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Halton weighing in with upbeat birth statistics

By IRENE GENTLE

The Champion

Halton women are waiting longer to have babies, the Region's health and social services committee has heard.

But the babies they bear are often healthier than the provincial norm.

Those are the findings of a study issued by the Halton Regional Health Department and epidemiologist Terry Delmore.

The report, entitled Reproductive Outcomes in Halton, evaluated birth and babies through data taken from 1991-95.

It then compared the material with Ontario figures.

The numbers add up to good health.

Halton weighed in with fewer low birth weight babies than the provincial average.

Low birth weight is defined as 2,500 grams or less, which translates into about five pounds, five ounces.

When tracking single births only (as opposed to twins or triplets), Halton's rate was 21 per cent less than the provincial rate over the five years.

That could be related to the age of the women having the babies,



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ANN MULVALE

said Mr. Delmore.

Halton teens gave birth at half the rate of the province.

"We have a low birth rate among our teens and teens are more likely to have a low birth weight baby," he explained.

The low incidence of teen moms isn't due to the availability of abortion, the report hinted.

Halton women had therapeutic abortions at about half the rate of

provincial women, while area teens had a rate significantly lower than Ontario's.

In both Halton and the province, women aged 20-24 were responsible for the largest number of abortions.

Halton women also experience fewer still births, and infant deaths than their provincial counterparts.

And Halton babies are less likely to be born with birth defects.

In a list of 10 common birth defects, Halton came out ahead of the province in nine.

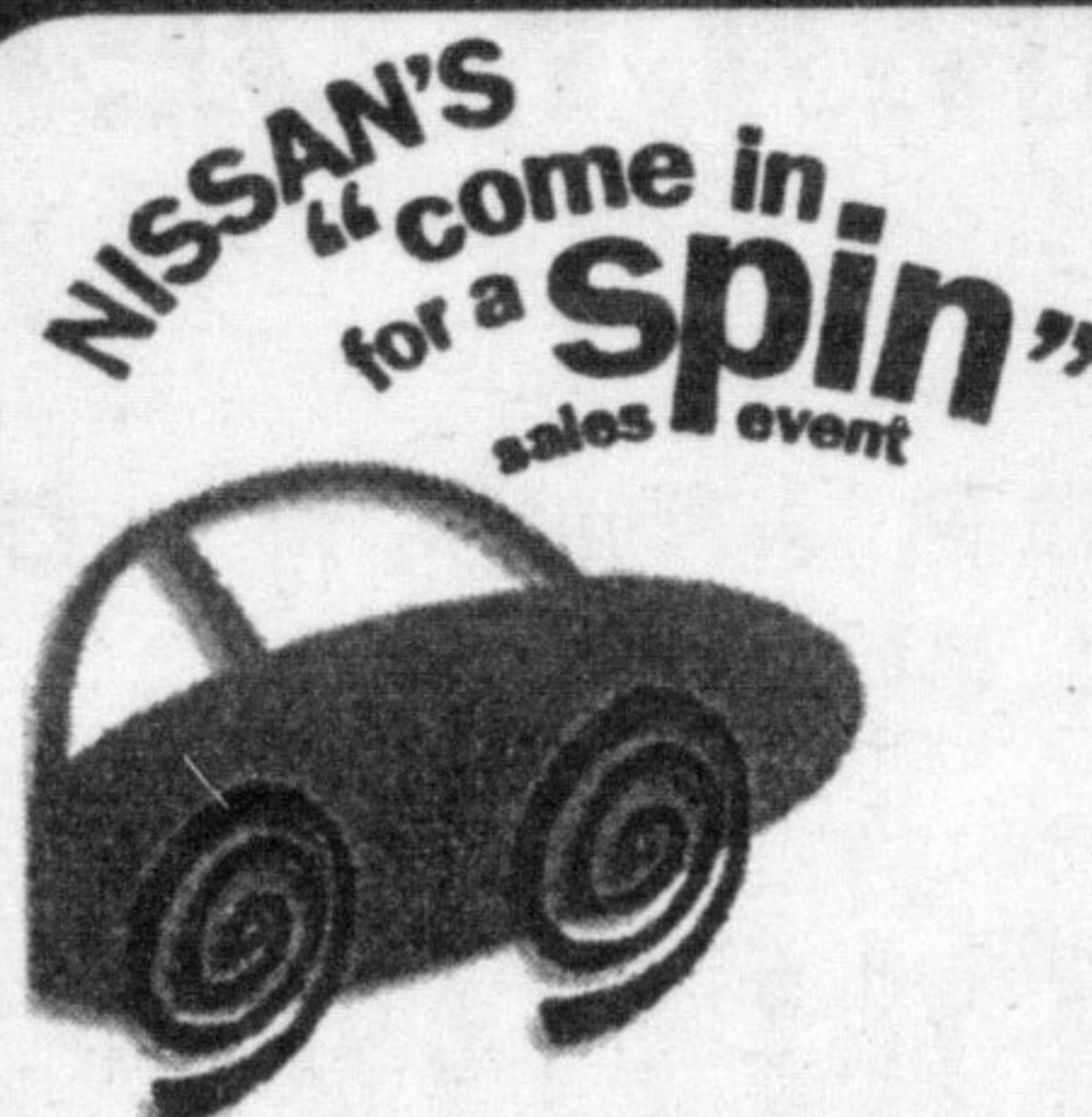
Particularly, Halton women were far less likely to give birth to babies suffering from Down's Syndrome and congenital dislocation of the hip.

That is despite the fact that Halton women are waiting longer to become moms.

The number of women who are having babies at age 30-34 has jumped almost 60 per cent since 1981.

But good overall report card does not mean Halton can slacken its push for optimum reproductive health, said Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale.

"The news is good but you never want to be complacent," she said. "I don't want it to look like we're patting ourselves on the back."



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