

ATC

SCM20-2/SIA2-150

Can the disciplines of studio monitoring be realised in the home? This passive two-way speaker aims to prove so, especially when driven by ATC's own integrated amp

ATC SCM20-2/SIA2-150

PRICE £2732/pair £2422 amp

In the depths of rural Gloucestershire lie the headquarters of one of the world's truly great speaker manufacturers. Its designs are used by many of the world's most famous artists, studios and concert halls. If you want to hear Pink Floyd the way David Gilmour does then, like him, you'd better use ATC speakers at home.

The SCM20-2 (Studio Control Monitor 20-litre volume) passive monitors occupy the lower-mid of ATC's surprisingly extensive domestic loudspeaker range. It's an easy speaker to accommodate by ATC standards, being around half a metre tall with width and depth in proportion. However, weighing around 60lb, it's extremely heavy for its size and demands the use of high quality frame stands.

The significant weight of the ATC is explained by its fabulous build quality. The sealed cabinet of the review pair came finished in charcoal-grey laminate with matt aluminium corner bracing and black wire frame grilles. The design is attractive and modern yet conveys a sense of the model's pro-studio pedigree. The drive unit complement consists of a hand-built ATC 150mm paper-coned

The speakers were installed on 20in open-framed metal stands and positioned around 2ft from the rear wall. Best results were obtained with them slightly toe'd in and around 7ft apart with the listening position 12ft away. My resident Naim

The SCM20-2 made a deep impression on me right away. It exposed the timbre of musical instruments to a degree unmatched by any other speaker I have used at home. The tonal signature between different makes of piano or guitar was clearly revealed – no surprise given these monitors' pro-audio heritage. When listening to a drum kit one was aware of whether the drummer had slackened or tightened the skins and acutely aware of the resulting tone and colour. This additional insight was extremely addictive and proved independent of both source and musical genre. What's more, no frequency extremes were emphasised. The music was immediate and visceral without ever sounding shrill with the result that Karen Carpenter's voice on 'Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft' sent shivers up the spine, so beautifully balanced was the sound. There was also a sense of sure-footedness and

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bass/mid driver, and a 25mm soft-dome tweeter built by Vifa to ATC specifications. This tweeter has an unusual double magnet design claimed to deliver frequency response to beyond 25kHz, thus ensuring sonic linearity and compatibility with the latest high-bandwidth formats such as DVD-A.

NAP 250 amplifier was used to power them, via Naim NAC A5 cable. Sources were a Naim CDi CD player and Michell GyroDec turntable. For comparison ATC also provided its SIA2-150 integrated amplifier (see panel opposite), reviewed in these pages before [*HFN* Sept '99].



security to the presentation that was independent of musical style and volume level. I played Led Zeppelin's 'Fool in the Rain' at extremely high levels and all that happened was that the Naim got pretty warm and the ATCs kicked some serious air. There was no fuss, no drama and no sense of the sound hardening, compressing or changing.

Switching from CD to vinyl and a copy of Albinoni's 'Adagio' performed by Musica de Camera I revelled in the haunting beauty and sadness that poured from the system. While these aren't loudspeakers that major in projecting a holographic soundstage they deliver world class immediacy, tonal purity, dynamics and neutrality. And as for bass, considering that they only utilise a 6in woofer, never did I find these speakers lacking in extension. They offered a balanced sound with a highly articulate low-end of good weight and great tonal insight. John McVie's nimble bass work on the latest Fleetwood Mac album *Say You Will* – this time on CD – was handled with ease. There are loudspeakers that go lower and offer greater bass output, but they all cost significantly more.

I have a feeling, however, that these are speakers that won't always impress on first hearing. They don't offer the superficially impressive aural fireworks of some lesser designs, by which I mean boomy bass or a prominent top end. Rather like a good wine they take time to appreciate, but soon you realise that the ATCs are every inch a Grand Cru.

One thing that characterises a live performance is a sense of speed and immediacy. Drums, guitars – even a Hammond organ – have a sense of attack to their notes that is lost when heard through the great majority of domestic hi-fi equipment. The ability to convey this quality is rare



Corners are braced with aluminium

Those drivers in depth

The infinite baffle cabinet measures 470 x 285 x 395mm (hwd) and is extensively braced and damped. The tweeter incorporates a double magnet system for linear frequency response while the bass driver takes a 2.8kHz crossover with time/phase alignment. Frequency response is quoted as 45Hz to 22kHz at ± 0.5 dB.

Such is the attention to detail here that all the magnet's metal parts are finished in black to help dissipate heat from the voice coil and so aid durability. Connection is via conventional binding posts with the facility for bi-wiring. The SCM20-2 is available in both passive and active versions with the active version being fitted with ATC amplification.



Remove the terminal links to bi-wire the ATC

indeed and the pairing of Naim amplification with the ATC speakers delivered speed in spades. I know that many will consider Naim and ATC to espouse differing ideologies with respect to hi-fi design, Naim being frequently cited as striving for 'musicality' while ATC is noted for 'neutrality'. In this case though, the coupling was a match made in heaven and one I would strongly recommend as worthy of audition. Indeed, the ATC was more tolerant of glassy production than my resident Naim SBL speakers, which can occasionally sound strident with poorly produced material at high volume levels.

Heresy it may be, but I don't feel that the disciplines of studio monitoring and hi-fi are mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is no reason why well-engineered studio monitors shouldn't also be great hi-fi speakers. The ATC SCM20-2 proved this point admirably and I loved them. It's a design that possesses absolute integrity of sound, build, power handling and philosophy. I want nothing more from a speaker. ■

Jonathan Gorse

ATC SIA2-150 amplifier

ATC's SIA2-150 is an integrated amp ideally suited to the task of driving the company's passive speakers, like the SCM20-2. The amp is specified to 150 watts per channel and works in Class A mode up to two-thirds of its rated output.

The front panel features two large rotaries for source selection and volume plus two buttons to provide for tape monitoring and standby functions. It's quite large, measuring some 440 x 130 x 325mm (hwd) and, like the speakers, looks 'studio ready'. To the rear can be found four inputs for line-level sources and a designated AV input so that it can be run in tandem with an external AV amplifier to cater for surround duties.

Straight out of the box the amplifier gave a good account of itself. With the Naim CDi and a Sony tuner as sources, connected via Chord Cobra interconnect, the sound was dynamic, punchy and controlled at all times. As for the soundstage this was both wide and surprisingly deep. Fully warmed



up (ATC recommends three hours) the amp had more warmth and body than my Naim NAP 250 reference and sounded slightly softer at the top end. On material that was inherently bright I favoured the ATC but found myself preferring the Naim amplification on smoother recordings like James Taylor's 'Fire and Rain' for its slightly greater incisiveness. It's worth pointing out here that I'm comparing around £4500 worth of Naim amplification and power supplies with an ATC integrated costing practically half that.

The ATC amplifier also conveyed a sense of unbridled power and massive headroom. There was nothing in my music collection that could phase it or make it sound anything but utterly composed at all times. In a sense it was the audio equivalent of David Niven: impeccably attired, well bred, articulate and refined. A gentleman then, but one that could be relied upon to deliver a consummate performance again and again, irrespective of genre. The SIA2-150 is an ideal partner for the SCM20-2. It is also an excellent design in its own right, and offers superb value for money in the context of a wider range of speakers.

Supplier

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Hi-FiNews verdict

Neutral, superbly balanced and with insight that can only be described as addictive, this passive ATC brings the immediacy of the recording studio sound into the home. Dedicated amp makes ideal partner.