

Premature twins show fighting spirit in health battles



FORTUNE has smiled on 10-month-old identical twins Aurelia and Indiana Oliver from the moment they popped into this world.

Born at just 25 weeks gestation, with matching heart conditions and breathing difficulties, their little lives have been an uphill battle, but one they are destined to win.

With Indiana weighing 695g, little more than a can of soup, and Aurelia barely tipping the scales at 910g, they were so tiny they had to wear dolls' clothes at first.

The twins were incredibly born inside their amniotic sacs, an omen that since medieval times has meant good fortune for babies.

The pair have since conquered many of their early complications, and are now trying to overcome their matching heart conditions - atrial septal defect.

They have a hole in the wall dividing the left and right atrial chambers, allowing oxygenated and deoxygenated blood to mix.

Dad James Oliver said: "We've been told by doctors that despite them being identical twins, it is uncommon for them to have identical heart conditions."

Royal Children's Hospital cardiologist Bryn Jones said the holes might get smaller or close by themselves or they would be surgically closed before the girls started school.

They also both had a condition where a blood vessel in the heart, which normally closes after birth, failed to.

Their lungs were so damaged they had difficulty breathing, and Indiana was on oxygen for the first six months of her life, Mr Oliver said.

Indiana, the sicker of the two, developed pneumonia and almost died twice, needing to be resuscitated.

"For three days we kept a vigil beside her bed - it was pretty hard for us," Mr Oliver said. "We were sitting there knowing our daughter only had a 50-50 chance of pulling through."

"She is the most amazing little battler - she's got an incredible spirit. When she's really struggling she just bites down and pulls through."

The twins were in the Royal Women's Hospital for four months before going to their Berwick home.

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Mum Lilian Oliver said: "Aurelia is definitely the determined one - she wants to be the first to do everything. She wanted to come out in the big wide world first.

"They've both always got a smile. Every morning they wake up with a smile ... they are the happiest babies."

Life's Little Treasures Foundation, a charity supporting families of premature babies, is holding a fundraising walk or run on November 14 at Albert Park Lake.