

# ATC SCM20ASL Active Speaker Review

## *Change for a twenty*

by

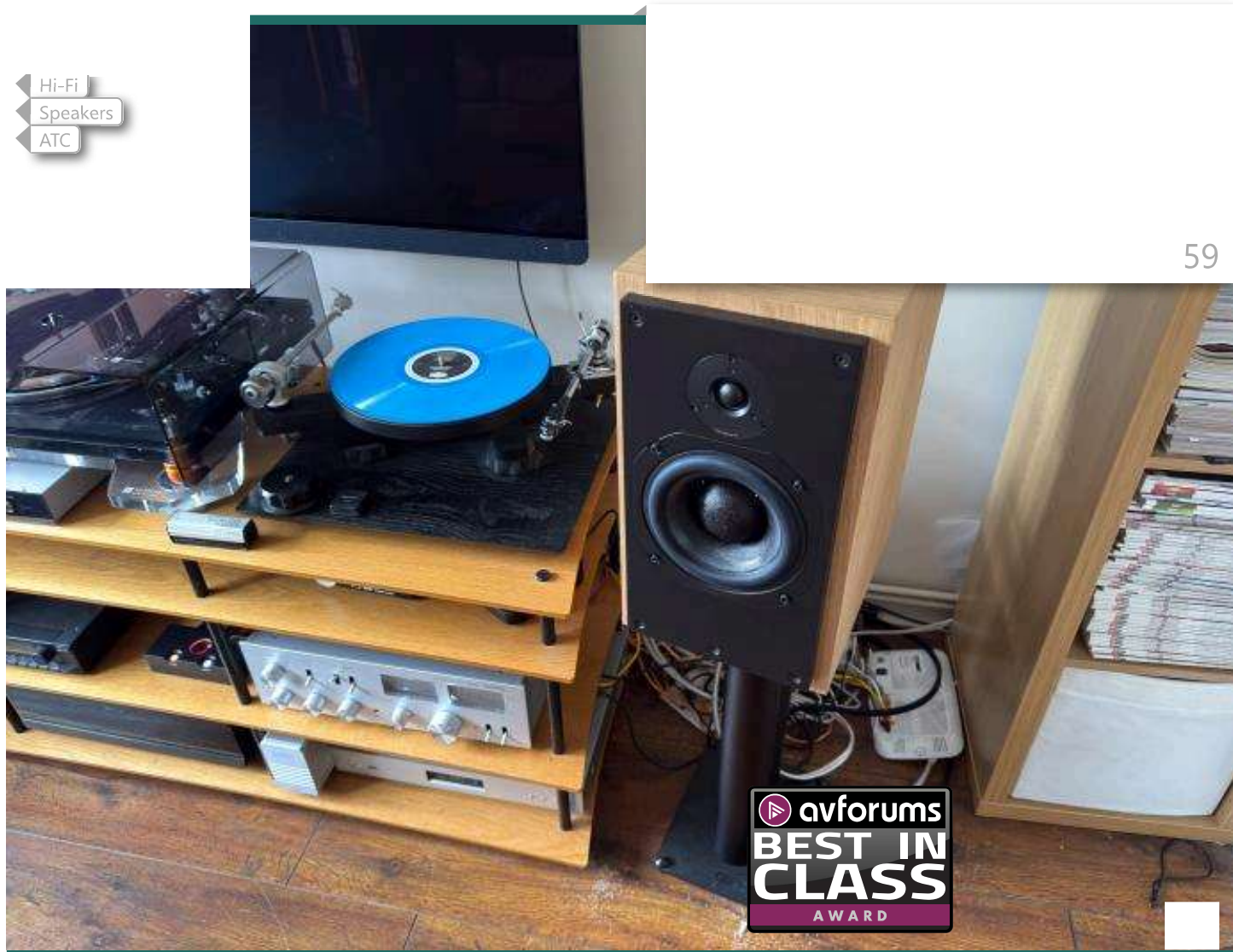


Ed Selley Sep 15, 2025

Review

Specs

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ATC SCM20ASL HI-FI SPEAKER (2025)

MSRP: £6,499.00

## ATC SCM20ASL Active Speaker Review

The SCM20ASL is a demonstration of how experience counts in the construction of active speakers. It's not cheap but the level of performance on offer here is truly

10  
SCORE  
OUT OF 10

outstanding and it comes encased in one of the best built devices available anywhere near the price.

