

ATC SCM40



£2000

IT'S BEEN THE thick end of three years since first we wrestled ATC's substantial SCM40s from their packaging. In that time, they've established themselves as one of our favourite floorstanders at the price – but as the old stagers here, how well do they wear their age?

The short answer is: perfectly well. For the longer answer, we have to start with the looks. Floorstanders are

“They have the incontestable authority to take the song by the scruff of the neck”

pieces of furniture almost as much as functional items, and while build is impeccable and the veneer luxurious, you'll need to be a fan of the 'dumpy, boxy' design school to get excited.

That's as opposed to the sound the SCM40s make, which is certainly exciting. Listen to The Rolling Stones' *Monkey Man* and you can add the words 'dynamic', 'detailed' and 'subtle' too. The ATCs have the incontestable authority to take the song by the scruff of the neck and

↑ FOR

Thrilling musicality and authority; built like a bank-vault door

↓ AGAINST

Won't flatter standard recordings; functional looks

→ VERDICT

For an unexpurgated insight into your music, you'll struggle to better these

bring it bounding to life. The by no means easy trick of integrating all three drivers is pulled off with something approaching disdain, so the SCM40s enjoy crisp timing, an expansive, explicit soundstage, and fine stereo focus.

Low frequencies are deep, taut and responsive, the midrange occasionally torrential in the amount of detail and expression it delivers, and percussives at the top end shine benignly. This winningly even and musical tonality is apparent whether playing small-scale, subtle recordings (when the ATCs sound like they've shrunk to the size of dextrous standmounters) or full-on orchestral blow-outs (when they sound big enough to fill a concert hall).

Superb, but a little unforgiving

Three years hasn't blunted the ATCs' charms, then; neither has it eradicated their one limitation – their frank honesty. Listen to Jack Hayter's *Practical Wireless* and its shortcomings are laid bare. Fine if you don't want the warts airbrushed from your music, worrying if you listen to a lot of poor recordings. That, and a lack of sensitivity that means they need to be shown the whip if you're to enjoy them at high volume, is the extent of the gripes. These remain among the best £2000 floorstanders around.



Dynaudio Excite X36



£2000

WE'VE SAID IT of other speakers from this range: it takes a brave company to call a range of speakers 'Excite'. The X36 is an imposing-looking design with an imposing array of drivers; but exciting? Let's hope they've saved that for the sound...

Positioned in a degree of free space and toed-in towards the listener, our black-ash X36s find it impossible to hide their bulk. It's not the prettiest

“The X36s could be just the thing to make a loutish amp sit on the naughty step”

bulk, either. They certainly feel well-enough made to justify a £2000 price tag, but we're not convinced the X36s look it. The question of whether they sound like two-grand's-worth of speaker is even more moot a point.

The X36s' size and appearance seem at quite significant odds with the sound they make. The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion's *Now I Got Worry* is a whirling, gung-ho recording; under the Dynaudios' aegis it sounds

↑ FOR

Lots of well-made cabinet and drivers for your money; expressive midrange, good detail retrieval

↓ AGAINST

Lumpy low frequencies and an overarching lack of sparkle can make for a pretty safe listen

→ VERDICT

While others in Dynaudios's range have lived up to their name, these fail to thrill in the same way

considered, even-handed – downright reasonable. Where detail retrieval, soundstaging and vocal eloquence are concerned, the X36s are a convincing listen – but for the more visceral aspects of music-making, they lack the last drop of, well, excitement. This is compounded by low-frequency reproduction that's stolid by the standards of rivals and gains ill-merited confidence as volumes increase.

Safety first. And second

It follows that something as stately and mature as Bob Dylan's *Together Through Life* sounds only barely alive via the Dynaudios. The X36s do good work separating the rather swampy sound into something distinct and easy to follow, and their innate restraint is more suited to the material (the phrase 'death's door' came up once or twice in Dylan's vocals). But they don't integrate their drivers as smoothly as competitors can. The resulting lack of unity with the leading edge of notes makes a mildly pleasant sound soporific.

If your amp is uncouth and loutish, the Dynaudios could be just the thing to make it sit on the naughty step. Otherwise, we think you'll want a little more bite and verve than the X36s are willing to give.





There are three really fantastic-sounding speakers here, and the **Spendors** just manage to take it with their style and all-round ability

THE REALLY SATISFYING thing about this Group Test is illustrating just how good the majority of products of this type, at this price, are. You'll know by now that we've given the nod to the Spondor A6s but there's next-to-nothing between them and the ATC SCM40s. Ultimately we've decided to go with the Spondors because a) they're a little more forgiving of ropery source material and less-accomplished partnering electronics and b) we think being short is preferable to being ugly. But if you listened to them back-to-back and went with the ATCs we wouldn't criticise you.

"There's next to nothing between the A6s and the ATCs"

Don't discount the rest

We wouldn't really blame you if you decided you fancied the Monopulse 42As, either. They're a five-star sound, no doubt about it. It's just that their relative poverty of build and finish is shown in an unforgiving light in this company. And there's a case to be made for the PMCs (if you enjoy their unflappability) or the Roksans (if you want your trouser-legs flapping) too. Only the Dynaudios surprisingly find themselves in the 'average' category, in fact - and that's much more a testament to the strength of the opposition than it is a condemnation of their abilities. Audition and enjoy.

Spondor A6



£2000



NOW ADD THESE



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March 2009

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CYRUS 8XPd



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July 2009

If you're looking for a style match for the Cyrus CD player, you really must check out this amplifier. Top class transparency, dynamics and resolution, a fine built-in DAC and, in the fine Cyrus tradition, it's upgradeable as well



SPEAKER CABLE
DNN STEREO SOLID CORE



£ 18/m

November 2007

One of the most detailed and articulate speaker cables you can get for the money. Dynamics are strong and expressive, and timing is pleasingly crisp. Terrific value for money.

TOTAL SYSTEM £4880

FACTS AND FIGURES

PRICE RANGE	ATC SCM40	Dynaudio Excite X36	Monopulse 42A	PMC FB1i	Roksan Caspian FR-5	Spondor A6
PRICE	£ 2000	£ 2000	£ 2000	£ 1900	£ 2250	£ 2000
TYPE	Floorstander	Floorstander	Floorstander	Floorstander	Floorstander	Floorstander
SENSITIVITY (DB/W/M)	85	89	88	90	87	87
IMPEDANCE (OHMS)	8	4	9	8	4	8
MAX POWER	300W	250W	200W	300W	135W	200W
HANDLING (WATTS)						
BIWIRABLE	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
FINISHES	2	4	50	4	2	2
DIMENSIONS (HWD)	97x23x32cm	104x21x31cm	108x23x25cm	100x20x30cm	100x20x25cm	88x19x28cm
HOW THEY RATED						
SOUND	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
BUILD	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
COMPATIBILITY	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★