

ATC SCM7

Like Dynaudio, ATC is no stranger to speaker design, being set up in the early '70s by ex-Goodmans engineer Bill Woodman. It's a company with a long pedigree in both professional and domestic speaker manufacture, makes its own drive units and even offers the odd amp or two, though to date it has limited itself to big-ticket boxes only.

The SCM7s mark ATC's first foray into the highly competitive £500-£600 market. Like the Dynaudios they're weighty designs, each cabinet tipping the scales at 7kg, with much of this weight due to the use of a typically massive 3.5kg magnetic assembly that backs the 12cm polyester weave mid/bass cones.

However, unlike the Audience 52s, which choose to exploit the claimed advantages of single-wire operation, the SCM7s are of a biwirable design, and using them so certainly opens up and focuses the soundstage, while also allowing instruments and voices to sound a little more finely etched.

First impressions are that the ATCs are the more expensive of the two designs on test, especially when one hears such a big and superbly detailed sound emerging from such compact and

well-finished cabinets. Indeed, at just 30cm tall, the SCM7s sit firmly in the miniatures camp, making them appear an ideal purchase for those after a speaker for use in a small room and wanting a heady dose of high-end sound.

For example, play the Rachmaninov Piano Concerto or Tallis's *Te lucis ante terminum* (Linn Records, 10/00) and the Dynaudios sound a little flat and grainy in comparison, especially when the ear is greeted with that first shimmer of a superbly resolved cymbal crash decaying against an inky-black background, or the intake of breath between vocals just before they're delivered dripping with the ambience of the recorded acoustic.

However, while many will love the ATCs' stark sound, quite a few will hate it. The ATCs will suit music collections made up of well-engineered CDs and vinyl – the sheer transparency of the ATCs make a wonderful foil for the richness of the ol' black stuff. But should you use these speakers, allied with similarly transparent amps and source, on recordings whose main strength is in the performance rather than production niceties, then you might well find that you've discs on your shelves that remain unplayed, as such a combination will sound harsh and fatiguing.

Get things right however, and the ATCs can amaze. Resolution of fine detail is up there with speakers costing three times the price, while the air and openness these miniatures achieve can be breathtaking. Whether it's a three-piece ensemble, as in the Bach Concerto or a full orchestral affair as with the Rachmaninov, the tiny ATCs lay out all the performers before you, enabling you to sit back and pinpoint performers as they play.

Further strengths lie in their speed and grip: those drivers stop and start on a sixpence with the result that *staccato* violin work or rapid piano runs punch out from the cabinets, while down low, bass is satisfyingly tight and never out

of control. Those sealed, unported enclosures help in this respect, and while the low-end sounds leaner than that delivered by the Dynaudios, timbre and separation are tremendous. What's more, these ATCs are capable of that wonderful disappearing act that is so often the province of the small speaker, allowing the music to float free of the enclosures. Partner them with a warm-sounding amp (83/db/W/m and 8 Ohm impedance makes them an easy

sheer resolution provides a listener in experience unmatched for the money, but whose transparency makes no attempt to mollycoddle either poor production jobs or inferior electronics? One thing's for certain: both these models represent the cutting edge of speaker design at the price, and both genuinely offer new benchmarks in value for money.

However, for me it has to be the Dynaudios. Not only does their forgiving nature mean that



Solid build and heavy magnets: ATC's superb SCM7 speakers

load for amps to drive) and remember to keep those grilles on (they're designed to sound best that way) and the ATCs will bring you the best seat in the hall. It's just up to you to ensure that your source and discs are up to the level of performance on offer.

Conclusion

So do you want speakers that make your whole collection of music CDs sound highly enjoyable, but trade some atmosphere, ambience and sheer bite to achieve this? Or miniatures whose

they'll fit more easily into a wider range of systems, but they always seem to dig up that little bit of magic, whether it be a previously unheard counter-melody or harmony, or, in the bigger scheme of things, the way they simply make sense of the music while offering unbeatable pace and rhythm to boot. What's more, they go on sounding better and better the more sophisticated the electronics used and have a knack of sounding consistently 'right', so they're the last things you're going to be spotlighting the next time that upgrading itch arrives. **G**

ATC SCM7

Type

Standmount loudspeakers

Price £480/pr

Made by

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