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A class act
 ATC 5.1 offers
 real sonic thrills

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Audio whizz ATC develops a new centre speaker, giving **Ed Selley** a great excuse to get in a whole set

A touch of class from the pros

1. The SCM7s are all supplied with robust, magnetically-affixing grilles



1

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1 standmount
speaker system

POSITION:
The SCM range
is ATC's entry-
level offering

PEERS:
Spendor S3/5R2 5.1
PMC Twenty.22 5.1

Some speaker brands make a point of releasing and updating products on a regular basis while others unveil new equipment roughly as often as we are visited by comets. ATC is firmly at the celestial visitor end of this equation so a new speaker is big news.

The new model in question is the C1C centre. ATC has centre speakers in its range already, but the C1C has been developed to partner the company's well-regarded SCM lineup – specifically the 7 and 11 standmount models. To ensure a good tonal match, the C1C uses a pair of the same 5in midbass drivers that reside in the SCM7

standmount, partnered with the company's 1in soft dome tweeter that's used across the whole SCM range. All drivers are made by ATC and exude a ruggedness that suggests they'll take anything you throw at them.

As it has been designed with a view to working with the SCM7, we've selected that speaker for front and rear channel duties (there are SCM floorstanders, too). These two-way standmounts are the smallest stereo model that the company manufactures, and as ATC does not use bass ports in the SCM range, it means that while they have an extremely even performance across their frequency response and seem unfussy about placement, they bottom out at 60Hz, which is pretty high even by the standards of a speaker of this size.

This is where the C1 Sub subwoofer comes into play. Once again designed to compliment the smaller members of the SCM family, this is also a sealed box design. But given that the cabinet contains one of the burliest-looking 12in drivers I've seen in anything that wasn't being gigged by The Grateful Dead, the absence of a port or bonus passive radiator shouldn't be too much of an issue. Power is provided by a 200W class AB amp (rather than the more typical Class D), built in-house by ATC.

While the C1 Sub is pretty hefty (24kg), it's also rather clever. All the controls are accessible by jog dial and supplied remote, and set via a front-panel display (which can be dimmed and switched off). This is instead of peering around the rear panel trying to read switches upside down, which is always welcome.

In fact, the package as a whole manages to balance functional brutality and elegance rather well. ATC is still very active in pro audio but this hasn't prevented it from veneering everything to a superbly high standard, and the result is a set of speakers that should sit in most lounges without jarring sensibilities. The cherry finish of our review samples is attractive but more modern black ash and white finishes are also available. Of course, you can't take all the pro essence out of the mix and the metal cage grilles might attract a few curious looks. But they are at least almost completely childproof, and as they affix magnetically, they don't leave any unsightly holes when not attached.

As the entire suite of speakers uses sealed enclosures, this is not a terribly hard set to accommodate. The SCM7 does its best work on stands but is unfazed by proximity to walls, while the C1C is completely content on a sturdy shelf. The ATCs have fairly benign impedance behaviour but do benefit from plenty of power and they will cheerfully show up the limitations of your electronics.

Virtuous performance

For that reason, I have not always been the most ardent fan of ATC speakers, wary of their slight ruthlessness and a controlled but slightly limited bass response. In this context though, neither of these detriments is as much of an issue and the virtues of the ATCs begin to make themselves felt.

For starters, this is a supremely revealing set of speakers. With *Big Hero 6*, the film's giant waves of microbots are a treasure trove of individual detail. The ATCs capture the sense that onscreen is a mass of millions of individual units and not a single object. They then have capacity in reserve to move dialogue and the frantic whine of an escaping minivan around the room with pin-point precision. These are speakers that seem to take it as a



point of honour that no detail of the soundtrack, however trivial, is to be omitted. This makes the CIC a joy for dialogue. If you are supposed to be able to understand what someone is saying on screen, this is a speaker that will ensure you do.

