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ATC SCM12

Compact standmount features one of ATC's awesome main drivers

A strong whiff of déjà vu emanated from the boxes when this compact monitor was unpacked. Our first impression was that this was a repeat of the SCM20 from 2001. But though presentation and shape are familiar – and these models have plenty of underskin engineering in common too – this more recent SCM12 is a very effective downsizing exercise. Internal volume is reduced from 20 to 12 litres, but more important is the fact that a decent-sized ATC speaker can be sold for less than £1,000 (there is a still less costly SCM7, but a seven-litre enclosure puts it firmly in the miniature category).

ATC is essentially a Pro-Audio-oriented brand, massively over-engineering its drivers in order to survive the notoriously rigorous environment of the modern recording studio. However, true studio monitors tend to be actively driven, with built-in electronic filtering and power amplification, whereas this SCM12 is primarily aimed at domestic users because it's a passive design (with a built-in crossover for driving from a single amplifier).

'Classic' and 'timeless' are the more polite terms for what passes for styling here – a simple wood-veneered box with recessed grille, it could have been manufactured any time in the last thirty years. No disputing its solidity, however, with a total weight of 15kg, the same as the smaller floorstanders here.

Much of that weight is down to the massive main driver magnet and motor, of course, which adopts a 'long-gap/short-coil' approach (to retain linearity under large excursion). ATC's 'Super Linear' magnet technology coats polepieces in a magnetically permeable insulator to inhibit the generation of eddy currents within the motor. The large 75mm voice coil has massive thermal power handling and drives the 125mm diaphragm at its cone/dome junction.

SOUND QUALITY

The most impressive thing about this compact speaker is that it doesn't sound anywhere near as small as it looks. This is partly because the designer has traded sensitivity for bass extension, and by going for a well below average sensitivity here, the bass extension can be much greater than the size of the enclosure might suggest.

The SCM12 is also unique in this test group in operating in sealed-box mode, which has several implications, including a bass alignment helped by close-to-wall siting. Even with this bass reinforcement, there's a notably tight and clean bottom end, with impressive ultimate extension and scale alongside considerable grip and convincing authority. There's some lack of warmth and richness through the upper bass and lower midband here, but you'll be hard pushed to find anything cleaner or more informative.

The mid and treble are very well judged indeed, deftly treading the neutrality line and avoiding either forwardness or 'shut in' voicing. The midband in particular is very coherent and expressive, with excellent dynamic tracking, although the top end could perhaps be a little more delicate and transparent.

This very explicit and impressive loudspeaker does sound a little thin overall, but its real strength lies in quite exceptional dynamic grip and subtlety, and the superior linearity of that very classy main driver. Note that the low sensitivity will soak up extra amplifier power, so

carrying out fair comparisons with other speakers can be tricky. **HFC**



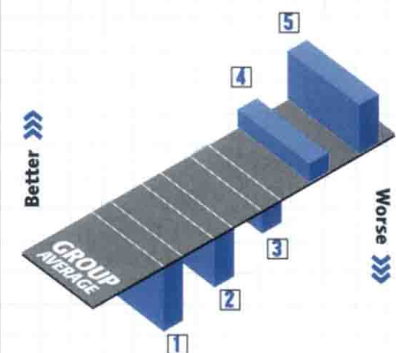
LAB REPORT

The main driver is oriented towards maintaining accurate linearity and ensuring good headroom when operating continuously at high replay levels. To this end the sensitivity is a modest 85-86dB. Happily the load it presents to the amplifier is reasonably benign, staying above 5 ohms throughout.

The in-room tonal balance, measured under far-field conditions, is unusually smooth, and slightly emphasises the upper midband. The sealed-box bass loading gives a dry alignment with a relatively even output and good ultimate extension. Wall reinforcement will usefully augment the mid-bass, though the upper bass and lower midband regions are likely to remain lean.

The crossover point occurs at 2.8kHz, the acoustic and electrical transitions coinciding on this occasion. The integration is well handled here, with just a slight notch at around 2.3kHz. Pair matching was close enough, though a little below average.

HOW IT COMPARES



- 1] Sensitivity >> -55%
- 2] Bass extension >> -40%
- 3] Ease of drive >> -20%
- 4] Overall frequency balance >> 15%
- 5] Response smoothness >> 40%

SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Sensitivity @ 1m/2.83V	85dB	85.5dB
Impedance (nominal/mean)	8ohm	7ohm
Est. bass extension (-6dB, Hz)	62Hz	55Hz

VERDICT

- SOUND >> 85%**
- PRACTICALITY >> 85%**
- BUILD >> 92%**
- VALUE >> 81%**

Massive main driver magnet and 75mm voice coil gives this compact standmount massive grip, headroom and power handling. Best close to walls, it sounds smooth and coherent with great authority, if a little lean in the lower midband.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE >> **85%**



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