

STEREO SPEAKERS

ATC SCM11



£850

IF YOU WERE feeling particularly harsh, you could call the ATC SCM11 the ugliest speaker in this test. You'd probably be right, but at least they don't try to pretend that they're anything other than ruddy awesome speakers.

We've tested the SCM11s a number of times. Indeed, they scooped a Best Buy Award at this price-point in our 2007 Awards issue. Aesthetically, the SCM11s feature a stepped graphite-grey

"The SCM11s don't pretend that they're anything other than ruddy awesome"

double front baffle with curved edges. It's claimed that this design improves imaging and reduces diffraction. The cabinet is unported – unlike every other speaker here – to help bass accuracy.

The speakers use a 2.5cm soft-dome tweeter, and the company's own heavily damped 12.5cm mid-bass driver. ATC has refrained from making wholesale changes over the past couple of years, but newer versions of this speaker benefit from an internal modification to the mid-bass driver unit, designed

FOR

Superb detail and insight; exquisite, natural sound; excellent transparency

AGAINST

Insensitive, so need you'll need a decent amp to drive them; not exactly blessed with supermodel looks

VERDICT

One of the most honest and transparent speakers out there – a delight to listen to

Don't let their looks fool you: these are refined, transparent sound machines

to help the speaker play at higher volume levels. Not that there was a problem with the original version...

ATC's mid-bass driver is a real beauty. Instruments and vocals sound pure and natural. During Duffy's *Every Heartbeat* and Adele's *Hometown Glory*, the ATCs give you every last drop of emotion. It's enough to make you dewy-eyed. Switch over to the orchestral soundtrack for *The Dark Knight*, though, and the ATCs change tack – layering the various instruments to perfection, picking up each and every natural tone.

Incredibly detailed presentation

Although the floorstanders in this *Group Test* can produce greater bass weight, the ATCs counter this by digging up immense detail. This awesome transparency is a great platform for well-produced CDs; possibly not so for compressed, poorer recordings. But, that's hardly the speakers' fault! The SCM11s are also the most insensitive speaker here, so you'll need a decent amplifier – around 100W per channel is a good starting point.

Apart from this, the SCM11s are still the speaker to beat. There's a simplicity and honesty to their sound that's unbeatable at this price. They've most definitely set an early benchmark in this *Group Test* and it's up to the rest of the field to prove their worth.



B&W 684



£700

YOU CAN SPOT a B&W speaker from a mile off. Well, perhaps not quite that far, but those unmistakable cones grab your attention like a glowing hi-fi beacon.

In each 684 you get two of these yellow 16.5cm woven kevlar cones – one handles mid-bass, the other takes care of low frequencies. Above the mid-bass driver you'll find the company's high-quality 25mm aluminium tweeter, complete with a tubed chamber that

"It's difficult not to get carried away with their enthusiastic sound"

absorbs the driver's rearward sound, producing cleaner, less distorted highs. The cabinets are tall, sturdy fellows and make for an intimidating pairing of bouncer-like proportions. They're available in an array of vinyl finishes including Black Ash and Red Cherry.

B&W has a reputation for building hugely entertaining speakers and the 684s don't disappoint. They enjoy nothing more than having the volume cranked up to eleven. Just sit back, and

FOR

Striking looks; great build-quality; hugely entertaining sound; awesome sense of scale and authority

AGAINST

Need to be cranked up for maximum enjoyment

VERDICT

Big in size and sound, the 684's will entertain whatever your musical taste

At only £700, these B&Ws represent excellent value – their sound is hard to match

bask in their sonic glory. It's difficult not to get carried away with their enthusiastic sound, especially when spinning the colossal *Dark Knight* soundtrack; the B&Ws create such a tension-filled atmosphere that you fully expect Batman and the Joker to burst into your listening room. The soundtrack really allows the speakers to show off their awesome sense of scale and authority. These B&Ws were clearly born to entertain.