## Pros

- Astonishing detail, tonality and imaging
- Unfussy about placement and partnering hardware
- Built to survive the end of the world

## Cons

- Some limits to bass extension
- Won't flatter poor material
- Amp pack runs pretty warm

## Video Review

Is ATC SCM20ASL the BEST Sounding Speaker for Your Home?



## Introduction - What Is the ATC SCM20ASL?

The [ATC SCM20ASL](#) is a two way, active standmount speaker and the latest addition to the ATC range. I have avoided using the word 'new' in that sentence for a few reasons that will require a little bit of unpicking. So, before we get into the heady world of bass adjustment and pippy oak, we should do that.

I have wanted to review the SCM20 for a long time. The 'long time' bit of that statement should be a partial clue why I haven't. Reviewing, both here and elsewhere, tends towards looking at new things because that's kind of the point. The SCM20 by contrast, is not new. It is in fact firmly on the way to 'living legend' status. It did in fact enter production in 1990 and while it has undergone a number of revisions in that time, even the most recent of these was in 2014 which doesn't really count as new in 2025. As such, the scope to look at it was a bit limited.

Even the active version you see here is not a clean sheet of paper design. There has been an active version of the SCM20 available for many years. It's called the SCM20ASLT and it's a floostanding version of the same SCM20 design. By the by, it's one of my very favourite ATC designs and it's recently enjoyed a price cut to bring it more closely into line with the ASL. ATC then released a SCM20ASL Limited Edition that took the SCM20 standmount, fitted the active modules and made it available with a matching sub in a smart blue finish to celebrate the company's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. What you see here is a standalone standard finish of that LE product. The good news is that it counts as 'new', it's in series production and it's here to be tested. So let's crack on and test it.

## Specification and Design



Business as usual at the front...

The SCM20 uses the same complement of drivers in both the passive and active version. The tweeter is a 25mm soft dome unit that ATC calls their 'S-Spec.' This is designed and built in house and it represented one of the more recent updates to the SCM20 design as it replaced a tweeter that was bought in. The key design element of the in house tweeter is the use of dual suspension. This was developed to ensure that the movement of the dome is entirely pistonic (i.e. back and forth) in nature and doesn't include any unwanted oscillation. By exerting the greater control over the dome, ATC also avoids needing to use ferrofluid to cool the dome which boosts power handling to boot.

This hands over at 2.2kHz to a 150mm mid bass driver that also uses dual suspension. This driver looks and feels like very little else available at this - or really any other - price point. It's dominated by a large central dustcap and 'overbuilt' doesn't really begin to scratch the surface of how it's bolted together. Like the tweeter, a considerable amount of effort has gone into ensuring that this driver can both move in an entirely pistonic way and achieve a usefully long throw while it does so.

This long throw is something of a requirement because the driver is working into a sealed twenty litre cabinet. Now, so to be clear, twenty litres is not small; park the ATC next to most standmounts and it'll feel big, but in the context of a sealed box, it's not enormous. This is reflected in the quoted measurements of the passive version which involve a low frequency roll off of 55Hz at +/-6dB and a sensitivity of 84dB/w (or 'not very sensitive at all' should you not be a numbers person). Something that is very important to qualify about the frequency response in particular is that ATC is not a 'round it up' sort of company. The figures they quote are in anechoic conditions (as opposed to in room) and they have always felt pessimistic compared to what the speaker does in reality but even allowing for this, the SCM20 is not a bass monster.



... with 250 watts of added urgency at the back

This is where the active version comes in. Around the back you'll find a 250 watt 'powerpack' which contains both amplification and a powered crossover. These amplifiers are not an even split; the tweeter gets 50 watts with the remaining 200 on tap for the mid bass. These amplifiers are designed and built by ATC (they make electronics as well) and you won't find any mention of Class D here; the SCM20ASL is Class AB and has a socking great heatsink on the back to prove it.

