TAXI FOR OLIVER

Huddersfield rider refuses to be beaten by stoppages

■ HURDLES TO NEGOTIATE: Huddersfield eventer Oliver Townend has had to be prepared to try any route possible to reach Kentucky

BRITISH eventing star Oliver Townend is determined not to let Europe's air travel chaos deny him the 'biggest moment of my career' as he bids to keep his Rolex Grand Slam dream alive — after already spending £1,600 on a French taxi and planning to take a flight from Spain to Disneyland.

Former Holme Valley Riding Club rider Townend left his Shropshire base ahead of the Kentucky three-day event where victory will earn him £230,000.

With no flights from the UK due to the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud, 27-year-old Townend drove to Crewe from his base in the village of Dudleston Heath, then caught a train to London, where he boarded a Paris-bound Eurostar.

After arriving in the French capital, he took a taxi to Madrid – a 14-hour journey costing around £1,600 – with the aim of boarding a US-bound charter flight, before then trying to get from Miami to Lexington, some 1,000 miles north through Florida, Georgia and Tennessee.

"I got to Paris and I knew that I had to

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persuade someone to drive me to Madrid," said Townend.

"I just thought 'Yorkshire's not that different to French', so I grabbed a bloke and explained that I had to get to Madrid.

"I am sitting in the back of a cab, trying to keep the driver awake.

"It cost me £1,600 and took 14 hours, but I am determined to get to Kentucky.

"My entire career has been building up to a moment like this and I am not going to let it slip away just because of a volcano in Iceland.

"I want to be there to represent Britain and this is the biggest moment of my career so far and the biggest event of the year."

Townend's horses for the Kentucky event, which starts on Thursday, arrived there last week. The British rider is bidding to win consecutive Badminton, Burghley and Kentucky competitions, a hat-trick which would see him complete the £230,000 Rolex Grand Slam.