



Wall of sound

As ATC adds a wall-mounted loudspeaker range, **Ed Selley** finally has room to dance as he checks out its music credentials

Given the sometimes rather compact dimensions of listening spaces in UK homes, it's surprising that wall-mounted speakers aren't more popular with music lovers than they are. Being able to solve placement issues without eating up valuable floor space would appear to be a neat solution. In practice, the choices are limited and it is more common to find small speakers with optional wall mount brackets rather than a dedicated wall-mounted version designed specifically for the purpose.

ATC Loudspeakers is one of several manufacturers with models that have been especially put together for this emerging market, and will perhaps be more familiar to multi-channel music or movie fans. What you see here are speakers from the smallest member of its three-strong range of dedicated on-wall speakers, which use a low-profile cabinet.

Crucially, the two-way HTS7 is not completely new. Instead, each model is an adapted version of the entry-level series of SCM speakers and shares a driver complement with the

▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT
ATC HTS7

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
2-way wallmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
245 x 390 x 137mm

FEATURES

- 25mm Neo soft dome tweeter
- 125mm mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 84dB/W/m (8ohm)

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SCM7 standmount (HFC 384). The internal volume is the same at seven litres – albeit distributed slightly differently – and the drivers are the same. The 125mm mid/bass unit has the same slightly sticky finish to the cone and has a heavyweight surround, which allows impressive levels of excursion. This is partnered with a 25mm fabric dome 'Neo' tweeter, which hands over to the mid/bass unit at 2.5kHz.

One notable aspect of these drivers is that thanks to the nature of the HTS7's intended placement and use, you get greater low-end extension than is the case from the conventional SCM7. The nature of placing a speaker on a wall means that there will be a degree of reinforcement from the sealed box cabinet. ATC has designed the HTS7 to take this into account and consequently has a quoted bass roll-off at 44Hz.

The cabinet feels substantial and inert and the knuckle tap test suggests that it's impressively solid. There are also some welcome pieces of design aimed at making the HTS7 easy to live with day to day. The 8kg weight is spread across two mounting points so as not to place undue strain on the

wall. ATC then supplies a full-size template to ensure you drill the mounts in the correct location. Once on the wall, thin but pliant padding on the corners of the rear panel ensure that the speaker makes good contact with the surface and doesn't rattle or vibrate. The terminals are at the top of the rear panel and there's a useful channel cut into the back that you can fit the speaker cable into.

It's almost a perfect design, but there are some minor quirks to take into account. The drivers are impressively engineered, but they are very black. This means that in the white cabinet of our review sample, they really stand out and even putting the grilles on won't completely obscure the sight of them lurking behind. A black finish is also available, which helps to disguise the drivers, although this may look a little unfriendly. It's rated at 84dB sensitivity, which isn't particularly sensitive, and impedance is quoted at 8ohm.

Sound quality

On the end of a Naim Supernait 2 integrated amplifier it works admirably as the HTS7 makes it clear that increased room convenience is not at the expense of what I have come to expect from the brand. This is an extremely revealing speaker that takes complex and dense material and effortlessly opens it out into something logical and self-explanatory. What is most notable is that the HTS7 doesn't feel like an analytical monitor, and is more than capable of keeping the underlying musical message at the centre of what

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it does. It is also sufficiently neutral in its own presentation that the greatest influences to the performance will be the supporting electronics. It is also tested as part of a multi-channel installation on the end of a Yamaha RX-A3040 AV receiver where the speakers take on a slightly warmer and sweeter tone than they do with the Naim.

Listening to the wonderfully atmospheric *Gargoyle* by the Mark Lanegan Band, it motors along with real enthusiasm. Lanegan's distinctive gravelly vocals are delivered with a richness and presence that is unusual for a relatively small speaker. The design of the HTS7 means it's going



A serious wall mount speaker with a total lack of compromise

to be mounted flat to a wall with no ability to toe-in or fine tune placement, but it produces a very substantial and immersive three-dimensional image, and it's possible that the wider baffle used gives the speaker a dispersion that's more in keeping with traditional models.

That extra bass extension makes itself felt too. To be absolutely clear, the HTS7 won't trouble a similarly priced floorstander and there are standmount models out there that also have more low-end shove, but it never feels like a satellite speaker needing assistance from a subwoofer. The shifting drumline of UNKLE's *Natural Selection* is punchy and extremely fast. The ATC virtues of a complete absence of any overhang or congestion are clearly discernible and there is enough weight that you can feel low notes as well as hear them. Even at higher volume levels, the cabinet stays silent and there's no sign of it hardening up.

Where it's less happy is with poorer recordings and compressed material. At its heart, this is still a speaker made by a company known for its monitors. While it is entirely good fun for the most part, it also has no issue showing where recordings are less than perfect. The compressed nature of Feeder's *Echo Park* is clearly apparent, and although still listenable, this is a speaker that does its best work with quality formats and recordings.

The accuracy and slightly demanding side to the HTS7 does raise a slight question over its target market. This is a speaker that offers the promise of a useful degree of space-saving convenience but doesn't necessarily fall happily into the role of playing background music in a forgiving way on the end of a compact amp. The HTS7 is a serious speaker, just one that has made some useful concessions to modern life.

Conclusion

The lack of compromise ultimately makes the HTS7 rather special. This is a seriously capable standmount that's been adapted to work in extremely demanding conditions, and ATC has made a niche product that is deeply capable and will impress if you're looking for a space-saving design ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

- SOUND QUALITY** ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Detailed and involving sound; excellent build and flexibility
- VALUE FOR MONEY** ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Won't flatter poor material; requires careful partnering
- BUILD QUALITY** ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** An impressive addition to the wall-mounted market
- EASE OF DRIVE** ★★★★★

OVERALL

