

ATC SCM19 Loudspeaker

by Roy Gregory

ATC is not a large company but it seems to have penetrated an unseemly amount of recording studios with its monitors, mainly because they are built to withstand the abuse and deliver the resolution demanded of pro monitors. A year or two back they even managed to usurp a major US brand, replacing the PA system at Disney Hall, home of the Los Angeles Philharmonic. Which given the fact that the homegrown competitor had donated its speakers in the first place is quite a coup. The names David and Goliath come to mind.

But despite its success in that domain ATC is not just a pro company, it also makes a wide range of loudspeakers for the discerning music lover to use at home, the sort who are more interested in sound quality than high-tech features and shiny badges. In fact the people who run ATC give every appearance of having little concern whether the speakers sell in the domestic market or not. But every now and again they bring out a new model, and about a year back, brought out a whole new range, which is something of a first. This so called Entry Series consists of four designs ranging from the compact \$499 SCM 7 to the £1,999 SCM 40 floorstander, bringing the entry price for the brand to its lowest ever point. The SCM 19 sits just below the 40 in the range and is the biggest stand-mount. It's also about the heaviest stand-mount I've ever had to shift around. There's something disconcerting about its mass (16kg) which seems far too great given its size. If this were a floorstander one's perceptions

wouldn't be quite so confused but it ain't and they are. Every time I pick one of these up it seems too heavy!

This has more than a little to do with the excessive size of the magnet system on the main driver, which weighs more than half as much as the speaker overall. It's the same motor assembly that you find on ATC's 12inch bass drivers where such mass appears to make more sense. But if you want control, and I do want control, then this brute force approach is very effective.



The reason for such a large magnet/

motor assembly is to give the short voice coil a long gap to work in, one that's long enough for the flat wire coil to remain in the grip of the magnet. This is an expensive way of doing things but it does deliver the sort of results you need if a drive unit is going to be used all day at high SPLs.

The price is both fiscal and electrical: this is a pretty low sensitivity system by most standards and you'll

need a pretty powerful amplifier to make the most of it. But ATC argue that Watts are cheap and besides, at least their speakers are far from a difficult load. Even so, SETs won't cut it, so if that's your bag, these speakers probably aren't.

What ATC speakers are all about is resolution and this cannot be achieved with a coloured balance. That means neutrality and you need an amplifier that pulls in the same direction. If you

want colour in your music look for it in the source material, and while tonally colourful hi-fi can be tremendously entertaining it can ultimately do a disservice to that music by subtly remixing it. In some respects this makes ATCs rather unforgiving where recording quality is concerned. A lot of great music was not that well recorded, some of it being heavily compressed or just plain distorted. Jose Gonzalez's fabulous *Veneer* is a good example of a very poor recording of beautiful music, so you want to listen to it but a softer speaker will make less of the problems. On the other hand it is unfair to ask a speaker to be true, resolute and accommodating of poor quality source material.

Physically the SCM 19 is not that different from its SCM 20 predecessor, even the size is the same 20 litres (apparently the name change was simply to differentiate the two models). The main driver is one of ATC's SL or super linear varieties and uses a doped paper cone with an integral 75mm dust cap. The tweeter is a 25mm soft dome with neodymium magnet ▶

● EQUIPMENT REVIEW

and an alloy wave guide, the latter element improving sensitivity and helping to even out the response. The MDF cabinet is made in the Far-East to keep costs down, allowing more budget for the drivers. Mass may not be everything in a loudspeaker but it generally relates to magnet size and you won't find another bookshelf design near this price point that weighs as much as the SCM 19. The front baffle is doubled up and gently radiused to reduce diffraction and the new SCMs are designed to be used without the grilles in place.

Compared to its predecessor the SCM 19 seems to be a slightly smoother but more resolute loudspeaker. Earlier ATC passives could be a little crude and abrasive for some tastes, but the changes seem to have resulted in a more refined and resolute speaker that is hugely capable and immensely revealing for its price. Capable that is in terms of the level it can comfortably be used at and in the breadth of bandwidth it delivers. The style of delivery is typically analytical and this is not a smooth or overly refined loudspeaker; it is an honest and revealing one. You can get speakers that are more obviously open, and if you pay a bit more there are more refined alternatives, but in terms of the detail in the recording you have to pay a lot more to hear deeper into the mix.

I tried a number of amplifiers with the SCM 19s readily revealing the pros and cons of each; therefore the better the amplifier the better

the overall sound. Power is of course useful, as previously mentioned, but you don't need mountains of the stuff. Russ Andrews PA-1 is a compact fifty-Watter but it delivered a taut and timely result with plenty of energy. The best results however came with Gamut's D200 Mk3, which produced a more three-dimensional and substantial soundstage than the smaller amps whilst also enhancing detail retrieval and timing. This is not a 'fast' loudspeaker but give it some spirited music and it will deliver a very tidy result that is precise yet fluent.



It also has wide dynamic range thanks to the power handling capabilities of the main driver, which means that when a loud transient comes along you are left in no doubt about it. The phrase "good power handling" can be misleading. It doesn't merely mean you can play long and loud, it also means that there is no compression of dynamic peaks. So music with wide dynamic range is revealed in all its glory from the quietest to the loudest notes.

This quality however, can be a problem. If music is heavily compressed you will hear that compression for what it is and the only way to make such recordings entertaining is to turn them up, which will challenge partnering amplifiers and bring out any problems in the room. It also makes differences between recordings more apparent than ever, something that's useful in the studio but not so welcome at home.

But that brings us back to one of my earlier points, you can't blame the speaker for telling you too much. You have to look at the real culprit and that will be the guy who mastered the disc. So if you'd rather listen to Steve Lamacq than Verity Sharp this may not be the speaker for you. On the other hand, if the output of Late Junction and other programmes on Radio 3 is your thing then you will find a lot to appreciate in these self-effacing speakers. While I don't listen to a lot of classical music myself I do appreciate a bit of dynamic range and space alongside the all-important bone-crunching bass, and I can't help but enjoy the results I get with this speaker. The sheer girth they afford EST's *Tuesday Wonderland* when the double bass and piano get into a groove is a delight that few speakers which I could just about afford can deliver. If it's the sound of music you are after, forget Julie Andrews and check these out. ➤

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Two-way stand mount
Drivers:	25mm Soft dome with neodymium magnet 150mm paper cone bass-mid
Bandwidth:	54Hz-22kHz (-6dB)
Matched Response:	±0.5dB
Sensitivity:	85dB
Max SPL:	108dB
Nominal Impedance:	8 Ohm
Dimensions (WxHxD):	223 x 440 x 315mm
Weight:	16kg
Recommended Stand:	700mm
Guarantee:	Six years
Price:	£1,499

Manufacturer:

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