

## High Desert Trails Rally Opens the 2018 California Rally Series Rally Championship

Written by Erik Christiansen  
Tuesday, 22 May 2018 20:07

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**Los Angeles** – The California Rally Series (CRS) kicked off its 44<sup>th</sup> season with the High Desert Trails Rally on May 4

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. The rally switched to a two-day format for 2018, with a double-points (coefficient 2) event going into the night on Friday followed by a triple-points (coefficient 3) event on Saturday. The rally ran on the same roads as previous years, with stages ranging from ultra-fast blasts across a desert valley to twisty mountain roads that had teams dodging through Sequoia trees.



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Last year's Open class champion Flynn Baglin teamed up with co-driver Alix Hakala for the season opener. They were plagued by strut issues all weekend, but managed to hold on and finish the weekend at the top of the class. Baglin will start 2018 with the points lead in the driver's championship, although Hakala is second behind Sean McElwain, who co-drove for a non-points eligible driver. Deke Williams also had a new voice calling notes, veteran co-driver Rhianon Gelsomino, but were the victims of bad luck when they had just managed to take the lead from Baglin/Hakala when their Subaru's engine blew up on the second to last stage Friday night. A similar fate befell Santiago Caballero and co-driver Chris Fine when they found

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themselves leading the rally on Saturday only to have a busted tie rod end their day with only a few stages to go.



2017 Open Lite (the normally-aspirated four-wheel drive class) champions Kurt Northrup and co-driver Will Smith kept their streak alive and walked away with maximum points for the weekend in their Subaru Impreza. Second place went to Brent Blakely in his very first rally as a driver, with Robert Maselli sitting in the passenger seat. They had a clean run on Friday, but strut issues forced them to withdraw from Saturday's rally.



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