

Equestrian

Townend hot on the trail of one more big prize

Yorkshire-born rider has fantastic year

OLIVER Townend has set his sights on landing one of eventing's most coveted prizes next year after ending the 2009 season by collecting another sizeable cheque.

The Yorkshire-born rider will head into the winter break as Badminton champion, Burghley title holder, HSBC FEI Classics winner and Express Eventing champion.

Although his attempt to win Les Etoiles de Pau at the weekend – it would have been his third four-star event triumph this year – ended in frustrating failure, it could not take the gloss off a memorable campaign.

A mammoth 31 faults, including seven fences down, relegated Townend and his Burghley winner Carousel Quest from overnight leader to eighth place overall.

But he had already done more than enough to secure the £92,000 Classics jackpot, a series where riders collect points for their performances at Lexington, Badminton, Luhmühlen, Burghley and Pau.

Oliver, 26, now based in Shropshire, has won more than £300,000 in major prize money during the past 12 months. He will head to Kentucky next April chasing the £213,000 Rolex Grand Slam, which is awarded to any rider winning consecutive Badminton, Burghley and Lexington four-star events.

The feat is so difficult that only

one rider – Britain's Pippa Funnell – has previously achieved it.

"I am absolutely thrilled with winning the HSBC series," said Oliver. "I've had a fantastic year. My horses have done me proud, and they will now have a winter's break before returning next spring."

William Fox-Pitt was the only competitor who could deny Townend the overall HSBC crown, but his hopes vanished following a run-out during Saturday's cross country phase.

Germany's Dirk Schrade and King Artus took top spot in Pau, with his countryman Andreas Dibowski (Euroridings Butts Leon) second, Frenchman Pascal Leroy (Minos de Petra) third

and Britain's Lucy Wiegiersma (Granntevka Prince) fourth.

Fox-Pitt and Macchiato dropped from second to fourth on the overall HSBC list behind Townend, Schrade and Dibowski, cutting his potential earnings in half to £20,000.

Townend also made an impression on the supporting two-star event, finishing second aboard one of his brightest young prospects Neo du Breuil. Businessman Andrew Cawthray, who owns Carousel Quest, paid his own tribute to Oliver.

"We are a great team," he said. "All I try to do is give him the tools to do the job. He is such a talented rider who was always going to get to this position."

A 24-HOUR sponsored ride, starting at 1pm tomorrow, is being held at Throstle Nest Riding School in Bradford to raise money for the Yorkshire Air Ambulance and the riding school's Riding for the Disabled group.

Over 50 riders are taking part, most of them riding twice, with ages ranging from five to over 60. They will be doing mounted games in hourly shifts.

Those involved include weekly riding school riders, Pony Club members, livery owners and students from Craven College.



PERFECT ENDING: Oliver Townend ended the year by winning the HSBC FEI Classics Series.

Don't miss Saturday's Country Week for the la