

Having loved the smaller speakers in ATC's HTS on-wall range, **Ed Selley** demanded we let him check out their bigger brothers

Space-saving super sonics

If you ask me, on-wall speakers should be a great deal more popular than they actually are – having a sound system that takes up no floor space is surely desirable. Yet they are often seen as lifestyle items that play second fiddle to more conventional designs. The package here is a rather determined riposte to that idea.

The company responsible, ATC, isn't in the business of making speakers purely for their cosmetic qualities, and its HTS on-wall models are closely related to their floorstanding/standmount siblings.

We've already auditioned an array using the smallest HTS7 on-walls [see *HCC* #275] but this setup is rather more serious. The £1,950 (each) HTS40 is the flagship of the range, a three-way design based on the highly regarded

SCM40 floorstander. The '40' value refers to its cabinet volume of forty litres. In fairness, this does make it a rather big speaker for something you are supposed to hang on a wall – 74cm tall and 15cm deep to be precise.

The HTS40 has a feature that puts it in a small subset of speakers

of any type, and one that offers some huge performance possibilities. As well as a 1in soft dome tweeter and 6.5in bass unit, the front baffle sports a 3in soft dome (as opposed to a more typical cone) midrange driver. These are extremely difficult and expensive to make, but promise a more robust midrange performance and are something of an ATC speciality. This dome is also present on the HTS40C, which is the same speaker arranged for horizontal centre channel placement.

The HTS7 (£475 each) that serves as the rear four speakers in this 7.1 setup is a more typical two-way design but still makes use of entirely bespoke drivers and shares a tweeter with the HTS40.

All the HTS Series models have been designed taking into account their on-wall placement. This means that despite their sealed cabinets, they offer an impressive frequency response, with the HTS40s rated down to near 30Hz. Like all ATC speakers, however, they will do their best work with some power behind them. They're not massively sensitive or efficient, and ATC suggested to me a target figure of 100W per channel.

The partnering C1 subwoofer (£1,500) is ATC's go-to bass maker for both the HTS product line and the SCM range of speakers. The ingredients are pretty typical enough; a 12in doped paper driver powered by a 200W Class AB amplifier (which is also all ATC's own work), but there are some useful nods to modernity. User operation is menu-driven from the front of the unit rather than peering at the back panel over the top (where you'll find just line-level and speaker-level inputs), and the sealed, down-firing design makes placement a simple business.

Given the size of the HTS40, this is never going to be a speaker that vanishes into a room but when you consider the floorspace that the related floorstander needs, it's still an attractive proposition. The HTS7 is rather more discreet and is the sort of thing that should work in any room.

The overall level of build and finish of the HTS Series is extremely good. These aren't 'showy' speakers but the care and engineering that has gone into them is evident wherever you look. As noted when I reviewed the HTS7s, ATC's white grille doesn't do a perfect job of covering the black drivers, but this isn't the end of the world.

Powered up

Connected to an Anthem MRX 720 bolstered by three of ATC's own P1 power amplifiers, giving the HTS40s the power they need to really shine, the results are impressive from the off – as I'd expect from a £9,000 system.

If you are looking for an instant calling card of that dome midrange then you might be disappointed, but settle in for a listen and you'll start to realise that this system's LCR stage has a whip-smart ability to find details in a mix that can leave rivals standing around looking glum. When K enters Sapper Morton's apartment in *Blade Runner 2049* (Blu-ray), the various Foley effects amid the near silence of the room are beautifully conveyed. The squeak of

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
7.1-channel on-wall speaker system

POSITION:
On-wall iterations of ATC's SCM range

PEERS:
Artcoustic SL Series; M&K MP150 Mk II; DALI Phantom range



HOME CINEMA
Choice
BEST BUY

1. The centre speaker is identical to the HTS40, but horizontal

REVIEWS

floorboards and the bubbling of the pot on the stove are perfectly placed and worked into the mix. They don't leap out at you because they sound absolutely and unambiguously right.

