

Written by Erik Christiansen
Monday, 13 May 2019 20:44

Los Angeles – On Saturday May 4th, the high desert outside of Ridgecrest, CA saw an array of prepped rally cars racing from the valley floor to the forest on Mount Piute as the High Desert Trails Performance Rally kicked off the 45th season of the California Rally Series. With high speed blasts down wide hard-packed dirt to sandy washes to switchbacks climbing the side of a mountain to tarmac s-curves, this rally is known for offering the most diverse stages in the championship. Once again the course did not disappoint and despite no lack of blind turns and harrowing exposures, not a single team had an off that ended their rally.

In the Open Four-Wheel Drive class, Jason Cochell and co-driver Robert Maselli won the class and the rally overall in their Subaru Impreza. The team had a dominating performance, setting either the fastest or second fastest time on every stage. They had close competition from 2018 Rookie of the Year and Performance Stock champ Travis Fienhage, who moved up into Open class for this event. He and co-driver Ryan Dunham jumped into an early lead in the rally despite Fienhage only having owned his Subaru for barely a week. Unfortunately, a broken driveshaft left them stranded on the side of the road on stage 6 and they were unable to continue.



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Open Lite, a class for normally aspirated four-wheel drive cars, has been dominated over the last couple of years by Kurt Northrup and co-driver Will Smith. The team had a rough start, with electrical gremlins in their Subaru Impreza causing them to leave Parc Expose late, resulting in a two minute penalty. Once they got that sorted out, it was smooth sailing all the way to the finish. They extended their winning streak, which goes all the way back to the start of 2017. However, runner ups Michael Seidman and co-driver Tommy Luhrs showed impressive pace on the last few stages in their Subaru Impreza. If that continues they will be championship contenders this season.



In the large-displacement two-wheel drive CRS-5 class, Andrew Cowan scored maximum points against all odds in what turned out to be a remarkable display of the “press on regardless” spirit. His VW Jetta VR6 experienced a broken transmission mount, a heat shield fire, and a water pump failure, but the crew could not be stopped. They removed the hood before the last two stages to let the engine “air cool.” Despite the extreme engine temperatures, the strategy worked and they drove it across the finish line, finishing ahead of the Mustang of Jason Hamilton and Ralph Pond.

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