



SO MANY HURDLES: Oliver Townend has lots of obstacles on his journey

Black cloud, silver lining

BARRING a volcanic eruption in downtown Atlanta, Oliver Townend was last night confident he would make the Kentucky three-day event and his shot at a life-changing Rolex Grand Slam bonus, even if he is stressed, exhausted and already heavily out of pocket.

Townend, the three-day eventer from Shropshire, is just one of many sports stars to taste the frustrations of the ordinary traveller as the cloud of volcanic ash swept across European skies.

Millionaire footballers have been forced to swap jets for coaches and trains to fulfil European fixtures, Formula One teams are scattered over the Far East waiting for skies to clear, while boxer Carl Froch has taken matters into his own hands and hired a light



GIDEON BROOKS

reports

catching a train from Crewe to London and another from London to Paris, Townend had to take a £1,600 taxi between the French and Spanish capitals, before sneaking on to the tourist flight bound for Disneyland.

It has left him "stressed out and very tired" ahead of today's journey. All being well, he will arrive on the eve of the competition, which starts on Thursday, when he will aim for the £230,000 jackpot for winning the big three events in his sport following his victories at Badminton and Burghley already, a hat-trick achieved just once before, by Pippa Funnell.

"It has been like a movie script, which is ironic because of a volcano in Iceland" he said. "My entire

mechanics and media either waited or embarked on tortuous journeys home.

The Virgin team, who have Sir Richard Branson's airline behind them, have had to grab space on a charter flight operated by Air Asia owner Tony Fernandes, who owns rivals Lotus.

F1's problem is that the Boeing 747 transporters that fly the cars and equipment to intercontinental races were grounded in Europe.

On the edge of Asia, nearly 100 world rally championship staff who had been competing in Turkey at the weekend boarded coaches for a marathon road trip back to northern England.

Andrew Wheatley, business development manager at the M-Sport operation that prepares and runs the works BP Ford Abu Dhabi, Stobart and Munchi teams, said: "What would normally have been a £500 trip is going to cost £1,500. So if you multiply that by