The connections that the ATC presents to the world are a reflection it is a traditional active speaker and not a 'smart' one. Each amp plate has a single XLR input and an IEC mains socket and that is your lot. You'll still need a source and a volume control to make them strut their stuff. Given that a plethora



of devices we've looked at that do both of these things, it's a solid decision on the part of ATC but it does mean that you should not look at these as a standalone solution.

What you *should* look at is lurking at the bottom of the rear panel. Unlike the passive version, the SCM20ASL has the means of augmenting the bass response via a small pot on the back of the speaker. ATC make no bones about the fact that doing so will affect the tonal balance of the speaker and reduce peak SPL but it's there and it has the scope to fill out that low end somewhat. You'll also find sensitivity and trim adjustments for the XLR input that suggest that at various points over the decades, ATC has been contacted by people trying to connect their active speakers to everything short of an Edison wax cylinder and have studiously adjusted the XLR input to work with as wide a spread of devices as possible.



The cabinet is large but not unmanageably so

Unlike the Limited Edition, the SCM20ASL is available in the same selection of finishes as other members of the ATC range. We need to take a moment to enjoy just what that means because it's rather engaging. Most of the time, when I review a speaker, particularly one at a higher price, somewhere in the comments will be someone saying that they'd prefer it in a different finish. Well, **GOOD NEWS** everyone because the SCM20ASL is available in ten (10) standard finishes and nine (9) gloss ones. They do not all cost £6,495; some of them will in fact add the best part of two grand to that total but here is a speaker available in everything from 'Live Laugh Love' satin white through to the 'full Ron Burgundy' gloss rosewood. If you can't find something you like, realistically the problem might be you.

What makes this plethora of finishes so unexpectedly joyous is that they encase a speaker that is absolutely route one, no nonsense engineering. You do not need to know anything about speakers, or the Hi-Fi industry or the nature of pro audio to know that the ATC is built to withstand the sort of

abuse that would have most things that come in a natty pippy oak veneer reduced to their component parts in an hour or so. The grab handles on the back (which are not decorative and actually quite handy lugging the 16kg speaker around) and massive baffle encasing those hefty drivers speaks to a design language that comes from building speakers that need to keep going. On unboxing them, the thing that came immediately to mind was [Chief Philips addressing Willard in \*Apocalypse Now\*](#).

At the same time, there's nothing unsightly or impractical about what the ATC is or does. It's not unmanageably large and, thanks to the absence of holes in it, it's not terribly affected by boundaries and it will sit on most stands without issue. You get (huge) grilles and, while the absence of an RCA input might be irksome for some people, at the very least, long runs of XLR cabling won't be an issue. The amps do warm up somewhat over time - something that was noticeable over the hot spell we had during testing - but they aren't hard to switch off, although there is no autostart for them to come back on again.



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## How Was the SCM20ASL Tested?

The ATCs have been parked on a pair of Soundstyle stands and used with a [Bluesound Node ICON](#) streaming preamp via the XLR connections. The ICON has been used as a Roon Endpoint, as a HDMI ARC receiver for an [LG 55B8 OLED](#) TV and receiving a signal over RCA from a [Rega Planar 10](#) turntable and [Nd7 moving magnet cartridge](#) via a Cyrus Phono Signature phono stage. Material used has been FLAC, AIFF, DSD, Qobuz, Spotify, on demand TV services and some vinyl.

## Performance



Some outstanding veneer options are available

ATC is one of a number of British companies that operate with success in both the pro and domestic spheres of audio. What is more unusual about this proficiency is that the hardware that they operate with is pretty much the same across both disciplines. The SCM20ASL Pro does not come in nineteen finishes and there are detail differences to the front baffle but the oily bits are the same. When you sit down in front of a pair of SCM20ASLs, statistically, if you listen long enough, you'll hear something originally mastered on them.

Let's not beat around the bush, this is not a warm or cossetting speaker. Listening to the fabulous *The World Is What You Make It* by Paul Brady on the ATC is a different experience to running the Node ICON with the resident Chord Electronics TToby power amp and [Focal Kanta No1](#). That trio is punchy but there is a warmth and refinement to the sound that gives it a slightly lush quality. The ATC by



contrast eschews lushness. What it takes with one hand it gives with the other though. All of a sudden, what feels like a slightly languid bit of mastering has an immediacy and sheer realism that takes you aback slightly.

