



Sound of the studio

This standmount has so much pro heritage it could be used in Abbey Road, but asks **Jason Kennedy** how good is it at home?

As David Vivian discussed in his *Opinion* page in *HFC* 386, there is a school of thought among certain loudspeaker manufacturers that what's good for studios is also good for the home. One of those manufacturers is ATC, the Acoustic Transducer Company, which builds professional and domestic monitors and voices both in the same way. In studios monitors are used to reveal problems, to highlight sounds that shouldn't be there. Monitors are a fundamental tool of recording and

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mastering, the window into the production. There's a school of thought that suggests you don't want that degree of analysis at home if you are looking for the essence of a performance rather than all its fine details and perhaps shortcomings. This monitor's pro antecedents go a long way to proving that wrong.

The SCM19 is the smallest speaker in the domestic range that has an equivalent in its professional monitor series called the SCM20ASL Pro. That is an active model with a different tweeter – they share the same mid/bass unit and physical volume, despite the numerical difference. The SCM19 monicker has been in the ATC range for some time, but it didn't used to look so curvy and attractive. The last version was a traditional box shape with a black front baffle that increased the thickness of that face and had peg inserts for the grille. The latest update has mesh steel grilles that magnetically attach to the box, leaving it looking more elegant when removed. Like other ATC two-ways its

a sealed, infinite baffle design because ports introduce a loss of driver control below resonance. The acoustic price you pay for this is reduced sensitivity and extension, but this is a trade off that ATC prefers, and power is relatively inexpensive these days.

The main driver is a 150mm SL (super linear) spec unit with an integral 75mm soft dome and 9kg short coil/long gap motor assembly or magnet. This is why the SCM19 weighs too much for a speaker of its size, if audio equipment was judged by its mass/price ratio this brand would win every time. Apart from the change in cabinet what differentiates this speaker from its predecessor is the tweeter, which is now made in house by ATC. The SH25-76 tweeter has what the company calls a unique dual suspension system that's designed to suppress rocking modes in the dome at high output levels. In practice that should mean cleaner high frequencies even when you are hammering out Metallica at full chat. This is where ATC's pro background comes in handy – it is used to working with engineers who play at high levels all day so they know how to make bomb-proof drive units. The tweeter's motor system has a short edge-wound coil in a long, narrow magnetic gap, which gives very low distortion and removes the need for ferrofluids which apparently dry out over time. The magnet itself is a neodymium type with a heat-treated top plate for maximum speed of heat dissipation, another factor in consistency in high power situations. Do we need speakers that can withstand that degree of abuse in the home? Most of the time we don't, but it gives confidence that this speaker will last.

This is true of the build quality overall, the cabinet is finished to a very high standard and the bi-wire terminals are solid and of appropriate

DETAILS

PRODUCT
ATC SCM19

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
Two-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
17.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
265 x 438 x 300mm

FEATURES
● 25mm soft dome tweeter
● 150mm mid/LF driver with 75mm soft dome
● Quoted sensitivity: 85dB

DISTRIBUTOR
ATC Loudspeaker Technology Ltd

TELEPHONE
01285 760561

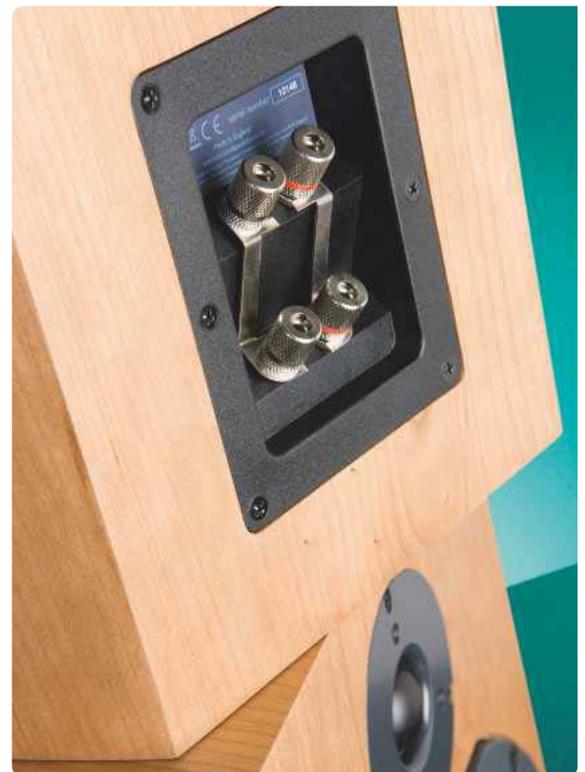
WEBSITE
atcloudspeakers.co.uk

quality for the price. The fact that both drive units and crossover are made in Gloucestershire is remarkable when you consider the price, very few companies make their own tweeters any more. ATC doesn't recommend a particular stand height for the SCM19, but suggests that the top-most part of the surround on the mid/bass unit be at ear height.

