

ATC SCM19A Loudspeakers

By Dan Worth

The ATC SCM19A active loudspeakers have onboard amps and active crossovers more often seen in pro audio, but these £4990/pair speakers are designed most specifically for the home environment.

ATC SCM19A LOUDSPEAKERS

The Acoustic Transducer Company, ATC for short, is one of a handful of pro-audio companies to have crossed over successfully into the Hifi arena, winning many fans in the process. Its latest product, the SCM19A, introduced to me by ATC's Technical Sales Manager Ben Lilly at the Bristol Show in February, is here for review today.

Imagine a passive SCM19 monitor with the footprint of the SCM40 floor standing system, complete with onboard bi-amplification rated at 182W: 150W for the low frequency/midrange Super Linear (SL) driver, and 32W for ATC's wonderful SH25-76 tweeter, which, if you've read any of our previous ATC reviews, is a revelation for the brand.

Be prepared for a double trolley ride from store to car or delivery truck to listening room. The boxes that protect the 19As are large for what essentially is a 19 litre speaker. There must be at least six inches of packaging around the cabinets and a huge chunk of shock-resistant foam top and bottom. Remove the outer and inner boxes and the protective packaging and a more modest floorstander is revealed, having cabinet dimensions of (HxWxD): 980x370x344mm (spikes add 25mm to height, grill adds 34mm). Weighing in at just over 30kgs they are easily manageable when unpacked.

Also worth noting is that, according to ATC, the 19A's magnetically-fixed grills have virtually zero effect on overall sound performance. My own reference loudspeakers have fixed metal grills that similarly have no obvious effect on sound reproduction - a feature which is very important to me and I'm sure many others. Cloth grills collect dust, fade in sunlight, are a constant attraction to little paws, and their flexibility can lead to driver damage. A metal grill, especially one that can enhance design elegance such as the 19As, means there's one less thing to worry about in our busy domestic environments.

The 19A review samples are finished in ATC's trademark cherry veneer finish but there's also a black ash alternative. At the bottom of the speaker is a black fixed plinth, which requires the installation of an underside outrigger board with

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a simple two allen-screw fitting. Also supplied are M8 spikes. I opted to use Soundcare Superspikes in order to protect my granite surface and I like what they do.

ACTIVE DESIGN

Here's what ATC has to say about the electronics: 'the 19A's proprietary two-way on-board amp pack design has been revised to reduce noise and distortion (a further -10dB @ 10kHz), while achieving a lower operating temperature for improved reliability. The design includes protection circuits for both DC offset and thermal overload. Mid frequency THD is vanishingly low at 93dB/0.002%, and a very wide bandwidth of 200 kHz ensures the accurate reproduction of musical transients. ATC's Grounded Source output stage modules are fed by a newly developed two-way active crossover section featuring 2nd order modified Butterworth circuitry with phase compensation for each crossover point. The advantage of active crossovers is that their response remains unaffected by variable voice coil impedance, while the use of phase compensation enables phase coherency at the crossover points, improving the 19A's tonal balance and enhancing imaging for a pin-point stereo field. As usual system input is via balanced XLR.'

Being an active speaker the crossover is placed before the amps rather than after, allowing the amplifiers to work accurately within the frequency response designated by the design team and making for a more efficient drive of the transducers with lower distortion levels. Even though the 19A is a floor-standing system, the acoustic design remains the same as the passive 19, retaining the 2.5kHz crossover point from mid/bass driver to tweeter and the frequency range of 54Hz to 22kHz.

USING A PRO/HIFI CROSSOVER SYSTEM

Although gear with a pro heritage has not always had the greatest following in Hifi, it's been proven again and again that a product which achieves this balancing act can bring extraordinary results. For this review I've put together a system which could live in either world and is also very minimalistic and family friendly.

As a source I'm using a Mac Mini, with the ability to play music from iTunes,



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performance was simply stunning. Newton and his guitar did something for me I didn't think I'd feel with these ATCs. Their ultra-transparent midrange imparts a subtle fluidity to the vocal and even the softest guitar notes sound slightly liquid on the leading edges whilst retaining speed and authenticity.

All home-orientated stand-mount passive ATCs have good punch with a spritely nature, but the addition of what is effectively a veneer-lined floor stand to passive 19 cabinet adds a good deal of solidity to the lower most frequencies with beat-driven Dance and Electronica music. Of course this may be the active crossover of amp and drivers working its magic again, but I also think that the rigidity of the extended cabinet contributes to a sense of greater confidence and composure. If I owned a pair of standard 19s with the best matched stand I could test this idea objectively, but I have a pretty good memory for sound and it hasn't failed me yet - *I think...*

Hooking the ATCs up to a computer and DAC of lesser quality immediately showed in their performance, so I'd suggest treating the 19As with some good source electronics in order to bring out their awesome abilities. There is more potential for even greater performance from the 19As, but whatever front end is used, the core system is already ready and waiting to spring into action.

CONCLUSION

I believe that this system demonstrates that there are huge opportunities in mixing products from a range of manufacturers beyond the traditional Hifi brands. The sound I obtained from the Mytek/Studio Connections/ATC combination is transparent and accurate, non-fatiguing or over analytical, truthful and honest: a very engaging listen that would give some of our most highly regarded Hifi only systems some serious competition.

I am accustomed to ATC's abilities, but listening to the transformation of a speaker from a passive stand-mount design to an active version has been truly informative. Although ATC has removed the choice of amplifier and stand away from the listener in the 19As, they have also solved the problem of finding the ideal combi-

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nation of driver/amp/stand with an outcome that always delivers music which is exciting and engaging.

If you're looking for a no brainer approach to high fidelity sound at a reasonable cost with great looks and build quality, and one that lowers the box count I'd strongly recommend a demo of the SCM19As. Any reasonably sized domestic space will be confidently filled by their ability to offer a bigger and finer performance than their size would suggest. ATC has a range of speakers that in my experience steps-up in audio scale but retains its revealing character. In short, and as demonstrated by the 19AT, it's simply honest and insightful.

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AT A GLANCE

Sound Quality: very engaging, exciting and honest

Build Quality: strong solid build, nice veneer and amp pack integration

Value For Money: in the grand scheme of finding a great sonic match amplifier and stands, ATC take away the burden of wasting money and time with the designs synergy

Pros:

Honest and insightful sound
Incredibly transparent midrange
Confident stable soundstage
Lovely design and finish

Cons:

Low quality recordings are exposed

Price:

£4990/pair



SPECIFICATIONS

Drivers: HF ATC 25mm dual suspension Tweeter, Mid/LF ATC 150mm SL

Matched Response: +/- 0.5dB

Frequency Response (-6dB): 54Hz-22kHz

Dispersion: ±80° Coherent Horizontal, ±10° Coherent Vertical

Max SPL: 108dB

Crossover Frequency: 2.5kHz

Connectors: Male XLR

Input sensitivity: 1V

Filters: 2nd Order critically damped with phase compensation

Overload Protection: Active FET momentary gain reduction

Fault Protection: DC fault protection and thermal trip. Fault indication on rear panel mounted LED

Amplifier Output: 150W LF, 32W HF

Cabinet Dimensions (HxWxD): 980x370x344mm (spikes add 25mm to height, grill adds 34mm to depth)

Weight: 31kg