Concentrate on what you're hearing and it becomes clear that the ATC is able to both extract detail and rationalise it in a way that makes even some decidedly talented rivals (Focal has a thoroughly proficient Pro team all of their own remember) feel a trifle toylike. It's the 'rationalise' part of this that is the most impressive. The SCM20ASL doesn't simply fling detail at you, it contextualises it in a way that gives greater sense and realism to the wider recording.



The bass adjustment makes a considerable difference

Where this takes on a special form of magic is the small set of 'studio live' (a band playing together in single take rather than recorded separately) albums I have in the inventory. The imaginatively named *LIVE!* by My Baby is a great album played on a Fisher Price tape recorder but here it's a thing of absolute magnificence. My Baby is a great band (the greatest band nobody has ever heard of) and they're having the time of their lives making this album. You get the feeling at some points during *Mad Mountain Thyme* that, if the ATC did have a bass port, joy would drip out of it. Nothing is being added to the performance but it so perfectly captures what it was originally that there is no need for it to.

And the bass? Well, this is always going to be a subjective area but, with the +2dB increment selected, I had enough. If your life revolves hearing the noise at the beginning of *Edge of Tomorrow* with the sort of vigour that means you need to visit a toilet shortly after, this is not and will never be the speaker for you. What the SCM20ASL does with consistent effectiveness is deliver the low end it does have with sufficient control, detail and integration that it doesn't feel lightweight. My personal preference has always been for control and definition to my bass over and above the ability to flap my trousers. If I can have both, I'll take it, but if it has to be one over the other, I will always choose the former. The SCM20ASL delivers what I need, and it delivers it well.



The handles are not decorative and are actually pretty handy

Of course, this is a monitor. It monitors things and tells you what is wrong with them. If you play *Language, Sex, Violence, Other?* by The Stereophonics on the SCM20ASL it has no choice but to tell you it was mastered with the dynamic range of a Tickle Me Elmo and has some of the worst audible artifacts in any recording ever actually signed off for sale. The only way the ATC could do anything good with this recording is if it had been used to monitor it in the first place. Where some speakers will use some of their abilities to soften the awfulness, the ATC will go out of its way to tell you how awful it is. It's not a bug, it's a feature but it does mean that this isn't a terribly forgiving device.



How much this matters will come down to what you listen to more than anything else. Making that final decision probably also ought to take into account how much TV and film material you might be sending the ATC's way because that ability to resolve and make sense of the information on screen is peerless. I entrusted an episode of *Foundation* to the ATC and it was quite astonishingly good. This is a stereo review and the SCM20ASL has been judged as such but it would be remiss of me not to point out that ATC has made a matching active centre (the C4CA) for some years and I suspect that a combination of that and the SCM20ASL would be pretty formidable.



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## Conclusion

### ATC SCM20ASL Active Speaker Review

Six months ago, I reviewed the *PMC twenty5 23i Active* and I came away seriously impressed; it represented a serious upgrade in performance *and* convenience to the passive version. At the same

time, I noted that the asking price left it potentially vulnerable to competition. Well, this is the competition. Simple physics means that the ATC cannot hit as hard as the PMC and it's markedly less forgiving but... when the ATC is doing what it does, I don't really care. This takes all the things that iterations of the SCM20 have been doing for 35 years and makes them more accessible, more capable and more appealing. No, it's not cheap but you can see where the money has gone and the combination of longevity and resale value means it has to be judged carefully in actual value terms. This is a formidable active speaker and the current Best in Class.

HI-FI review



## PMC twenty5 23i Active Speaker System Review

by Ed Selley · Feb 14, 2025

PMC joins the active speaker party with a different take on the concept to many rivals; is it the way that works for you?

51

9



## Scores

|                        |    |
|------------------------|----|
| <i>Build quality</i>   | 10 |
| <i>Connectivity</i>    | 8  |
| <i>Sound quality</i>   | 10 |
| <i>Ease of use</i>     | 9  |
| <i>Features</i>        | 9  |
| <i>Value for money</i> | 10 |
| <i>Verdict</i>         | 10 |



10  
OUT OF 10

 SCORE

## Our Review Ethos

[Read about our review ethos and the meaning of our review badges.](#)

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