Sound quality

I reviewed SCM11 not so long ago, this is a smaller speaker with a different 6.5in driver that hits the ground running so to speak. Immediate, upbeat and highly entertaining in a youthful, spirited way. The SCM19 is a rather more mature loudspeaker, it has a much more pro audio sound inasmuch as it is very low on character and revealing in a calm, restrained manner. It takes a while to appreciate how much it lets through because colouration is so low. This is a very good thing for the music because you hear more of what the artist intended, more of what they heard in the control room at the studio. This is the true advantage of a monitor, in a world where there is no absolute sound – we rarely listen to purist audiophile recordings that attempt to capture a totally natural sound – the best we can aim for is the sound that was conjured up in the studio, a sound that was arrived at with studio monitors. And given the amount of studios that use ATCs you ▶

Bi-wiring is possible thanks to these robust binding posts



Q&A

Richard Newman

ATC transducer/R&D engineer



JK: Why no indication of this speaker's Mk 2 status?

RN: This is the second generation of the SCM19, but we tend not to do that – it is in the literature. This is the SCM19 Mk 2 in all but name.

The SCM19 seems quite a lot cleaner and calmer than the 11, is that just a result of the bigger driver and box?

They're both 6.5in drive units, but the drive unit in the SCM19 is a much more expensive and highly developed part, hence the price difference. The SCM11 uses constrained layer damping with the diaphragm made up of two separate diaphragms with a viscose layer between the two as a damping medium, whereas the SCM19 is a piece of floppy cloth like the midrange dome. In fact it's made of exactly the same fabric as the midrange dome with damping material on it. I do like floppy cloth because it doesn't have particular resonant characteristics of its own. The SCM19 is the only two-way we make that crosses the pro and domestic markets, it's called a 20 in the pro market.

What stand height do you recommend for the SCM19?

The phase plane is if you take a vertical line between the tweeter and the bass driver. The position of the rubber surround on the bass driver at the top is about the phase plane for setting that speaker up. That's about where your ear should be, you're better to be below that than above it.

I read that you think studio monitors and domestic speakers should be the same, but aren't they intended for different purposes?

It's imperative a high-fidelity loudspeaker is a high-fidelity loudspeaker. How can you make judgement on something that doesn't have the best possible fidelity? In all honesty, if you're listening to recorded music, the higher fidelity the better your experience will be. That's the whole premise of hi-fi I suppose, better stick with it!

IN SIGHT



- 1 25mm soft dome tweeter
- 2 Solid bi-wire binding posts
- 3 125mm SL driver with 75mm soft dome



I put the SCM19 directly up against a natural competitor in the PMC twenty.22 (£1,970). Both come from companies with a strong pro heritage and both are similarly priced standmounts. The PMC is more open and fleet of foot than the ATC, but works better in well damped environments. The ATC has darker sound that results in greater perceived bass extension and a stronger sense of focus. The PMC is the easier to drive by a small margin and has a more pacey sound that some will find more engaging, but the ATC's quiet confidence has a strong appeal, as does its bone crunching bottom end.

have a good chance of emulating that with its domestic loudspeakers.

With Donny Hathaway's live recording of *The Ghetto* that means massive image scale in height and depth alongside smokin' keyboards, conga *et al* that build an irresistible groove. You can hear the recording is not the cleanest possible, but more obvious is the atmosphere that takes over the listening room, it's a party on a disc no doubt about it. This ATC has superb bass, it goes low but is tight and fully textured, with a decent amplifier it stops and starts with total precision. So when a pianist uses a damping pedal you know exactly how he or she is doing it. This is partly because this is a very quiet loudspeaker, the box makes very little contribution and the absence of a port removes the resonances that such devices introduce. Overhang is not in evidence yet serious low end is, you can get quick bass by avoiding deep notes, but that is not the case here.

The new Melanie de Biasio album *No Deal* has the Belgian chanteuse singing over often quite deep synth bass alongside piano and a rhythm section. It's an inky black recording from which the SCM19 extracts an enormous amount of character, the way the voice has been treated is particularly obvious but this doesn't undermine its appeal. You can hear way down into the mix and appreciate the subtlety of playing from every member of the band, this in the context of very open vocals but quite dark instruments. All is laid bare but thanks to the speaker's ability to stop and start precisely on cue the timing remains spot on.

Put on something less controlled like Frank Zappa's *Roxy By Proxy* and you can immerse yourself in the raw vitality of a well honed live band. Appreciate the distortion in the PA system and revel in the compositional genius of the man without effort. Piano really shows what this speaker can do. I get totally carried away with Haydn and Beethoven pieces that usually fail to keep me interested.

Conclusion

The SCM19 makes a good case for Billy Woodman's assertion that what's right for the studio is also best for the home. Transparency is what you want in both locales, the engineer might be listening for something different to the music lover, but they both want to hear as much as possible. In that respect this is a killer product, it tells you exactly what's going on in the mix be it good or bad. It lets you hear how Jimi or Jimmy or Jeff played the mind blowing stuff they did and that's what life should be all about ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



VALUE FOR MONEY



BUILD QUALITY



EASE OF DRIVE



OVERALL



LIKE: Very revealing; superb bass and fine timing; well built

DISLIKE: Needs more power than average to give of its best

WE SAY: When it comes to bandwidth and transparency per pound, the SCM19 is particularly good

