

# Heavy hitters

ATC's take on a lifestyle system still exudes a rather professional air to **Ed Selley**

**T**he level of interest that a statement generates can change drastically with a single additional piece of information. Tell someone you own a car and it really isn't a big deal. If you go on to mention that the car in question is a Ferrari you will find that many people are suddenly rather more interested. So it is the

case here. An all-in-one system with a pair of standmount speakers might be something that is moderately interesting, but if I add the further detail that the system comes courtesy of ATC you should be rather more excited about it.

ATC needs little introduction. With a background in professional audio, the company tends to shun bold

headlines and wild claims and neither does it change anything that doesn't need to be changed. This quiet confidence has resulted in a devoted following. The company is synonymous with products that combine bulletproof build with unburstable performance. Nothing is there for show or decoration and the focus has always been on sound





**Quite simply one of the most impressive all-in-one systems on sale today**

**COMPONENTS**

**ATC SIACD £2,970**

ATC's take on an all-in-one system features a CD mechanism, a pair of digital inputs, USB connection and a pair of analogue line ins. These are then powered by 100W of Class AB amplification, which gives the SIACD the ability to drive a wide variety of speakers.

**ATC SCM11 £1,200**

The SCM11 is a small, but perfectly formed manifestation of the ATC design philosophy combining the company's distinctive 'CLD' mid-bass driver, soft dome tweeter and a sealed cabinet finished in a smart, but subtle cherry veneer.

## BEAUTIFUL SYSTEM ATC SIACD & SCM11



quality. This being so, ATC equipment has always been rather business like in design and it makes the electronics you see in front of you here all the more intriguing.

### Kings of convenience

The SIACD is part of ATC's small range of electronics and perhaps the one that takes it furthest from its comfort zone. With a CD player, choice of digital inputs and amplifier all in the same box, the SIACD could be viewed as a lifestyle all-in-one system – on paper anyway. Unpack the ATC and it is clear that this is only a convenience system as far as this can be achieved without compromising any standard area of ATC's design criteria.

To this end, the digital inputs save the USB are all 192kHz-capable, and the 100W of power is generated into 8ohms by a hefty Class AB amplifier rather than the more in vogue Class D you might expect to find in a one-box system. Indeed peer into the vents on the top of the SIACD and it becomes clear that a considerable portion of the chassis is given over to the amplifier and the attendant heatsinks. That being said, the SIACD is attractive in the way that simple and functional things often are. The slight outward curve to the fascia sides and flush volume control might almost be

seen as a styling flourish – albeit not one so rash as to have an effect on performance or operation.

The partnering SCM11 speakers are also an example of ATC allowing for a little flourish of styling to creep in provided that the basics are adhered to. To this end the curved sides and elegant cherry veneer give them a domestic acceptability you might not otherwise expect from ATC, but these encase a pair of drivers that show that no concessions have been made in the

### I suspect this could be all the computer audio that many people ever need

areas that matter. The 25mm soft dome tweeter and 150mm hand assembled mid-bass driver are classic ATC down to their almost light absorbing blackness and immensely substantial construction. In keeping with the design philosophy of the brand, the SCM11 is a sealed design and seems utterly unfazed by placement near walls.

The resulting system could only be ATC, but with some unique twists to it. The SIACD is slightly less than the conventional full width and exudes a compact, but purposeful appearance.

**Above: The SCM11 doesn't conceal its pro audio origins**

**Above centre: The SIACD is understated and beautifully built with easy to use controls**

**Above right: The sealed design of the SCM11 makes them unfussy about placement**

The controls are a model of logic and operate with a satisfying sense of weight and travel to them and the display is easy to read and dims automatically after a minute or so. Partnered with the SCM11s, the resulting system manages to be usefully compact and extremely flexible in terms of placement in a room, but it still exudes a purposefulness that is not normally the preserve of an all-in-one system. The electronics and drivers have dictated the size of their enclosures rather than the other way around and the system is small because it can be, not because it needs to be.

### Listen with mother

Once you stop prodding the controls and sit back for a listen, it only takes a few bars of Mark Lanegan and Duke Garwood's *Black Pudding* to realise that the ATC is a phenomenally revealing system. The detail that is effortlessly extracted from the CD is something you only notice when you go back to other electronics. The professional heritage of the company is made abundantly clear with every note the system plays as you are treated to an unambiguously real performance that is capable of gripping you in a way that is unusual for electronics at this relatively sane price point.



This realism is absolutely free of embellishment and romance, but it also manages to avoid ripping poorer material to shreds. The better the recording you throw at the SIACD, the better it tends to be, but this is not the sort of system that renders a chunk of your collection unlistenable. This is mainly down to how well controlled it is. The SCM11 is utterly unflappable even when pushed hard and when the electronics doing the pushing are as capable as those in the SIACD, the performance that results is superbly refined.

### System addict

It is also extremely entertaining. Give it a rhythm – any rhythm – and the ATC latches on with an effortlessness that is utterly addictive. Seasick Steve's *Hubcap Music* pounds along with a togetherness that systems that cost many multiples of this can't match. The control and refinement that the system possesses means you find yourself driving it at higher levels than you might expect because it is so free of harshness or strain. At no stage during the time I spend with the ATC do I ever feel that I am approaching the limits of what it can do.

This astonishing competence seems to stem more than anything else from the way that all the key components have been designed inhouse to work



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together. Listened to separately, both the SIACD and the SCM11 are very good – the electronics in particular might even be considered great – but there is a further jump in the level of performance they offer when combined. The grip that the amp of the SIACD exerts over the mid-bass drivers of the SCM11 gives them a performance boost that other amplifiers – even ones that are considerably more expensive – don't always replicate.

The digital inputs of the SIACD are also rather more than a convenience feature too – you might find yourself rather surprised by how good a piece of digital equipment you have to have before you consider using an analogue over a digital connection.

The digital front end is refined and extremely believable, but once again it is the incredible levels of detail that it can dig out of a recording that really stand out. The USB input might not be a hi-res capable asynchronous design, but give it a CD-sized file and whatever the measurements suggest you might hear, I suspect this could be all the computer audio that many people ever need.

### All things to all men

In fact, on a wider level this could well be all the hi-fi you need. The ATC is a clever and utterly convincing demonstration that accuracy and realism need not come at the expense of fun or liveliness. This is hi-fi for grown ups – people who have come to the realisation that beyond telephone number power outputs and drivers made from unobtainium, this is a system that delivers genuine musical satisfaction. What makes the ATC even more impressive is that this performance comes from a system that is compact, attractive and built like the studio equipment that the company made its name with. This is an all-in-one system that delivers convenience as a result of clever design rather than any sonic compromise and the outcome is one of the most impressive all-in-one systems on sale today ●