Natural, rich and full-bodied sound

The soundstage that's created is truly massive. The 684s throw you right into the heart of the music, whether it's *The Dark Knight*'s orchestral setting or the mosh-pit confines of the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Don't Forget Me*. There's a lot of low-end grunt, too. Bass is tight, weighty and deep. This is balanced by a rich, full-bodied top end. Adele's vocals during *Hometown Glory* are natural and emotive, while the accompanying piano sounds full of texture. The smooth, slick mid-range and treble make all genres sound enjoyable and never uncomfortable.

Considering the B&Ws are one of the cheapest speakers in this test, they give you fantastic bang for your buck and one of the most thrilling musical performances possible at this price-point. But is it enough to upset the ATCs?



TEST RESULT

They've been pushed extremely hard, and the result's a close call, but the **ATCs** just have the edge

IT'S TESTAMENT TO the quality of the speakers in this test that all but two pairs have been deemed worthy of a five-star rating. Usually, it wouldn't be uncommon for established five-star speakers to shed a star or two as a result of side-by-side comparisons.

The only really disappointment is the KEF iQ70s. If we're being brutally honest, it's only the design and quality of the cabinets that saved these speakers from dropping from three stars to two.

On a brighter note, the other five set-ups have really excelled. The B&W 684s impress with their beefy, larger-than-life-sound. The Mordaunt-Short Mezzo 6s present a convincing case, aided by their captivating, dynamic mid-range and treble. If it's power and poise that you're looking for, then the the Tannoy DC6Ts are a great choice.

Different sizes, different strengths

The smaller standmounters can't match the big guns in terms of scale and authority, but they're not at a major disadvantage, as both the Dynaudios and ATCs deliver ample bass weight and scale for their dimensions. The X16s fleet-of-foot delivery and sweet treble are extremely attractive sonic features, but the transparency of the ATCs gives an amazing insight into music that just can't be beaten.

"The ATCs deliver ample bass and scale for their dimensions"

ATC SCM11



£850



WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION

GROUP TEST WINNER

NOW ADD THESE



CD PLAYER
CYRUS CD8SE



£ 1100

November 2008

Once you've heard the CD8se, you'll realise that it's the obvious choice as the hub of this system. It's a supremely musical disc spinner, capable of getting across the feeling and emotion in a song, whatever the genre.



STEREO AMPLIFIER
ROKSAN CASPIAN M SERIES-1



£ 1000

August 2008

The Caspian produces a solid, even-handed sound that will complement the ATCs honesty and balanced approach to music. Throw in some impressive dynamics and accurate timing and you're onto a winner.



SPEAKER CABLE
CHORD COMPANY
CARNIVAL SILVERSCREEN



£ 6/m

May 2008

We never tire of the Chord's dynamic, detailed and authoritative sound. It's a perfect fit for this system.

TOTAL SYSTEM £3010

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE RANGE	ATC SCM11	B&W 684	DYNAUDIO EXCITE X16	KEF IQ70	MORDAUNT-SHORT MEZZO 6	TANNOY REVOLUTION SIGNATURE DC6T
PRICE	£ 850	£ 700	£ 890	£ 700	£ 800	£ 1000
STANDMOUNT	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
FLOORMOUNT	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
SENSITIVITY	85 dB/W/m	90 dB/W/m	87 dB/W/m	90 dB/W/m	89 dB/W/m	89 dB/W/m
IMPEDANCE	6 ohms	8 ohms	4 ohms	8 ohms	8 ohms	8 ohms
MAX POWER	200 watts	150 watts	150 watts	150 watts	150 watts	175 watts
BIWIRABLE	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
FINISHES	1	4	4	5	2	2
DIMENSIONS (HWD)	38 x 21 x 25cm	91 x 20 x 30cm	35 x 21 x 29cm	82 x 18 x 26cm	100 x 22 x 28cm	95 x 23 x 23cm
HOW THEY RATED						
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★