With identical drivers across the SCM7 and CIC, handover between the enclosures is extremely good, as you might expect. Even judged by demanding standards though, the CIC is an astonishingly close match to the standmount, and the result is an exceptionally smooth and well-integrated front soundstage.

There's a gorgeously uniform tonality from the whole array, too. With the final rendition of jazz torture test *Caravan* in *Whiplash*, the ATCs prove absolutely

'The addition of the CIC centre introduces ATC's SCM7s to the home cinema world. That's a good thing..!'

outstanding. The band is a visceral presence in the room with tangible presence and scale, and the tone of the brass section is so fundamentally right it leaves most rivals looking somewhat half-hearted by comparison.

With a Yamaha RX-A3040 as the back end, this SCM7 package goes effortlessly loud. The climactic storm drain sequence in *Into the Storm* is an absolute cacophony of wind, water, debris and senseless dialogue. The ATCs deliver it with a genuine sense of pressure in the room, but never harden up or sound strained. It's the kind of refined sound that you might expect from a brand with a musical bent, but don't confuse that with a lack of excitement. That same sumptuous detail retrieval and effects positioning never wavers.

Once you've finished thrashing them, you can drop the volume, return to watching something innocuous on Netflix and the ATCs will uncomplainingly deliver the goods. A lower level doesn't equate to less sonic assurance. The supreme clarity with dialogue and all-round tonal accuracy remain, making viewing a continual pleasure.

Amongst all this relentless positivity, what little can be said against the ATCs mainly concerns the subwoofer. Compared to the outstandingly capable speakers, the

SPECIFICATIONS

SCM7

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in doped cone midbass driver; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 60Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 84dB **POWER HANDLING:** 300W
DIMENSIONS: 174(w) x 300(h) x 215(d)mm
WEIGHT: 7.5kg

CIC

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5in doped cone midbass drivers; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 57Hz-22kHz
SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED): 86dB **POWER HANDLING:** 300W
DIMENSIONS: 410(w) x 161(h) x 280(d)mm
WEIGHT: 12kg

C1 Sub (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in doped paper woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED): 18Hz-250Hz **ONBOARD POWER:** 200W
REMOTE CONTROL: Yes
DIMENSIONS: 360(w) x 410(h) x 360(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24kg
CONNECTIONS: Stereo phono input/LFE input; speaker level inputs

PARTNER WITH



PRIMARE SPA23 4KVM: Primare has updated its premium SPA23 five-channel AVR (£3,750) to include 4K passthrough via its HDMI stage. This is a useful addition to a receiver that astonishes with its dynamic, accurate presentation.

C1 Sub is not as much of a show-stopper. There's nice integration with the SCM7s, and the effortless detail and cohesion that the speakers possess is matched here, but there are unquestionably rivals at a similar price (£1,300 when bought individually) that can slam a little harder. It does drop remarkably deep, though.

A caveat to this is that a partnership of two SCM7s and C1 Sub makes for a wonderfully revealing and insightful 2.1 system. Listening to a 16-bit/44.1kHz FLAC rip of Leftfield's *Bad Radio*, the sub's slight lack of final LF punch is overshadowed by its breathtaking speed and agility. It's a spectacular performance, showcasing real synergy between the standmounts and woofer.

Nice to meet you

The addition of the CIC centre speaker introduces ATC's SCM7s to the home cinema world. On the basis of my experience with this 5.1 array, that's a good thing. This is a set of speakers that's domestically acceptable in terms of size and finish, but carries over enough of the brand's professional audio ethos to ensure you get a sense of what a movie sound engineer wanted you to hear – without embellishment, compromise or oversight. It's not inexpensive (ATC's idea of entry-level is probably different to yours), but when you consider the sheer ability it possesses, it's worth it ■

HCC VERDICT



ATC SCM7 5.1

→ £3,250 → www.atcloudspeakers.co.uk

WE SAY: A triumphant multichannel package that combines detail, power and authority. Beautifully built and easy to accommodate. Give it an audition.

2. ATC's C1 Sub offers low- and high-level inputs

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