

ATC SCM11 | Stereo speakers | £1200

How to improve perfection

Living with them
 The SCM11s are flexible in just about every way. They excel with any musical genre and are relaxed about positioning, too.

Over the years, we've given ATC a lot of Awards for the SCM11s. They're versatile and balanced, and we're very fond of them. We don't even bother putting them away any more: they've an important part of our stock of reference equipment.

So when we heard of a new version, we had mixed feelings. Updated speakers are always exciting, but it's hard not to wince at the thought of someone going all Frankenstein with them on some operating table.

The 15cm mid/bass driver has been ripped out and put into a new body, which is curved for more rigidity and less internal resonance. There's also a new tweeter. It's a 25mm soft-dome unit, designed in-house - that's a rare thing for a relatively small manufacturer to do.

Improvements everywhere

The result? Great success. The new SCM11s make their talented predecessors seem ordinary. Nearly everything we've come to love about the originals has received a remarkable boost.

The sound is bigger and more spacious than before. There's a much higher level of rhythmic precision here, which is helped by increased agility. Dynamics are stronger and further reaching. And the sound is remarkably clean, and more transparent than ever; combine that with a high level of detail and you get superb insight. Vocals, meanwhile, are given air and plenty of emotion.

In keeping with tradition, these SCM11s have a sealed-box design. That means the low frequencies aren't quite delivered in the generous quantities of some ported rivals. What you do get is impressive bass



The brilliant new ATC SCM11s make it just as easy to analyse everything about a song as it is to just sit back and enjoy it. This isn't just a step up. It's a running leap

A new cabinet design and an in-house tweeter all make for a truly stunning pair of speakers

texture, tonality and detail. We reckon a slight hit in outright quantity is worth it for the excellent control on hand.

In fact, the whole frequency range is superbly controlled. Nothing we did could wrong-foot these speakers, which remain composed no matter how hard we pushed. We go from Atoms for Peace to Massive Attack, via a spot of Eminem: at every turn the ATCs demonstrate an extraordinary level of precision.

Amazingly easy to listen to

That precision extends to the focused stereo image as we switch to Jupiter from Holst's *The Planets* suite. These ATCs make it easy to place the various parts of the orchestra on the wide-open soundstage.

But it's never too analytical. As easy as it is to pick out all the separate elements of a track, these speakers manage to knit everything into a cohesive, musical whole.

And the trait we liked the most about the original SCM11s - their natural, balanced sound - is here, too. Whatever we fed the speakers, the sound came out uncoloured and uncorrupted. That makes them hugely versatile, and an easy listen. With these it's as easy to analyse everything about a song as it is to just sit back and enjoy it.

The flaws? It's hard to think of anything. If we really have to nitpick, we'd point at the speaker grilles. We're not entirely convinced a grey honeycomb mesh suits a cabinet with cherry wood or black ash veneer. Then again, these were designed for optimum performance when uncovered. And they do look nice in the nude.

The new SCM11s represent a drastic improvement over an already talented performance, and have good looks to match: ATC has raised the bar it set itself. This isn't just a step up. It's a running leap.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR Versatile, balanced sound; smooth and subtle with fine power and weight; insightful, expressive vocals

AGAINST Nothing of note

VERDICT These are the most talented standmounters anywhere near this price

Also consider PMC Twenty 22 £1970 ★★★★★

Ace standmounters with similar skills, but at a higher price.



System builder total build £4590

CD player

Roksan Caspian M2 CD player ★★★★★ £1695

Not many products combine refinement with excitement and tank-like build. The M2 does. It's great.



Stereo amplifier

Roksan Caspian M2 amplifier ★★★★★ £1695

This smashing amplifier, like its companion above, does just as well with subtlety as it does with bombast. It's an immensely capable unit.