The commonality of drivers across the front three speakers also makes for a beautifully cohesive soundstage. There is simply no clue as to where one speaker's activity ends and another begins. A good turn of the volume dial helps their performance expand in scale, but even at low levels the listening experience is wonderfully immersive.

The integration from top to bottom is no less impressive. The C1 subwoofer adds to the weight of the presentation in an utterly seamless way. You really only appreciate how much it is doing when you turn it off. There are subwoofers you can buy for the same price that can hit harder than the C1 (and have a little more design flair), but not many of them offer the same blend of speed and subtlety at the same time.

War machines

Up next is *Mad Max: Fury Road* (Blu-ray), as I wanted to see how this system would cope with material that's a bit more boisterous. The good news is that it doesn't bat an eyelid – no rough edge or tightening up – during the escape of the War Rig from the bikers and Immortan Joe's splendid monster truck. The speakers find and reconcile the most intricate of details without harming the overall sense of fury and impact that the film requires; something that the ATCs do in a way that makes it sound easy. The HTS40 is also an emphatic demonstration that there is no replacement for displacement with soundtracks of this nature. The experience of a centre speaker that is capable of reaching 40Hz with negligible roll-off is something that genuinely changes your experience of the action on screen.

All this is helped by the HTS Series' seemingly limitless headroom. With the power on tap from the Anthem/ATC combi, the only limitation to how loud the speakers would go became my own sense of self-preservation.

Surround handling from front to back is excellent. The climactic sequence of *Atomic Blonde* (Blu-ray), with the crowds moving through the streets, is a wall of noise and energy, but there is still a sense of order and cohesion to what you experience. This is helped by each HTS

SPECIFICATIONS

HTS40

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6.5in doped paper cone bass driver; 1 x 3in dome midrange unit; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, on-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 32Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 85dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 380(w) x 740(h) x 154(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 23kg

HTS40C

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 6.5in doped paper cone bass driver; 1 x 3in dome midrange unit; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, on-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 32Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 85dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 740(w) x 380(h) x 154(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 23kg

HTS7

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5in doped paper cone midbass driver; 1 x 1in fabric dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed, on-wall **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 44Hz-22kHz **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 84dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 300W **DIMENSIONS:** 245(w) x 390(h) x 137(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 8kg

C1 (subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 12in down-firing doped paper woofer **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 18Hz-250Hz **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 200W Class AB amplifier **REMOTE CONTROL:** Yes **DIMENSIONS:** 360(w) x 410(h) x 360(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 24kg **FEATURES:** LFE input; stereo phono input; speaker level input; 12V trigger

PARTNER WITH



BLADE RUNNER 2049

(BLU-RAY): Sure, it's a drag that this sci-fi sequel doesn't get an Atmos mix on its UK Blu-ray, but that doesn't mean its DTS-HD MA track can't get your juices flowing. This oozes subtle ambience and fine FX placement.

model having enough dispersion to ensure that you sit in a single soundfield rather than seven distinct points of sound. And there is still the same ability to make the effect that matters – a single gunshot – the sole focus of your attention.

Classy fidelity

As a company with a long heritage of professional and monitor applications, the classy fidelity and dynamic ability of this setup should not be a huge surprise, but to experience a set of speakers that delivers so much of whatever you ask them to play while putting so little of themselves into that presentation is still noteworthy. This is an unashamedly expensive 7.1 array, and even at this elevated price point there are more discreet options for those that need their equipment to truly hide away. What the HTS package offers, however, is a sweet spot of sheer ability combined with effective space saving, allowing for a devastatingly capable AV system to be accommodated in an area that might not otherwise be deemed up the task. Who says that practical can't be fun? ■

HCC VERDICT



ATC HTS40 7.1

→ £9,250 approx → www.atcloudspeakers.co.uk

WE SAY: A deeply impressive combination of audio ability and installation practicality. If you have the power to drive them, these ATCs will delight.

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2. Recessed speaker terminals help get a snug on-wall fit