

Eventful three-day trip for Townend

EQUESTRIANISM

By Ian Chadband

WITH what he described as true Yorkshire grit, top horseman Oliver Townend has embarked on his own epic three-day event just to keep another three-day event dream alive.

Townend will today, he hopes, complete the "most surreal" 55-hour journey to reach Lexington, where on Thursday he begins his quest to achieve the grand slam of eventing by adding the Kentucky title to his Badminton and Burghley crowns.

With the sport's biggest prize to date at stake – about £270,000 – Townend has spent a small fortune himself, including a £1,600 taxi ride from Paris to Madrid, to keep his potentially lucrative date.

"My entire career has been building up to this and I wasn't going to let it slip away just because of a volcano in Iceland," said the Shropshire-based Townend, whose competition horses had been sent on in advance.

His rescheduled journey began on Sunday at 9am from his yard in Dudleston Heath with a car ride to Crewe, train to Euston, taxi to King's Cross and Eurostar to Paris, where, without a word of French, he managed to strike a deal with a bemused cabbie.

"It must have been pretty funny to see a Yorkshireman grabbing hold of a Parisian taxi driver and saying 'take me to Madrid'. The journey took 14 hours and I had to try to keep the driver awake. It's been like something from a movie script, which is ironic because the only flight I could get was a business seat on a charter to Disneyland!"

He eventually flew out of Madrid yesterday afternoon, was due to arrive in Miami early today, with a connection to Atlanta and another flight to Lexington to follow.



Long haul: Oliver Townend has endured an epic journey