



The C4 subwoofer shares its name with a type of plastic explosive...apt!

ATC Concept 3 £4877 ★★★★★

FOR

Brilliant performance in every regard

AGAINST

Not exactly pretty...or small...or cheap!

VERDICT

A first-rate solution to the music and movies conundrum; if you've got the space and budget, give it a go

ATC'S SCM 12 standmount speakers won an Award in our annual gongs, and remain some of our favourites in their class, so, stick four of 'em together – as ATC's Concept 3 does – and the results ought to be impressive, right?

Not half! This is a terrific system. It's not pretty, it's hardly small, and you must use decent partnering kit to get the best from it – but, boy, are you going to love this package. It plays music properly, it relays details with astonishing precision, and it goes damn loud without stress, even at levels that'll have neighbours kicking your door down. It's an excellent choice for a system able to excel with both multichannel and stereo sound.

As you'd expect, the brilliant SCM 12s (two for front effects, two for the surround channels) play a big part in that success, but in some ways the other two elements in the package are even more impressive. First, the C3 Centre, a centre speaker so deceptively heavy that it gave one of our reviewers a bad back for a week. That's a reflection of ATC's obsessive attention to engineering detail: the C3 uses two hand-built 15cm polypropylene drivers (each of which has a huge 17.7cm magnet) as found in the SCM 12. These are mounted in a rigid sealed-box enclosure for minimal colouration. The only downside is that you'll need a very sturdy speaker stand to support your C3. In the end, we used a compact Mana equipment rack.

If you think that's big, then check out the C4 subwoofer. This gloss-black behemoth totes a downward-firing 30cm driver actively driven by no less than 650w, delivering 112dB of continuous output without distortion down to a subterranean 19Hz.

This means serious bass: it delivers a muscular, forceful and authoritative low-end that raises a grin while vibromassaging your sofa. Connect the subwoofer using balanced leads, which ATC can supply, and allow plenty of space, but if you want a system that can turn simple surround audio into a semi-religious experience, then the C4 subwoofer will provide.

Bring all these elements together, and you've a recipe for sonic fireworks. The clarity and clout of the naval battle in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is

exceptional, the sheer snap and weight of each explosion being relayed with blistering intensity. But it's not a bright, hard sound – even 'out of the box', with the drive units still stiff and in need of a run-in, the balance is fairly composed. Given time (and a stern thrashing) the performance matures, growing in stature with each passing hour. Perhaps the only 'flaw' is that you'll hear poor-quality mixes 'warts and all' – but that's hardly ATC's fault.

And don't forget – this is a system with serious music ability. As you'd expect, it's terrific in stereo, with or without the added support of the subwoofer. The balance is accurate: informative and yet wonderfully natural. Whatever you play, from Jet's retro-rock to Snoop Dogg's laconic raps, the SCM 12s involve you in the heart of the music like few others. This is a terrific system and given partnering kit of appropriate quality it's an excellent buy.



Winner ATC Concept 3 | £4877 | ★★★★★

AS YOU'LL HAVE noticed, there's not one duffer among this group. Each offers specific technology – ATC's sealed-box enclosures, PMC's transmission line, Triad's LCR and in-wall designs, and Vienna Acoustics' curved cabinets – that gives each system its own unique appeal, and you would be proud to own any one of them. We've got to give credit to Triad for understanding that not everyone wants to see their speakers; equally, we're happy to praise Vienna Acoustics to the skies for making speakers that are easy on both the eye and the ear.

But in the end, we've got to pick a winner, so here it is: ATC. Yes, the Concept 3 system is the priciest here, and it's also (in most ways) the biggest – but you get what you pay for. This is a package for which no sonic apologies are needed on any front. Yes, the surround speakers are on the big side, and they do 'beam' sound rather than spread it in numerous directions, but that's more a question of individual sonic taste than a genuine criticism. As to the rest, the Concept 3 has it all: massive bass, huge dynamic ability, wondrous clarity and total composure – and it also plays music like you wouldn't believe. If you've got the money and the space, get ready with the plastic...

“Massive bass, huge dynamic ability, wondrous clarity and unbelievable composure”



ATC Package

TEST WINNER



PMC Package



Triad Package



Vienna Package

WHAT'S IT GOT?

Price	£4877	£4162	£4180	£3700
Front speaker type	Standmount	Floorstander	LCR	Floorstander
Mid/bass drive unit	15cm	17cm	16.5cm	15cm
Treble drive unit	28mm	25mm	25mm	25mm
Reflex port	Sealed-box	Transmission	Sealed-box	Ported
Terminal	Biwire	Biwire	Single-wire	Single-wire
Frequency range (+/-3dB)	62Hz to 20kHz	22Hz to 25kHz	70Hz to 20kHz	40Hz to 25kHz
Sensitivity	86dB/w/m	90dB/w/m	92dB/w/m	91dB/w/m
Nominal impedance	4 ohms	8 ohms	4 ohms	4 ohms
Subwoofer drive unit	30cm	2 x 17cm	30cm	30cm
Subwoofer power	650w	150w	250w	220w
Subwoofer design	Down-firing	Forward-firing	Forward-firing	Forward-firing
Front speaker dimensions (hwd)	33 x 20 x 26cm	103 x 20 x 30cm	48 x 22 x 24cm	105 x 27 x 9cm
Subwoofer dimensions (hwd)	58 x 50 x 50cm	55 x 20 x 55cm	42 x 39 x 36cm	40 x 64 x 22cm

WHAT WE GAVE IT...

Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
VERDICT	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★

Partners for the winner

The ideal kit to put with the ATC Concept 3

Yamaha DPX-1000 projector £8000

★★★★★ October 2003

A sound this big needs an equally large image, and the Yamaha delivers. Superb quality and a DVI-D compatible digital video input as well



Denon DVD-A11 DVD player £1700

★★★★★ February 2004

Denon's latest and greatest is a DVD behemoth, equipped for superlative sound and vision – universal DVD replay and DVI-D video on top.

Arcam AV8 processor and P7 power amplifier

£5500 ★★★★★ May 2003

Supreme multichannel power and composure from this remarkable combination; effortlessly capable, both in stereo and in surround



We tested them with Projector Yamaha DPX-1000; DVD player Denon DVD-A11; DVD player Arcam DV-78; Processor Lexicon MC-12B; Power amplifier Lexicon LX-7; cables and interconnects Chord Company; Stands and supports Atacama; Equipment table Mana