

Though aimed at the studio world, the engineering involved shows the ATCs could work in the home environment too



A contrast to the luxurious veneers and exotic designs we normally review, these functional boxes are designed as studio monitors, meant to sit on a mixing desk and work for their living

“These ATCs could shine in a domestic environment too”

■ **ATC SCM20ASL Pro** Stereo speakers

■ **£4380** ★★★★★

These aren't the kind of speakers we normally review in Temptations. A contrast to the luxurious real wood veneers and exotically shaped designs with high tech drive units that pass through our testing rooms, these functional looking boxes are designed as studio monitors, meant to sit on a mixing desk and work hard for their living. In fact, the ATCs aren't even intended for home use. So, why are we reviewing Pro-orientated speakers here?

Seriously engineered drivers

These are effectively ATC's SCMI9s with a higher-grade tweeter and driven actively, but minus the curved cabinet and smart real wood finish. While they are very much aimed at the studio world, a closer look at the engineering involved shows that they could shine in a domestic environment too.

There are two MOSFET Class A/B amplifier packs in each cabinet: a 200W module to drive the mid/bass and another 50W circuit for the in-house tweeter. ATC is unusual among the smaller speaker specialists in that it designs and builds its drive units in-house. This has resulted in some seriously engineered drivers, built to withstand plenty of abuse.

Ruthlessly honest

A highlight is the recently introduced 25mm soft-dome tweeter. It's a design that has been in development for years and is only now making its way into all the higher-end speakers in the company's range. The mid/bass is the same robust 15cm unit the

TECH SPECS

Type Standmount
Sensitivity (dB/W/m) n/a
Max power handling 250W
Biwireable No
Finishes 1
Dimensions (hwd) 45 x 25 x 39cm

company has been using for what seems like decades. It uses a cone made of doped polyester weave onto which a 75mm dome is grafted in a bid to improve the unit's performance at the integration point.

The back panel is more crowded than we're used to seeing - there's the mains input and a single input in the form of a balanced XLR. These speakers should be easy to accommodate in most rooms thanks to a bass-adjustment control (working from 80Hz downwards) that alters the quantity of low frequencies in 1dB steps. The range of adjustment is -2dB to +3dB, which proves subtle enough to be useful. Preamp matching is helped by switchable sensitivity and an extra trim adjustment, which means these speakers will be happy to work with a range of partners.

Just make sure you like the sound of whatever you connect, because these ATCs - like other speakers from the brand - are ruthlessly honest. If your recording isn't made with care or your preamp is on the aggressive side don't expect the ATCs to sound great.

Sounds immensely stable

The flipside is that when you listen to a great recording such as *The Rite of Spring* played by the Minnesota Orchestra conducted by Eiji Oue, everything comes to life.

There are wide-ranging dynamic swings, crashing crescendos and a sense of authority that would be hard to get from a passive set-up at this price. Everything sounds immensely stable, with the speakers keeping hold of the

multitude of instrumental strands with impressive composure. There's plenty of enthusiasm on show together with the kind of agility and articulation that's rare to hear at this level.

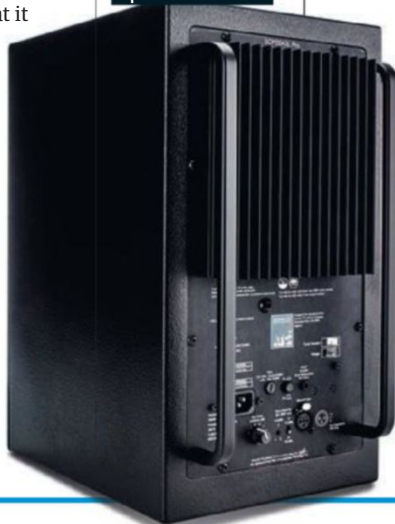
For a different mood, we play The Dead Weather's *60 Feet Tall*. The ATCs show up the recording's compressed feel, but also excel at delivering the build-up of tension in the opening. There's an excellent amount of attack, and we're impressed with their ability to convey the changing pace of the piece.

Weight and power

These aren't massive speakers. They stand 45cm tall so really deep bass isn't an option, but the SCM20ASLs remain seriously impressive at the low-end, delivering bass with weight and power, and rendering it with skill.

By high-end standards these ATCs are terrific value. Getting standmounters and four power amplifier channels of such a high standard is likely to cost a lot more than this. Get past their functional appearance and you have speakers with a performance of rare quality.

The crowded back panel features a mains input and a single input balanced XLR



Consider if You can put up with the puritanical appearance

Highlight Sound quality is truly as good as it gets for this outlay

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Excellent resolution; strong dynamic expression; secure rhythmic drive; comfortable at high volume levels; flexible in use; fine build

AGAINST Appearance is an acquired taste

VERDICT Judge the ATCs on performance, and we doubt you'll get better sound for the money