

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



ATC SCM40

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It's probably best not to wear socks whilst listening to the SCM40s – they're only going to get blown off each time you fire-up these gorgeous floorstanders. Right from the outset, these hand-built speakers impress even before you get their drivers moving. They're built using a curved cabinet design that adds a classic elegance, and our review pair was exquisitely finished in a cherry wood veneer (they can also be ordered in black ash veneer as well as a black or white satin finish).

What's more, the '40s feel weighty and solid (ATC traditionally uses numbers in its speaker names to represent their internal cabinet volumes in litres). They feature a new cabinet design that has been developed to deliver more than just aesthetic appeal as each enclosure is braced and laminated for added strength and damping.

The SCM40s were first launched in 2013 as part of ATC's 'Entry Series' range which also includes active models. The line-up is the first to use the company's new SH25-76 soft dome tweeter, which utilises what's described as a "unique dual suspension system that suppresses diaphragm rocking modes, even at high output levels".

As well as the 25mm soft dome tweeter, the three-way SCM40s also include ATC's 75mm soft dome midrange driver (which was first developed in 1976) and a 164mm short bass driver. According to ATC, its driver design of a short edge-wound voice coil operating in a long magnetic gap ensures "exceptionally low" distortion throughout the operating band. The magnet assembly also has a hole through the pole, enabling air to be vented from under the dust cap. It's claimed this cuts air flow noise at low frequencies while simultaneously increasing power handling and reliability. ATC adds that it has removed from all drive units the need for ferrofluids which, it reckons, can dry out over time and affect performance.

This company is known for its engineering knowhow, and all of this tech-talk certainly leaves you in no doubt that you get a lot of speaker for your money when it comes to the SCM40s, setting you up nicely for what comes next. The '40s have been designed to present an easy load for amps with 75W to 300W on tap, and I partnered them with ATC's own SIA2-100, a combined DAC and integrated amp rated at 100W. I was in the mood to listen to Air and so loaded up their 2007 album, *Pocket Symphony* (using ATC's CD2 CD player). Selecting the atmospheric track 'Photograph', the SCM40s instantly unleash a thunderous, wall-to-wall sound that instantly captivates and engulfs the listener. And the bass! To say these ATCs plunder the lower frequency depths is an understatement: they go further, mining subterranean

frequencies and delivering them as a powerful backdrop to the soundscape that is created before you.

The big and bold SCM40s belt out a sound that's as Herculean as their solid looks and feel suggest. And just to be clear here, we're not talking quantity over quality – these aren't crude, stadium-style sonics that lack grace and subtlety. What these speakers truly excel at are dimension and imaging; singers are brought to the fore and you know exactly where they are, while instruments and backing vocalists appear in the sound stage with pinpoint accuracy. Some jazz proves the point here. Playing tracks from Gregory Porter's 2016 album *Take Me To The Alley*, I was totally blown away by the atmosphere the SCM40s were able to produce, delivering 'Holding On' not only with great power but also with great intimacy. It was like the man was right there in my living room and singing just for me.



Track after track, these speakers consistently served up intricate detail, such as delicate percussive sounds on 'The Power of Goodbye' from Madonna's *William Orbit produced Ray of Light album* (1998). In fact, 'Happy Cycling' from the Boards of Canada's *Peel Sessions EP*, came across with a percussive muscularity that had not previously come to the fore (an effect that my cat Rumi found rather disconcerting).

Downsides? Well, this is not a criticism of the ATCs as such, but they do need to be fed with high quality recordings if they are to give of their best. Don't therefore think that they can turn a dull recording into gold – alchemy remains a myth. But fire-up some well-produced sounds and the SCM40s will leave you in no doubt that they are certainly magical.

Specifications

Type: 3-way sealed-box / infinite baffle floorstanding loudspeaker

Tweeter: ATC 25mm neodymium

Midrange driver: ATC 75mm soft dome

Low frequency driver: ATC 164mm short coil

Recommended amplifier power: 75-300W

Sensitivity: 85dB 1W @ 1metre

Nominal impedance: 8 Ohm

Crossover frequencies: 380Hz & 3.5kHz

Matched response: ± 0.5 dB

Frequency response (-6dB): 48Hz-22kHz

Dispersion: $\pm 80^\circ$ coherent horizontal, $\pm 10^\circ$ coherent vertical

Max SPL: 112dB

Connectors: binding posts/4mm plugs, tri-wire

Dimensions (HxWxD): 980 x 370 x 305mm (inc. foot plinth – spikes add 25mm to height)

Weight: 31kg