

# ATC actives reveal all

The stunningly stylish and self-powered C5 Collection will highlight all that's good (and bad) about your disc library

## ATC C5 Collection

★★★★★

£9396

### FOR

Thunderous dynamics; remarkable accuracy and composure; quality construction; amplification is included

### AGAINST

Ruthlessly revealing – which can be a good thing, but which also has some pitfalls

### VERDICT

A terrific multichannel package in many ways; excellent for CD, and superb with good SACD/DVD-A discs; lower-quality movie soundtracks are relayed warts 'n' all, though

TEN GRAND IS a lot to spend on a surround speaker set-up, but there's more to the ATC C5 Collection than meets the eye. This is a fully active set-up, where every speaker contains internal power amplification: all you need add is a surround processor and a DVD player.

Advocates of active speaker design often have a professional audio background, because active speakers tend to produce a very controlled, accurate sound, ideal for studio monitoring. The signal path between amplifier and drive unit is short, while there's no passive crossover to spoil signal purity.

You don't need to worry about speaker cables (or their effects on tonality) – active speakers connect via long interconnects. ATC uses balanced XLR connections rather than standard RCA phonos, but XLR-to-RCA adaptors are available if you prefer.

You'll also need to be mindful of the need for a power point near every speaker and that an active speaker normally throws out a fair bit of heat.

Let's talk specifics. The C5 Collection comprises two pairs of the excellent Active 20 standmounters, one for front effects, one for rear (see *First Tests*, November 2003), bolstered by a truly titanic (45kg)

centre, the C5. Two power amplifiers are used per speaker: a 200w design for each 15cm mid/bass driver; the other a more modest 50w design devoted to each 25mm tweeter.

The remaining low-frequency information in the system is dealt with by the massive C4 subwoofer with its 30cm downward-firing drive unit, 650w output, 52kg weight, and low-frequency response down to 18Hz – serious stuff, then.

So, how does a £10,000 active system sound? The C5 Collection is extraordinarily taut and dynamic: there's not a trace of excess 'flab' in the sound, from the precision of impact effects to the character relayed in voices. It's a devastatingly honest sound, turning a movie with big dynamics – any war or horror movie, in particular – into a heart-pounding audio aerobic session. Jump? We leapt off the sofa...

There's a downside to that, though – the C5 Collection reveals every flaw in a multichannel mix. It sounds best with well-engineered movie scores, usually those created by surround illuminati such as Ben Burt and Gary Rydstrom, and it also thrives on high-quality multichannel music mixes. On the other hand, it can sound wincingly aggressive with lower-quality audio mixes.

That's partially because Dolby Digital and DTS are compressed audio storage systems – to an extent, the ATCs are simply revealing the effects of that compression. But even higher-quality multichannel discs can sound perilously hard, too. Don't try this system with, say, The Corrs' *In Blue* album on DVD-Audio. You'll regret it –

and we're not just referring to the music.

Whether such ruthlessness suits you is a matter of taste. Certainly, the C5 Collection covers all the multichannel bases effortlessly, and undoubtedly, it will suit even large rooms and top-end systems. It's also very musical, as you'd expect from a system based around hi-fi speakers as revered as the Active 20s. Just remember, if you're considering arranging an audition, to try the system with a really wide range of music before you sign on the dotted line.



The truth will out: ATC's C5 Collection will reveal every nuance – for good or for bad

