

Review: ATC SCM 12 Pro



Recording

23 August 2017: By [Alistair McGhee](#)

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Alistair McGhee gets his hands on a pair of these new passive nearfields to see how they compete with the market's many active alternatives.

If you were making a checklist for a modern compact nearfield monitor, what would be the givens? Well, first it would be active, as unlike the hifi market, studio monitoring has long since embraced the active route. Secondly, small drive units, 4in or 5in for the mid/bass driver, and to go with the smaller drivers narrow baffles.

A ported design will also deliver the low-end extension we would otherwise struggle to achieve with our smaller mid/bass unit. Whether as a result of solid engineering choices or mere fashion, that blueprint covers a sizeable amount of the nearfield monitors on the market right now.

Obviously ATC has a very different checklist, as the SCM 12 Pro is the latest ATC nearfield monitor and it checks none of those boxes! Except being relatively compact. First it is a passive speaker and that is probably the most remarkable thing about it, given both the state of the market and the role of ATC at the forefront of the introduction of active monitoring. The 6in mid/bass driver means the cabinet is wider and indeed just bigger than many of its rivals. Remember this is the entry point into the ATC range. Finally, the ATC is an infinite baffle design – no ports or transmission lines for the SCM 12. This is a sealed box.

So what were ATC thinking when they put together the SCM 12 Pro? Well, firstly it's a response to a market requirement. As the number of monitors increases in surround installations, some studios have looked to the live model for the install where all the electronics sits in one central rack – and you can see that in systems with maybe nine or 11 monitor speakers that brings a certain amount of rationality to the install and indeed the ergonomics of the setup. Also, as the entry-point model, a passive speaker is considerably cheaper than an active model and with many studios having decent power amps kicking around it is a way of getting a foot on the ATC ladder while not breaking the bank. Though you do have to dent it a bit! So if you have a tidy heft of amp warming your feet while driving a pair of NS10s that have seen better days, the SCM 12 is aimed at you.

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But hang on – I hear you say – ATC are pioneers of active and everyone agrees that a well-designed active system enjoys considerable advantages over a similar passive system. So shouldn't an active system from Brand 'X' outperform the ATC passive offering at or near the same price point? Well the devil here is in the detail. Many modern active systems include amplifiers with switch mode power supplies and ATC consider that a compromise that they are unwilling to make – their amps are all class A/B, and more on that later.

In Use

So what do the ATC SCM 12 Pros sound like? Very, very good. They excel in dynamic stability – loud things go loud without treading all over quiet things, and if your percussionist likes sly effects and cheeky delicacies, you will hear them. If your drummer mixes rock thunder with jazz accents you will smile – and if she makes it swing you will hear it swing. The beat tightens and rhythmic intentions become clear. Layers in EDM will be laid bare, synth tones revealed, backing vocals resolve out of the soup of lesser systems. The bottom-end is a lesson in control – less is more when bass has actual notes, and the notes have actual character! But it is the mid-band clarity that stands out for me – vocals just sound more ... more like the singer, and everywhere a clarity that makes much of the competition sound veiled.

Driving them? Well, ATC sent me their P1 Pro 150W dual mono class A/B mosfet amp. It's a killer amp as the 12 Pros take a bit of driving; they are an easy load but suck up the volts. I blagged a session in Audio-T's listening room (thanks Hefin) to try the ATC's with the new Nytech CPA402 power amp to see if less power would work. The CPA402 is 40 Watts of pure Welsh goodness per channel – enough to drive the ATC loud and clear and make them sing, but if you need to turn it up to 11 on a regular basis – shell out for a P1 Pro, pardon?

I have been massively impressed by the SCM 12 Pro – defying mere fashion it's an evolutionary product from a firm that refuses to compromise engineering decisions for marketing acceptability. They are professional tools designed for a working studio environment. The finish is utilitarian but the sound extraordinary, and if you need compact monitors that tell the unvarnished truth about your audio, start here.

Key Features

Compact passive two-way nearfield studio monitor

Equipped with 6in CLD (Constrained Layer Damping) mid/bass driver and 1in dual suspension tweeter

Recommended for use with amplifiers ranging from 75 to 300 Watts, such as the 150W ATC P1 Pro

Comes with six-year warranty

RRP: £1,485.60 (pair)

<http://atcloudspeakers.co.uk/>

Alistair McGhee began audio life in Hi-Fi before joining the BBC as an audio engineer. After 10 years in radio and TV, he moved to production. When BBC Choice started, he pioneered personal digital production in television. Most recently, Alistair was assistant editor, BBC Radio Wales and has been helping the UN with broadcast operations in Juba.