

California Rally Series Celebrates 2016 Champions!

Written by Erik Christiansen
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Los Angeles – The California Rally Series (CRS) continued its over forty year tradition of honoring regional rally champions at its annual awards banquet. Five classes were recognized, including the return of the two-wheel drive, large displacement CRS-5 class.

The Open four-wheel drive class was once again dominated by turbocharged Subaru Imprezas. This season the championship came down to the wire with John Coyne and co-driver Doug Nagy ultimately claiming the top spot after the last rally of the season, which saw runners-up Jason Copt and co-driver Cameron Meng crashing out during the night-time stages at the Prescott Rally. The third place driver's trophy was awarded to Kurt Smith who had solid finishes all season. Nicolas Renold managed to secure the third place co-driver's trophy after riding with Stephen Benson, who was awarded the fourth place driver's trophy. Fourth place co-driver honors went to Brent Blakely.

Michael Seidman and co-driver Thomas Luhrs dominated the normally-aspirated four-wheel drive Open Lite class, finishing the season with a clean sweep winning every event in their Subaru Impreza! The second place driver trophy went to Kurt Northrup who had strong finishes in the second half of the season in his Subaru Impreza.

After a multi-year hiatus, the large-displacement two-wheel drive CRS- class returned to the championship for 2016. Andrew Cowan and co-driver Ryan Dunham finished the season with a solid lock on first place in their VR6 VW Jetta. In second place were Ray Piloto and co-driver Brock Palmer in the first full season competing with their turbocharged Chevy Sonic.

CRS-2, the small displacement two-wheel drive class, saw the most participation this past season, with thirteen drivers vying for the top honors. By the time the dust settled after the Prescott Rally, Javier Olivares emerged as the driving champion. His Ford Escort proved very reliable, finishing every event in a respectable position. At the top of the list of co-drivers was Christine Marciniak, who sat with three different drivers this season in order to secure the championship. In the second place co-driver slot was Brock Heinz, who rode with Olivares for half the season. Markus Saarinen, the 2014 and 2015 CRS-2 driver champ could only manage second place after failing to finish the last two events. His co-driver Alicia Saarinen claimed third place. After getting off to a rough start at High Desert Trails, Mike Hurst managed to salvage the season with a strong finish at the Idaho Rally in his Ford Capri and took home the third place driver's trophy. Finally, Larry Gross in his Toyota Corolla ended the season in fourth place among drivers.

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The production-based, two-wheel drive class known as Performance Stock is a CRS tradition that continues to have solid participation. Rookie driver Brian Tullio managed to eek out a win over twenty-plus year veteran Tony Chavez by one of the narrowest margins in Performance Stock history. The competition came down to the last event, the Prescott Rally, where Brian Tullio slid his BMW off the road during Friday night's event, but managed to come back on Saturday for a podium finish in order to secure a championship. The second place co-driver award went to Tony Chavez's wife / co-driver Raquel Salas. In third place were another spouse team - driver Jennifer Stonecipher and co-driver Terry Stonecipher.

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.