATC reeks of that pro-audio approach. Hardly surprising when one considers that ATC has always been seen as the hi-fi equivalent of studio monitoring. The image is that if a studio uses ATC, they mean business. ATC enjoys sending out a user list that reads like a musos' aristocracy. All well and good, but what of domestic considerations? After all, this system is ATC's most cubically-challenged of all its active kit. The one set it reckons is ideal for us, er home boys.



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Out of the box, the first thing that grasps you is their serious mass. The T16 satellite's 17.5kg is not far short of 40lb for the non-metric. This is because of the cast aluminium enclosure it lives in, along with 250W of amplification inside each one. There's 200W RMS for the meaty paper pulp 6.5incher and 50W RMS for the neodymium magnet softdome 1in tweeter. Apparently, although it doesn't state it on the blurb, the first 50 watts are class A driven, with a slow progression to class B above that.



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This means that your four T16 satellites will offer a kilowatt to your sound stage. The centre, which is called C4C, has a similarly massive chassis, the same 250W of oomph and weighs in at a hefty 24.5kg or 53.9lb which is just under four stone for us oldies and tops up the muscle to 1.25kW! By any reckoning, this is heavy.

Each of the five speakers has a single pro-style XLR socket, which can accept a pukka balanced line signal, or if wired right, an RCA-XLR cable may be used from your preamp. There's also a simple on/off switch on the back of each one, under the power socket. The T16 (but not the centre) sports both a -20dB sensitivity trim pot and a possible 6dB of bass boost at 50Hz.

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Since the declared figures for the speaker are 70Hz at -2dB and still only 62Hz at the -6dB point, this is to boost a low end into the speaker that it would otherwise not show. Simple, but effective, as it helps create a seamless blend into the bulky sealed-box, 650W RMS driven active C4 subwoofer. Again, solely offering XLR input socketry, you get two inputs to use if you wish and simple gain and phase switching, along with a 40-

80Hz boost if you want to apply what ATC calls its Theatre Equaliser. There is no auto-on sensing circuit anywhere. The C4 sub, like the surrounds has just on/off.

The C4 Sub Bass is even larger than the reference REL Stentor III. It uses a 12in driver rather than the REL's 10 and costs £600 less at £1,900. A serious item, standing off a substantial floor panel on short supports, this was a very polite speaker, lots of lows and just like a REL, there's no uncontrolled woofery.

The last part of the system, is the £770 optional MCU-6B balanced line signal driver. This took the 5.1 signals from my reference Acurus ACT3 preamp's phono's outputs and instead of sending them to the power amp, they went to the speakers via three-pin XLR cables, in balanced line mode, in addition to driving the signal a bit harder to cope with the longer signal run than normal.

Easy to set up, you plug six outputs into the box and wire the signal lines to the speakers. Mains in all directions and you're off. Each of the five plus LFE outputs from the preamp feature a simple screwdriver tweaker-trim pot accessed via a tiny hole in the front cover. Very pro.

Then you can press either the 79 or 85dB reference buttons to control overall signal level or opt to use the variable gain knob on the preamp. There's also the 20dB of attenuation available in each corner, but not centrally, as well as the possible 6dB of gain at 50Hz each T16 offers on its own. The subwoofer has very simple flip-or-not phase controls and a straightforward choice of crossover points (50, 60, 75 or 90Hz.)

This system sounds absolutely delicious. A lack of power compression in the low-level detail makes for dramatic amounts of realism. Detail retrieval in all directions and levels is exemplary, with a truly fat bass response from the big-mouth ports. The low end reaches effortlessly and is all about accuracy and lack of overhang, as well as pancake-flat performance to 20Hz.

Clean and analytical, the highs are blisteringly fast, as shown by the right-in-the-room vocals and strings on the MI-2 soundtrack. Dynamics, even at low levels are revelatory. This system has crispness, accuracy and control. Ugly as a punch in the face, as domestic as a zebra - this is still more than worth the operational effort for the pro-cognoscenti. A treat.



RATINGS

Highs: These massively expensive and aesthetically unusual speakers have real snap and attack; great detail retrieval at low level and high levels. Enormously powerful at just under 2,000W a set and bass that could cause serious structural damage without even sounding remotely overblown.

Lows: The four stone centre would crush your average television; remember that there are six individual on switches to deal with here. No grilles on T16, nor any auto on circuits

Front	*****
Centre	*****
Rears	*****
Bass	*****
Overall	*****

SPECIFICATIONS

System Price: £7,600 plus £770 for MCU-6B

Purchased Separately: ATC T16s £3,600 (£900 each, £1,800 for two); C4C centre £2,100 (each); C4 Sub Bass £1,900.

Frequency Response/ Efficiency (+/- 2dB): T16s 70Hz to 20kHz; C4C centre 75Hz to 20kHz; C4 Sub Bass (-6dB at 14Hz) 18Hz-250Hz variable.

Power Handling: T16s 250W ; C4C Active centre 250W ; C4 Sub Bass 650W

Dimensions/Weight: T16s 270(w) x 448(h) x 330(d)mm & 17.5kg; C4C centre 550(w) x 190(h) x 380(d)mm & 24.5kg ; C4 Sub Bass 500(w) x 582(h) x 500(d)mm & 52kg.

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