Los Angeles - The California Rally Series (CRS) Championship season begins May 3 with the High Desert Trails Rally. Based out of Ridgecrest, CA, the rally takes place on Kern County roads in the Jawbone Valley and Piute Mountain area just two and a half hours north of Los Angeles. The rally features new roads for 2014, expanding to a total of 127 stage miles with a new, spectator friendly format. The rally concludes with a fifteen mile “power stage” where competitors reverse order in a final sprint for prizes.

CRS Open Class will be the one to watch, with Open Class vehicles comprising over half the field. Last year’s winning team, Jonathan Burke and co-driver Tom Morningstar return with their Subaru WRX. The team will face stiff competition from fellow Open Class competitors Hakan Okcuoglu and co-driver Sean McElwain in their Eagle Talon as well as John Trucks and co-driver Christopher Fine in a Subaru WRX STI. CRS veteran and HDT alumni Chuck Wilson and co-driver Leelyn Pritchard could be spoilers in their Subaru WRX STI.

The Open Lite class consists of normally aspirated four-wheel drive cars. Returning this year are Michael Carnes and co-driver Reza Yazdani in their Audi 4000CS. The team only made it through one full stage at last year’s event before being forced to retire with engine trouble. They hope their luck changes for the better in 2014.

Tony Chavez and co-driver Raquel Salas are entered in their Performance-Stock Class Volkswagen GTI. Tony is a fast driver with decades of experience in the CRS. The team missed the class win by less than a minute last year, so no doubt they will be pushing for not only a class victory, but a spot on the overall podium this year.

The small-displacement, two wheel drive class CRS-2 Class is shaping up to be a battle between three Volkswagens and a Ford Escort. Son and father team Bret and Doug Robinson had mechanical issues sideline their VW Golf on the final stage last year. This year they return to High Desert Trails with their sights set on a class win. Eddie Fiorelli is reunited with co-driver Brent Ellzey after nearly five years since they raced together. Fiorelli just rebuilt his VW GTI after a component failure caused him to crash midway through last season, but he took the class win here in 2012 so expect them to be fast. In the third VW are husband and wife team Erik Christiansen and co-driver Amy Floyd. They finished second in class at last year’s event, so will be hoping to move into the top spot. Rounding out the competition in CRS-2 are Javier Olivares and Gian Castellanos in a Ford Escort. Olivares finished third in CRS-2 in the 2012 event, when he was driving a Mitsubishi Galant. The switch to a Ford Escort might be just what he needs to move up the leaderboard.

The High Desert Trails Rally was first run in 1973 on roads to the Southeast and West of Ridgecrest, CA. This year's event features new sections of road for 2014, and over 127 stage miles in a one-day compact format. Located just two and a half hours north of Los Angeles, the competitor and spectator friendly format makes this a perfect season opener for the California Rally Series. For more information on the High Desert Trails Rally, visit http://highdeserttrails.com.

The California Rally Series is the premier performance rally championship in the southwestern United States. The Series incorporates events from various sanctioning bodies in order to create a meaningful regional championship for its members. The Series celebrates more than 40 continuous years of performance rally, making it the longest running rally series in the United States. To learn more about the California Rally Series visit www.californiarallyseries.com and follow @crspress on twitter.