

Dramatic Prescott Rally brings the 2012 California Rally Series to a Close

Written by Erik Christiansen
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Los Angeles – The final round of the 2012 California Rally Series Championship took place on September 28 – 29 in Prescott, AZ. This year marked the 25th anniversary of the rally, which has become one of the most popular events on the calendar. The classic Southwest desert backdrop provides a beautiful setting for the smooth and fast roads. This year saw even more stage miles, with teams covering almost 120 stage miles over the two days.



Photo credit to Kurt Womack

In the open four-wheel drive class, two drivers had a shot at the championship title – Keith Jackson and Cem Akdeniz. Jackson and co-driver Mara Estep had an impressive run in their Subaru, and collected maximum points for the weekend. The team also displayed an impressive show of sportsmanship when they stopped at the end of the very last stage on Saturday to tow some fellow competitors with a damaged car across the finish line (photo left). Despite sacrificing time, they still managed to take the overall win and a well-deserved championship. Akdeniz and co-driver Mustafa Samli ended their rally early on Saturday when they spun and hit a bank on the first stage, damaging their car. The team each would have to settle for second place in their respective championships.

Competition was tight in many classes, but the one class that had the most riding on the results was the production-based two-wheel drive P-Stock. Coming into the final event, Sarkis Mazmanian had a slim 36-point lead over John Black. With a combined maximum of 500 points up for grabs between the two events (Friday and Saturday), both drivers had a good shot at the championship. These two had seen some close battles all year long, and Prescott was no exception. Black was fast right out of the gate – he and co-driver Lori Stone were flying on

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Friday's night stages, ending up winning the class and finishing the night in fifth overall amongst the turbo four-wheel drive cars. Handling issues on Friday meant Sarkis and his co-driver son Michael Mazmanian were off of Black's pace, but managed to secure second in class by edging out Jen Imai and co-driver Terry Stonecipher by only twelve seconds.

With Black's win, it all came down to Saturday's event, and it proved to be a thriller. The Mazmanians were in the lead after the first stage, but Black/Stone set a fast time on stage two in order to move ahead of them by just four seconds. Their lead was short lived as the Mazmanians pushed back and reclaimed the lead on the very next stage. They managed to hold on through the end of the day, claiming the class win. The victory gave Sarkis the driver's championship over John Black, while Lori Stone secured the co-driver's championship of Michael. Despite a dnf on Saturday, the husband and wife team of Chris and Victoria Rosner finished the season in third place in P-Stock – an impressive feat for the rookie team.

In the small-displacement CRS-2 class, Michel Hoche-Mong had already secured the drivers' championship at the last event, but he showed up with his VW at Prescott to prove once again that he could drive his little car just as fast as the turbocharged four-wheel drive cars. He finished the first stage in third place overall, just thirty-five seconds off the leader! However, an unfortunate encounter with a rock on stage two ended the event for him early. There was still a lot of great racing, as husband and wife team Kris and Christine Marciniak traded stage time with Eddie Fiorelli and Tom Smith. Fiorelli/Smith drove their VW Golf fast enough to be leading the class after the first two stages, but the Marciniaks picked up the pace after the sun went down, and claimed the Friday night victory in their Dodge Neon by just thirty seconds.

The battle between the Marciniaks and Fiorelli/Smith continued in the light of day on Saturday. The two teams swapped times on each stage in a battle that went down to the wire. In the end, Fiorelli/Smith finished ahead on Saturday, beating the Marciniaks by just forty seconds. The strong finish allowed Kris to take third in the CRS-2 driver's championship behind Chuck Wilson, while Christine finished second in the co-driver's championship behind Brent Ellzey. The team of Brent Hercelinsky and Alex Orozco ended up fourth and third in the driver's / co-driver's championships, respectively, despite dnf-ing their Suzuki Swift on Saturday. Rounding out the top four co-drivers for the season was Tom Smith, thanks to his strong finish.

Paul Willemsen and co-driver Travis Bos were the only team competing in the production-based four-wheel drive CRS-GT class, but they didn't let that stop them from enjoying themselves. The team drove a smooth and consistent rally, which ended up securing them both second place in their respective championships, behind the husband and wife team of Alex Rademacher and Jeana Yi who had previously clinched their titles.

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The annual Prescott Rally took place on smooth dirt roads outside of Prescott, AZ on September 28-29. The rally is a favorite among CRS competitors for its flowing stages and breathtaking views. For more information on the Prescott Rally, visit <http://www.prescott rally.com/> and follow @crspress on twitter.